Movements across Borders: South Asian / Indian Diaspora Youth in Scandinavia

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Abstract

The article explores social psychological aspects concerned with diasporic relationships among the South Asian diaspora in Denmark and is a follow up of a project conducted in the mid-nineties. The first wave focussed on the intergenerational relations within the double challenge perspective dealing with age transition and ethnic belonging while the second wave focuses at the relationships across the borders within a theoretical framework of life course perspectives combined with diaspora conceptualisations. In-depth interviews were conducted and analysed through meaning condensation. The gendered experiences of the young adults perceived as active actors indicate reinterpretation of the self, others and home. The results depict that the young adults' relationships involve both the country of origin and the Danish welfare society, though refutes the myth of return, in spite of Denmark turning increasingly restrictive in migration policies in the past years. *How does moving across the geographical borders affect the relationships of diaspora members both here– in the country of residence and there- in the country of origin? The article delineates some of the processes through gendered experiences of the young adults perceived as active actors based on an empirical longitudinal study. The results indicate transformations in belongings and*

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longings indicating reinterpretation of the self, others and home
in context of exclusion processes at various levels.

Introduction

In studies of South Asian Diaspora, the Scandinavian countries like Denmark, Norway and Sweden are rarely named among the receiving societies (Rai & Reeves, 2009, Kivisto & Faist, 2010). USA, UK and New Zealand are mainly named among the new Indian diaspora (Raghuram & Sahoo, 2008)   and in the Nordic transnational studies this diaspora is barely mentioned. However, there are about 65,000 South Asians (from India, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka) and their descendents in these countries, who have primarily arrived as migrant labourers in seventies and smaller number as refugees in the seventies and eighties such as Gujaratis from Uganda, Sikhs from India, Tamils from Srilanka. In Denmark there are approx. 5,000 persons of Indian origin and 25,000 persons of Pakistani origin (Befolkning og valg, 2008)

Diaspora is about the processes of dispersal, distance and maintaining or creating connections especially the relationship with the country of origin (Dufoix, 2008) and involves complex psychological issues. The interaction between the diasporic populations in the country of origin as well as country of residence receive attention. This article focuses on the gendered diasporic relationships   and   processes   based on   a longitudinal Danish research project conducted in two waves in the nineties and in middle of the present decade (Singla, 2008). The article delineates a shift between these two waves and poses the question whether this shift identified between wave one and wave two is connected with 'gendered notions of home'.

A literature review of the South Asian diaspora in the Nordic countries includes some salient studies, however none of the studies focus on the diasporic processes among the South Asians diaspora as is done in the present study. In Denmark, a young man's definition of himself *as Muslim, Pakistani and Danish* illustrates construction of a complex diasporic identity (Khawaja, 2003). Another Danish study (Mørck, 1998) brings to notice the youths' development of "double identities" as they feel mostly

Danish but have strong attachment to their parents' "homeland". Similarly the young women develop identity as "Danish- Muslim" as they are afraid that the ethnic Danes will not accept them as Danes because they look different, implying skin colour based experiences of exclusion (Siim, 2006). While Frello (2006) notes that some minority youth are *cosmopolitan* characterized by the ability to engage in others cultures and at the same time have a reflexive distance vis-a–vis their parental cultural background. On the other hand Andreassen (2007) presents the dominant stereotypical pictures of 'visible', minority youth as criminal and violent, while the women are pictured as victims of violence and negative marriage patterns through an analysis of media and minority in Denmark.

Singla (2004a & 2004b) analysed the double challenges related to youth period and ethnicity faced by the young people, depicting the positive ways of meeting the challenge. Hole (2005) indicated that Gujarati Hindu women living as the first generation in Sweden still long to return to India, even when they are well acculturated in the Swedish context and seen as "*Neithe*r *here- nor there*". While the young generation does not have the urge to return to India and have almost no economic commitments *there*. Prieur (2004) in Norway has studied minority youth through gender and generation perspective and seen as artists balancing between parents, their own and majority societies understandings, forming new identities and new combinations.

Theoretical Framework and Methodology

The framework is mainly social psychological, combining positioning theory with life course perspectives along with diaspora phenomenon both as a concept, practice and consciousness. The present study is a follow up of an earlier study (Singla 2004b), which indicated reciprocal creation of space and warmth between the parental and youth generation in the well functioning families as a common denominator (p.245).

The young adults *position* themselves and can simultaneously occupy more than one position, belong to a number of categories: through birth, gender, associations and alliances, within the family

and networks in backdrop of these *societal* and *life course* contexts (Gergen, 2001; Levy et al, 2005). The gender perspective is perceived as significant for understanding of the diasporic processes and touched upon in this article.

Diaspora is seen as a process of *dispersal*, which implies distance, and maintaining or creating connections becomes a major goal in reducing or at least dealing with that distance (Dufoix, 2008). The subjective features of the diaspora, the agency, directs attention to the multiple meanings of diaspora perceived as a social form, type of consciousness and mode of cultural production / consumption (Vertovec, 2000). A social form is about relationships, networks, and economic strategies across the borders while consciousness is awareness about multi-locality, both *here* and *there*, interconnecting with others sharing the "roots" and "routes". Lastly diaspora as mode of cultural production is seen as a transnational cultural phenomena, with flow of media images and messages as connectors.

Kalra, Kaur & Hutnyk (2005) argue that diaspora[1] shifts attention away from viewing migration as a one-way process for an understanding of the complex transnational identities and conceptualise diaspora as both *positive embracing* of transnational affiliation in context of the South Asian postcolonial history, and defensive posture by communities in the face of a hostile host saying *you do not belong.* Castles (2006) emphasises transnationalism as a relevant research perspective for studying these groups, hardly used in Denmark, though here diaspora is seen as more relevant due to continued significance of the country of origin (Rai & Reeves, 2009). Thus *myth of return* as an archetype of diaspora is included.

This article is based on a follow-up of the first wave conducted in mid-nineties (Singla, 2004b), in which the sample was strategically selected as *well functioning* and *poorly functioning* youth with South Asian and native Danish backgrounds. This categorisation is not used in the second wave as it proved to be too simplistic and stigmatising.

Re-establishing contact with the participants after a decade involved ethical dilemmas. Out of total 14, eleven participants were

traced. Two of these were seriously ill, thus nine interviews were conducted out of which five originated from South Asia, see table.

Table: Demographic features of the participants

Name	Age / Gender	Ancestral Country	Civil status	Education	Occupation
Salman	29 / Male	Pakistan, Dk	Married	Law Student	part time job
Abdul	30 / Male	Pakistan, Came to Dk aged 14yrs.	Married	High School	own music systems company
Mita	28 / Female	India, DK	Married	Masters in Bio Technology	Researcher and firm owner
Nadia	26 / Female	Pakistan / Afghanistan, Came to DK aged 12yrs.	Married	Teacher's Training	School Teacher
Atim	28 / Male	Pakistan, Came to DK aged 3yrs,	Single (Girl Friend)	Pedagogue	Jobless

My own South Asian background (North Indian, ability to speak Hindi/ Urdu/ Punjabi, Danish and English), professional position as university researcher and middle age contributed to a balance between insider and outsider perspective between the researcher and the participants. They were also given a choice of languages for the interview. The choice was English for one, mother tongue Urdu / Punjabi for another, a mixture of Danish and Urdu for three.

The questions were based on the themes covered in the first wave combined with *young adult* life course dynamics. The major themes in the second wave were horizontal and vertical relationships both familial and extra familial, diasporic contacts, job trajectories development and experiences of psychosocial intervention.

The analyses strategies are meaning condensation combined with post hoc categories grounded in the narratives. Comparison is made with the youths' first wave narratives, through temporal analysis *now* and *th*en along with the spatial analysis with focus on

here and *there* in their life world. The metaphorical framework of *pull* and *push* is also used for analysing the diasporic relations.

Results: Diasporic Relations and Strategies across Geographical Borders

The social form of diaspora focuses on the relationship with the family members in the ancestral country along with relations with the diasporic community in the other parts of the world. The young people are placed in the post-hoc categories: Comprehensive and Limited contact & strategies. The first is seen as frequent relationships in the country of origin and, while in second the contact is relatively infrequent contact.

Comprehensive Contact and Strategies

This analysis indicates paradoxical psychosocial understandings of the young adults, an example is the Indian young woman Mita, who has a comprehensive contact with the ancestral country, related to her marriage to an Indian spouse and their biotechnical- pharmacy business relations in an Indian metropolis. She is the only participant who has been eight times to India in the past decade and also has business and familial relations in UK:

Our company is also in India, England and in Denmark…sort of international.

She mentions economic strategies related to the company employees in India and emphasises that there are no economic obligations to the in-laws' family in South India, as they are economically well placed and encourage the couple's endeavours. She also pointed her and spouse's regular contact with the in-laws. However, she proclaims her connection and gratitude for Denmark as her country of birth and upbringing, providing "settlement for life" along with positive feelings for country of origin, which she didn't have due to limited contact in the first wave.

Denmark is my country because I am born here…. But what I gained in Denmark is simply my settlement for life. Got my education here, came back and ... I do belong to Denmark. But I love India as well. I didn't have before, because I haven't been to India for that long…

Mita is reflexive about her positive feelings and connection to both countries and seems to be content with the present solution of their

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business relations between India and Denmark. However, she also positions herself as open regarding the future possibilities pointing to the negative side of the Danish society—not being open to the foreign cultures.

Tomorrow my dream is to work in India... I can go and live there forever. …The Danish culture is very restricted, not very open to foreign cultures.

Mita's own parents live in Denmark where she shifted back to live close to parents. This is due to her brother's conflicts with the parents and his failure to provide care to the frail parents, which is a son's filial piety according to the South Asian ideals (Languiani, 2007). She thus challenged the gender stereotypes about the son's filial duty and moved again to Denmark to take care of her father.

Spatial analysis of Mita's narrative reveals that her social contacts between *here* and the multiple *there* are at several levels, as she has frequent and varied contact with the ancestral country as well with U.K., where some of her diaspora family members reside. A temporal analysis indicates transformations, as she didn't show much interest in her ancestral country in the first wave (Singla, 2004b).

Limited Contact and Strategies

Young adults Abdul and Salman have rather limited relations to their ancestral country Pakistan, though they explicitly mention their parental close relationship to the country. In the first wave, Abdul was very connected to Pakistan, especially to his father's older brother where as he had studied in a boarding school (ibid, p.147). He visited Pakistan only twice in the past decade and emphasised conflicts between his father and uncle regarding the ancestral property. However, as a company owner, he travels comprehensively and has an international business network.

Similarly Salman has infrequent connections with the ancestral country due to conflictual relations in the extended family and his wife's Afghani background. His reduced contact after the grandparents' demise can be understood through the life course perspective, and while marriage outside the family, in contrast to the dominant discourse about Muslim extended family endogamy.

Likewise the family conflicts pertaining to property can be seen as a factor pushing away from country of origin.

... We had a closer relationship with the family when my grandparents were alive. After their death it is not the same.

On the other hand, Atim's parents have a very close relation to Pakistan and his mother spends 3- 4 months every year in the ancestral village. He himself has visited Pakistan twice in the last decade though he visits Pakistani friends in Norway and Sweden. These young men don't seem to maintain relationships with the family in the country of origin.

Nadia has not visited Afghanistan/Pakistan at all, political instability being a *push* factor. though she has frequent contact with the extended family members in Australia, Germany & USA through Internet/phone. Nadia has a supportive economic strategy in relation to the family living in Afghanistan, as she sends money to her maternal family every month due to her solidarity with them. She is placed as a compassionate family member with diasporic relations in multiple contexts. Her gender position related to her economic strategies is discussed later.

We have my mother's family in Afghanistan. Our contact is that we send money to them every month. I send money to my grandmother and mother's sister. I have chosen to send money to them.

Psychological Dispora Consciousness and Cultural Consumption

For all the young adults, the ancestral country and the other contexts are aspects of their complex identity, though with varying salience. They are placed in the following categories based on the meaning attached to diasporic consciousness, indicated by their social network, self-identity, and experiences of inclusion in the majority society in their narratives. The young adults analysed to have their primary interpersonal relationships within the diaspora group as well as emphasise the subjective feelings of belonging to the Indian/Pakistani group, involved in diasporic cultural practices are placed in category *dominant diaspora consciousness,* while others who attach relatively less significance to these relationships and are less engaged in such cultural practices are in *moderate diaspora consciousness* category.

Dominant Position

For young adult Salman, the diasporic consciousness is a dominating aspect of his identity, as his present primary social relationships are within the ethnic group with the almost everyday contact with co-ethnics and less frequent contact with Danes. He also mentions sustenance of the network he had developed through the religious participation in the first wave. At the same time, he also draws attention to the Danish aspects in his identity. He positions himself as a combination of Danish as well as the Pakistani aspects, contrary to the dominating discourse in the Danish society about the "incompatible" Danish and Pakistani worlds.

I already think of myself as Danish. I think a lot Danish, though there are also Pakistani things in me. ..My feelings are Danish... there are Danish words circulating around in my head. Only this is symboling how Danish I am…. I have taken the good things from the Pakistani culture and the good things from the Danish culture.

Juxtapositioning Salman's position in the first wave, *I am a Pakistani, irrespective of my years in Denmark or passport* and emphasis on his experiences of racism in the society (ibid, p.171), to his present position as *a combination,* illustrates the changing nature of diasporic identity.

In contrast, young woman Mita has an ethnically mixed network comprising of her friends from different life phases including Danish high school friends. She clearly positions herself as Indian along with her sense of belonging to Denmark. In the first wave, she stated *I am Indian-Danish, though more Indian than Danish* (ibid, p.172). She elaborates her interest in the Indian cultural productions like films and music along with connectedness with other language cultural products such as English films. She indicates that she has not encountered racism recently in her life, yet Mita's unpleasant memories of racism in the college days were part of the first wave narrative.

Moderate Position

Atim's network consists of Pakistanis along with a few Turkish and Danish friends, though he doesn't perceive himself as just Pakistani or a combination. He mentioned his interest for both International

Rap music and Pakistani singers. He has become aware of his ethnic belonging through the experiences of racism, expressed through the negative stereotypical understanding of his teachers, which he tried to challenge in his education as the club-pedagogue.

My teachers were really harami (bastards)… discriminatory and racists. They were very prejudiced... I was the only foreigner there.

His positioning of himself as a "foreigner" reflects his feeling of exclusion from the society. Similarly Abdul feels discriminated in the society, especially in the media, though he doesn't experience discrimination in his business dealings. This is one of the reasons for his moving to Malmo which he expects to be more congenial than Denmark.

... The way information, media is creating impressions is very bad. This is why my interest for living here has finished.

His diasporic consciousness is considered moderate as he views Indian films and Pakistani dramas[2] once in a while, he has an international business network and he is a member of "Mazda car club". Abdul exemplifies the active agency– contrary to the prevalent discourse about unemployed, criminal minority man. He is active enough to confront constructively the racial discrimination by shifting from Denmark to Sweden. Similar active agency is seen for Nadia, whose moderate diasporic identity is in sharp contrast to the dominant position in the first wave as *an Afghani girl, more Afghani than Danish* (Ibid, p. 243). Now Nadia has a comprehensive Danish network, as she teaches in an elite Danish private school.

...I have a friend from the school, which is also Danish..... Then I have 5-6, who are much older than me, about 57-58... All Danish.

Nadia's narrative reveals unexpected positive transformations in the life trajectory due to her active agency and supportive contacts (Wilson 2005). Moreover, she is member of a number of mainstream charity organisations such as Red Cross and Refugee Aid. In a way, Nadia is positioned to transform from her rather narrow ethnic minority to a broad, international cosmopolitan position (Frello 2006). She has not experienced racism personally in the later years in contrast to her earlier experiences of race discrimination at her work place (Singla, 2004b). Though she

regards herself as *fortunate,* yet she mentioned her siblings' discriminatory experiences and had to put in *double* efforts to reach their goals, as compared to native Danes.

But my sisters, they had to do double of what Danes have to do in order to get a job or just complete their education.

The analysis also indicates how technologies of integration are envisioned as means of bringing about gender equality for immigrant women such as Nadia (Lippert & Pykkonen, 2012).

Discussion

An intertwined understanding of diasporic social relations and psychological consciousness directs attention to the young adults' continued social relations and economic strategies in the country of origin. Intersectionality of their gender identity with ethnicity, socio economic status, family history, educational level, national and the ethnic identity of the partner influence the extent and quality of these contacts. There are two distinct positioning of visit to the country of origin– from eight visits to just no visit at all in the past decade, with two visits as middle position.

The gender aspect is related to the paradoxical economical relation to the ancestral country, based on different grounds– business motives for Mita and family related loyalty as well as altruism for Nadia. Their active agency and self-defining position invoking the feminist 'ethics of care' (Yuval-Davis, 2006) can be deduced through these strategies thus creating counter discourses to the dominant discourses about the ethnic minority women as passive victims. Abdul's estrangement with the uncle in the country of origin is contingent to family's contentious dynamic, hardly to his gender position.

Nadia's concern with the maternal family reflects gendered ethics of care, further supported by the nuanced empirical evidence. Mirdal's study (2006) about female Turkish diaspora in Denmark, conducted over 20 years emphasises that worrying *about the family in the home country is a major stressor* e.g. parents and relatives in need of health and economic support. . Congruently Guzder & Krishna (2005) note in Canada the South Asian diaspora women's concern and connection with the extended family in India, though

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marked by generational differences. Hole (2005) notes the relative decrease in connection with India for the young generation in comparison with the parental generation while Priuer (2004) discusses formation of new identities and "a third way" among the young migrants, different from the parental and Norwegian peer group practices. An illustration is the tendency of the young adults to live separately from the parents, which also implies decreased direct contact with the family in the country of origin. She also underpins the Nordic welfare states' overtaking the parental responsibility for the mature children and the children's responsibility for the adult parents (p. 70), though not confirmed in present study as the young adults continue with the filial piety.

We consider factors such as transnational marriages, close relations with the partners' family, presence of extended family with warm ties, business relations as factors which *pull* the diaspora group towards the country of origin. On the other hand, complex societal factors like uncertain political situation, family conflicts about the issue of marriage and property, demise of the close family members are seen as factors which *push* the diasporic population away from the ancestral country. New restrictive foreign policy legislation in Denmark has paradoxical consequences on marriage patterns; many choose partners *here*, while some continue transnational marriages in different forms (Rytter 2004, Singla, 2006).

 Mita's narrative illustrates that globalisation[3] through transnational business directly influences the diasporic identity processes, while Nadia's narrative illustrates that shifts in world politics amplifies dynamics in the diasporic relationships. The multiple elements are involved in these processes and the gender aspect is in interplay with aspects such as entrepreneurship, ethics of care and the life course.

The paradox about the dominating and moderate diasporic consciousness despite limited social relations in the country of origin can be understood through diaspora as *positive embracing* of transnational affiliation and defensive posture by communities in the face of a *hostile host (*Kalra et al. 2005). The young adults' experiences of racial discrimination in various forms – from direct stigmatising in the educational institutions, "do double" to get a

job, to awareness of negative media images of ethnic minorities lead to the feeling of partly *not belonging*, and to sustained interest and a feeling of *belonging to the ancestral country.*

There are transformations in different directions as far as feelings of belonging are concerned— from positioning himself as just *Pakistani* to a combination of the best from Pakistani and Danish cultures for Salman along with invocation of *Danish thinking* and participation in the mosque activities. For Nadia there is a major transformation— from a narrow diasporic identity to a broad cosmopolitan identity with strong transethnic relations, overcoming the problematic aspect of overemphasis on the transnational bonds within communities of origin (Anthias, 2006). In spite of changes, these young adults consider both the country of origin and the country of residence as dimensions of their identities, where diasporic relations have varying positions, hardly bothered about the negative view of the transnational relations in the public debates in Europe (Rasmussen & Galal, 2007).

How the *home* is perceived seems to change within the first and second wave of the study. These young adults are both diasporic and Danish, in different proportions, contexts and movements. There are transformations in the relation between *here* and *there*[4] as *mo*st of young adults seem to be *here* but also *there,* perhaps more *here* than *there.* They are young adults in the Danish society as well as in the country of origin, Indian / Pakistani, Danes, Hindu/ Muslim at the same time, though with differing emphases in different phases of life trajectory. The analysis of *the mythical longing for return* indicates that the young adults hardly mention returning to the country of origin.

Irrespective of the extent of the direct social relations, probably helped by the complex transnational flow of media images and messages through global technologies e.g. Internet and Indian films, the diasporic identities are significant for South Asian young adults as they are about the feelings of longing and the sense of belonging (Guzder and Krishna 2005). These complex relations between the country of residence and the country of origin have significant implications for psychosocial intervention (Singla 2005, 2008) and government policies at both ends (Naidoo 2005).

Conclusion

Against the backdrop of the late modernity and the Nordic welfare societies, this journey through a decade concludes that the young adults' diasporic identities are under transformation in interplay with their gendered experiences. We can infer that the South Asian young adults in Denmark in the study feel both *here* and *there* in their multiple belongings and contexts, where the secure welfare system and the opportunities for *settlement for life* and some experiences of race discrimination co-exist.

A spatial analysis shows that the young adults are maintaining/creating relations and attachments across the borders, in varying extents from yearly visit to almost no visit to the country of origin. In spite of these varied direct social relations, diasporic consciousness is a part of their identity and they are able to feel at *home* in multiple contexts. Using the global technologies and transnationalism in the form of Internet, films and music contributes to create *home*, not only in the country of residence, but also in the country of origin and in some countries where part of the diaspora relations and business contacts exist. Diaspora is dispersal and connections as well as longings and belongings at various levels.

This feeling *home* is not only a positive affiliation, a pull towards the country of origin but it also relates to the processes of being *pushed* away, racism and exclusion in different forms– job-wise problems to media-wise stigmatisation in the country of residence. In spite of some experiences leading to feelings of, *not belonging,* also due to the restrictive policies for foreigners in the past decade in the Scandinavian countries, paradoxically most young adults feel at *home* mostly *here* in Denmark; but also *there*, as they had hardly addressed *the myth of return* characterising diaspora in their self-definition and life trajectories now. The future is not known and would be addressed in the third and fourth waves 2012 and 2017.

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Notes

[1] The diaspora defined by its Greek etymology as "a scattering" from the roots, *dia* (apart) and *speirn* (to sow), entered the globalising language to apply to all migrants

[2] He downloads latest films through Internet, views them regularly, combining the narratives about *there* with his everyday life *here*

[3] Breaking down of artificial barriers to the flow of goods, services, capital, knowledge and (to a lesser extent) people across the border (Stiglitz, 2002)

[4] Homeless as en existential state is seen as an aspect of radical modernity (Dencik, 2005).