



MIGRATION, MIGRANTS AND MARGINALITY

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ABSTRACT

Migrated people in a new society having a distinctive culture are liminal people whose identity is ambivalent and hazy. The present paper attempts to understand the situation of migration and the status of the migrants in Manipur, one of the north-eastern states of India vis-a-vis the migrant's cultural adaptation. The *Teli*, *Bengoli* and *Nepali* community who migrated during the British colonial expansion into Manipur have been studied in this paper and explore their sense of inclusion to Manipuri society. The earlier arrivals including successive generations, though adapted, not assimilated but integrated through social-cultural involvement. Sense of deep-rooted in own tradition as well as activeness towards the new host society are observed to make places. Involvement of the migrants in various socio-cultural and political groups in order to familiarise the host culture is found significant in Manipur.

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INTRODUCTION

Migration is a historical process that shapes human civilisation, culture and development. The movement of people is a constitutional right in promoting the right to work anywhere, right to livelihood, right to choose any occupation. Human movement from place to place is a universal phenomenon from the right beginning of human evolution. Pre-historically, the movement of the people was basically to meet human primary needs. The hunters and gatherers were migrating from place to place in search of food and their societies had a nomadic life. The subject of migration and adaptation is by no means a new topic of interest and it attracts a lot of attention to the galaxies of social thinkers. Migrants introduce new services and commodities which later on become essential items or services to the receiving society. As for example, migrant barbers predominantly provide hair cutting services in Manipur. At the same time, migration may bring defensive towards the sons of the soil, and xenophobia may also be resulted as a social problem. Culture conflicts in the receiving society, depopulation particularly among tribal societies may be considered as social problem as well. Keeping the nature of adjustment of the migrants in the host society, the present paper attempts to understand the situation of migration and the status of the migrants in Manipur, one of the north-eastern states of India. Manipur is not a big state having no big cities. But since the colonial time, it attracts a number of migrants such that the migrants and their children exceeds from the number of tribal population in the state based on 2001 census (UCM, 2005). Migration may be studied as an important factor of population change, economic, political and social dynamics.

Primarily, there are two types of migration – internal and international migration, based on the involving boundary. If the migration takes place within the national boundary, it is called internal whereas if one migrates crossing the international borders, it is called international migration.

In the recent past it is found that the growth of industrialisation and capitalism had impacted a major stream of migration from rural to urban centres. This was initially started in European countries. Along with the expansion of the British Empire in various countries, the same scenario came into being in Indian cities as well. The British India was born with the establishment of East India Company and its trade expansion was transformed into colonialism. In the later part of 19th century, the Britishers made their trade expansion to Manipur (one of the states of India bordering with Myanmar) also. In order to facilitate their trade and commerce as well as their colonialism tour, they accompanied several trained Indian traders and army-men represented by the Marwaris, the Bhojpuris, the Bengolis, the Nepalis etc.

Before the advent of the British in Manipur, the Indian folks had less communication with the people of Manipur due to geographical isolation from the Mainland India. Manipur was never conquered by any of the emperor from the mainland country. The Meitei king ruled this princely state for centuries and its territories were expanded beyond the present boundaries to a large extent. However, the Britishers who were advance in transportation technology having strong passion toward exploring new world finally arrived in Manipur. The Britishers along with their tradesmen of Indian origin could successfully introduced colonialism and capitalist market into the state. After the return of the Britishers, those traders, armies and agriculturist continued to settle in the state since the state had abundant natural resources and pleasant climate and so forth.

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With the expansion of British colonialism, migration became better alternatives to many Indian traders, bureaucrats and army men under the guidance of Britishers. As of now, Migration is often a deliberate decision to improve livelihoods, enable investments (Bebington 1999:2027), and help to reduce fluctuations in the family income that has been entirely dependent on climatic vagaries (De Haan *et al* 2000:28; McDowell & De Haan 1997:18). Migration can then be seen as a means to acquire a wider range of assets which insure against future shocks and stresses (De Haan *et al* 2000:30). In Manipur, those Indian folks accompanied with the Britishers continued to settle. The children of those migrants such as the Telis, the Nepalis, the Marwaris, the Bengolis are living as members of the state.

In India, we may consider two problems of migration. Firstly, the irregular immigrants from neighbouring countries to India (since India has relatively better socio-economic conditions and porous boundaries), particularly infiltration through the north east states such as Meghalaya, Assam, Manipur etc. Secondly, the internal migrants, and the issues relating to their social adjustment to the new host society. Of these two issues, the later is being briefly highlighted in this paper. In this paper we focus on the way how the migrant's mentality is modified as because of the interaction to a new society and to point out the locus of their status.

From the anthropological perspective, for the welfare of the migrants as well as for the host society, the stages and the ongoing process of cultural adaptation, acculturation, assimilation, and integration need to be examined. When a migrant arrives to a new host society, live in between culture and they are compelled to socialise to the host society. The migrants in contemporary literature may be perceived and analysed across two headings. Firstly, the migrants are the resources to the host society particularly to meet the labour or intellectual demands. The migrants will contribute economic services which accelerate the growth of the market and thus the host society is benefitted. Secondly, the migrants are culturally distinct groups and during their transit stage, the host community feel xenophobia and reluctances, when the migrants start dominating the market structure. When there is rise in migrant population, migrants arrive in a position to hold authority in geo-political structure as well. At this point of time, there is likely to emerge a hostile relationship between the migrants and the host society. Very often, on the arrival of migrants, the host society feels reluctant initially, may react with intolerance.

The migrants also experience culture shock during the struggle of adaptation because they are usually caught in between two cultural systems. Therefore, the problem as because of migration has effected in both the societies of origin and destination. Consequently, many socio-cultural conflicts, dispute over land and natural resources are observed. In this connection, Furnham and Bochner (1982) were of the opinion that cross-cultural incompetence is due to inadequate or absence of learning rather than being inherited or the manifestation of unresolved childhood conflicts. In this later stage, migrants are hardly seen as the resources but are seen as resource consumer thereby

resulting unwanted socio-political atmosphere to the society. In the recent days, many thinkers are interested in studying the migrants in connection with their adaptation, the way how they preserve own culture in the midst of a completely new culture.

Migration may also be observed as the function of cultural lag, culture crisis, culture shock if the host society is not in a position to accommodate properly. Migrants in a host culture, usually demands for a good company, food, language, security, human and social capital. Their demands are fulfilled only when they invest space and time in the socio-cultural aspirations of the host society through participation and inclusion. Inclusion continuously creates a community involved in defining and addressing public issues; participation emphasizes public input on the content of programs and policies. Keeping these aspects into mind, the migrants' towards participation and inclusion to the host society are studied as the mandates for adaptation. The modern Manipuri society is the host society, in majority represented by the Meiteis of Manipur.

In the light of redistribution of population, it is imperative to analyse evidence based analysis on how migrants are integrated, how well adapted in the new cultural set up. Most of the in-migrants in Manipur are peoples from lower castes such as Telis, Hazam, Sahu, Das, Yadav etc. The study speculates whether their caste rule has any impact on the degree of inclusion as a social group. Level of integration is evaluated by examining their inclusion and participation to cultural or social activities as a member of their own community as well as to the mainstream Manipuri society. Data collected from the Telis of Telipati of Imphal East District, Manipur reveals that presently they could represent in the state as a community. The Telis are caste group of the Bhojpuri people who has traditional occupation of dealing with business of vegetable oil. In Manipur, they are usually known as the 'Telis' being used synonymously with the Bhojpuris. They also prefer to identify themselves as the Telis or the Teli community. The Bengolis in Manipur are usually the descendants of those bureaucrat officers accompanied by the Britishers. The Nepalis were brought as *sepoys* (army men) and labourers, by allotting plot of lands to the state by the then king of Manipur.

Looking back the recent history of Manipur, Manipuri society was formed by amalgamation of Hindu culture and indigenous cultural elements. People with Hindu culture predominantly migrated and inspired the host society during the 18th century. In due course, the Brahmin migrants were assimilated and occupied a reputed position, identified as 'Meitei Brahmins' under the common roof of Meitei society. In earlier period, the Manipuri Society was able to assimilate the migrant population and no adverse impact was inflicted upon the society¹ (United Committee Manipur, 2005). The migrants arrived to the state in the later period did not show

¹ Cultural assimilation took place when Brahmins migrated to Manipur during 17th century; Manipuri Muslims called "Meitei Pangals" were allowed to settle in Manipur during the reign of King Khagemba, 1597-1652 A.D.

such a visible process of assimilation. Racial elements of Indo-Aryan particularly from the state of Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, West Bengal, Assam and others migrated to the state for different economic pursuits. This review thus has a major focus to sensitize people, to bring up the idea of anthropocentric, integration and development by eliminating the concept of xenophobia.

Manipur has been resided by a number of ethnic groups inclusive of migrants and original peoples. Major ethnic groups are the Meiteis, the Pangals (Manipuri Muslims), the Kukis and the Nagas. Among the major migrant communities, the Nepalis, the Bengolis, the Punjabis, the Telis may be significantly noted. The state has a very pleasant climate and rich in forest resources. From the very past, the state has better economy, demography, political lives than that of Bangladesh, Burma and Nepal. Urmila (2007) rightly pointed out that India's neighbours are poorer than India. Therefore, once the migrants arrived in Manipur, they wish to continue for permanent settlement. Meanwhile, the state has no proper policy to maintain the undocumented arrivals. There were enough evidences of illegal immigration in Manipur which lead to several political upheavals in the state. Students movements against illegal immigration is initiated by All Manipur Student Union since 1980s.

The early migrants were assimilated to the Manipuri society and there was no adverse effect of it historically or in the contemporary society of Manipur. However, the late arrival becomes a social tension because of economic competition. During the colonial period of Manipur, there is an overlapping of national migration with international migration because arrivals during the British time are foreigners and their descendents settled down in the kingdom. The then constitution of Manipur was having a system called 'Foreigners Act' which clearly identified the migrants as foreigners or immigrants instead of in-migrants. In this stream of migration, people of Manipur are staying with the children of those foreigners along with in-migrants as well who are actually the internal migrants when the Indian constitution was established in Manipur.

Migrants in Manipur are perceived as foreigners being supported by the loosely referred term '*Mayang*' which is quite similar with the meaning of foreigner. I would like to illustrate reasoning behind this issue. Soon after independence, Pakistan was separated from India, but Manipur was merged. Some sections of Kashmiri could not feel the sense of being foreigner to their relatives in Pakistan. In contradiction to it, while the king of Manipur was mingling with the British and their followers, people of Manipur treated them as foreigners. In this time, the British or Bengoli or Bhojpuris or Nepalis are the same immigrants of different races. Now all the British subjects went back but Indians continued to settle down in the state. When there is further expansion of settlement and arrival of migrants within the Indian constitutional framework, people may not get readily accept it as internal movement. The early migrants in Manipur particularly Bengoli Brahmins and Bengoli Muslims were assimilated to the Manipuri society. In the earlier times, migration being a small stream was not significant to create any

social problem. Many Nepalis were also arriving during the king's time. The king allowed them to settle by providing plots of land. Even the village name was given in their Nepali language such as *Char Hajar, Kala Pahar*.

MIGRANTS IN BETWEEN STAGES

Adaptation is an essential condition to satisfy one's need for livelihood. It is natural that migrant children, and adults need to gain *bi-cultural competence*-the ability to comfortably interact in both family and mainstream cultures. Bicultural competence has several dimensions which include knowledge of cultural beliefs and values, positive attitudes toward both culture groups, a sense of efficacy in both cultures. In the question of adaptation, migrants bear two types of status-one is being associated with own original culture and the other being adopted from the host culture. Gumperz and Tannen (1979) argue that cross-cultural interactions are more difficult to enact because persons have relatively dissimilar language histories. To me, it is not only the dissimilar in language histories; dissimilar in historical identity and culture is also one of the important issues during interaction.

The migrants' adaptation to a new society is regulated by hybrid characteristics, and potentials of the migrants involved in between cultures. It is noteworthy to observe the social mobility of the migrants from a particular state of being to a particular state of being thereby creating a transit stage to them. A series of complicated social realities occurred in this transit stage. In the language of Victor Turner (1970), this stage may be compared to the state of liminality. The migration at times might also lead to 'anomie' for the recent migrants from rural backgrounds who no longer accept their traditional values, norms, and who yet remain unassimilated into the social and cultural life of the complex and materialistic urban community. Emile Durkheim (1897) used the term anomie to explain why some people became dysfunctional and anomie denotes insufficient integration into society's norms and values. In his studies of suicide, he associated anomie to the influence of a lack of norms or norms that were too rigid. Anomie is caused by the lack of differential adaptation. Therefore, anomie causes society to become less integrated and more individualistic. The term 'anomie' was also used by Merton (1938) to describe of the incompatibility in social structure generally in socially prescribed goals. Searching for ideal place is practically a very difficult task and so it is quite challenging when there is the question of adaptation. The concept of liminality is originally taken from an anthropologist, Arnold van Gennep. In his work '*Rite de passage*' (1960), he demonstrated in practice its coordinating role in the process of seasonal changes, in the course of change of the individual life style. Rite de passage, is an indispensable attribute of any type of change, characterized by three phases: separation, marginality or liminality and incorporation. The individual involved is called the initiand or the transit traveller. Of these three phases, special interest is given to the second or liminal phase in which the individual acquires the experience of becoming completely detached from the reality. The terms liminal and

liminality gained popularity through writings of Victor Turner in the second half of 20th century. In Turner's view, the temporary detachment of an individual brings him to an ambivalent social status but frees him from any laws. His status is essentially ambivalent and hazy. A migrant may be understood as an actor residing in a liminal space in-between location of cultural action because he is the one who is separated from the earlier world and yet to be incorporated into new world. Liminal phenomenon performs the function of a transitory phase between destructive reality governed by force and the other worldly cosmos worked out by imagination.

When an individual enters into the liminal phase, finds himself in the gap between worlds, he is likely to be caught in an alternative structure of here and there. The significance of liminality is not only the isolation from hardened structures, but also the potentialities of forming alternative structures. According to Turner, this occurs when there is dual role to the actor and he is in between the roles as observed in during a rite of transition. For example, a man during his wedding ceremony is neither "single" nor "married", and Turner characterizes them as "liminal," that is, "betwixt and between" their regular social roles. In this phase, the migrants behave in such a way to adapt at two different angles of strategy.

Kim (2003) pointed out, "the change from sojourner with an ethnic identity to an assimilated individual with an intercultural identity is a process rich in complexity, with a myriad of influential forces pushing and pulling in multiple directions but ending in an individual, changed, in varying degrees, by the experience". The cross-cultural adaptation may be initially affected due to communication failure between intercultural interactants. Gumperz and Tannen (1979) argue that cross cultural interactions are more difficult to engage in than homophilous interactions because participants lack a common language or shared knowledge. Improving communication clarity is a systematic statement of the functional pre-requisite of integral co-existence. Kim claims the sojourner goes through a continuous cycle of stress and adaptation which results in growth over time which Kim calls the Stress-Adaptation-Growth dynamic (Ruben 1983).

Migrants experience culture shock initially and become more comfortable in the later stages or may be absorbed to the culture of greater tradition, primarily to the host society in case of migrants. However, assimilation is very difficult in this modern age. The migrants in the early period were highly indulged to assimilation as compared to the later arrivals. The final stage of cultural adaptation is termed as *Feeling at home* (Oberg, 1960), developing a sense of biculturalism. The new culture is no longer new; instead feels like another home. In this stage, one becomes in a position to live and work at his full potential, but not necessarily occurred assimilation. A migrant is assigned with multiple deals primarily economic activities; he experiences new social structure in the new set up and behaves accordingly. Liminality implies here that the original social status of migrants could not be identifiable unless the counterpart existed in the destination society. The idea is that a Brahmin cannot be fully identifiable in a new society where there is no caste system. For

example, the Teli is a caste group in India, particularly in Bihar state under the umbrella of Bhojpuri community, however, the Teli people of Manipur are hardly identified with the original caste identity since there are no sizeable other caste counterparts like Goala or Dhobi or Hazam or so. Rather, the Teli has been considered as a community in Manipur which definitely brings a lot of changes to Telis' culture and practices which actually attracts various social philosophers. The Telis are followers of Hinduism. They worship most of the Hindu Gods like the Manipuris do. However, they have unique cultural-rites, forms of worship and festivals within the frame of Hindu culture. A sense of rooted in their original tradition is still observed. This is made explicit by their own temple in their locality. The temple plays a great role in organising them, retaining them to their unique traditions. They are still practising their age old 'Chhath Pooja', (Sun God) a unique worshipping ceremony for the prosperity of one's family, along with several family rites and worshipping in their houses.

During the interaction, it is also known that they are not entirely isolated from those cultural practices of Manipuri Hindus. They participate in celebrating 'Yaoshang Festival' as done by the Meitei Manipuris. They also participate in 'Thabal Chongba' dance, the practice of 'Nakatheng' etc. which are the unique elements of Holi festival of the Manipuri society. The Telis are now recognised as a community by the host society and their integration to the host society is quite observable. The Bengoli migrants are better in educational performances. They are engaged either in business or government services, clerical or teachers. They are Hindus and they organised their festivals together with the host society particularly *Durga Poojah*, the worshipping of goddess, *Durga Devi*. In Babupara, locating in the heart of Imphal city, the Bengoli High School established in 1903, four decades back to Indian independence is one of the oldest schools of Manipur. It indicates the Bengoli migrants' interest to western education and close connection to impart education in Manipur. It is also learnt that Bengoli migrants are well skilled in documenting and clerical works. On the other hand, Nepalis migrants are descendents of armymen or other unclassified works. They took important role in helping the British India force during the Second World War in Manipur. Now, they are agriculturists or in the army or engaged in daily wages on manual works. In the locality of Pangei Nepali, which is perhaps the oldest village of Nepali in Manipur, has a close relationship with the host society. Inter-marriage with the host society is permitted. Nepalis celebrated festivals jointly with the host community and they are well acquainted with the host culture, food habits. Their active participation in 'Lai Haraoba' (pleasing of god, the *Marjing* God) one weak long traditional Meitei festivals is surely a good sign of integration to the Manipuri society. They prefer to call themselves as the Gorkhas or the Gorkha Manipuri. In spite of the aforementioned relationships between the migrants and the host society because of the liminality theory, migrant communities are surely having different significant cultures which are very strange to the host culture and vice versa.

Xenophobia is the most problematic condition in Manipur. The people of Manipur acquired a resistance feeling particularly towards the late migrants.

CONCLUSION

Due to globalisation, migration becomes quite prominent and widespread. Cultural change to a migrant population is quite a substantial process. Migrants witness and experience a social mobility with a wide range of variations. Migrants' behaviours in liminality transition bear a very complex structure because of new phase involving in and out mobility in between cultures. The Bhojpuri, the Nepalis, the Bengolis who are integrated into the soils of Manipur are those whose forefathers migrated in Manipur during British period. The Nepalis of Pangei in Manipur, are well adjusted to the host society through social involvement such as in common festivals, ceremonies and complete acceptance of inter-marriages. Manipur with a literary history of over two thousand years has been graced by different racial elements over time. The early arrivals were quite friendly and integrating to the host society because it was occurred with the complete knowledge and permission of the then king of Manipur, however, the later arrivals due to irregularity and undocumented, irrational arrival, population pressure as well as imbalance was resulted. It is the right time for awakening the sense of nationalism and highlighting the importance of integration in the pace of socio-economic development. Otherwise, anomie, which refers isolation, individualism, social dysfunction may be resulted in the near future of Manipur.

Since Manipur is having unhealthy law and order, improper economic policies, numerous sensitive political issues, migrant groups and host society are often trapped in social and ethnic tensions because of the clash of interests between the two. Such a situation sometimes, tends to impregnate social crisis and destabilise the pace of development. People of Manipur, are demanding to introduce a mechanism as a means to regulate migration in order to safeguard its land and indigenous peoples. Involvement of the migrants in various socio-cultural and political groups in order to familiarise the host culture is very much important at the present hour. The extensive work on the area of co-existence and integration will be able to remove xenophobia and will throw light in building peace and development. There is a need to think on identification of the rational migrants and to roll out policies on how to accommodate them as a way forward to acquire peace, integration and development in the country in general and the state in particular.

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