

Social Capital and Transnational South Asian families: Rituals, Care and Provision

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Introduction	2
Social Capital, Families and Social Change	2
South Asian Families and the Migration Process	5
Rituals, Gender and Migration	6
Care and Provision in a Transnational World	7
Conclusion	9
References	10

Introduction

Social capital, understood as resources held in networks made up of kin and non-kin, is implicit in the migration process. Mainstream theorists of social capital suggest processes of social change such as migration affect social capital, but they perceive the influence as detrimental in so far as such changes erode traditional forms of social organisation (i.e. families) leading to a decline in social capital (Coleman 1990; Putnam 1995). However, studies on transnational ties reveal a different picture as they explore the creative and innovative practices through which migrant networks are maintained, reproduced and utilised (Gardner 2002; Goulbourne 2001; Mand 2002). Furthermore, these studies highlight how migrant practices and strategies occurring in social and legal contexts that involve social norms and access to social resources are mediated by gender, generation and geography.

This working paper reviews the literature on South Asian familial practices involving rituals, care and provision in the light of broader debates about social capital, ethnicity and transnationalism (Goulbourne & Solomos 2003). The first section examines the major theorists on social capital and their ideas about the family and ethnicity. The second section details ideals and norms concerning gender and household in South Asia and draws attention to the impact of migration in terms of social norms and social capital. The final two sections deal more specifically with the literature on rituals, care and provision.

Social Capital, Families and Social Change

Theorists of social capital like Coleman (1990; 1991), Bourdieu (1997) and Putnam (1995; 1993; 2000) explore in different ways families and social capital. Bourdieu's analysis usefully demonstrates the role of practices and power in the generation, utilisation and maintenance of social capital within and across generations. Although Coleman focuses on families and Putnam with ethnicity, what unites these two is that they find processes of social change like migration detrimental for the generation of social capital. For Putnam 'emigration devalues one's social capital, for most of one's social connections must be left behind' (Putnam 2000: 390). Hence, he argues that geographic mobility introduces instability to social networks resulting in a weakening of social ties and perceives this to be detrimental for social capital. Similarly, Coleman stresses kinship ties to be the backbone of social capital and correspondingly argues that processes of social change disrupt the generation of social capital. Coleman's (1990) critique identifies 'individual mobility' as highly problematic as it poses a challenge to kinship based social capital. However, the study of South Asian Transnationalism highlights migration to be a household decision and social capital based on kinship and ethnic ties are significant features of the migration process. Furthermore, familial networks span across national boundaries and these ties are in a process of becoming rather than being static (Gardner 1995; Mand 2004; Sharma 1986; Zontini 2004).

Coleman's approach to social capital stresses traditional family structures and 'stable' environments as optimum for social capital. For Coleman (1990) such contexts enable consensus and control notably through high levels of obligations and expectations, the creation of information pools, and effective norms and sanctions. In Coleman's view, where there are dense ties coupled with high levels of obligation there is solidarity and by extension social capital. Coleman's position on social capital and its relationship to families makes particular assumptions. For example he assumes that norms are given facts and not social constructs that reflect relations of power. Furthermore, whilst norms governing social networks can aid solidarity, they can exclude and sanction alternative realities. Secondly, since familial life is largely seen as a cost-benefit exercise (through obligation, investment and repayment) it is unsurprising that, for Coleman, social capital flourishes in stable situations. This rational view of

social relations fails to account for the emotional aspects of familial life that are located within and challenged through social norms and obligations.

If Coleman's writing about social capital presents it as a singular resource, Bourdieu differentiates social, cultural and symbolic capital, which he argues are underpinned by economic capital. Bourdieu also draws attention to the undercurrents in the different forms of capital, when he states:

Capital, which, in its objectified or embodied forms, takes time to accumulate and which, as a potential capacity to produce profits and reproduce itself in identical or expanded form, contains a tendency to persist in its being...' (Bourdieu 1997:46).

Bourdieu formulates a relationship between practices and capital by drawing attention to 'values', 'sentiments' and notions of belonging to be embodied and transmitted through socialisation. With Bourdieu's focus on practices, our understanding about social capital is enriched as we factor in time as an ingredient in the accumulation and generation of cultural capital, which in turn is linked to social capital through social obligations. Like Coleman, Bourdieu links social capital to membership of a larger group, 'which provides each of its members with the backing of the collectivity-owned capital, a 'credential'...', and which are expressed through material and symbolic exchanges (Bourdieu 1997:51).

Bourdieu's ideas touch on other factors that are necessary in the understanding of social groups and social capital. He highlights differential access to social capital based on the size of networks, the maintenance, accumulation and quality of capital, and brings to the fore questions of power and the perpetuation of social inequality (1997). The issue of networks as a resource is highly pertinent at different stages of the migration process and relative to a group practice. From Bourdieu we learn that in order to explore social capital a focus on networks is necessary.

Social capital is the sum of resources, actual or virtual, that accrue to an individual or a group by virtue of possessing a durable network of more or less institutionalised relations of mutual acquaintance and recognition. (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992:119, quoted in Field, 2003).

Therefore, like Coleman, Bourdieu stressed networks, but found that in themselves they do not necessary generate social capital. Rather, Bourdieu explicitly draws attention to the necessity of investments within networks (requiring time and energy), of power relations (institutionalised relations) and how these are manifest through practices (creating social obligations). Furthermore, in Bourdieu's writings on cultural capital, space is given to the relevance of practices, through which we can explore social capital in less tangible forms as generated and accessed through rituals (often marked by symbols) and practices of care and provision.

Although Putnam's (1993; 1995; 1998) approach to social capital is concerned with communal activities and civic engagement and not families per se, he also brings to the fore social networks, trust and norms as foundations upon which social capital is generated and mobilised. In terms of networks, Putnam draws distinctions between bridging ties that cut across social divides enabling a broader set of linkages, and bonding ties that are dense and inward looking creating solidarity within bonded networks (Putnam 1998; see Edwards et al. 2003).

The idea of bonding and bridging social capital has been explored in relation to South Asian communities in Britain, notably through the lens of marriage practices and related kinship alliances. For example, Ballard (1990) explored the marriage practices of Mirpuris and Sikhs and found that the relative economic and social success of the Sikh community in the British context was because Sikh marriage practices widened networks. By drawing attention to the differences between Sikh marriage

practices (for example, gotra exogamy, whereby marriage takes place outside the kin group) and Pakistani practices involving cousin marriages, Ballard highlights the former's inherent ability to expand networks through marriage. Ballard argues that the Pakistani practice of cousin marriage results in tighter networks that remain spatially confined (Ballard 2001: 13 & 1990).

Inherent within Sikh marriage practices then lay the opportunities for households to widen networks across space and place. According to Ballard, the impacts of kinship and marriage rules are central 'not just on processes of migration and resettlement, but also on their users' subsequent trajectories of adaptation and socio economic mobility' (Ballard 2001:13). However, Ballard does not address rules and preferences as 'rhetorical devices to support ... to judge, bargain and negotiate with others' (Shaw 2000:138). Through Shaw's analysis of Pakistani marriages we learn norms are flexible and that 'marriage choice and negotiations that surround it must be understood in terms of strategies adopted by different participants, rather than in terms of any rule or preference' (Shaw 2000: 138-139). Shaw alerts us to the dangers of magnifying cultural norms as all pervasive, and so removing the ways that migrants are involved in complex relations pertaining to culture with a host of audiences ranging from familial and communal members, the state and media.

Shaw (2000) notes power structures and relations in the context of families and in particular in the light of migration (Gardner 1995). As feminists have highlighted, power relations also govern families and other structures through which positioned actors bargain and negotiate for resources. The ways in which ethnicity has been used to mark boundaries and its use at pivotal moments has a particular resonance with gender. For example, feminists focusing on ethnicity as it intersect with gender ideologies show how women are positioned as the markers of communal ethnic identity and central for the transmission of ethnic values (Anthias & Yuval-Davis 1993). The idea that social capital is a communal resource held within a family leads to questions about the positions held by different family members, and the corresponding creation, maintenance, access to and use of collectively held social capital in relation to gender and generational identity. For example, by taking gender roles and practices as culturally constructed and varying over the life course, we can begin to address differing access to social capital (Moore 1988).

While some correlation has been identified with regard to ethnicity and social capital in Putnam's work on civic engagement, we know less about the intersection between ethnicity and familial or communal life in the generation and utilisation of social capital (Goulbourne & Solomos 2003). Collectivising notions of shared identities by migrants is partly a reflection of the dislocation inherent in the migration process and also the social exclusion and racism in Britain (Goulbourne & Solomos 2003). As Fenton notes, ethnicity is based on notions of familiarity, which as social scientists we know are constructed and reproduced, and it is a powerful force that varies in intensity (Fenton 2003). Fenton takes on some of Bourdieu's ideas in his discussion of the ways in which 'sentiments' based on shared aspects of identity cannot be easily discarded through a focus on practices.

To speak of 'customariness', 'familiarity', 'conventions of language and thought' is not ... to imply that 'irrationality and effect' are dominant forces in social life (c.f. Bourdieu 1990). It is to ... acknowledge that this kind of familiarity exists, that habits of thought do become ingrained and are often associated with early life, place, the family and wider groupings or regions (Fenton 2003:89-90).

Assertions of ethnic particularities are contextual (Banks 1996), can be used to demarcate boundaries between different groups (Barth 1969), are related to politico-economic structures, and are often

expressed through cultural symbols and practices. As Ballard notes:

Ethnic consolidation is not a product of cultural distinctiveness per se but is best understood as the outcome of the articulation of cultural distinctiveness in situations of political and/or economic competition' (Ballard 2002:28, emphasis original).

The literature illustrates the complexity of exploring social capital in the context of migration and processes of social change and continuity, which is unaccounted for by the major theorists on social capital. For example, Coleman's model forecloses the possibility of social change inherent in the migration experience as being a catalyst for the creation of new networks and by extension social capital. Rather than assuming that social capital within families is adversely affected by migration and global processes, there is a need to look at the strategies and practices through which migrant families negotiate familial life. This is a key area of exploration in the studies concerning transnational families (Gardner 1995 & 2002b; Goulbourne & Solomos 2003; Mand 2004; Reynolds 2004; Zontini 2004). Furthermore, Bourdieu's ideas about social capital generate a discussion for understanding power in the context of families and communities leading to a more nuanced discussion on ethnicity than the model proposed by Putnam. Other theorists of ethnicity have further stressed the relational aspects of ethnic identification and performance through rituals and the necessity to locate these within socio-economic and political contexts.

South Asian Families and the Migration Process

In South Asia, personhood is thought of in reference to a collectivity such as a family, kin or caste group, whilst other broader differentiation occurs on the basis of religion and region (Gardner 1995; Hershman 1981). Traditionally, South Asian households have been defined on the basis of co-proximity, a common hearth and patrilocal residence (Parry 1979). A variety of norms surround generational and gender identity, for example the dominant notion amongst Sikhs is that women are 'temporary' members and 'guests' in their natal household and, following marriage, are seen as outsiders. However, although it is widely acknowledged that women leave natal households to join and care for their husband and by extension his household, research has indicated that women contest such ideological constructs and speak/sing about their connectedness to natal homes (Raheja & Gold 1994). Differences are also apparent between women according to their stage in the life course and marital status. For example women are less likely to maintain power within their households following the death of a husband, particularly if relations with daughters-in-law are strained (Chen 2000). Elderly South Asian men, on the whole, relate to the household in a different manner as they characteristically spend more time outside the home. Hence, it is not uncommon to find men meeting other men in public places such as parks and temples. Whether South Asian families have had a tradition of inter-generational cohabitation is a matter of debate. However, there are ideals surrounding care and provision for an older generation by the younger (usually sons) generation (Vatuk 1990). Traditional norms suggest that it is a son and his wife who care for his elderly mother, although married daughters often take on this role (Chen 2000).

Not surprisingly, therefore, migration decisions in South Asia are made in the context of household needs and social relations (Gardner 1995; Mand 2004; Sharma 1986). Migrant experiences in the UK have been documented among religious communities, for example Pakistanis (Shaw 2000; Werbner 1990); Sikhs (Ballard 1994; Bhachu 1985; Mand 2004); Bangladeshi (Gardner 1995; Gavron 1997); and Christians (Jeffery 1976; Mascarenhas-Keyes 1979), and concern processes of change and continuity and intergenerational relations.

The role of social capital within and between household members and the relationship to the migration process is documented through the practice of remittances in the literature on South Asians mass migration to Britain from the sub-continent. Mass migration began in the 1950s and 1960s and it comprised mainly South Asian men who arrived to work in low paid and low skilled jobs available in Britain, following which a pattern of chain migration became established. Chain migration involved male migrants arriving and living in all male households and actively enabling other incoming migrants usually to find work and adjust to living in 'new environments'. This type of sharing was largely based on linkages back home, usually it was members of the same village who migrated and settled in particular regions of the UK. Sharing resources were part of social norms and morality translated into the British context, notably in the creation of information pools pertaining to jobs and accommodation (Ballard 1994). The experience of migration nonetheless differs according to a group's point of departure, migration histories, kinship structures and religious identities. These factors also bear an impact on cultural practices, socio-economic status in the migratory context and for the experience of transnationalism for particular groups (see various contributions in Ballard 1994; Gardner 1995; Mand 2004; Shaw 2000).

During this early phase of migration, the transnational activities of male migrants largely focused on remittances, which they sent to their families. What we see in this phase is the bonding of men on the basis of common kinship and points of departure. Significantly, through the practice of sending remittances primarily to support family members and the household at the point of departure, maintaining links across places has been part of the history of South Asian migration (Ballard 1994; Gardner 1995). What also becomes clear when looking into the early experiences of the migration process is the significance of gender and the relationship this had to the division of resources across places. For the majority of the male migrants, the stay in Britain was perceived as temporary, since they hoped to return to the sub-continent to their families having capitalised on the relatively high levels of income possible in Britain (Anwar 1979).

Following the period of chain migration, Ballard (1994) describes the arrival of women and children as part of the phase of 'family reunification'. He suggests that this was the period when 'ethnic competition' was translated to the host environment. The arrival of women and children is said to have led to a more traditional adherence to the norms of the departure point. It is difficult to ascertain whether such a depiction of women's arrival rings true across the South Asian experience, however, particularly in light of migration from East African countries (Bhachu 1985).

From the literature we learn that migrant households are more flexible and adaptable, and that migrants adopt new and innovative ways for maintaining networks (Shaw 2000). An understanding of these processes is significant for exploring social capital, as family members negotiate belonging to people and places in the light of their geographical dispersal. Additionally, the discussion on transnationalism and families draws attention to the positions – in terms of gender, generation, geography and marital stage – occupied by individual family members, and the relation this potentially has to social capital generation and access.

Rituals, Gender and Migration

Studying ritual practices is relevant for understanding social capital as these practices reveal processes of change and continuity, and the significance of social identities. Some of the key ritual occasions that are explored in the context of the South Asian diaspora relate to the arrangement and practices of marriage (Mand 2004; Jhutti 1998; Shaw 2000; Werbner 1991). In the migratory context, the performance of rituals can be a way through which migrants enhance social status and mobility for a family and or a community (Bauman 1996; Mand 2004; Osella & Osella 2000).

The analysis of migrant ritual performance draws attention to new forms of identification with a locality. For example, Gell (1994) draws attention to the Sikh incorporation of registry marriage ceremonies alongside traditional wedding rites at temples as an illustration of their 'Britishness' and upward mobility. Furthermore, other studies have drawn attention to rituals as being creative responses by migrants as they innovate and re-invent practices that in turn tell us about internal changes within communities (Werbner 1990). Such analyses invariably draw attention to the gendered dimensions of familial rituals, which are often celebrated in the context of the 'house', although the division between public and private spheres remains contextual in the field of ritual and gender (Mand 2002). A key illustration of changing social identities, social mobility and innovation enacted through ritual practices is illustrated in Bhachu's study of twice migrant Sikh women in Britain. Bhachu (1991) highlights how migration played a key role in the reformulation of marriage practices amongst Sikhs and how, in the British context, women transform their earning capacity into goods for their dowry. The picture of migrant ritual practices illustrated in these studies is one of innovation and the re-invention of tradition.

Through exploring rituals as they celebrate key aspects of a household, for example expansion through marriage and/or migration, anthropologists have been keen to note the intersection with gender. In South Asia, women's work includes ritual activities such as gift giving (Werbner 1990), the provision of money, food and care for the elderly and children, and visiting and keeping key social relations (Alicea 2000; Mand 2004). Amongst Sikhs, ritual work is often aligned to gender and stage in the life course and household rituals are said to be the concern of women (Mand 2002). This is not to say that men are not involved in ritual activities. Rather, in the course of Sikh weddings, rituals involving men tend to occur in 'public' spaces and involve less symbolic exchanges (Mand 2004). One exception in looking at rituals beyond the family has been Baumann's (1992) exploration of Asian men's participation in the D-Day Parade in Britain. Significantly, this article addresses male ritual engagement in public. It highlights rituals as necessitating an 'other' and brings to the fore the significance of audiences. The factor of audiences in the performance of rituals has so far been largely absent in studies concerning South Asians. Nonetheless, there has been an interest in the ways in which rituals are being recorded and viewed through videos across space and time (Mand 2004; Sengupta 1999; Steen-Preis 1997).

Bhachu's (1988 & 1991) analysis of Punjabi women's translation of the income they have generated working in the British economy into their dowries, highlights other factors such as class in the negotiation of gendered activities in the household. New ways of relating, within and between families and non-kin, through changing practices around rituals is addressed by Shaw (2000) in the context of transnational Pakistani marriages. She notes that new forms of alliances are arising in the context of migration based on friendship, and that these are transforming traditional marriage practices wherein families in Britain are refusing marriage offers from kin in Pakistan. At one level such changes are often viewed as a loss of 'values', an idea that resonates with some social capital theorists. Nonetheless, there is a viewpoint that sees new forms of power and connectivity being created out of changing family forms (and practices), and hence social capital is no longer limited to rigid categories of belonging and identification (Edwards 2004).

Care and Provision in a Transnational World

As noted above, South Asian familial life is experienced in the context of norms pertaining to gender and generation, which are in themselves influenced by region, religion and caste identities. A dominant feature is the attribution of specific activities according to gender identities. As discussed above, activities involving rituals, care and provision performed in the context of the household are conceptualized as women's work. In contrast, provision occurring in the public sphere is traditionally thought of as men's work. Despite the ideological division in South Asian norms between the public and

domestic space, practices involving care and provision can also tell us about the effect wider social, economic and political structures have on families and their social capital.

Activities that make up care and provision in a transnational world include physical, emotional and material activities such as remittances, visits, gifts and everyday tasks performed in the domestic context. Burholt (2004) notes that Punjabis in Britain do not send remittances, although the practice is prevalent amongst Sylhetis. This variation can be explained by the different migration histories of the two groups (see above). Furthermore, there are differences between Punjabi and Sylheti familial ties that are not explored by Burholt, and these stem from different kinship structures and practices of relating. Ballard (1990) put this argument forward in his discussion about Mirpuri and Sikh marriage practices, and although cousin marriage is less common amongst Sylhetis it nonetheless is a recognized way of recruiting family members.

However, Burholt's study does not tell us how expectations and obligations are gendered or have altered across generations. Therefore, although Burholt indicates high levels of remittances amongst transnational Sylheti families, we know little about how those who are expecting and those expected from understand care and provision, or whether the younger generation contests such practices. Significantly, in another study, attention was drawn to intergenerational conflict over the practice of sending remittances from Britain to Sylhet amongst Bangladeshi migrant households in Tower Hamlets (Phillipson et al. 2004).

Horden and Smith (1998) argue that notions of care and provision are not static and that we need to address how these have altered over time and space. In the case of South Asian families, changing ideas about care and provision across generations (time) and across places (space), or whether there are points of convergence between the two, is an area that remains unexplored. Horden and Smith also raise the myths that surround family based care as sufficient and the suspicion that external agencies (i.e. state welfare policies) are detrimental to care provision by the family. The idea that welfare agencies are detrimental to family-based social capital resonates with Coleman's (1990) arguments. However, we do need to question to what extent this is the case and whether all types of care and provision is best served by family members?

What Coleman, and Horden and Smith raise – albeit in quite different ways – is the need to locate familial experiences within state policies. The intersection between social policies, ethnicity and families is best illustrated by Boneham's study of elderly Sikh women in Britain. Boneham unveils two myths pertaining to elderly migrants: first that they seek to return to the point of origin; and second that families take care of themselves as units. Rather than accepting such assumptions, she argues that welfare policies, community organizations, and women's class and employment position as well as their roles in families, shape elderly people's quality of life (Boneham 1989:448).

Addressing care and provision by migrant families necessitates looking at external and internal dynamics. For example policies like the 1990 NHS and Community Care Act actively seek to instigate 'care in the community' as opposed to institutional care (Harpen & Leeson 2003). Such policies do not take into account changing or diverse familial relationships, or the cultural contexts within which ideas about care and provision are enacted or contested (Horden & Smith 1998: 2; Harper & Leeson 2003). Similarly, one of Burholt's (2004) key findings is that immigration policies influence familial ties and practices of care and provision. Thus whilst family members in Britain may seek to care for their elderly in the sub-continent by having them migrate to reside with them, 'families can find it difficult to get visas ... and parents may come on a visitors visa instead'. Thus, an external factor influencing South Asian migrant families specifically in terms of gender and social practices is immigration policies. Although there is not the room here to outline specific immigration laws, there have been key policies in the past,

notably the 'family reunification' policy and the 'primary purpose rule' that targeted South Asian marriage practices and families in Britain. Policies quite often operate on essentialised notions of culture and notions of fixed gender identities (Parmar 1982).

There has been little systematic investigation of how traditional norms that place the onus on South Asian women as being carers and nurturers are reinforced in state policies. An exception is Gardner's (2002b) study of elderly Bangladeshi in which she addresses British policies compounding traditional gender ideologies concerning women's care of elderly family members. Additionally, as others have documented changes in immigration policies often result in migrants' developing strategies in order to ensure the arrival of key kin in Britain, and policy often reinforces dominant norms (Ballard 2001; Boneham 1989; Gardner 2002, Mand 2004).

Conclusion

Social capital as a concept rarely has been applied explicitly in the South Asian context largely because of the dominant focus on studying social organisation through the prism of traditional kinship (Mand 2005; Palriwala 1996). Nonetheless, many of themes involved in exploring social capital, such as networks, norms, trust and reciprocity, have been inherently investigated in the literature on South Asian migration.

In this review I have illustrated that the literature on South Asian migration contradicts assumptions about a decline in social capital arising from processes of social change such as migration. Rather, in the South Asian context, migration is a household decision and is related to the needs of members. At the same time, migration influences the ways in which family life is experienced and how members relate to one another. Thus, migration acts as a catalyst for change and results in new ways of relating. Correspondingly, these new forms of social relatedness to people and places are enacted through practices involving rituals, and care and provision.

Such processes of change and continuity directly affect social capital, how it is generated and utilized, and by whom. The literature reveals the need to explore familial relations and access to social capital from the perspective of social actors who are positioned by gender and generation. This review has highlighted how processes of social change challenge classic theories of social capital. Ignoring the wider processes that influence institutions (families), and the fluid and contextual nature of social identities and networks, limits our understanding of social capital.

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