Chapter-VIII

*Migration & Social Change: Reflection through Case Studies*
CHAPTER EIGHT

MIGRATION AND SOCIAL CHANGE: REFLECTION THROUGH CASE STUDIES

Introduction

The main purpose of this chapter is to present the detailed studies of some cases identified from the respondents and the socio-religious organisations that they have constructed in the slum and are a part of that. We know that in quantitative research, information is gathered about a sample on a limited set of variables and the ‘individual unit,’ the person disappears from the analysis, which instead mainly comprises of traits. The individual representing the wholeness of those traits does not figure in these analyses. Since the study focuses on change, it is important to bring together the microcosmic approach in the form of case studies in support of the arguments given earlier in the empirical chapters that use macrocosmic approach based on quantitative data.

The case study approach focuses on the wholeness of the unit of analysis. It provides a platform for an intensive and in-depth research. It has helped in establishing the interconnection between the cases and the basic trends in the structure of social life of Kusumpur Pahari. The fusion of the qualitative and quantitative data based on the macro and micro orientation or the general and specific orientation provides us a better understanding of various dimensions of the life of migrant slum dwellers and the changes in their identities that have taken place since migration. In order to understand the present pattern of change, the knowledge of the life prior to migration is very important for better understanding and exposition of a transitional society. The knowledge about the pattern of social life in the past is quite necessary to derive any conclusion regarding change. The analysis of change also requires a thorough study and understanding of non-change.

The study of social and cultural change requires a ‘base line’, a reconstruction of social and cultural life around a hypothetical ‘point of departure’. For this purpose, the information about the social life of the slum dwellers prior to migration has been collected. Although the problem of fixing a point of departure is a difficult one, as the social life of a community is a continuous process and does not permit fragmentation into clear-cut phases, but nevertheless it was necessary to understand the complexity of
changes. In light of the nature of enquiry of this study, it was thought necessary to describe the cases reflecting changes in the life of the slum dwellers. This chapter takes forward the discussion on the changing social identities of the migrant slum dwellers after a certain years of settlement in this slum. In this chapter we proceed from more general to more specific observations. Although, the study does not aim to arrive at any kind of generalisations about the changing social identities of the migrant slum dwellers across slums, this approach, however, has surely helped in the better, all-round understanding of the life of the Kusumpur Pahari slum dwellers. The case studies have also made the interpretations more reliable and valid, which is one of the principal requirements of any social research.

The migrants struggle to come to terms with the changed environment. Their life prior to migration, conditions of work, rural-urban linkage, life after migration, community-based organisations, inter-community linkage and the impact of all of these on their identities have been discussed with the help of few identified cases. The outsiders usually see slums as a 'highly disorganised' area. However, the study shows that the social life in this slum is as organised as lives of any groups who live in spatial proximity with each other over a long period of time. The study presents a holistic account that offers a deep insight into the objectives of the study. During the course of the discussion, an attempt has been made to ideally link the explicit findings to larger theoretical and conceptual issues. The chapter deeply probes the phenomenon under investigation and analyses it intensively applying the quantitative data used in the earlier chapters along with a view to establish a connection between the macro and the micro and to make the analysis and interpretation more meaningful.

Case Study: Five Families
The profile of the cases revolves around the wide range of variants relating to the objectives of the study. In each profile, it is intended to provide a close view of the selected families in relations to its past, its condition in general immediately after arrival in the city, the dynamics that follow in the family sub-culture in the course of its adjustment with and assimilation into the slum life and the larger city life, its joys and sorrows and its apprehensions and aspirations. This has been done to examine the impact
of these changes on the social identity of the identified cases. In the cross section attempted to be captured in the profile, one case has been selected from each of the five blocks of the slum and from the fifty respondents taken up for the quantitative study in each block. The case, which was thought to have undergone the greatest mobility and transformation as per the requirements of the study, has purposively been chosen for the detailed investigation. For the community-based religious-cum-caste organisation, six main organisations have been identified based on the population of its members in the slum and the nature of the working of those organisations. For assembling the information, non-participant observation and unstructured interview with key informants have been used in varying degrees.

These case studies have helped in gaining a sharp understanding of the changes that have taken place in the social life of the migrant slum dwellers. During the study, we came to know about the working and importance of their socio-religious organisation in their identity formation and reconstruction and the influence it has on their group behaviour. It has also helped in testing the objectives and the hypothesis of the study. Through the case studies it has been tried to investigate the phenomena within its real life context. This has enhanced synthesis of information and knowledge integration. This chapter and the preceding chapters dealing with empirical findings are an attempt to strive for a fusion of the macro and micro information obtained during the fieldwork. In all of these chapters, both the quantitative and qualitative findings have been used to give the general as well as the specific analysis of the phenomena under investigation.

While describing the cases it has been kept in mind that they simply do not end up being just a narrative account and therefore appropriate theoretical frameworks have been used during analysis. The case studies have added value to the analysis and have helped to expand and corroborate the quantitative findings. The purpose of corroboration is to ensure that the research findings accurately reflect people's perceptions. This has provided greater credibility to the research findings. During the course of the study, various socio-economic and cultural dimensions of migration and the impact of those changes on the social identities of the migrants living in the Kusumpur Pahari slum have been taken up. A number of critical variables such as age, income, education profiles, caste composition, family size, debt position, factors behind migration, process of
Migration, employment status, earning profile, family responsibilities, social networks, social organisations, occupational shifts, rural-urban linkages, socio-cultural life, adjustment problems, perception about migration, etc, have been discussed in the study.

Case Study-1: ‘I Can See My Village’

Bhola Chaube, a 48-year-old Brahmin has been staying in the Kusumpur Pahari slum for the last 17 years. He migrated from the village ‘Salathua’ in ‘Bhabhua’ district of Bihar at the age of 31. The available literature on migration shows the significance of age in determining migration particularly for the rural migrants from poor socio-economic background. The migration theorists have argued that adolescents and those, who have come of age predominate the voluntary migrants.  

The empirical studies on the causes of migration in India have also supported this viewpoint. The rural poverty, reflected in low agricultural income, low productivity and under employment is a major factor in migration in the country. This comes true in the case of Bhola who came to Delhi in search of better livelihood opportunities.

Prior to migration, Bhola stayed in a joint family with his parents and four brothers. Two of them were married. He also had a sister, whom they had married-off. His extended family along with his wife and son comprised of fifteen members. His wife bore him two more children here in Kusumpur Pahari after migration. Bhola’s family was into farming and they owned ten acres of land. But that was not sufficient to feed a big family, so he decided to move out in search of a job. From Bhola’s case, we get to see that though he had a considerably good share of agricultural land, it was not sufficient to support a large family due to the high dependent population. It could also be inferred that acute poverty is not the only push factor for migration and the innovative migration criteria devised by Petersen is applicable to understand this (See Chapter-2).


4 See, chapter two in this thesis for the distinction between conservative migration and innovative migration as explained by Petersen.
Migration and Social Change: Reflection through Case Studies

migration need not always be to maintain the status-quo but it could also be to improve the standard of living, as in this case. The studies in the Indian context have shown that a considerably good percentage of the migrants belong to families having their own land for cultivation.\(^5\) Bhola’s better economic status could also be linked with his high caste status that has been pointed out in several studies tracing the link between the caste and economic status in the Indian society.\(^6\)

It has been found that the pull factors, like better employment and educational opportunities, health facilities and social networks etc, associated with the place of destination act as stimulus to draw the migrants towards it.\(^7\) Also, the educational status of the prospective migrant comes handy in getting a suitable job. This could be seen in Bhola’s case who, had to face less difficulties owing to the presence of acquaintance here, and due to his education till higher secondary level. He fully understands the value of education and the changes it brings in one’s life. Bhola has made sure that his children, two sons and a daughter, gets proper formal modern education. One of his sons is pursuing his graduation in science and other is in class 10\(^{th}\). His daughter is studying in class 12\(^{th}\).

Bhola feeds a family of five by working as a security guard. He gets a salary of six thousand per month and he makes some extra income by working overtime. He is not in favour of letting her wife seek job, as he thinks that because of her poor educational background, she will not get a proper job and he does not want her to work as housemaids like the wives of many of his neighbours. His high caste status could be one of the reasons behind this decision though he did not specifically mention this. His neighbours are mainly from Uttar Pradesh and Bihar but of different caste like Valmiki and Dhobi. In the beginning, he was reluctant to discuss his preference of neighbours, but after much persuasion, he said that if possible he would like to have some one from his own caste as neighbours. This corroborates the findings of the quantitative study


\(^7\) For a better understanding of the push and pull factors see Everett S Lee’s theory as discussed in chapter two in this thesis.
discussed in chapter five, where 58% respondents prefer to have their caste men as their neighbours.

He said that he feels ashamed to stay in the slum, something he can never disclose to his relatives and kins back home. Secondly, he has to stay as neighbours with those castes, he had never imagined to ever have to live with in close proximity. It is only for earning his living and giving his children the best education, which was nearly impossible at his birthplace, that he is compelled to stay on in this slum. With a paltry salary he cannot think of renting a room outside the slum. This shows his difficulty in coming to terms with the loss of identity he has undergone by staying in a slum, amongst the low caste people.

Bhola's struggle to maintain his separate identity has pulled him towards the traditional rituals and customs. He said that all Hindus are bound by their birth to perform the rituals and customs that the religion requires them to perform. He further said that all caste men should perform the duties expected of them as a member of that caste. This could be seen as his attempt to re-assert his high caste status, which other wise seems lost in an urban slum. The studies have shown that in urban areas, caste as a determinate of social status gets subdued to the system of class. The act of strictly adhering to the traditional customs could also be an attempt to come to terms with the fall in the position of strength and special status, which his high caste background might have accorded him in the village.

He said he did not have to face any caste-based discrimination or bias in his stay of over seventeen years in this slum. But at the same time he said that at times he and his children have to face derisive and belittling comments for his regional background and accent. He thinks that those mocking him and his family for being 'Bihari', are jealous of the abilities and capabilities of a Bihari. He feels that by dint of their hard work, 'Biharis' could adjust and survive anywhere. Here, we find his sense of belongingness to a region taking precedence over his caste identity. This explains the contextual nature of identity, which has been explained in detail in chapter three. But again we find the importance of the highly segmented/narrow caste identity in his life when on the question of allowing

---

8 Eames, E. (1954), "Some Aspects of Urban Migration from a Village in North Central India", The Eastern Anthropologists, 8 (1), September-November.
his children for inter-caste marriage, he said an emphatic no. He believes that even if he allows his sons and daughters to go for inter-caste marriage, they won’t do that owing to their high values that he has inculcated in his children. Studies on this aspect have shown that the migrants strictly adhere to the principle of endogamy in order to preserve their identities.  

Bhola has good relationships with his caste men in this slum, as they are very few and are of great help to him in times of need. He follows religion devoutly and even visits a temple in ‘R.K Puram’ every Tuesday. His room has a special sacred corner where pictures of Hindu gods and goddesses could be seen. They proclaim his religious identity. Bhola and his wife light incense sticks and do some bhajan every morning and evening. They also keep fasts on various religious occasions. He and his family also goes to a temple on the outskirts of the Kusumpur Pahari slum as it does not belong to any particular caste group. When asked why he does not visit so many temples located in the slum itself, he said that they have been constructed by different caste people for their caste men. Moreover, he does not feel like visiting those temples. He or his family has never visited the Valmiki temple located near his jhuggi or any temple belonging to other caste groups in the slum. Sticking to the traditional customs, religious functions and mode of worshipping is an attempt by him to re-create his village life, which he misses here the most. They are also the proof of his continued attachment with his primordial identities in order to preserve his culture and continue with the style of life he and his family had in their native place.

A contradiction was visible in his response when he said that he was not averse to working with the people belonging to other caste and region, as he said that this is something, which is beyond his wish. Although, he wants to work with his caste and region men, he can work with anyone, as he has left his homeland (place of origin) only to earn his livelihood. This again suggests the contextual nature of identity. Even his political inclination is quite unclear, as he said that he believes that all parties are the same. Prior to migration, his family and he himself were the supporters of congress. He also on earlier occasions have voted for the congress party but this time he has still not decided, which party he should support.

9 Inbanathan, Anand (1997), Migration and Adaptation: Tamils in Delhi, Delhi: Kalinga Publications.
His family could be seen to be adopting some of the characteristics of urbanisation in matters of dress, food and language. His sons and daughters are quite happy to be in Delhi but they wish to visit their hometown during vacations. His wife misses the company of women she had in the village. She also misses her parents, with whom she used to meet quite often when she was at her native place. She yearns to return back but has never conveyed her feelings to her husband fearing he might get disturbed and similar feeling might compel him to return back, thus jeopardising the career of their children. Bhola secretly divulged that he himself misses the rural life very much but cannot think of going back because the conditions in the village remain the same that forced him to move out and that will also not be good for his children’s career. He said he might return back with his wife after marrying off his son and daughters and seeing them settled in life.

Bhola is the first to migrate from his family. But other people from his village had migrated earlier. One of his caste and village men, who was working as a security guard in Delhi helped him in migration and in getting the job of the security guard. This also goes with the finding of the quantitative study which shows that 81.2% respondents had received various kinds of support from their social networks after migrating to this city. The social network helped Bhola to deal with the early poverty and vulnerability at the new place. The studies on migration have shown that a series of factors like the presence of relatives and friends in urban areas provide initial assistance to the new migrants, which fascinate people in the rural areas to migrate. Though, Bhola has left his job many times during his stay of 17 years in Delhi, each time he got the job of the security guard itself. He does not want to become a member of any association or organisation, as he believes it to be of no value. Bhola is fully happy and satisfied with the way his life has unfolded after migration. He has also purchased a few acres of land at his native place in Bihar. His only wish is to see his sons settled and move out of the slum to some nearby locality before he closes his eyes.

From this study, we find that the migrants living in slum are also upwardly mobile. They develop their own mechanisms to adapt to the changing milieu. The story of Bhola also indicates that there cannot be any generalisations regarding the concept of

---

‘culture of poverty’ propounded by Oscar Lewis, that has been mentioned earlier. Bhola’s case study also disproves Lewis theory. The findings show that how the economic compulsions coupled with the desire to give the family and children a better life and opportunities keeps one tied to the city and checks return migration despite the fact that the person wants to return as in the case of Bhola Chaube. Staying in the city becomes a compulsion for the migrants both economically and socially. In addition, living in the city also raises the status of the person in his native place.

Case Study-II: ‘Aiming High’

Deshraj Singh who appears to be in his late forties came to Delhi from a rural hamlet in the Swai Madhopur district of Rajasthan. He belongs to ‘Khatik’ caste, a scheduled caste that is traditionally into meat selling and goat rearing. In some areas, the Khatik caste families are also into pig farming. The difficulty in finding a descent job in village and unable to support his family through the traditional work of meat selling forced Deshraj to migrate to Delhi. This shows that the lack of work opportunities in rural areas is the main push-factor that forces people to urban destinations. The prospective migrant anticipates better livelihood opportunities in cities, especially big cities and decides to migrate. The decision to migrate is not merely influenced by anticipation but is also a calculated move made after contacting the social networks in the city of destination. Indeed, human migration can be considered to be a series of ‘network-mediated’ movements. This observation has also been supported by several studies on the causes of migration.

11 Lewis propounded the concept of ‘culture of poverty’ where he suggested that it is a ‘design for living’ of the poor people where they develop characteristics of marginality, helplessness, inferiority and fatalism at an individual level. On the family level, their life is characterised by family disharmony and high rate of divorce and desertion. And on the community level, there is lack of effective participation and integration in the major institutions of the larger society by the poor people. See, Haralambos, M. (2001), Sociology: Themes and Perspectives, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, p. 154.


Before Deshraj, his elder brother 'Bhudev Prasad' migrated to Delhi and settled in 'Kartar Nagar', an area across the river Yamuna. Later on, his brother-in-law migrated and settled in the Kusumpur Pahari slum. This proves the 'chain migration' theory, which says that the migrants are more likely to move to those places where they have contacts and the previous migrants create links for the new migrants. Through their social networks at the place of destination, the prospective migrants learn of opportunities, are provided with transportation and have initial accommodation and employment arranged for them in an alien setting. Thus, the presence of social networks makes sure that the new setting no longer remains alien to the newly arrived migrant, as is seen in the case of Deshraj. After coming to Delhi, Deshraj first stayed with his elder brother for some time in the Yamuna Pushta slum, but was unable to find any work in that area. His brother-in-law then asked him to come and stay with him. He accepted his invitation and shifted to Kusumpur Pahari.

He had already completed his intermediate education at the time he migrated to Delhi. The studies have shown that the migrants have a higher level of education than the non migrants. The education provides an impetus to the process of migration. His 'didi' and 'jijaji' were a great support for him. They motivated him and asked him to continue with his studies and not to bother about work. They assured him that his needs would be taken care of by them. His brother-in-law who himself was a teacher in a polytechnic college understood the value of education and the changes it can bring in one's life. His earning was sufficient and did not have much problem in supporting Deshraj. With their support, Deshraj completed his B.A and M.A in geography through correspondence (See News Paper Column-14 in Appendix-6). During his study days, he used to do odd jobs as head loader at the Palam Airport to earn some quick pocket money. He also gave tuition to small boys in the Kusumpur Pahari slum and earned around three hundred rupees per month. Presently, he is teaching in a coaching centre located in a nearby area. His monthly income is around five to six thousands rupees per month. He also gives tuitions to students in the slum on nominal charges. He wants them to come up in life as he did.

Here, again we find that staying in a slum does not mean that the residents are resigned to their fate and develop the 'culture of poverty' as used by Lewis in his study on the urban poor in Mexico and Puerto Rico.\(^{17}\) He has defined the concept of 'culture of poverty' as the design for living characterised by a sense of resignation and fatalism, marginalisation, lack of effective participation in the community-based organisations and associations, etc. according to him this fatalist attitude leads to the perpetuation of poverty from one generation to another. The case of Deshraj and others in this slum who have themselves come up in life through education and hard work and also the fact that the majority of the respondents are sending their children to school and wants them to come up in life, refutes Lewis conclusion.

When Deshraj migrated, his family had only a small piece of land in the village. Today, he and his brother own around seven acres of agricultural land in the village and have also repaired their ancestral home, although it is not a concrete house. The migration induces change not only in the life of the migrants but also in the life of the people of their native place. The migration in this case has lead to the improvement in the socio-economic condition of the out-migrant families. There are several studies on the causes and consequences of migration that point to this aspect.\(^{18}\) The migrants could be regarded as one of the forebearers of change in the communities of origin. It does not only lead to the rise in the material conditions of the family at the place of origin but also brings about changes in the various socio-cultural dimensions of the rural social life.

Deshraj continues to stay with his sister and brother-in-law though he has purchased the neighbouring 'kholi', which they share among themselves. It is usually assumed that the process of migration and urbanisation leads to a decline in family size, weakening of family bonds and break-up of the joint family system into nuclear families, but as matter of fact, it is only the spatial separation, as the families remain united through constant links and interaction. Even in urban slums, instances of joint or extended families have been found, just like in this case.\(^{19}\) Deshraj tied the knot as per


his parents' wish. His wife has studied until higher secondary but she does not work. She takes care of her family and does the household chores. His two sons aged ten and eight are studying in the nearby ‘Chinmaya Vidyalaya’. They are in class fifth and third respectively. The importance given to the education of children also comes out from the analysis of the family profile of the respondents that was taken up as a part of the quantitative study. This shows the value the slum dwellers attach to education as a harbinger of change in their and their children’s life.

Deshraj is fairly satisfied with the way his life has turned out to be. When he set from home to work as a labourer he had no idea he would end up getting into the teaching profession. He is friendly with his neighbours and has no inhibitions in staying with any one. When queried about his opinion on inter-caste marriage, he fell silent for a moment as if pondering for the right and diplomatic answer and then smilingly replied ‘it is up to the children to decide’. Very cleverly, he ducked the question but it was clear from his blushed facial expression that he is quite averse to the idea. His response could also be influenced by his considerably good educational background. Among other variables like, age, gender, duration of stay etc., the educational variable has also been found to influence the responses of the respondents in the quantitative findings, as discussed in the chapter five and six.

Deshraj is a member of the ‘Khatik Samaj’, a caste-based religious organisation functioning in the Kusumpur Pahari slum. He gives regular contribution and is an active participant in the functions of the ‘Samaj’. Owing to his good academic achievement, he gets good respect from his caste men and they consult him on various issues both personal and those related to their community. He believes that such ‘Samaj’ is helpful, as it gives support in times of need and gives a pleasant feeling of having people of similar culture and life style around. The ‘Khatik Samaj’ helps its members and caste men find employment, accommodation, house on rent and other such socio-economic needs. Deshraj informed that the Khatik communities of Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh have formed their separate ‘Samaj’ and they do not have much interaction among themselves. He further informed that the Khatiks from U.P feel themselves to be superior to the Khatiks from Rajasthan as they mainly earn their livelihood through selling vegetables and fruits and thinks the meat selling occupation of Rajasthani Khatiks to be
polluting. This suggests the relationships between status and occupation, as well as, the subordination of caste identity in comparison with the regional identity, as cultural affinity seems to be the better source of bondage between people than caste similarity.

The separate organisations for the same community belonging to two different regions, indicate that the socio-cultural similarities, reflected in the form of shared history, culture and language supersedes the affinity based only on caste similarity. But again there is another dimension to this, as the members of the Khatik caste do not have similar affinity with other caste groups from the same region present in this slum, like the Valmiki or the Raigar caste. The affinity that a migrant shows towards his own culture and caste pulls him/her towards caste, region and religion-based organisations. Such organisations or groups help the migrants to maintain their traditional identity. These organisations also lead to the perpetuation of caste-based identity. It has been highlighted in many studies that caste system exists among the migrants even in an urban setting.\textsuperscript{20}

Deshraj does not intend to return to his native place because he thinks that he will not be able to provide better education to his children. He also thinks that in the village his family will miss the city life, as they have got used to it. He says what he and his family will get there. They will not get proper education and city life. Besides, these, there are several other problems back home which he does not want his children to face. He said now this is their home but at the same time, he does not want to sever all ties with his village. He said that it is the place where he was born and his childhood memories are attached to that place. How can he forget that? He goes home regularly to take care of his old parents and his other brother who is elder to him. He tills the seven acre land that Deshraj and his other brother living in Delhi have purchased. Sometimes, Deshraj brings some agricultural produce from his native place like, rice, wheat, mustard, etc. for himself and his brother if there is something to spare back home.

The studies have shown that many rural migrants in town or urban areas maintain contact with their native place and help their families living there in terms of money and other forms of assistance needed from time to time, ultimately retaining their culture. For instance, Deshraj’s family continues to maintain its linkage with the village even after around two decades of migration. During cultural and festive occasions in the family such

as marriages, they unfailingly try to visit their villages. Speaking about marriage, he informed that in village his caste men used to practice ‘nata’\(^{21}\) form of marriage, which is now very uncommon in the city. He says that city has life has led to a change in their cultural practices so he prefers to maintain regular contact with the village to protect his cultural identity. Since, his village is nearby, annual visits are quite common during religious festivals like holi, rakhi or diwali. A visit to the village bears a high value in the socio-psychological calculus of the migrants because of the emotional satisfaction derived out of the contact with their near and dear ones and the social groups they are familiar with.

The visit to one’s native place helps the migrants to renew their contacts with the family members left behind. This strengthens their family bond and at the same time gives a new lease of life to their primordial identities based on primordial values. This could be one of the prime reasons for the continuation of the rural way of life in the cities, as the migrants are not able to break freely from the inherited culture of their villages. Thus, in this story we have seen how changes have taken place in Deshraj’s life after migration and how his social identity has been shaped and reshaped by such changes. As evident from the life history of Deshraj several noticeable changes have, taken place in his life and migration is said to be an important cause for these changes.

**Case Study-III: ‘Master Ji’**

Malik Ram’s life history shows how a man can come up in life despite many difficulties. Belonging to a poor backward caste had made things all the more difficult for him. But he persisted with his efforts and they began to bear fruit after years of toiling hard. Malik Ram is a frail looking young man aged somewhere between thirty and thirty-five. During the first visit to his house for the quantitative study, he appeared to be just like any other

---

\(^{21}\) ‘Nata’ means remarriage. A boy can be married more than once but if a girl has to be remarried, only ‘nata’ is possible. This is a simple ceremony that varies from caste to caste but never includes the traditional pheras of the Hindu marriage. Sometimes, the boy can just come and stay in the girl’s house and with the permission of the parents, take the girl to his home. Thus, they become man and wife. The custom of ‘nata’ is prevalent among Raigars, Gujjars, Meenas, Bairwas, Khatiks and other scheduled and backward castes. It is not prevalent among the Brahmins, Banias, Rajputs, Mahajans and Jains. ‘Nata’ generally takes place when either of the spouses dies, or there are mutual disagreements or when one of the spouses leaves the other. In some cases it happens because the girl’s father wants to make some money. For the custom is that the man who takes the girl in ‘nata’ has to give money to the former husband. Sometimes he has to give to both the husband and the father. See, [http://www.webindia123.com/rajasthan/people/marriage2.htm](http://www.webindia123.com/rajasthan/people/marriage2.htm).
slum dweller, illiterate, doing manual labour, living in hardships etc, but the assumption proved entirely misplaced after getting to know him well. During the conversation, which was in Hindi, he was frequently using English words with quite an ease. Later it was discovered that he has done his M.A in English literature through correspondence from IGNOU and is also about to complete another masters in political science for which he had enrolled himself in Meerut University.

The use of English words in between the conversation shows his desire to come out of the ‘slum dwellers mould’, and to make himself more appealing. This could also be seen as an attempt by him to reconstruct his linguistic identity. His desire for higher education, despite living in the confines of the slum proves the vibrancy that can be found among the slum dwellers unlike the ‘doom-theorists’, who visualises slum as an area of isolation, fatalism, poverty and crime.22 Malik Ram is a ‘Dhobi’ by caste. He belongs to a village named ‘Vasvar Kala’ in the Faizabad district of Uttar Pradesh. His elder brother had migrated before him and had settled here in this slum. His maternal uncle and his elder brother assisted him in migration and early settlement. His elder brother works with MTNL as fourth grade staff. When he first came to this slum in 1987, he was a teenager barely of twelve to thirteen years in age. He has been staying in Kusumpur Pahari for over twenty years now. How the presence of prior contact can induce the process of migration is quite evident from the case of Malik Ram and other case studies discussed in this chapter.

Malik Ram stayed with his brother and worked as a ‘mali’ (gardener) in the ‘kothis’ of Vasant Vihar for about four to five years. He did not follow his traditional caste-based occupation of a washerman. This suggests how migration leads to occupational shifts and weakening of caste based division of labour. When he left the job of mali, his elder brother once more came to his aid. He helped him get into a tailors shop as a helper. This job again was not hereditary, based on caste. This signifies Malik Ram’s urge to carve a separate identity independent of his caste status. As the tailor’s assistant, he learnt the skill of stitching and tailoring. Soon after, his brother gifted him a sewing machine. He used to go from dwelling to dwelling in the slum and collect the clothes that

22 Like for example, Oscar Lewis, who believes that the slum is an area of darkness and despair characterised by the culture of poverty. See Lewis, Oscar (1959), Five Families, op cit.
needed altering or fresh stitching. This way he began to earn his livelihood. But amidst all these struggle, his love for books and education never waned. He continued his studies and earned a master’s degree.

Soon the lady luck smiled on Malik Ram. He got an opportunity to teach in a school in Kusumpur Pahari run by an NGO, ‘Prayas’. He left the stitching job and started teaching on a paltry sum of rupees nine hundred. Within a span of one year, his salary increased to thirteen hundred. As a tailor, he was able to earn much more than this amount but, nevertheless he stayed on as he got job satisfaction and he also felt the teaching job to be very dignified. He feels proud when his student calls him ‘master ji’. The case of Malik Ram is a good example of ‘upward social mobility’ resulting due to education and modern education.23 This also demonstrates the replacement of ascribed status based on caste with the achieved status based on merit and skills.

Malik got married when he was pursuing graduation from IGNOU. Soon after, he shifted to ‘Search’, another NGO in Kusumpur Pahari on a monthly salary of three thousand and five hundred. He is currently earning about six to eight thousand per month. He also makes some money from his salary, as well as, from his part time association with another NGO in the slum, the ‘Santi Devi Charitable Trust’, where he teaches class nine students for one and half hours during weekdays. He also gives tuitions at home to some slum children but without charging them any fees. This, he does for his own satisfaction and out of gratitude for the slum dwellers, who got their clothes stitched by him when he was struggling to make ends meet. Many studies have shown that the slum life exhibits features of organised community life and the migrants have achieved a level of occupational and social mobility when compared with their occupation and social standing at the place of origin.24 The notion of ‘culture of poverty’ characterising the social and economic conditions of slum dwellers as propounded by Lewis is not applicable to the Indian slums.25

After marriage, Malik Ram purchased a jhuggi near his brother’s and uncle’s jhuggi. It gives an impression of an extended family, although, their kitchens are

---

23 The upward social mobility refers to a change in a person’s social status resulting in that person receiving a higher position in their status system.

293
separate. He has two sons and a daughter who are in primary and upper primary schools. Malik Ram said that he is not a member of any caste organisation but has a membership of the voluntarily organisation in which he is working and some other such organisations active in the slum. The reason behind his not being associated with any caste or religious organisation could be the absence of any such organisation formed by his caste men. Since most of caste and religion-based organisations are run by various caste groups, their membership is opened for caste men only. Thus, he cannot think of becoming a member of these organisations. Moreover, the proportion of his caste men in this slum is very negligible, so their opinion hardly matters in the day-to-day affairs of the slum, but Malik Ram is respected for his achievements.

He largely keeps to himself and has close contacts with few people in the slum other than his close relatives and kins. He said that he does not like to mix much with the people around, as they are not his type. This could also be due to his high caste status in comparison with other castes like the Khatik and Valmiki who are described as ‘outcastes even among outcastes’. He is deeply attached to his village and goes there frequently. His parents and a younger brother are staying in the village and are engaged in agriculture and caste based occupation of washing clothes. They own six acres of land in the village, which is their principal source of livelihood. He takes his kid to his native place during vacations and wants them to know about their ancestral place.

Malik Ram is not planning to leave this slum, as it has given him everything he has at present. He said that he never felt bad about living amidst the illiterate and labour class people because he is also one among them. The memories of his past struggling days are still fresh in his mind. This indicates that the migrants do not view slum-life as a static state of deprivation but as a foothold into the modern, urban world. The only thing that Malik Ram dislikes about slum life is the lack of study environment and the non-seriousness on the part of parents to make their children study properly. He feels bad about the boys using foul and rustic language and strolling in the slum meaninglessly throughout the day, but finds himself helpless, as their parents, themselves are least concerned about their children’s bright future.

He likes to speak in his native language ‘awadhi’ and in home or even with his relatives and kin he speaks in the same language. He wants his children also to speak the
same language at home so that, they do not forget their mother tongue. He said that he wants to inculcate in his children the values, which he himself has inherited from his parents. This suggests the importance of language in shaping one’s identity. Language is known to form the core around which regional and cultural identity revolves.\(^{26}\) Regarding inter-caste marriage, he said that he has never tried to force any thing on his children and it is up to them to decide. If they are satisfied with their choice then he will not have any objection to their marriage plans. However, he said that marriage should only be thought of after the completion of a certain level of education and after getting a good job. He is very optimistic about the career of his children and wants them to achieve great success in life.

Contrary to popular wisdom, the Indian slums are not the places of hopelessness but of enterprises and energy. Life in a slum may be hard but it is certainly not the source of despair and fatalism. In a rapidly growing economy, there is enough socio-economic mobility to give most slum-dwellers hope and keep them hard-working and enterprising. The story of Malik Ram gives us a glimpse of this facet of slum life. It has been found that slums too offer possibilities for upward growth, progress and success as in the case of Malik Ram. There are often fallacies held - by urban residents and policy makers alike - that slums are home to domestic servants, rag pickers, sex workers, manual labourers and anti social elements - people with very low or almost no education - people with dysfunctional households or no households at all. Such fallacies have given rise to the idea that these settlements are ‘urban sores’, with almost no positive contribution towards the normal functioning of the city. Malik Ram’s story is helpful in shattering such misconceptions and myths about slums and slum dwellers.

**Case Study-IV: ‘Beginning of a New Journey’**

Vinod Kumar has been living in Kusumpur Pahari, also known as Kusumpur village since 1989. Vinod’s father Daya Ram migrated to Delhi in 1977 from a village in Kanpur district of Uttar Pradesh. He stayed at Govindpuri with an acquaintance from his village for a month. He tried hard to find some work in this period but failed. As a result, he had

to return to village. But again he came back in 1980. This time he was lucky enough to get work at a small export house in Munirka in South Delhi. At that time he was getting a meager sum of rupees eighty per month. By 1989 he was able to earn about two hundred and fifty rupees per month. It was this time when his elder son Vinod came here to aid him in supporting a large family of eight members back in the village.

Studies have shown that early migrants help the new ones in getting jobs and housing and initiate them into the urban ways of life. The migrants belonging to a particular region, language, religion, caste and tribe tend to live together in separate neighbourhood in cities and they form ethnic groups on the basis of shared elements of culture and ideology, merging lower levels of differences based on sub-caste or sub-region. This is evident in the case of Vinod and his father who chose to stay in the vicinity of their relatives and caste men. They preferred to stay in the slum as it provides low-cost housing and services for the rapidly expanding low-income urban populations. The slums also serve as networks of social support for new migrants to the cities.

Vinod belongs to the ‘Chamar’ caste group of Uttar Pradesh. The traditional occupation of this caste was processing, manufacturing and trading in leather and leather goods, but agriculture is another important occupation in which they engage, either as owners or as tenants who farm property on a share-cropping basis. Vinod’s family was also into agriculture apart from their traditional occupation of leather works. The Chamars are known to be one of the most influential groups among scheduled castes, both politically and socially. About his religious inclination Vinod said that they worship ‘Saint Ravidas’ as their guru and call themselves ‘Raidasis’. Calling oneself Raidasis, could be understood as a means to escape the denigrating name Chamar and to improve the position in the caste hierarchy. A group among the Chamars believed that by associating with Saint Ravidas they would be able to raise their social status. The adoption of ‘Sanskritised’ symbols, norms and even behaviour pattern like, claiming

27 See for details, Gore, M.S. (1970), Immigrants and Neighbourhood, Bombay: TISS.
strong bonds with Saint Ravidas signifies an attempt towards upward social mobility among a section of the Chamars.\textsuperscript{30}

After migrating to Delhi, Vinod began to do some menial jobs like rag-picking and working in roadside eateries to support his father. As he grew up he began to work on the construction sites. Both he and his father toiled day in and day out to save money to remit back home. His father managed to marry-off his two daughters and also purchase some land in the village but poverty and financial requirements of migration had forced his father to sell-off whatever land he possessed. There is another side of Vinod’s story that is his urge to study, which helped him to complete his graduation through correspondence. When Vinod came here, he was a class six dropout. From a rag picker he moved on to become an LIC agent and presently earns about four to five thousand per month.

When he started earning a descent sum his father married him to his friend’s daughter who happened to be from his own caste. After settling down Vinod convinced his father to return back to the village a few years ago as he was finding it difficult to do hard work any more. Vinod now sends money regularly to his father and has also purchased his own ‘jhuggi’ at Kusumpur Pahari slum. Now his younger brother has also joined him to support the family back home. Together they earn and send money back home. This points to the phenomena of ‘chain migration’ from a family as has been discussed earlier in chapter seven. Vinod has three children, a son and two daughters. Two of his children are staying with him. The youngest daughter stays with his parents and brothers family in the village. The daughter is in class fifth and the son is in class third. Vinod is also planning to bring back his youngest daughter when she attains the school going age, as he feels the quality of schooling is not good in the village. Vinod’s wife also works as domestic help in the nearby posh locality of ‘Vasant Vihar’ to supplement the family income.

Vinod has a wide group of friends of different caste backgrounds. Even his neighbours are from different caste and regions. Recalling the role-played by his neighbours at the time when Vinod was jobless, his wife said, “I had never stepped out of the house except for groceries and for fetching water from the tankers sent by the Delhi

\textsuperscript{30} Ibid, p. 232.
Jal Board (DJB). My husband had lost his job and he was the only earning member. We had school going children to look after. Slowly, our family fell into debts, as there was no money left and our savings got exhausted”. Further, she said that the wife of one of her neighbours who worked as a domestic help helped her get the work of a housemaid in the same locality. Hence, they could pull over the difficult times through their neighbour’s help.

When Vinod came here he was supported more by people from other regions than his own caste and region men. He said that he befriended a person named Mahendra who is originally from Haryana. Mahendra helped him financially to purchase a ‘kholi’ in Kusumpur Pahari. He does not remember in how many installments he returned Mahendra’s money. They are still very good friends and the friendship has extended up to family members, with both their wives and children having very good terms with each other. There are studies that have shown that when the migrants fail to get help from their networks of kins and caste men they develop alternative networks with people of other caste, region or occupation. The networks of friends and acquaintances work like a social capital providing access to jobs and other necessities in the city.

Vinod keeps to himself and does not have much social interaction with other slum dwellers except his close group of friends. He is not associated with any religious, caste or voluntary organisation and wants to spend his leisure time with his family and friends. This could possibly be due to the fact that his prime social network consists of other caste and region people. Another reason for his withdrawal from the caste and religious organisations could be due to the absence of any such organisation of his caste men and the poor numerical strength of his caste group in the slum.

Like several respondents in the study, he too is averse to inter-caste marriage despite his liberal and secular orientation. He said that he is a family man and marriage decisions are made by the family and not by the children. He said he would never tolerate his children to go against the wishes of his family. Further, he added, “We have come here to earn our livelihoods and not to copy the bad habits of people living in the ‘kothis’.

very near to his slum. He did not explain what habits of the posh colony dwellers are bad and simply smiled and said, “You better understand what I mean to say”. Although his caste men are few in this slum and their opinion might not be so important to him, still he is against inter-caste marriage. The village continues to hold sway over his way of thinking despite the fact that he has been away from the traditional set-up of the village for a long time. The strong opposition to inter-caste marriage could be due to the desire of the migrant community to prevent the erosion of their culture and values.33

In Vinod’s case, we find that the hold of caste and region seems to have weakened in terms of social interaction, as he is not averse to establish close relationships with the people of other caste and region. However, as far as family and marriage matters are concerned, caste is still quite important to him. Vinod believes that to protect the caste identity the marriage relations have to be strictly within the caste. It shows that caste consciousness remains strong even in an urban setting. The adherence to past also means a symbol of respect for the traditions and customs of the village and to respect the sentiments of the family members at the place of origin, as they continue to influence the social behaviour of the members at the place of destination. The deep linkage of the migrants with the family members and the village makes it possible. Also, there is a constant fear lurking in the minds of the migrants that if they disregard all the primordial codes of behaviour, they may lose the respect of their caste and community and suffer social isolation.

Vindo’s case has added another dimension to the study of social networks. His story is different from the other three stories discussed earlier as here in his case it is the ‘other’ people who came to his aid in times of need unlike the earlier cases where relatives and kins have played a prominent role. Here we get to see the potentialities of slum dwellers as a community if they are able to think in terms of broader identity rather than limiting themselves to the limiting identity based on caste, region or language. The slum communities can form a formidable pressure group by working together among themselves. The example shows that how social networks can become social capital and it has the potential to create change provided it is formed around secular and rational principles.

33 Rayaprol, Aparna (1997), Negotiating Identities, Delhi: Oxford University Press.
Case Study-V: ‘Distinct Identity’

Mula yam Khan is in his late sixties. He originally belongs to the ‘Puchi’ village in the Jhansi district of Uttar Pradesh. He migrated to Delhi way back in 1989 and stayed with a relative in Kusumpur Pahari slum. Since then he has been staying in this slum. At the time of migration, Khan had completed his 12th class and his parents sent him to a relative in Delhi. They told Khan that the relative would help him find a work in the city. Poverty and the burden of a large family forced him to discontinue his further study. Within a few months of his arrival, his relative got him the job of a security guard in a ‘kothi’ in Safdarjung Enclave. Until then, Khan stayed with his relative and all his needs were taken care of by him. Here, we find that how the presence of social network acted both as a push and a pull factor for Khan that helped him migrate to the city and find a work. The studies have shown that people do not migrate blindly. They have a network of relatives and friends who help them in many ways at the place of destination. This is what happened in the case of Khan also.

After Khan got the job, his parents married him to a relative’s daughter. His wife is class tenth pass. Two years after marriage, Khan’s wife gave birth to a son. Khan’s father named him Sabaz. His wife and son were staying with his parents in ‘Puchi’. When Sabaz was around a year old Khan brought his wife and son to Delhi. In the beginning, Khan’s mother also came to help her daughter-in-law settle in a new place. After few months she returned back to her village as she did not like the city life. Khan’s father has some agricultural land in the village and he also used to breed goats and sell them to butchers to make a living. Before coming to Delhi, Khan used to help his father by doing some odd jobs in village, like cutting firewoods, or grazing the herd of sheep and goats of fellow villagers apart from studying.

Khan is now a father of three sons and two daughters. He stays with his family in a rented accommodation owned by a fellow Muslim from Uttar Pradesh. This shows the role of social network in migration. Further, we get we know that religious identities remain strong even after migration, as Khan chose to stay with a fellow religionist and not any inhabitant of other religion. When queried about this he said that other people

---

34 Singh, Manfee, Andrea (1997), Neighbourhood and Social Networks in Urban India, New Delhi: Marwah.
would not have given him house on rent as he is from a different religion. This suggests that religious identity is thriving even among the socio-economically poor sections of the society. The finding here could be used to explain the high degree of opposition to inter-faith marriage displayed by the respondents as discussed in chapter five of this thesis.

He has not been able to purchase a ‘kholi’ for himself, as he has to support a large family here as well as, in the village, though he is earning around eight thousand rupees per month. Khan still sends some money to his brothers back home. Landlessness, fragmentation of land due to divisions in the family, rising population, lack of employment opportunities and the lack of assets in villages are believed to be the propelling forces of migration to urban areas, as in the case of Mulayam Khan. Even studies have shown that the slum and pavement dwellers are occupied by overwhelmingly poor rural migrants primarily from lower castes or disadvantaged communities who migrate to the city through caste, kinship and village networks in search of better economic opportunities.35

Khan’s eldest son Sabaz is in the twelfth standard and his two sons are in class ninth and seventh standards respectively. One of his daughters is in class fifth and the youngest one does not go to school yet. Khan’s desire is to see Sabaz getting higher education, which he himself could not fulfill due to grinding poverty and resourcelessness. The migration has certainly improved his condition and he wants to utilise this opportunity to give best education to his children. He said that it is education that differentiates him and his family from the majority of residents in this slum. Khan said boastfully, “We are certainly better placed than most of our relatives and village men who are staying there in the village”.

Sabaz has also started contributing to the family income as he is engaged with NGO Ritinjali on a part time basis. He has been entrusted with the task of maintaining the computer room and the library run by Ritinjali in Kusumpur Pahari. Khan has no plans to return to his village. He said that by the time, he will leave his work, Sabaz and his brothers will be earning well enough to sustain their father and mother. He said that by returning home, he does not want to increase the difficulties of his family members living

in the village. Though, he makes sure to visit them once every year. Even his sons and wife visit home according to their convenience or on some social occasions, like, marriage or birth. The migrants maintain contacts with their place of origin to fill the void created by their ‘uprootment’.36

When asked about their experience of staying with other religion people, Sabaz said it has been a very good experience, as they have some very good friends from the Hindu community. He said, “We all live together happily”. But when queried further, he revealed that when any terrorist attacks take place, some of his friends jokingly call him ‘terrorist’, which he does not like. He said he has never faced any discrimination in work for being a Muslim. Sabaz said that his teachers used to give his example that how he has performed so well despite facing poverty and other constrains in his life.

Opening his heart further, Khan said that during social and religious functions they miss their community. He gave the example of a function called ‘khatna’ which is the term for male circumcision carried out as an Islamic rite. Ritual circumcision serves to introduce males into the Islamic faith, and works as a sign of belonging to the wider Islamic community. He also gave example of another function called ‘akika’ which is more popular among rich Muslim families. It is quite similar to the ‘mundan’ ceremony among north Indian Hindus. As a part of this ritual the head of the male or female child is tonsured and gold, silver or money (depending on the economic status of the family) equal to the weight of the hair is given to the poor and the needy. He said that for major festivals like ‘id’ or ‘bakrid’ they either go to their village or to their relatives and community members residing in other parts of Delhi but for minor occasions, which can be celebrated in the household, they miss living amidst their community.

Khan is not willing to allow his children to go in for inter-religious marriage but does not have any problem with inter-caste marriage, as he said that Islam does not support caste. He said that inter-religious marriages are bound to lead to adjustment problems for both the boy and girl and it would also create animosity between the communities. He might also be afraid that the introduction of two contradictory belief systems into a marriage might lead to frequent marital strife. This suggests that he is

probably referring to the cultural gaps between the two religions. The response of Khan on inter-religious marriage could also be interpreted as his urge to maintain his distinct religious identity. The Islamic religious symbols like, the picture of ‘Kaba’ the sacred number ‘786’ and the stickers of ‘Kalma’ inscriptions could be clearly seen adorning the entrance and walls of Mulayam Khan’s ‘jhuggi’, that professes his strong religious identity.

From the other case studies discussed earlier and the one of Khan, we see that across religions there are certain commonalities in the way migration and its effects are felt by the migrant and the family. The migration and slum life bring together the migrants of diverse caste, region, religion and culture. This opens up enormous possibilities for cultural exchange and acculturation. The process of acculturation leads to the change in custom resulting from the contact of people from diverse socio-cultural backgrounds. Though cultural exchange and interactions have shown the capacity for selective adaptation and integration of new cultural values and practices, it, however, does not imply that the encounter with the other culture is without conflict or resistance.

From the case studies of the five families, it can be concluded that the magnitude and degree of aspirations to migrate differ with castes and communities. The purpose of migration seems to vary, as some came looking for employment opportunities while others came for education, or to enhance skills and income. The stagnancy in rural life that offers no chance of mobility for the socio-economically poor people to attain higher social and economic status has also come out as a reason for migration. In villages, still we find the perpetuation of caste-based discrimination, caste-based marginalisation, and caste-based exclusion. We have also seen that despite being away from their villages, the migrants identify themselves with it. The migrants faithfully carry along their traditions and customs all the time. Festivals and rituals connected with the landmarks of the life cycle between birth and death continue to be steadfastly adhered to despite some

---

37 Kaba is a cube-shaped building in Mecca, Saudi Arabia, and is the most sacred site in Islam. All Muslims around the world face the Kaba during prayers, no matter where they are.

38 The number 786 is the sum of the numerical value of the Arabic letters of the opening phrase of the Quran. It means “in the name of God, the merciful, the compassionate”. Not all Muslims place emphasis on this numerological analysis, however, some - mostly in Pakistan, India, Myanmar and Bangladesh - use 786 as a substitute for the phrase.

39 Kalma is the Islamic prayer reciting: There is No God but Allah, and the Prophet Mohammed is his Last and Final Messenger.
variations. The contacts with villages, fellow villagers and relations in the city provide the continuity of time honoured conventions.

Most slums are not the social wastelands of the popular imagination at all, but provide livelihoods, social networks and a tolerable standard of living for the residents. The slums are not just the places where poor people live in shacks surrounded by trash. They are vibrant communities. There are schools, dhabas, shops, temples, laughter, life and music. The case studies documented above reveal the potential significance of slums as incubators for upward social and economic mobility. By upward mobility, we do not necessarily mean that people will move out of slums. The social and physical transformations in slum communities as evident from the studies suggest socio-economic upgrading. The slum dwellers constitute a complex mosaic and have an embedded sense of community participation.

Case Study: Socio-Religious Organisations
The caste and religious belief carried by the migrants from their villages continue to pervade their lives even in cities. The caste and religion shape the life style and the behaviour patterns of the migrants to a large extent. This is visible in the Kusumpur Pahari slum as well, which can by no stretch of imagination be considered unorganised. There are different types of formal and informal organisations in this slum, as has already been mentioned and discussed in chapter six. This section discusses the socio-religious organisations present in the slum, their multiple activities and the manner in which they affect the social identity of their members. The socio-religious organisations found in the Kusumpur Pahari are mainly caste-based religious organisations with the exception of Tamil Samaj, which is more of a regional organisation. Several caste groups inhabiting Kusumpur Pahari have formed socio-religious organisations here.

The nature and character of these organisations largely possess the characteristics of ‘gemeinschaft’ based on primordial community attachments, affectivity of relationships and strong caste and regional network. The centrality of caste and religion in these community-based organisations suggest that primordial identities continue to

influence the migrant slum dwellers and have taken new forms at the place of destination. When the migration occurs within multi-cultural and multi-lingual states there is bound to be crystallisation of social identities based on caste, region, culture and other differences. The migrants from different regions and caste stay in the slum in close spatial proximity. This gives rise to the 'we' and 'they' distinctions. The primordial organisations further leads to the sharpening of differences between the migrants from different regions of the country. The studies on this aspect have shown that migrants establish their own schools, dispensaries, marriage bureaus and places of worship in order to retain their cultural distinction.  

The desire of the in-migrants to re-create their local, cultural and social environment gives rise to caste and religion-based organisations of the nature as is evident in the Kusumpur Pahari slum. The participation in caste and religious organisations provides one of the most important social-support networks to the migrants. Many of the respondents said that they did not have any religious affiliation before migration, but they all reported some level of religious participation after arrival. The participation in these socio-religious organisations provide emotional comfort and psychological support to the migrants that help them deal with various problems generated in the process of migration and settlement. The act of participation in socio-religious organisations is positively seen as something that could help migrants adjust more easily in a new surrounding.

These organisations function within their caste community in organising marriages, ceremonies and other socio-cultural and religious programmes and also in settling cases of conflict between the group members or between caste men and 'others'. In some cases, these organisations have been found to help the members in getting work and provide financial support to them in times of distress. The participation in these organisations, which are segmentalised on caste and regional lines re-socialises the migrants within the caste and caste ideology, which are the characteristics of the traditional rural society. Their re-socialisation promotes not only caste solidarity but also caste consciousness in an urban setting. Due to the impact of primordial social network and such organisations the migrants adapt themselves in such a way that their ascribed

---

41 See for details, Gore, M.S. (1970), *Immigrants and Neighbourhoods*, Bombay: TISS.
rural-based social identities are preserved, reinforced with certain degree of adaptation of urban ways of life.

**Case Study-I: Bairwa Samaj**

The Bairwa caste is sometimes known as 'Berwa'. Bairwas are divided into different exogamous clans, namely Mehar, Jatwa, Marmat and Tatwara. They are generally treated low in society. Although, the Bairwa caste people are found in all the five blocks of Kusumpur Pahari, their highest concentration is in block-E, followed by block-C. While, in block-C the Bairwa caste people are mainly from the Tonk and Alwar district of Rajasthan, in block-E they are primarily from the Dausa district of Rajasthan. This reflects 'chain migration' from these districts owing to the strong presence of social networks of people from these districts in Delhi. The Bairwa caste people are earning their livelihoods as labourers and masons. Although, the majority of Bairwa caste people are working as labourers and masons, some are also practicing traditional occupation of making mats and ropes.

The Bairwas claim themselves to be closer to the 'Meena and the Rajput' castes of Rajasthan in terms of life style, food habits, 'gotra', religious performance, etc. They worship lord Shiva and the holy Saint 'Balinath' who they claim gave them the caste name of Bairwa. Bairwas have constructed a 'Ramdev temple' for their caste people in this slum and have also kept the idols of lord Shiva, goddess Durga and other gods and goddesses in the temple (See Picture-11 in Appendix-5). They visit this temple, spend on offerings, worship personal deities and observe religious rites with sanctity. Some Bairwa houses have also been found to have 'swastik' on their entrance doors or front walls. This shows the Sanskritic influence among the scheduled caste Bairwas. Such a process is called 'Sanskritisation'. The Bairwa caste people in the slum have high regards for Saints like Kabir, Ravidas and Bairwa Shiromani Baba Balinath Ji, as they exhorted them to live with self-respect and dignity.

---

43 M.N. Srinivas has defined the Sanskritisation as a process by which a 'low' Hindu caste, or tribal or other group, changes its customs, ritual, ideology and the way of life in the direction of a high, frequently, 'twice born' caste. Generally such changes are followed by a claim to a higher position in the caste hierarchy than that traditionally conceded to the claimant caste by the local community. See, Singh, Yogendra (2001), *Modernisation of Indian Tradition*, New Delhi: Rawat Publications, p. 7.
The Bairwa Samaj functioning in the slum is not a formally registered body but the members do have contacts with the ‘Delhi Bairwa Maha Sabha’, which is a registered society. The main work of the Samaj in the slum is to maintain the Bairwa temple and organise community festivals and ‘bhajan-kirtan’ in the slum. Some of the Bairwa people are also members of the ‘All India Bairwa Samaj’. The members of the Samaj organise a community feast once in a year and for that they contribute between rupees fifty to rupees five hundred. During evening, elderly men of the community sit near the temple and sing ‘bhajan-kirtan’ and folk songs. On the eve of the elections also, the members of the community gather near the temple to decide the prospective candidate and party to vote for. Most of the Bairwas said that they are traditionally involved in urban areas in petty business and as labourers, and in rural areas they are mainly marginal farmers and agricultural workers.

The Bairwa women said that they participate freely in rituals and in the religious, social and political activities. A number of them have also been found to be working and contributing to the family income. This suggests gender equality among the Bairwas. The Bairwas celebrate festivals like, holi, diwali, dassehra, makar-sankranti and Ravidas jayanti. They have special reverence for Saint Ram Dev. During festivals, the Bairwa women could be seen deeply emerged in the celebrations, dressed in their finest dress and jewellery, the men running around organising the things needed for the celebration and the children chatting excitedly with each other. The scene and the joyful expression of all the participants remind one of any wedding atmosphere.

The presence of socio-religious Samaj strengthens the caste identity of the members. It helps the members to define and redefine their ‘pre-established’ identities based on caste and religion.44 The caste and religion-based organisations aid its members in different ways and also help them adjust at the place of destination. Such organisations also provide platform to the migrants to broaden their network of contacts beyond relatives and friends. Wider network means wider social capital. The widening of the social attachment of the migrants among their caste men, which could be described as

community, leads to a satisfying sense of participation by people in a social collective.\textsuperscript{45} But there is also a flip side to it, as the attachment with the caste and religion-based organisations mainly emphasise on the inherited, the primordial, the parochial or the traditional affinity, which are limiting in nature and hinders the development of broader and universal identity. The existence of separate temples leads to the classification of identity based on ‘we and they’ distinction, which further crystallises in separate group identity. The collective mobilisation around caste and religion gives people a collective identity and the strength of solidarity, but the benefits are far in number if the mobilisation is around universal identity markers like class and nation and not the limiting identity markers like caste, and language.\textsuperscript{46}

**Case Study-II: Khatik Samaj**

The Khatik population in this slum comprises of the people mainly from three states-Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh and Haryana. The Khatiks belong to the Scheduled Caste and are traditionally into rearing and butchering of goats and pigs, selling vegetables and fruits and agricultural labourers. Many of the Khatik families from Rajasthan inhabiting this settlement are continuing their traditional caste occupation of rearing goats and pigs and selling meat even after migration (See Picture-15 & 18 in Appendix-5). Few are also engaged as ‘mali’ in the localities surrounding the slum. Few others earn their livelihood by running small shops, while others work as daily wages. Some others make their living by hanging ‘nimbu-mircha’ strings in front of shops and houses. The Khatik caste people from Rajasthan are primarily concentrated in the block-C and block-E of Kusumpur Pahari.

The Khatik caste inhabitants of Kusumpur Pahari are mainly from the Swai Madhopur and Tonk districts of Rajasthan. Some families also belong to Jaipur and Dausa districts of the state, while some are from the districts of Aligarh, Agra and Kanpur in Uttar-Pradesh and Jhajjar district in Haryana. The Khatiks from U.P, who belong to the ‘Sonkhar’ sub-caste, are engaged in various economic activities, such as selling vegetables, fruits, flowers. The Khatiks of U.P dislike the Rajasthani Khatiks


mainly because they practice the 'defiling job' of skin tanning and sell pig meat. Since the U.P Khatiks are into 'clean occupations', they rate themselves higher than the Khatiks of Rajasthan. The change in the traditional occupation by the Khatiks of U.P signifies the effort of the community for enhancing their social status in the caste hierarchy, where occupational practices also play an important role in determining the social status.

Most of the Khatiks in this slum know and speak Hindi, as they have been living here for a considerable period of time, but many prefer regional languages, often using Hindi as a second language. It has been found that the community values education and almost all the caste people are sending their children to schools, unlike other scheduled caste in the slum like the Valmikis. Even a good number of women members of the community are found to be literate. The importance accorded to education could be due to the impact of migration and urban exposure. It has also been found that the migrants develop greater awareness regarding education and its role in bringing change in the life of their children.47

The Khatik people in this slum are associated both formally and informally with the Khatik Samaj, a caste-based organisation of the Khatik people, which runs its office at Lodhi road in Delhi. The Samaj has played an important role in bringing the Khatik population of three different states together who otherwise barely communicate with one another. However, Khatiks of U.P still do not have close social relationships with the Rajasthani Khatiks and there is absolutely no question of a marriage alliance among the Khatiks of these two states. The Samaj, which maintains social solidarity and harmony among the community people, helps people find the potential mates. The marriage among the Khatiks is endogamous. Every year, the main meeting of the Samaj members takes place on the first Sunday of the month of January. In the meeting, they discuss the issues of awareness creation for the upliftment of the community members. The involvement of caste people in the activities of the Samaj boosts the unity among the caste group and strengthens their sense of identity emanating from being associated with a group. This also builds up their social and political consciousness.

The Khatik Samaj organises sports, recreation activities, and community festivals. It also comes forward to resolve intra and inter-community disputes, as well as, family disputes. There have been instances when the Samaj has taken lead to organise marriage of the daughter of poor community members who were unable to find a suitable groom for their daughters. The community members also help each other to find work but that usually happens among the close group only. The Samaj members have considerable clout over its members and they are successful in directing its members to support a particular party whom they feel have something to offer to their community. The local issues also mould the opinion of the members to support a particular party. The findings are a proof of the fact that such organisations have a prominent role to play in the development of religious, socio-economic and political identity of the migrant community.

The Khatiks have constructed a Shiv Mandir for their caste men (See Picture-9 in Appendix-5) with the contribution from the Khatiks of all the three states. Others are also allowed to worship in the temple but mainly Khatik caste people visit it. The Khatik population in Kusumpur Pahari slum is deeply religious as claimed by the members of the Samaj. It has also been observed during the study that almost all the houses of the Khatik caste people have the pictures of Hindu gods and Goddesses. Religious festivals are the centres of gravity around which their lives revolve. The Khatik parents make sure that their children keep faith in god and follow religious rites. Little children have been found to observe religious fasts and sometimes they also organise miniature puja, particularly Saraswati puja and Krishna Janmashtami.

This suggests the level of their religiosity among the Khatik caste people in this slum and the way the Hindu culture has got ingrained in them. It could be due to the process of Sanskritisation undertaken for years. The importance accorded to religion here could mean that Khatiks view it as a dominant force that preserves their village traditions and insulates them from forces alien to their tradition and culture. But it has been observed that the new generation excluding the children is moulded in a different cast. Though religion is important for them too, it, however, gets somewhat mellowed, possibly under the impact of education.
Case Study-III: Od Samaj

The Od caste people residing in this slum claim that their forefathers had originally migrated from the Larkana district in the Sindh province of Pakistan at the time of partition and settled in Ganganagar district in Rajasthan, India. Later on, many of them relocated to different parts of India. Some came to Delhi also. The Rajasthan government allotted them some land in the Alwar and Bharatpur districts. The informant said that many still continue to reside on the Pakistani side. In the areas of Rajasthan where the Ods settled, they started practicing agriculture on the allotted land. Even today, the family members of the Od migrants are into agriculture in the native place if they are still left with some land. They claimed that the lands of the majority of the Ods were forcibly taken away by the dominant castes like, the Jatas and the Gujjars of the region and as a result, they were compelled to migrate.

The Od caste people have got the status of the scheduled castes but they claimed that they are the descendents of Rajputs and prefer to be known as Od Rajputs. Believing that they are of Rajput origin, the Ods are proud of their heritage. In general, they are a shy reserved, hospitable and very hard working people. Their habitations reveal that they prefer to stay in groups. Some of the old people speak the ‘Oadki’ language among themselves but the majority of them speak Hindi. The majority of the Ods, are construction laborers involved in digging pits and drains, building houses, carrying loads and laying roads. They have traditionally been found to be keeping donkeys and they use them for transferring construction materials from one place to another.

The illiteracy rate is alarmingly low with a meagre percentage of barely literates in the community. Most of the members interviewed are found to be illiterate. Even the younger generation is found not very inclined towards education. This could explain the cause of their pitiable condition. Even in this slum, their housing condition is far worse than that of the other caste and community people. With poor education and difficulty in finding regular work in the construction industry, many of the younger men have begun to move to other areas in search of various occupations in the labour market.

Some have taken up the jobs of gardening, driving, vegetable selling etc, to earn their livelihood. The Ods have a relatively mobile lifestyle. Although, they have house in the slum, most of the time they live on the construction sites. When one building project
is finished, the groups relocate to other construction sites. They live in a designated area provided by the employer until completion of the project. The Ods live in patriarchal (male-dominated) extended family units. Each family on an average consists of six to seven members. The father is the provider of the family, while the mother takes care of the household duties. Women also work alongside men, herding donkeys and helping them with the construction projects.

The studies have shown that the groups of lower-caste individuals could seek to elevate the status of their caste by attempting to emulate the practices of higher castes. Something similar to this is also being done by the Od community people. The idols and pictures of lord ‘Shiva’ and other Hindu gods and goddesses adorn the sides of their jhuggis. It has been found that the Ods visit the temples regularly. The marriage is solemnised as per Hindu rituals in the presence of the priest invited from any nearby temple. The bride and groom also move around the sacred fire and complete seven turns of it in the ‘mandap’, (See, Glossary in Appendix-7). There is a provision of dowry also. The similarity in the performance of rituals and the kinship usages with the higher castes could be an attempt to bring themselves closer to them and get their acceptance.

As recalled by Man Singh, an eighty-year-old Od migrant residing in this slum since 1978, the Ods are settled in various places of Delhi, particularly in the Bhatti mines near Chattarpur village. In the beginning, he was among the first few Ods to move here from the Chattarpur area and gradually some more families followed them. Some more moved to this slum during the eighties and since then about sixty to seventy Od families are staying here. He further informed that his allotted land at Bharatpur in Rajasthan was forcibly taken away by an influential local Muslim family and finding no other way to survive, he moved out with his wife and two sons and a daughter to stay with a relative here in Delhi. He stayed with that family till he was able to find a suitable work for himself and after one month took a room on rent in the same area.

He and some elder Od members said that actually they are the descendents of ‘Bhagirath’, the mythological wholly man responsible for bringing the sacred river to the earth. They want to be recognised as ‘Rajputs’ and had also held a meeting with L.K

---

Advani, when he was the deputy prime minister of India. They were asked to show certificates in support of their claim, which was nearly impossible for them to do so. They are facing a huge identity crisis as they find themselves to be nowhere people. The older people have not yet accepted their lowly status. However, the younger generations is more comfortable with their scheduled caste status and have got used to it. The Ods have begun worshipping 'Baba Ramdev' whom the scheduled castes Raigar and Bairwa worship. This could signify the growing acceptance of the scheduled caste status by the young generation among the Ods residing in this slum. Like them, they also visit the famous temple of ‘Baba Ramdev’ at Jaisalmar, near Pokhran during important cultural occasions or even other wise. They also visit the ‘Ramdev’ temple in this slum as well as in Bhatti mines, Delhi, especially in the month of September when a big fair is organised there.

The Od community though do not have any formal organisation in this slum, most of them, especially men are, however, attached with the ‘Rashtriya Od Samaj Maha Sabha’ in Delhi. They attend the functions of the organisation whenever they get time. The community of Od is very close and the elders often meet during evening at the open space near their houses. The community members help each in other times of crisis and generally tend to stick together during any conflict in the slum. The Od caste people are very united and can go up to any extent to help a fellow caste man.

**Case Study-IV: Raigar Samaj**

Raigar is considered as the sub-caste of the ‘Chamars’. Though Raigar is not directly the sub-caste of Chamars, there are similarities in their economic and occupational status that make them similar to the Chamars. The people of Raigar community have traditionally been leather tanners. The Raigar community is divided into three major groups namely Lashkaria Raiger, Sindhi Raiger and Raigar and these sub groups have a number of clans. They are commonly known as ‘motchi’ (cobbler) caste people in this slum. The Raigar people in this slum are basically from the Tonk and Bundi district of Rajasthan. This shows the influence of networks in migration. The Raigar community people in this slum are into various occupations. Some are into government service, some are following traditional occupation of leatherwork while others are engaged as labourers and masons.
The Raigar also have occupational and cultural similarity with the Jatav caste, which is another sub-caste of Chamar. There are both the Jatav and Chamar caste inhabitants in this slum but there is hardly any social interaction between these caste people. This is primarily due to the feeling of cultural superiority among these similar caste groups. The Raigars rank themselves above the Jatavs and the Chamars in the caste hierarchy but due to the complex working of the caste-based hierarchy, it is very difficult to verify their claim.

The Raigar caste people in this slum have constructed a temple in the name of 'Saint Ravidas'. A 'murti' of Saint Ravidas is kept in the temple besides other Hindu gods and goddesses. (See, Picture-20 in Appendix-5). A priest from Raigar caste manages the functions of the temple. This further signifies the assertion of the lower caste Khatiks and their rejection of the Brahmínical order. Every year the Raigars gather at the temple on the occasion of 'Ravidas Jyanti'. On the day of the Jayanti, a flag with seven colours, symbolising the main teachings of Ravidas, is unfurled. At the foot of the pole, an idol or picture of Ravidas is kept and is worshipped. A 'havan' (See, Glossary in Appendix-7) is also performed in front of the idol. Some of the highly devout also observe fast on this day. A community feast is organised in the evening, which is also attended by few close friends from other castes and regions. The Samaj is not so developed and functional, as in the case of the Valmikis or Khatiks but nevertheless it has an important role in keeping the caste identity of the members intact.

Some followers also decorate their houses in the night with earthen lamps or electric lamps like in Deepawali to celebrate the day. The festival gives a platform to the Raigars to come together and renew their social relationships. It is clear how celebration becomes a way to assert the identity of groups. During the month of August, a small 'mela' (fair) is organised near the temple, in which the members of the community participate and also the children belonging to various caste and regional groupings come and enjoy the 'mela'. The nature of the Samaj is mainly religious, but during the elections time it is also targeted by the political parties to turn the community votes in their favour. It has been found that some of the Raigar caste people read 'Ravidas Ramayana' and sing 'Ravidas Katha' in place of 'Tulsidas Ramayana' and 'Satya Narain Vrat Katha'. The cults and sects built around Saints and Poets like 'Ravidas' influenced the life ways of...
the followers in North India as these ‘Cult figures’ made several dents in the unjust social system and kept the hopes alive for its victims.49

The Raigars have also tried to change their position in the caste system through ‘Sanskritisation,’ the emulation of upper-caste behaviour. It appears to be a case of identity conflict. Married women could be seen applying vermillion in the parting of the hair and a ‘bindi’ on the forehead. Dowry is prevalent among them and is accepted in both cash and kind. Rituals during childbirth and ‘mundan’ (See, Glossary in Appendix-7) ceremony are found to be observed by this caste. After childbirth, ritual of purificatory bath is observed for the mother and the child, done on the third day, ‘chote nahan’ (small bath) and eighth day, ‘bade nahan’ (big bath). After seven days, name-giving ceremony is observed and after a year, the tonsure ceremony is performed. Close relatives and friends are invited on the occasion and food is served to them. It is a time of merrymaking in the family.

Even the marriage ceremony is performed in the presence of the relatives and friends and a feast is organised for them. The bride and the bride-groom moves round the sacred fire for seven times (jere). Similarly, the dead is cremated as per Hindu rites. The dead body is washed and covered with a new cloth. The sons shave their heads, carry the body to the cremation ground, and perform last rites. On the twelfth day, a feast is organised for the relatives and friends. Some Raigar respondents during the study said that they avoid inter-dining with Valmiki caste people in the slum. The practices mentioned here are very similar to that of the caste Hindus that suggests the effort made by the community towards Sanskritisation.

The Raigars are an endogamous community and are strictly against inter-caste marriage. Raigars takes help of the community members to find the suitable match for their sons and daughters. Keeping the marriage restricted within the caste suggests the string caste identity of the Raigars. The involvement of their caste based Samaj in searching the partner further indicates the widening of the caste network and hence the identity based on caste. From the point of view of intimate relations like marriage, each scheduled caste is an endogamous unit but in terms of other forms of interaction like,

occupational, there are certainly some changes, which have taken place among the castes in the city.\textsuperscript{50}

**Case Study-V: Tamil Sangam**

A Tamilian temple of 'Muthumariamman Devi' is situated in block-B of the Kusumpur Pahari slum (See, Picture-8 in Appendix-5). It is a place where social life of the inhabitants of Tamil Nadu revolves. It is much more than a temple for them. It organises the members of the Tamil community in the slum. The temple has a structured body with regular members to look after the affairs of the temple. The majority of the Tamil residents in the slum is from 'Salem', district of Tamil Nadu and belongs to the category of scheduled castes. Apart from their normal visit to the temple, these inhabitants gather near the temple every year in April during 'Pongal' and celebrate a community feast by sacrificing a male goat. The Tamilians inhabiting this slum and some other areas of Delhi are mostly part of this celebration with few neighbouring friends from other regions of the country residing in this slum. The money for the event is collected from the fellow Tamil residents.

There are around 250 Tamil families in this slum. Each family contributes any between three hundred to five hundred rupees depending on their economic condition at the time of the temple construction. The temple has been newly renovated and preparations were being made for placing the idol at the time of the fieldwork for this study. The 'murti ceremony' was planned for 19\textsuperscript{th} October, 2008. Prior to this there was a make-shift temple at the same place where a new concrete temple has been constructed. The Tamils, who had come to Kusumpur Pahari to earn their livelihood, felt that they do not live by bread alone. As the people from the far-off south settle with their life, the urge for their cultural identity and social interaction comes up and organisations of linguistic or religious groups prop up. Due to the desire to retain their distinct identity and to come out of the cultural vacuum in which they found themselves here after migration, the Tamils of this slum decided to have a temple of their gods akin to the way it is in their native place.

\textsuperscript{50} See, Ram, Nandu (1992), "Scheduled Castes: Social Stratification and Sources of Mobility in Urban India", in K.L Sharma (ed.), *Social stratification in India*, op cit., p. 237
The Tamil Samaj here is basically a regional-cum-religious organisation. They invite priest from the nearby ‘Malai Mandir’ to conduct some special ‘puja’ and other rites as and when required. Another priest, also of Brahmin caste has been specially appointed for conducting the daily rituals at the temple. The inhabitants near the temple also perform some other socio-cultural activities like Tamil New Year Day, Independence Day, Republic Day, etc., as it has a considerably big open area within its premises. During these festivals, young boys and girls of the community perform dance and sing songs. Sometimes painting or singing competitions are also organised by the temple management committee. In some instances the members of the temple trust collected money to help one among them at times of distress like, job loss, disease, death, marriage, etc. The members of the Samaj have also been approached at times by the political parties to help them mobilise votes of their community members residing in the slum. The local leaders of political parties have provided them no help and the temple has come up entirely with the help of the own community members.

It is rarely that the local M.L.A or M.P turns up during the cultural activities of these people. Only the pradhan of the slum visits them and celebrates the occasion with them. The Samaj also comes to sort out issues of conflict or other grievances between the community people or those involving community members and others. Some of the respondents from the Tamil community believe that the Samaj is more into religious activities and is not doing enough for the development of the community, like, taking care of the education of their children, their health needs, etc. The management committee members blame the lack of funds and enough educated people among them to actively take up these issues with the local bodies. The members here also maintain contacts with the Tamil Sangam, an organisation of Tamil people situated in R.K Puram area of Delhi. The Tamil Sangam mainly organises literary and cultural functions throughout the year. In addition, it also offers classes in Vocal, Bharata Natyam, Violin, Mridangam, Kuchipudi, Painting, etc., and brings out some valuable publications.

Temples have been a central part of South Indian culture in India and this centrality is also visible in the building of temples by South Indian Hindus in the various places to which they have moved. Many parents expressed that going to the temple

---

51 Rayprol, Aparna (1997), Negotiating Identities, op. cit., p. 64.
establishes some roots for their children within the traditional culture. For the migrants and especially their children, temple is also a place where they get to eat traditional ‘prasadam’ and food on occasions. Food becomes a symbol of the immigrants shared roots.\textsuperscript{52}

\textbf{Case Study-VI: Valmiki Samaj}

The Valmiki caste people have the highest concentration in Kusumpur Pahari. Although, their main concentration is on both sides of block-A, they are located in all the blocks of the slum in relatively good number. The Valmikis inhabiting this slum are mainly from the states of Haryana and Uttar Pradesh. They do not have much of a social interaction except the general exchange of pleasantries when they come face to face. The ‘Valmikis’ of Uttar Pradesh and Haryana are not a culturally homogeneous group. There are visible variations in respect of language, rituals, food habits and customs. The Valmikis from Haryana outnumbers the Valmikis from U.P. The Valmikis from U.P are mainly from the Western U.P districts of Bulandshahr, Muzaffarnagar, Moradabad, Meerut, Aligarh, Faridabad and Badaun, while the Valmikis from Haryana are from the districts of Panipat, Rohtak, Sonipat, Karnal and Zind.

The Valmiki caste people have been traditionally into the work of sweeping, cleaning and scavenging but differences could be seen in the occupational choices of the Valmikis from the two states. While, the Valmikis from U.P are in diversified occupations such as, sweepers, guard, cleaners, construction labours, gardener, shop owners, etc., the Valmikis from Haryana are mainly engaged as sweepers and cleaners either private or with the M.C.D and in city’s hospitals. Valmikis are the most downgraded among the scheduled castes present in the slum despite their numerical strength. But this is something which is a privately guarded secret that people of other castes discuss among themselves but do not let it come out in the public.

Valmikis regard themselves to have originated from the legendary Hindu sage ‘Valmiki’ who is traditionally regarded as the author of the epic Ramayana. The Valmikis believe that Sage Valmiki was the incarnation of god, and they uphold his work ‘the Ramayana’ as their holy scripture. For Valmikis, the place of worship is known as the

Ashram. The Ashram means a hermitage or monastery. It is the communal house for the devotees of Rishi Valmiki. The function of the Ashram is to serve as a centre for building up the commitment of devotees and for transmitting Valmiki’s message. Furthermore, it is the focal point for the whole community and preserves the culture and traditions, which inspires people to keep their faith.

All Valmiki Ashrams have a special flag at the main entrance to show that it is a place of worship. The bows and arrows represent Valmiki’s disciples Luv and Kush. For Valmikis, prayer is not restricted to the confines of the Ashram, but can in fact take place anywhere as long as the ‘Ramayana’ is present. The Valmiki caste people from Haryana and Uttar Pradesh have made their own separate temples called the ‘Valmiki Ashram’ (See, picture-5 & 12 in Appendix-5). The Haryana people have constructed their temple way back in 1987 in block-A of Kusumpur Pahari. This suggests that caste, as a rule does not include persons of different linguistic - cultural backgrounds. This could also explain the fact that most Indian states are organised on a linguistic-cultural basis. The committee is well organised and elections are conducted regularly every year to elect the new members. Similar Ashram has also been constructed by the Valmiki caste group of Uttar Pradesh in the block-A.

On the occasion of ‘Valmiki Jayanti’, the birth anniversary of sage Valmiki, which is celebrated just after ‘Dusshera’ every year, the Valmiki caste people of both the regions organise community feast and ‘jhanki’ (procession) at their separate Ashrams. The devotees dress up in their colourful best for the occasion. The followers contribute for these celebrations and they are served ‘halwa-puri’ as ‘prasaad’. Religious ‘bhajans’ are also sung on the occasion of Valmiki Jayanti, which can be done anywhere and not necessarily the temple. There is also a keen tussle to out-do the other regional group in terms of the grandeur and the variety and quality of food served at the feast. Also, the celebration of ‘Valmiki Jayanti’ could not unite its followers into socially solid groups. The respective Samaj also helps its people during the time of crisis be it the loss of work, financial problems or other socio-cultural requirements, like, marriage, birth, etc. The

---

political mobilisation of its people by the Samaj at the time of elections also came up during the study.

The Valmiki caste people also go to the nearby ‘Shiva temple’ and ‘Hanuman temple’ to worship. As informed by a member of the Samaj, they had installed the idols of ‘Shiva’, ‘Parvati’ and ‘Durga’ but they were broken by some miscreants. In addition, the Valmikis also visit the ‘Valmiki temple’ outside the slum, which is in the R.K Puram sector seven in Delhi. They go there as it is bigger and other gods and goddesses are also present there. During the case study, it was found that the ‘Valmiki’ caste people perform ‘mundan’ and ‘janeu’, the sacred thread ritual (See News Paper Clipping-16 in Appendix-6). It has been observed that several castes in the past have made efforts to get for themselves an honourable pedigree and also the right to wear the sacred thread. Some castes adopted new names such as, Vishwarkarma for blacksmiths, Shreewas for barbers, Namdeo for tailors and Valmiki for garbage collectors.54

The motive behind such move could be to ventilate the deprived feelings of status and position, which were denied to the scheduled castes for centuries due to their low caste status in the social stratification hierarchy. By imitating the ritual activities of the higher castes, they try to find a position as that of the upper castes. The scheduled castes derive inspiration from the religious (sect) tradition started by these Saints and find themselves elevated in the overall social and religious order.55 But they have not been able to succeed in their efforts, as they have failed to gain legitimate acceptance from the higher castes. Moreover, they are able to perform such rituals, as they do not have any fear of social opposition from the upper castes, as they are in majority in the slum and secondly due to the anonymity provided by urban living.

The socio-cultural practices of Valmikis as mentioned above could be seen as an attempt to acquire a new identity. The second instance of the scheduled castes seeking a new identity comes from the fact that many of the scheduled caste people in the slum belonging to ‘Raigar’ (cobbler), ‘Khatik’ (meat-seller) and ‘Valmiki’ (scavengers) have given-up their traditional caste-based occupations and have adopted new means of livelihoods. The abandoning of the traditional occupation is a struggle of the lower castes

to attain a comparatively higher status in the caste hierarchy. Following religious rituals regularly, by the majority of the respondents further points to this aspiration of the lower caste people. By identifying with and imitating certain customs and practices of upper castes, the scheduled castes seems to be looking to create a new identity. The social identities could be visible in terms of the subjective, symbolic or emblematic use by group of any aspect of culture, in order to differentiate themselves from other groups or in order to create internal cohesion.\(^{56}\) This aspect comes out from the above findings.

Despite years of urban living the slum dwellers continue to exist as peasant societies guided by their traditions and customs. The formation of caste and religion-based organisations shows the resistance of the inhabitants towards giving up their old traditions and practices. Such organisations help to reinforce caste and religious identities among the members of the given community. The idea of 'collective conscience' and 'collective representation' is manifest in caste and religious organisations. These organisations fuse individual consciences of belonging to a caste or religion to collective conscience. They connect individuals to something beyond them. To fully understand the nature of religion in India, it is important to know the pervasive role of the institution of caste among various religious groups. There are thousands of castes and sub-castes (Jatis) among the Hindus in India. The Hindu religion does not constitute a community in a solidarity sense. The caste and religion based organisations perform both the manifest and latent functions as described by Merton which we have got to know from the case studies discussed ahead.

The fact that several caste, region and religion based organisations exist in Kusumpur Pahari, which draws a healthy participation from the community members suggest that community sentiment is alive even among the people of poor socio-economic background. The finding here is in contrast to Lewis' observation that poor people develop a distinct sub-culture, which he termed as the 'culture of poverty'. He says that the people develop a different view to life under the influence of this culture and they withdraw from community participation and family is the only institution in which they directly participate.\(^{57}\) But the finding here is in contrast to his observation.


Religion is not only a body of beliefs but it is practiced. Almost all major religions of the world are found in organised forms. The genesis of religious organisations lies in social groupings, which are a part of the society. It also lies in the routinisation and institutionalisation of charisma and in the structural differentiation of society like the formation of ‘Valmiki Samaj’. Religion is something, which is eminently social in Durkheim’s view. Religious representations are collective representations and they express collective realities. The migrant communities carry with them their diverse religious faiths, customs and cultures. This results in bringing together people of different regions, religions and cultures. Years of living together leads to some degree of cultural and social similarities. These similarities are a product of interaction and accommodation established over a period of time by regional, linguistic, ritual and social proximity brought out by the process of migration. The religious organisations support and affirm the continued existence of the social group.

Summing Up

In this chapter we have seen that the migrants have largely moved to city slums voluntarily in order to find jobs. They have also been able to help themselves to come up in life. The findings here show that the migrants, exhibit features of organised community life and have been able to achieve a level of occupational and social mobility when compared to their occupation and social standing at the place of origin. The findings would be helpful to set aside several misconceptions regarding slum life. The slum communities in Kusumpur Pahari show the power of organisation. By forging alliance among caste men and working together among themselves, these communities have been able to weather difficult times and achieve success. Many men here work as unskilled labourers in the construction business or are daily wagers and depend on mutual contacts to find work. Similarly, many women in the settlement work as domestic help in the middle class households and ‘kothis’ in the neighbourhood for which again mutual references are important. The caste and village networks are also sometimes activated for negotiating marriages. The development and progress of these communities shows the power of social network and the potential it has to create change.
We have also seen the working of socio-religious organisations centred around caste and regions. These organisations present a picture of diverse sub-cultures within the larger culture of slum life. They condition the socio-cultural values of their members. These traditional community structures have been helpful in resolving local disputes and help the members in securing work or financial help apart from providing the members a sense of belonging. While these parochial community attachments appear to be the repository of social solidarity, they also prevent the formation of broader associations based on modern and secular values. The caste and religion-centric organisations lead to the strengthening of group identity and the political mobilisation by these organisations further reinforces this identity. It has also been found that in matters of common interest the slum dwellers suspend their caste and regional identity and jointly approach their 'pradhan' to ask for his help. They also come together to thwart any eviction attempt by the government.

The modernisation, urbanisation and migration have definitely undermined the caste system generally associated with village life and it is visible here in the city too. Even in villages it has undergone significant changes. The social distance between individuals belonging to different caste is considerably broken, as the rules governing the social behaviour and interactions in the village could no longer be enforced in the urban setting. As a result, transformations in the caste system are visible in the ritual, social, economic and occupational aspects. But, caste as group identity has acquired a new significance and the caste-based associations have also an important role to play in this development. The issue of reservations in government jobs and academic institutions has also contributed towards the strengthening of caste identity. By mediating between the caste-groups and the political process, the caste associations and caste federations have further helped the politicisation of castes as is also evident from the discussion on the socio-religious organisations.

The ethnographic details highlighted in this chapter verify and corroborate the findings of the empirical chapters based on quantitative data. The ethnographic data confirms the widely accepted fact that culture is not territory bound and also the migrants are active agents of cultural movements, as is evident from the case studies of five families and the caste and religion-based organisations. From the ethnographic account of
the cases, we get the overall picture of the various dimensions of everyday life of the migrant slum dwellers in the local context of community, neighbourhood, family and work. In the findings, we can notice some impact of urban values on attitudes, increased participation in urban institutions, associations and situations, family size, modes of consumption, styles of dress, food habits, etc., and some liberty in the performance of various practices by the migrant slum dwellers like, the sacred thread ceremony among the Valmikis. This would not have been possible in the villages without much social resistance from the upper castes. We could clearly discern the impact of migration on the way of life of the slum dwellers from the cases. We have also seen how migration has increased the chances of mobility of other members of the family in terms of education and occupational status. All of these have a deeper impact on the social identity of the migrants. Though, at the broader level the social identities still appears to be firmly embedded in family, caste, region and community, however, noticeable changes in the social identities of the migrants are also evident from the case studies discussed in this chapter.