Chapter III
Problems and Coping Mechanisms of Sikh Diaspora in Japan

In this chapter we focus on the issue of the kind of problems Sikhs in Japan have faced since their arrival and continue to face till now as also on how they cope with the problems. From the previous chapter describing the migration circumstances of Sikhs in Japan it became clear that there is a difference in the economic and social statuses of the Sikhs in Kobe and Tokyo. From this insight from the previous chapter we might assume that these dissimilarities might affect the type of difficulties they have faced and the solutions they take in various situations. How and in which situations their differences in economic and social status relate to their problems and copings? This question will be clear through the examination of the same case studies both in Kobe and the Tokyo area which we have already referred to in the previous chapter.

Problems and Coping Mechanisms of Sikhs in Kobe: Some Case Studies

Case 1: (Mr. and Mrs. S)

In his first year of coming to Japan Mr. S faced many difficulties and took a long time to get accustomed to the Japanese life. He says: 

*Especially when I came to Japan alone at first, I didn’t have much money. So to save the expense I had stayed in cheap accommodation which provided very simple facilities and meals of Japanese style. But it was not comfortable for me because I didn’t have any experiences of such Japanese style.*

Also, after shifting to the house with his wife once she joined him in Japan, he had faced some difficulties, the most important being availability of food...
and clothing items or other household articles which were familiar to them. “There was nothing in Japan those days, though now everything is available. Even finding bread was difficult. Furthermore, we couldn’t understand Japanese and had problem in communication. Fortunately in Kobe there were Indians who had lived before us and they helped newcomers like us.” Life in Japan was hard for Mrs. S, too because of same reasons which Mr. S told us. However, she didn’t seem to mind it much: “I agree life in Japan was hard. But I liked to experience a different culture. So I didn’t feel that the life was that difficult.”

Mrs. and Mr. S hired a maid who was from Nagasaki. They communicated with gestures because she could not understand English at all. The maid called her sister from her home town when Mr. and Mrs. S needed another maid. They found their maids very gentle and helpful and they got some idea about the thinking process of Japanese and their customs from them. In fact, Mrs. S learned Japanese through communication with them. Another thing that helped them get integrated in the Japanese society was the fact that when Mr. and Mrs. S’s children were young, they used to play in the neighborhood with Japanese children and slowly their friends’ mothers became Mrs. S’s friends too.

There were also other Indian families in the area where the S. family had lived at the time. They attended functions held at the Indian Club near their house. When their children started going to school, Mrs. S got some friends who were mothers of American students who were coming to the same school and could speak English. Mrs. S enjoyed her association with the American friends because she could see their different life based on American culture. “It was very interesting that I could know the other culture through foreign friends. We could share and exchange information because we could communicate in English.”
Case 2: (Mr. and Mrs. T)

When Mr. and Mrs. T first arrived in Japan they had to stay in a hotel. It was uncomfortable for them because they had to do everything like eating, sleeping, working, hanging washed clothes, etc. in the very small room. They stayed in these hard conditions for a few months but survived with the support of other Indians in Kobe till they bought a house and moved there.

At the beginning both had some problem with the language because almost no one could speak English around them in Japan. In 1950s when they started staying in Kobe, the only people who spoke English were the U.S. military personnel staying in Japan. Although they hired a Japanese lady as their maid, both had a tough time conversing and communicated with the maid by using a dictionary for every conversation.

When Mrs. T gave the birth to her children, her elder sister came from Thailand to Kobe to take care of her. That is why she did not have much tension about giving birth in Japan though even her doctor could not speak English. After Mrs. T delivered her children, she got another maid for taking care of children. By that time she had also picked up sufficient Japanese to manage her day to day life. So she did not have much difficulty while raising her children.

Since a few years ago, Mrs. T has had back problem and consulted a doctor. However, her condition did not improve and Mrs. T and her family felt that Japanese doctors are not capable of providing effective treatment. So they decided to go to Singapore where ‘reliable’ doctors are available. While the flight itself was tough for Mrs. T, yet after her treatment in Singapore, she has come back to Kobe and has begun rehabilitation process.
When Mr. H came to Japan in 1980, he could not speak Japanese at all. However, he learnt Japanese through his work within a few years and now he speaks Japanese fluently and has hired Japanese staff in his company. Mrs. H also acquired knowledge about the Japanese language and lifestyle through her everyday contacts with the Japanese in Kobe. She got a driver’s license in Japan years ago and now goes to supermarket, friends’ houses, gym etc. on her own. Although both Mr. and Mrs. H have not learnt Japanese formally, they have not had any problem for communicating in Japanese in their daily life.

They have had a Japanese maid to help Mrs. H’s house work (mainly cleaning) only few days a week because hiring maids in Japan is expensive compared to Southeast Asian countries from where Mr. and Mrs. H have come. That is why Mrs. H tried to do household work herself as much as possible, though it was not easy for her.

"Living in Japan is so hard because Japanese maids are expensive and I have to manage household work without them.” Mrs. H spent tough and busy days raising three children and doing household work without full time help.

One of Mr. and Mrs. H’s son Mr. A told us the story of when he was going to the school. “As you know, we don’t cut our hair or shave our beard. Whenever we go out, we wear turban. When we were younger, we would wear the scarf called patka instead of turban. These are our way of life but we were numerically in minority. In my school I was always teased by other students and sometimes even by teachers. But I settled for it because I had no doubt that keeping my hair long is one of our ways. But although I understood that, yet the bulling was very uncomfortable.”

Mr. and Mrs. H had to work very hard to build an economic base in Japan because they were first generation migrants. While discussing another Sikh family
settled in Kobe Mrs. H said: “We were first generation starting own business in Japan. So we were not rich. But the other family was very rich and living in quite a big house because now they were third generation here.”

Although Mrs. H had managed the house work for their family since she came to Kobe without full time servant coming every day, the same was too difficult for her daughter-in-law Mrs. A, who came to Kobe from Thailand after her marriage to Mr. A, Mr. and Mrs. H’s son. She was not used to doing household work and she decided to call her servant from Bangkok, who was not allowed to stay in Japan for more than three months. Mrs. A did not have experience of living in a town like Kobe. Compared to Bangkok where she had lived, she felt Kobe was very small and did not offer enough entertainment. However, she had to get used to living in Kobe. Her husband and her parents-in-law supported her adjustment to life in Kobe. After some time she got the opportunity to work as an English teacher at a private language school. She had tried to make her time in Kobe fruitful by taking the job. She has since had a baby girl for whose birth she went to Bangkok.

Once Mrs. H felt sick and went to a hospital in Kobe. She had suffered a stroke and needed treatment. However, as was the case with Mrs. T, Mr. H too decided to go to Singapore for her treatment because Mrs. H’s father who lives in Singapore recommended that. Currently, she is under treatment in the hospital. Mr. H is taking care of her in Singapore. He sometimes comes back to Japan for his work in the office. He told us “Just praying for everything to be fine. I believe God will help us. However, I prefer to get her treated in Singapore.”

Case 4: (Mr. P)

Mr. P, who is in his mid 80s, has been living in Kobe since 1953. Before settling in
Kobe as a permanent citizen of Japan, he had lived in India and then Thailand and came to Japan on account of his business. He along with his wife Mrs. P raised five children all of whom were born in Japan and have completed their studies. Four of them have shifted to other countries and only one son has stayed on in Kobe. He is now managing Mr. P’s business while another son is managing the Bangkok branch. Their business is successful and the family network spanning a number of countries has contributed to its success. He and his family enjoy a good social standing in Kobe.

However, at the present stage of his life, he sometimes feels lonely. The son who manages the business in Kobe lives separately, although, of course, he and his family sometimes visit Mr. and Mrs. P. Mr. P was happy because his sons succeeded his business and daughters had successful marriages. And he is very proud of the prestige his family has garnered in the Kobe society. Yet, at the same time, feeling of loneliness exists in Mr. P’s mind. “Four out of five of my children are living abroad. A son is in Thailand, another is in Singapore, a daughter is in London, and another is in Singapore. I am happy that they are all successful and well settled. But now I am spending much more time at home with my wife, waiting for the time when I can meet the children and grandchildren.”

In order to deal with his loneliness he tries to meet his friends at the sat sang at the gurdwara and the functions held in the Indian Club. He says that these opportunities make him feel that he is the member of Indian community and Sikh community in Kobe.

**Case 5: (Mr. and Mrs. R)**

Mr. R’s trading business of automobile parts has not been as stable as has been the case with many other Sikh migrants. He did not have the background of family-based
company like other Sikhs in Kobe and had to manage by himself without any support from the family business network. He has survived several economic crises in his business by handling their property and selling their house.

On the other hand, Mrs. R and the children did not experience any strain despite the difficult situation in Mr. R’s business. Mr. R let his wife hire two maids to help her in the house work so that Mrs. R could spend enough time to take care of their four children. All the four children were sent to the expensive international schools. Mrs. R told us remembering those days that “at one time we had to sell our house. But our life itself was no problem. Though actually my husband had faced trouble in the management of the firm, it did not lead to any difficulty in our daily life. It took a long time to make the business stable. But now we don’t have any problems. My sons are also doing very well.”

Mr. R sometimes thought that the difficulties which he faced in his business might have been because of lack of his understanding about Japan. Thus, he says that he has tried to give his children the opportunity to get knowledge about Japan and experience the Japanese way of life through interaction with the Japanese maids and neighbors. “I believed that understanding Japanese and Japanese society would be helpful in securing my children’s future.”

Case 6: (Mr. and Mrs. E and Mr. and Mrs. D)

Mr. D grew up in Kobe and took over his father, Mr. E’s business. He felt that the problems his father and mother Mr. and Mrs. E had faced were due to their lack of effort to adjust to the Japanese society. Especially for maintaining the business successfully, Mr. E had to comprehend the Japanese way in the business affairs like negotiation, contract, employment, etc. Because of the ignorance about these Japanese
ways, Mr. E had to repeatedly face failure and troubles. Through his father’s experience witnessed by him, Mr. D learnt how important building relationship with the Japanese people and the Japanese society is. That is why he has tried to have contacts with Japanese society actively. “We, second generation in Kobe, know how much difficulty the first generation had faced. On the other hand, we could have more opportunity than first generation to get accustomed to Japanese way in many ways since our childhood. In our house Japanese maids had worked when we were children and we had played with Japanese neighbors around our house. But we still needed to keep having good relationship with Japanese society. Whenever we have an opportunity to associate with Japanese society like local festival, function, meeting, etc, we try to attend.”

Mr. D’s wife Mrs. D, who is originally from New Delhi, runs cooking classes at her house. Following her husband’s footsteps, through her classes, she has tried to establish contact with Japanese people and Japanese society. Her classes are attended by people from different nationalities including Japanese, European etc. Yet Mrs. D feels that she has not been able to build a close relationship with the Japanese beyond a formal level. “I can’t find the reason why we (Mrs. D and Japanese participants) can’t open up to each other. I have thought it may be because of difference of culture, or because of barrier of difference of languages.... I don’t know.” Although Mrs. D feels difficulty in establishing relationship with Japanese, she is comfortable about her stay among the Sikh community in Kobe. “In our Sikh community in Kobe, the gurdwara has supported our maintenance of good behavior, relationship each other, values and ways of thinking and living, etc. This is very helpful especially for raising children. I am getting comfortable with our community.”
Case 7: (Mr. O and Mr. Q)

Mr. Q came to Japan in 1966 where his father, Mr. O had worked as a teacher at the school besides his trading business. Mr. O had dealt with textile in his trading business. Mr. Q joined Mr. O’s firm and started learning the know-how of textile trading. However, Mr. Q could learn only how to import and nothing about export business because Mr. O who had trained Mr. Q expired a year after Mr. Q’s coming to Kobe. After passing away of Mr. O, Mr. Q had to manage his father’s firm without the know-how of export, although in those days the textile business was thriving not in import but export. He thus had to find out the means to keep running the firm himself. Finally, he got interested in the market of textiles made in Japan and started dealing with textile goods made in Japan and now has a fairly successful business.

Mr. Q married a Japanese woman who was the student in his father’s school. Mr. Q and his wife, Mrs. Q discussed how and where they would live when they married. Mr. Q didn’t have any place to stay in India because all his sisters and brothers were staying not in India but abroad. They decided to live in Kobe and follow both Japanese and Indian customs. Interestingly, in their life there was no clash between the Indian and Japanese ways of life. He never removed his turban and continued to conduct Sikh prayers every morning. At the same time, he made his own Japanese style grave before his passing away. Mr. Q had thought that was the perfect way to be a Sikh who married a Japanese woman in Kobe.

When Mr. Q came to Japan first time, his flight arrived at Itami airport in Osaka, which is the center of commerce in the west Japan. The port city Kobe and the commercial city Osaka had already been modernized when Mr. Q shifted to Kobe in 1966. However, other places and transportation was modernized and became convenient only after Osaka Expo held in 1970. Even after 1970 Mr. Q’s business was
concentrated in Kobe, although Mr. Q’s son who took over his father’s business opened the branch in Tokyo. That is why Mr. Q is only familiar with Osaka and Kobe and knows very little about other places in Japan. Mr. Q often talked to his son “Kobe is comfortable place to live. Here are both hill and sea. I don’t know anything at all except for Kobe and Osaka. I lost my way soon easily when I went to Tokyo. I am a total stranger when I go out here, though I have been living in Japan so many years. So I have kept staying in Kobe.”

Apart from the above cases of Sikhs in Kobe, there were other cases of Sikh migrants in the Greater Tokyo area, which are discussed below.

Problems and Coping Mechanisms of Sikhs in Tokyo Area: Some Case Studies

Case 8: (Mr. L)
After some years of his coming to Tokyo, Mr. L achieved his purpose of building his own new house in Delhi. However, besides building a new house, he wanted to send his children to a good school of English medium for their successful future and understood that such school charges quite expensive fees. That is why he continued to staying in Japan to earn the money as much as possible to cover the expense for children’s education.

Since he came to Japan, he has not worn the turban, although he was wearing one in India. The turban would make him noticeable in Japan and he wanted to avoid making himself visible because he had become an ‘overstayer’. “If the police sees me, and feels suspicious about me, definitely I will be asked to show my alien card issued as ID for foreigners who stay for a certain period in Japan, mentioning not only name.
address, birthday and nationality, but also type of visa and the date of expiry, therefore, clearly showing whether or not the holder is an overstayer. Then everything would be over. So it is better not to wear the turban here.” However, he chose not to cut his hair or shave his beard. He kept his beard and hair uncut and wore a cap instead of the turban.

Although Mr. L had lived with a few other Sikhs, he had stayed in Japan without seeing his family for more than seven years. When he left India his daughter was only two years old and his son was born after his arrival at Japan. Mr. L had missed his family and called them once a week with a pre-paid international calling card which provided cheap talking time for South Asian countries. Such a card was available in the grocery store called Pakistani Shop managed by a Pakistani who knew cheap and convenient ways to contact South Asian countries like India and Bangladesh besides Pakistan. Whenever Mr. L called his family, they asked him to come back to India, “Please come back to India soon. We are waiting for you. The money is enough.” They told Mr. L that it would be better to stay together in India than living separately. But he was very clear that he had to earn the money especially for children’s education and, at the same time, he did not have any idea about how he would earn the money after coming back to India. Thus, he continued to stay in Japan and his return to India was delayed from the time which Mr. L and his family had expected.

To deal with the loneliness of missing his family, Mr. L sometimes visits his friends who live in Kanagawa. They often talk on the mobile and share the information about their jobs, problems of visa, accommodation, and all that. Mr. L also sometimes took care of his friends who lost their jobs and faced difficulty of maintaining their place to live because he was elder to them and was staying in Japan for longer time than them.
Case 9: (Mr. G)

Mr. G initially did not have a good experience in Japan. He had worked at a construction site in Tokyo and faced trouble related to his salary. He had not been able to get entire amount of his salary for several months. “I told the president of the company that please give me full amount, and asked when I can get the unpaid salary. He always said he will definitely pay it next month because this month the company is facing economic hardship. I asked him every month but his answer was always same.” Mr. G could not find an effective way to solve this problem and finally he decided to quit the company.

Mr. G then shifted to another company to which was introduced by his friends and since then he has not faced any trouble in the new company. The job was again at a construction site and a few Japanese were working together. “I don’t want to remember the former company. My heart was always full of anxiety about the unpaid salary and next month’s salary. But now I’m happy after shifting to this company. All bosses and colleagues are very kind.” Although he still has not been able to receive the unpaid salary from the former company, he decided to forget it and work hard in present company. “I have given up. I can’t do anything. Instead of that, I could meet good Japanese in this company. Till I make the enough amount money for my children in Jammu. I will work hard here.”

Mr. G does not enjoy the taste of Japanese food which does not use much masala. Whenever he has to go out for lunch with Japanese colleagues, he finds it difficult to select an item to eat from the menu in a restaurant. However, he has learnt of a Japanese dish called curry which originated from India and although it is quite Japanized, he always orders it because the dish is the only one which he does not dislike.
Case 10: (Mr. X)

Mr. X has been running a travel company in Tokyo and has established his office both in Tokyo and Delhi. He has obtained the visa as a permanent resident and bought his house near his company office. He has lived in Japan with his wife and two children for more than twenty years.

Mr. X has Japanese business partners, as well as, Japanese clients. His fluency in the Japanese language has helped him build good relations with the Japanese. However, the association between Mr. X and the Japanese is limited only to their business. Even the Japanese staff working at Mr. X’s firm does not have any social relationship beyond their job. They do not have any Japanese close friend, although they have lived in Japan for more than two decades. Almost all friends of his and his wife are Indian.

Being in travel business makes it easy for him to visit India five or six times a year, just to remain in touch. "Whenever I go to India and stay there, I become cheerful by meeting family, relatives and friends. My mother lives in Delhi even now. So my home is there, though I’m living and running my own business in Japan. When I am in Tokyo, I am doing only my work. The life in Tokyo is too busy to do any other things."

Mr. X sent his son to an international school where his son faced bullying by other students because of his long hair and patka. Mr. X went to the school to discuss this issue and explained to the class teacher how important it is for Sikhs to keep their hair unshorn. Although even after that, his son was sometimes teased, however, he learned to accept and ignore it because he himself understood his Sikh traditions.
Case 11: (Mr. and Mrs. B)

Mr. and Mrs. B came to Japan on the refugee visa which does not allow the holder to work in Japan. However, before coming to Japan they were not aware that they were not permitted to work there. So, since they did not have any money to manage their life, they worked illegally. Interestingly, not only them but also the people around including Mr. B’s employees did not have any knowledge about the rules for refugee visa holders and came to know about the illegal status of his work after many years had passed.

During his earlier years Mr. B changed his job several times, yet he remains a staunch Sikh and still keeps his beard and hair. Each time he switches jobs he has to explain his customs to the new employers. “I talked about turban, kirpan and beard to the presidents of each company. I have to explain to them that I can’t lose my hair and beard because these are the way of life for a Sikh. The kirpan and turban are symbols of our faith and I can’t remove them. They said if these practices did not cause any trouble in the job, there was no problem, and I could keep them.” Not only for himself but also when his friends had some difficulty regarding keeping their hair and beard in their working place, he went there to explain how important their hair and beard are. “When they start working in Japan, they can’t speak Japanese well and no one can guide them to keep Sikh way of life in Japan. So I explained to their bosses on their behalf because my spoken Japanese was better than theirs and I had the confidence to persuade their bosses.”

Although Mr. B was happy that his various bosses allowed him to wear turban and kirpan in the factory, he was not satisfied about the management of the labor force in his companies. His regular holidays were every Sunday, and second and fourth Saturday. However, his boss often asked him to work even on holidays due to
shortage of hands in the factory. Although he complained to his bosses that the staff who had to work on holidays were always him and the oldest Japanese, while other Japanese were taking a rest and enjoying the holiday, his complaint was not taken seriously.

Mr. and Mrs. B have faced a lot of difficulty when they get letters, bills and documents written in Japanese because they do not have literacy of Japanese. They often received letters especially from their children’s school and had to find Japanese who could explain the contents of the letters to them. The class teachers of their children did not have the skill of English and Mrs. B could converse with them neither in English nor Japanese. Even if Mr. and Mrs. B could read the letters from the teachers with the help of translation by their Japanese friends, they could not understand the contents because they were not familiar with the functions, exams, parents meeting, etc. which are held in the Japanese schools. This situation made feel Mr. and Mrs. B uneasy about sending their son to a Japanese school. However, they did not have any option about the education of their children. Another problem in children’s school was food which is provided in the schools. Mr. and Mrs. B and their children are vegetarians and their children could not eat the same dishes as other students because many of dishes include non-vegetarian ingredients and thus had to carry their own tiffin.

Whenever Mr. and Mrs. B have some program at home like children’s birthday party, they invite their Japanese neighbors, besides their friends. It did not matter whether they attended the function or not. The important thing was to inform them in advance about the function. Mrs. B explained “We call many of our friends including the children and play Punjabi music. When so many Indians came to our house and we played our music, many times our neighbors would be surprised and even
suspicious of so many foreigners gathering and listening to the strange music. But if we informed them about our function in advance, they could understand what we are doing."

The salary of Mr. B was not enough to take care of all the family and Mrs. B tried to find a job to supplement the family budget. However, she could not find a suitable job. Because of their economic difficulty Mr. B’s family did not have any health insurance and had to pay a lot of money whenever they went to a hospital. That is why they tried to treat themselves with the medicines sent by their family in India instead of consulting a doctor at a hospital in Japan.

**Case 12: (Mr. I)**

Mr. I came to Japan to attend an event related to his job in Malaysia. Although his visa was prepared by the company only for attending the event, he ran away from the event and went to his friend who had worked in Ibaraki prefecture to continue to stay in Japan without going back to Malaysia. Hence, Mr. I started working at a factory and did not go back to India till he got the visa for permanent stay due to his marriage to a Japanese woman.

Initially Mr. I experienced a lot of difficulties while dealing with the official documents in the local authority and the bank. "I can read some Japanese. So it’s my advantage. But the contents of the documents are very difficult. I can’t understand the technical terms used in such official documents." This situation motivated him to learn Japanese. "Of course, my wife can understand and handle those documents. So I can ask her. But it’s better if I can do it myself. I feel like a small child in such a situation despite the fact that I can understand what they are speaking."
Most of Mr. I’s close friends are Indians whom he met in the gurdwara or in his work place. Besides the Indian friends, Mr. I has contacted the people from South Asian countries like Bangladesh and Pakistan and they exchange the information about their jobs, accommodation, visas, etc. Since his marriage and getting the permanent visa, he has studied not only the Japanese language but also Japanese law especially about labor because he sometimes had the opportunity to attend the meetings of the labor union in his work place. And he has become a person who is contacted by the immigrants, mainly from South Asia who have some trouble with their jobs.

**Case 13: (Mr. U)**

Mr. U began to work at Ibaraki prefecture with his brother Mr. Z, although they did not have proper visa to stay and work in Japan. Since the beginning of 2000, many of the overstayers including Mr. U and Z’s friends, tended to be caught by the police and sent back to their own country by the Immigration bureau. Mr. Z decided to go back to India himself before he encountered the police. On the other hand, Mr. U fell in love with a Japanese lady and married her in 2004 and hence continued to stay in Japan. Subsequently, Mr. U got the visa for permanent stay in Japan.

Mr. and Mrs. U opened an Indian restaurant in Tokyo in 2008. However, because of recession in 2008 it became very difficult to keep the restaurant running and they had to close it. They did not have any idea regarding how to manage their life after the closing of the restaurant, although they had to raise two children. Mr. and Mrs. U discussed about their future again and again for around six months and decided to leave Japan because they thought life in India would be easier and better for their children’s education than staying in Japan.
In 2009 Mr. and Mrs. U and their children shifted to Jalandhar and started living with Mr. U’s parents and brother, Mr. Z’s family. Although Mr. U tried to start his own business, he could not find any opportunity for the same and realized that there is almost no chance to make money in Jalandhar. After around six months, Mr. U went back to Japan alone to work. Interestingly Mrs. U, a Japanese lady, and the children continued to stay in India for the children’s education. Till today they are living in India while the husband is in Tokyo.

Case 14: (Mr. V)

In the first year of his stay in Japan Mr. V could not work as he wanted to because he had been ill. He went to a hospital and realized he was suffering from jaundice. He could not eat proper meals and became very weak. When he called his family in India, his parents told he should not wait for his recovery in Japan but he could come back to India. However, he thought he should keep staying in Japan otherwise it would be impossible to get another chance to go abroad again. This period was extremely tough for him. After spending around half of the year in this condition, his health improved and he began to work as welding operator in a Japanese company.

Through his job Mr. V got the skills of welding and learned Japanese and slowly his bosses and colleagues came to rely upon him. They also started to spend time with him socially and would even plan their vacations together. One of the colleagues in her fifties became his “mother” in Japan. She sometimes invited him for supper to her home so that he could spend time with her family, sons and husband.

Along with him about twenty other people were employed by his company including two other foreigners. They spent time with him after their work and on holidays. All the three foreigners including with Mr. V and a Japanese colleague were
staying in rooms inside the company. The other two were also Punjabi Sikhs and
shared a room. Mr. V shared a room with the Japanese colleague who was the son of
the president of the company. They cooked their meals themselves and sometimes
gave out for their meals. Mr. V and his Japanese roommate often went for shopping
and watching movies on holidays. As he said, “We enjoyed together and became
really close friends.”

Other foreigners including Mr. V in the company were overstayers, but they
were sure that they would not be caught by the Immigration because all of them were
living at the company’s site. However, one of them was arrested by the police one day
when he went out drinking with his friends. After his arrest the officers from
Immigration bureau visited the company and accused the president of hiring
overstayers in his company. Although Mr. V escaped being caught by the police, after
this incident he and the other Indians had to leave their jobs and move to some other
place. Mr. V shifted with a friend who came to Japan from the same village. The
friend, Mr. D, had lived in Saitama prefecture working at construction site. Mr. V
explained the situation at that time “Shachoh (president of the company) was saying
sorry to us because we had to leave. He told us that he can’t risk keeping us in his
employ anymore. We could understand his predicament, you know. So I went to D’s
place and D took care of me for a while.” Mr. D’s room was also inside the company
in which he worked and was thus safe from the police. Mr. D got a job at the
construction site for Mr. V. However, after three months Mr. V got a call from the
president of his former company asking him to come back to the company because the
company had faced problems due to labor shortage. “Shachoh called me and said that
if I’m still in Japan and don’t have a job, he wants me to come back and work again.
And he explained that the company couldn’t meet their targets because of lack of
Mr. V decided to work again at the company because he thought the job of welding was better than that of construction. Nevertheless, there was always the uncertainty of being caught by the police. In 2008 Mr. V came to India to attend his sister’s wedding and stayed on because he did not have a proper work visa to Japan and living as an overstayer was turning out to be very stressful.

**Case 15: (Mr. and Mrs. C)**

Mr. C’s brother had worked in Japan at a company which deals with water pipes and Mr. C also joined the same company. The company was in Chiba prefecture and they had lived near the company. Although Mr. C could not understand Japanese at all in the beginning, his brother helped Mr. C till he went back to India and Mr. C got the skill of Japanese speaking. He married a Japanese lady in 2002 and got visa as a permanent resident. Till that time, for 7 years since he had come to Japan, he had been staying in Japan without proper visa and without a visit to India. After getting permanent visa by his marriage, he could finally visit India. Although his wife had run her own company, she could not manage it well and faced some financial problems. As a result, they often quarreled about money and ultimately decided to divorce.

After his divorce, on his mother’s insistence, in 2007 he married a Punjabi Sikh girl who hailed from a village near Mr. C’s home village. He called Mrs. C to Japan and they have lived in Chiba since. Mrs. C gave birth to a child in 2008 in Japan. Before her delivery she became nervous because she could not communicate with Japanese doctor and nurses. However, Mr. and Mrs. C got help from Mr. and Mrs. B (case 13) living in the same city. Mr. C told us “I had known Mr. B for many years but we had not contacted each other often. But my wife came and situation changed. She had to stay alone during my work hours and she knew nothing about Japan. So she
needed help from someone like Mrs. B. About some other things I know more than Mr. and Mrs. B. But about giving a birth and raising child, we didn’t know.”

Case 16: (Mr. and Mrs. K)

Mr. K started working at a small factory when he came to Japan in 1988. Although he changed his work several times, all work places were small or middle sized factories. After a few years, Mr. K married a Japanese woman and got visa for permanent stay. Although they have a daughter, they divorced a few years later. Since their divorce, his ex-wife has been taking care of their daughter and did not allow him to visit his daughter. Mr. K tried to contact her many times, however, his ex-wife avoided his request and changed her number and shifted to some other place. Mr. K told us “I really want to meet my daughter. I tried so many times to contact her but I can’t. Tell me what I can do? I don’t have any connections to find my daughter. Give me some idea...but don’t tell this to my wife (Mrs. K, an Indian woman whom he married after his divorce).”

Mr. K married a second time. Mrs. K who is also Punjabi Sikh from near Mr. K’s village in India came to Japan and they have lived in Tokyo since then. Mrs. K gave birth to a girl in 2005. In 2008 she began to work at one of the small factories near their house because her daughter was old enough to go to a nursery school. Although Mrs. K did not know Japanese, she has improved her Japanese through her job and her daughter who began to speak Japanese at home since she joined the nursery school.

Case 17: (Mr. M)

Mr. M engaged in a construction job in Japan, although he changed his company
several times. He did not want to work with his boss who said a lot of offensive things against him and other Indians. Mr. M explained about one of the Japanese bosses “He is no problem when we are working together. But after finishing work and drinking alcohol, he uses discriminatory and offensive words like stupid Indian, idiot, foolish, etc.” Mr. M was uncomfortable with his boss and decided to quit his job in the company. Although the Japanese boss asked Mr. M to return to the company and offered higher salary than before, he did not work with the boss again and rejected the offer. Mr. M had the similar experiences in other companies too and repeatedly quit his jobs.

Although he could not establish a good relationship with his Japanese colleagues and employers, he had some Indian friends who lived near his house. He often went to a Pakistani food shop which was around 15 minutes by walk from his house and met Mr. N who was working in an Indian restaurant in the same building of the shop. They became friends and Mr. N often visited Mr. M’s house when he was free. Mr. N helped Mr. M who could not understand Japanese well. However, they could not help each other in terms of their jobs because both worked in different settings. Mr. N was a chef and wanted to work only as a cook and Mr. M was without a job for five months after he quit the earlier job and had difficulty in even making payments for room rent, mobile, utility costs, etc. He had to leave his house and depend on his friends. Finally, he could find a job with the help of his friend. However, till that time Mr. M had borrowed a lot of money from his friends and had to work hard to earn enough to return the money and also survive in Japan. After a few months he was caught by the police and since he still did not have a proper work visa, he was deported back to India in 2005.
Case 18: (Mr. Y)

When Mr. Y reached Japan, he was only nineteen years old and a very skinny boy. He came to Japan depending on his cousins who were staying in Japan before him. One day he and one of his cousins were approached by the police in a train station and were asked to show their alien cards. His cousin distracted the police and helped Mr. Y escape although he himself was caught by the police and sent back to India. Mr. Y kept feeling sorry about his cousin's sacrifice and after the incident he thought that he must not waste his time in Japan and decided to work very hard as a construction laborer.

Another cousin, Mr. W, had married a Japanese lady and got the visa for permanent stay in Japan. Mr. Y thought that he also should marry a Japanese citizen so that he could stay in Japan without any trouble caused by his overstayer status. As he puts it, ‘I will marry here (Japan) and stay here all my life. Nothing is there (India), you know. If I go back to India, my life would be over. So I won't go back before getting the proper visa (to stay in Japan permanently).’ However, it was not easy to find a partner who could help him get the permanent visa by marriage.

One day he was introduced to a Filipino girl by his friend. They fell in love with each other and decided to marry. The girl had the visa for permanent stay because she had a child whose father was Japanese, whom she had divorced. The procedure for their marriage was very complicated, taking much time because both were foreigners and it was a second marriage for her. However, he felt that if he completed the process for their marriage, he would be released of the tension pertaining to the unstable situation as an overstayer. So he tried very hard to complete the difficult process. They scrambled for collecting documents from embassies and the authorities of their home towns in India and Philippines, and applying forms to the
city office and the Immigration office in Japan. Yet, in the middle of the process, agents from the Immigration bureau caught Mr. Y and despite the efforts of his wife who was by then expecting their first child they sent Mr. Y back to India, where he is still planning to shift either to Japan or Philippines with his wife.

Sikh Diaspora in Japan and its Problems and Coping Mechanisms
From the above case studies we can identify a variety of difficulties in the life of Sikhs living in Japan. We can classify the difficulties they encounter into five types – economic, social, psychological, medical and cultural.

Economic Problems and Solutions
The economic problems of Sikhs in Japan are based on their work profile which are mainly of three types – there are those who came to Japan to join the family firms, others came and started their own businesses and the third category includes those who are employed by Japanese organizations. Those falling in the first category faced relatively less financial difficulties. For instance, there are cases like that of Mr. Q who joined the family company which was already settled in Japan, where we learnt that he did not face any serious economic problems while working in the firm of his relatives. However, when it comes to those who had to start their own business in Japan, we came across many cases where the migrant Sikhs faced many difficult situations economically. For example, When Mr. S and Mr. T came to Japan to launch their businesses they had to spend uncomfortable time in cheap accommodations in order to save money since they did not have much money in the beginning. In the case of Mr. H, we learnt that because he started his business in Japan in 1980 when the commodity prices had increased greatly, he could not afford to hire a full time
domestic help due to the expenses involved. These cases were seen mostly among the Kobe Sikhs and their financial problems were mostly related to the management of their business.

The third type of group includes those Sikhs who are working as employees of various Japanese companies in different capacities. These cases were found mostly in Tokyo area. Their financial problems were more serious than those faced by the two former types. The reasons for their problems were that firstly, they were all employed in small sized organizations which in many cases did not pay them well and secondly, they had nowhere to complain about their economic exploitation since many of them were without a proper work visa. There is the case of Mr. B who could not earn enough income to take care of his family because of his job in a small factory. Similarly, the company in which Mr. G had worked did not pay him the full amount of his salary and Mr. G had to leave the company without getting the unpaid salary amount. Mr. M too, had to borrow money from his friends because he quit his job due to the uncomfortable relationship with the company. These people faced difficulties in their daily life due to their weak economic positions.

When it came to coping with the various financial problems faced by them, we found that in the cases of Sikhs who started own business, some used networks of their family-based firms established in other countries to settle their trading company in Japan as was the case with Mr. T and Mr. H. They were able to establish their businesses due to the help provided by their relatives in similar business. This help took the form of information, guidance and financial assistance. Although some like Mr. S did not have such support by family-based business, he also did not take much time to set up his business because he came to Japan to ensure the effective operation of his trade which he had already launched in India and his experience and knowledge
about trading was helpful in Japan. On the other hand, some others took a longer time to establish their business like Mr. R who had to manage his property and sell his house to run his firm when he faced economic crisis in the operation of his company.

Sikhs who worked in Japanese companies also have various solutions to their economic problems. Although most such persons located in the Tokyo area are employed in small firms, they take advantage of the fact that Japanese companies face a great amount of manpower shortage. It thus becomes easy for a skilled worker to change jobs in case he is not satisfied with a particular company. Mr. G whose company was not able to pay him well chose to leave the job and pick up a job in a better company. Others use the ploy of establishing good relationships with the Japanese bosses and colleagues. Mr. V could earn and save lot of money because the Japanese staff including the president of his company supported his accommodation, daily meal, recreation, etc. due to their close and reliable relationship. Others like Mr. Y work extra hard to earn more. They do overtime and even work on holidays to ease their financial problems. Then there are also others like Mr. M who borrowed a lot of money from his Indian friends to manage his life in Japan because he was not successful in establishing good relationship with Japanese bosses and colleagues.

**Social Problems and Solutions**

Apart from the economic problems, as the case studies indicate, Sikhs in Japan have faced many social problems as well. These pertain mainly to the difficulty in their adjustment to Japanese society. As the narratives of Mr. R and Mr. and Mrs. E show, they sometimes could not comprehend the thinking and the ways of the Japanese although they tried to establish close relationship with them. In fact, the Japanese sometimes did not accept them only because they are foreigners as Mrs. B learnt
when she had tried to find a job. Through experiences of staying in Japan, they knew that Japanese are suspicious of foreigners who have different appearance and customs. Additionally, such uncomfortable situations also happened sometimes due to lack of communication skill in Japanese.

It was also mentioned to us that the Sikhs in Japan felt that they were accorded a lower social status in the Japanese society, because of their inferior financial position or may be due to the very fact of them being outsiders. In the case of Sikhs in Tokyo there was the additional point of most of them being overstayers. They are afraid of going out and could visit only some limited places which were considered to be safe from the police. It was not easy even to go to the gurdwara although sitting and praying at the gurdwara was important in their life. Most Sikhs in Tokyo had no social life as they were staying away from their families and had only some other fellow Indians for company, as we saw in the cases of Mr. L and Mr. C. However, in the cases of the Sikhs in Kobe who have visas as permanent residents, we did not find such a situation in terms of their social life although they too were seen as outsiders because of their different appearance from Japanese.

Another social problem was related to education in Japan. As the case of Mr. and Mrs. B showed, Sikh parents have faced difficulty in understanding Japanese public schools because of lack of knowledge about Japanese education system, programs, functions, exams, etc. and difficulty of communication with teachers. This problem was seen in the Sikhs in Tokyo because most of the Kobe Sikhs have sent their children to the international schools which are operated by the ‘international common program’ in English.

When dealing with the social problems was examined, we found that Sikhs in Japan have attempted to integrate themselves into Japanese society in various ways.
The most basic way of doing so is by learning the Japanese language to avoid any kind of miscommunication. Others make an effort to learn more about the Japanese culture and lifestyle. For instance, Mr. S tries to participate in the various Japanese social events. Even in the case of Mr. E who was born and grew up in Kobe and is a second generation Sikh in Japan, he tried to gain knowledge about the Japanese and the Japanese society by mixing with the Japanese neighbors. Similarly, Mrs. B too tried her best to form social relations with the Japanese by inviting them to the various functions in her house, where they would meet and interact with the other Indian guests. To avoid any friction with Japanese, the Sikhs in Japan try to let the Japanese know that they themselves are peace loving.

In the cases of Tokyo, Sikhs who suffered due to the label of ‘overstayers’ attached to them, realized that they could find social support if they cultivated close and reliable relationships with their Japanese bosses and colleagues. The case of Mr. V is the most successful example. Another means used to improve the social condition of overstayers was the networks of South Asians. When they visit Pakistani food shops, they could meet other South Asians and exchange helpful information with each other, as we saw in the narrative of Mr. L People like Mr. I who can support others are known through such networks.

However, although Sikhs used these coping mechanisms, the fact of their being overstayers in Japan could not be changed. For the overstayers the only way to get a proper visa to continue to live in Japan as permanent residents has been marriage to Japanese or permanent visa holders and many have become permanent residents in this way. However, their marriages sometimes do not survive and end in divorce as was the case with Mr. K and Mr. Y. The problems related to the unfamiliarity with the education system of Japan have also been solved by taking the support of Japanese
colleagues and friends who can translate the letters from school written in Japanese to the other languages that they can understand. Whenever they meet their Japanese friend, they asked the friends to translate and explain the letters.

Although Sikhs in Kobe have had the status of ‘outsiders’ in Japanese society, they have nevertheless contributed to the ‘exotic’ atmosphere of Kobe as a historical port city which gathered many foreigners and this image of Kobe helps tourism in Kobe. Sikhs in Kobe have established their own position as the local residents on the basis of their success in business and trading and their long history as migrants.

**Psychological and Medical Problems and Solutions**

Sikhs living in Japan are also confronted by some psychological and physical problems. One of the psychological problems for Sikhs in Japan was isolation. As the cases of Mrs. R, Mr. Q and Mr. X show, they felt isolated from Japanese society. In the case of Mr. P we got to know about his loneliness in his old age now that his children are grown up and he has retired handing over his business to the next generation. Another problem we found from the cases of Sikhs in Tokyo was that many of them suffer from anxiety in their daily life because of the status as overstayers. The cases of the overstayers show they always feel fearful and apprehensive when they go out. Further, many times due to their illegal status and its resulting isolation, they feel so stressed that they want to return to the land of their ancestors. Hence they are always faced with the dilemma of wanting to return to their dear ones and their desire for wanting to stay in Japan as long as possible to earn more money, showing clear signs of what Vertovec termed as ‘a type of consciousness’ while discussing diaspora.
Besides the psychological problems, there are cases of physical problems as well. Some of Sikhs who work as manual labor got serious injuries like bone fractures and finger amputation because of their jobs using machines in factories and construction sites. Although in those cases the medical fees were covered by industrial injury insurance, they had to pay expensive cost for other diseases and injuries which are covered by other type of insurance which is not available to the overstayers. In fact, as we saw in the case of Mr. B, even if they have the qualification, sometimes it became difficult to get the insurance because of the maintaining cost. On the other hand, Sikhs in Kobe are the insurance holders and do not have any problem regarding the medical costs. Nevertheless, it is interesting to note that in many cases they were not satisfied with the treatment provided by the Japanese doctors because of communication problems although the facilities in a hospital were adequate and comfortable.

The Sikhs in Japan have tried to solve their psychological problems like the isolation from Japanese society and the loneliness in their life by indulging in activities that show their commitment for local Sikh community as the cases of Mr. P and Mrs. D in Kobe exhibit. One of the major ways to do so is to get attached with the gurdwara which works as the community center for the local Sikhs. For Sikhs going to the gurdwara often and sitting and praying there gives them a sense of peace and comfort.

On the other hand, many of the Tokyo Sikhs who suffer psychological problems of anxiety have coped by forming a network of Indian friends. Many of them spend time with friends and relatives in Japan and help each other as we saw in many cases in Tokyo. Another method of gaining support is by establishing close relationship with Japanese around them like Mr. V has done.
As for the medical problems of Sikhs in Japan, we found that many of them use Indian medicines which they have brought from India or were sent by their family instead of going to a hospital to save money. This solution was seen in the cases of the Tokyo Sikhs who did not have the national health insurance. On the other hand, the Sikhs who are not comfortable with Japanese doctors and nurses go to the other countries for diagnosis and treatment by ‘reliable’ doctors as the case of Mrs. T and Mrs. H showed. This practice is followed by the Kobe Sikhs who are well-off and have family networks in other countries.

Cultural Problems and Solutions

Sikhs in Japan also face difficulties in relation to language, food, costume, religion and recreation. Most of the Sikhs living in Japan had the difficulty of communicating with the local population especially in the initial years of their stay in Japan because it was difficult to find Japanese persons who understood even English. In terms of food, once again many could not accept the taste of Japanese food like Mr. G who could not enjoy Japanese food and who says that its taste is only sweet for him. In the cases of vegetarians like Mr. E’s family, the problem is even more severe as Japan is primarily a non-vegetarian society and the availability of vegetarian items is limited. Also, the migrants have faced the difficulty in purchasing food items because in Japan there is no display showing whether it is vegetarian or non-vegetarian food and food stuff. That is why people like Mr. B try to avoid buying readymade food stuffs and prefer to prepare fresh food themselves. Although their son’s school provides lunch to the students every day, he cannot eat many dishes which contain non-vegetarian ingredients. Additionally, many of the Sikhs in Tokyo have to prepare the meals by themselves because they have come to Japan alone and find it very difficult as mostly they have never cooked in India.
Then there is the issue of clothes. Many Sikhs we spoke to said that their turbans caused a lot of difficulty in various situations. Mr. A and Mr. X’s son were teased at their schools because of their long hair although they were attending international schools and even their teachers did not give enough support to stop the bullying. As the narrative of Mr. and Mrs. S tells us, Indian food stuff and clothes with which they are familiar were not available in Japan in 1950s and sometimes they suffered uncomfortable situations. After 1980s however, it became easier to get Indian food material, as well as, clothes. Yet, even if Indian costumes are available, some faced the difficulty of wearing them in the Japanese society because of the unfamiliarity and visibility in Japan.

Sikhs in Japan also found it difficult to explain to their Japanese friends and colleagues that they were different from Hindus in certain ways. Most Japanese tended to think that an Indian is equal to Hindu and although Sikhs explained about their religion, the practices and ways of thinking based on Sikhism it was difficult for Japanese to understand about the life of Sikhs related to their religion.

Another point that was interesting was that as far as recreation is concerned, although the Japanese television offers a large variety of programs, yet Sikhs in Japan preferred to watch Indian TV programs and preferred Indian movies and music. However, for many of them in Tokyo it was not easy to subscribe to these satellite channels as they cost a lot of money. Although some DVDs were available at Pakistani food shops, the variety was not enough to satisfy them. On the other hand, most of Sikhs in Kobe could enjoy Indian TV program through satellite broadcasts and felt connected to their roots.

Most Sikhs in Japan learn the Japanese language to cope with the problem of communication. However, as the cases above show different methods of learning the native language are used, especially among Sikh women. Mrs. S and Mrs. T learnt
Japanese mainly through interaction with their maids. Mrs. H picked up Japanese by trying to communicate with the Japanese she met outside in her daily life. Mrs. K learnt from both her work experiences with Japanese colleagues and her child who started going to the nursery school. Mrs. C picked up the language from Japanese friends who visited Mr. and Mrs. C. The second generation Sikhs, who were born and grew up in Japan, acquired Japanese language by interaction with neighbors and domestic help since they were children. Most Sikh males in Japan developed their skill of Japanese through their work. Interestingly, among the Sikhs in Kobe, we could not come across anyone who had learnt Japanese formally in an institution as most of the first generation Sikhs had studied outside Japan and those falling in the second and third generations were studying in the International Schools where Japanese language was not being taught. Most had just picked it up informally. However, in Tokyo the children were studying in Japanese public schools where they were learning Japanese.

The problems related to food were solved in several ways. In the cases of Sikhs who were not familiar with the taste of Japanese food, most prepared Indian dishes at home themselves. Many of the Sikh females in Kobe taught Indian cooking to their maids. Many of Sikh men in Tokyo who came alone learned to make Indian dishes themselves. However, many of Sikhs living in Japan told us the longer they stayed in Japan, the more they became familiar with the taste of Japanese food. In fact, some living in Kanto (Tokyo) area told us that they have begun to enjoy Japanese food and eat it every day. Although we know that vegetarians have problems in a society like Japan as we mentioned above, in the cases of the more affluent Kobe Sikhs, they also often have meals at the restaurants without any tension about the food because they have some favorite restaurants in Kobe and where they ask the chefs to cook
vegetarian dishes. On the other hand, in Tokyo, vegetarian Sikhs have different ways of coping with the problems related to food. Some never eat out and make every meal themselves. Others go out to eat only in Indian restaurants where they can find familiar vegetarian dishes. Some eat rice, vegetables, salads, fruits and yogurt only.

For the Sikhs in Kobe their ‘different’ turbaned and bearded appearance was less of a problem because of the nature of their jobs. Since most of them were in the field of business and trading, they had relatively less interaction with the average Japanese on the street and inside their place of work they were the bosses. But for ‘ overstayer’ Sikhs in Tokyo, their wearing turban was risky due to the possibility of being caught by the police because of their visibility. Therefore, most of them stopped wearing turbans. Some even cut their hair and beard. However, those like Mr. L who did not want to cut their hair and beard wore a cap instead of the turban. Mr. G kept his hair long while he shaved his beard. Thus, although Sikhs in Japan faced similar cultural problems, they chose different ways of dealing with them in different circumstances.

Comparing the Problems and Coping Mechanisms of Sikhs in Kobe and Tokyo

When we compare the difficulties faced by the Sikhs in Kobe and Tokyo, as well as, the coping mechanisms used by them, it is clear that although they share some similar types of problems and solutions, at the same time there exist many differences, too. For instance, we found that although in both Kobe and Tokyo the Sikhs faced economic difficulties, their coping mechanisms varied. In Kobe the economic problems were limited to their business and were countered with the support of the family network. On the other hand, in Tokyo area the economic difficulties of Sikhs were seen in their daily life. Although they relied mainly on their relatives or Indian
friends living in Japan, it was difficult to get adequate support economically, chiefly
due to the difference in the nature and types of their jobs. As we know, the Sikhs in
Kobe engaged in trading business and managed their own firms while many of the
Tokyo Sikhs are manual laborers. Also, the Kobe Sikhs are more affluent than the
Sikhs in Tokyo.

Another problem that all Sikhs in Japan faced was difficulty in adjusting to
Japanese society. Here again they chose different coping mechanisms for the same in
Kobe and Tokyo. Sikhs in Kobe have relatively less interaction with the Japanese
even after having lived in the city for many decades and tend to mix with their own
kind. However, in Tokyo, in terms of the process of their adjustment to life in Japan,
the Sikh migrants have been exposed to the Japanese way of life and, at the same time,
they have found the Japanese whom they can depend on. The reason of this difference
lies in the fact that Sikhs in Kobe have made their own community due to their stay in
Kobe for many decades while in Tokyo and its vicinity there is no particular area like
Kobe where the Sikhs have lived for a long time, and most of them are relative
newcomers. That is why the Sikhs in Tokyo have had to establish closer relationship
with Japanese in their daily life.

The psychological and health problems also tend to be different in the two
places. In Kobe we came across the psychological issue of loneliness faced by the
aged people whose children had separated from them or were too busy to give them
much time. However, they made it clear that this had nothing to do with their living in
Japan but due to their feeling of being neglected by their children. Among the Sikhs in
Tokyo, although we did find them feeling lonely due to their separation from their
families in India, it was the issue of physical health that was more troublesome for
them. As mentioned earlier, due to the nature of their employment, many suffered
from health problems which were compounded by the fact that they did not have any national health insurance. Although they lived away from their families in India due to their status as overstayers, they did ask their families to send medicines to escape paying the expensive medical cost in Japan. In Kobe, the only issue related to health was the problem of discomfort that the Sikhs felt in Japanese hospitals and hence preferred to visit ‘reliable’ doctors in other countries mainly in Southeast Asia where they originally came from and still have family networks. An interesting finding that emerges while looking at the health problems is that many Sikhs in Kobe have their roots not in India but Southeast Asian countries while the Sikhs in Tokyo have strong connection with India where their families live and where they intend to go back to.

In the cultural context, once again both the Sikhs in Kobe and Tokyo have faced common problems related to many categories like language, food, clothes, religion and recreation. Through the examination of the above cases and the stories of many others we met through our research in Kobe and Tokyo, interestingly we found that for the Sikhs in Kobe coping with cultural problems involved preservation of their Punjabi way of life while for the Sikhs in Tokyo it involved making an effort to adjust to the prevailing Japanese culture.

In conclusion, a comparison of the problems and coping methods of Sikhs in Kobe and Tokyo makes it clear that the differences in the economic (class and job factors), social (country of origin) and citizenship (visa status) situation of the Sikhs in Japan determine their problems and coping mechanisms. In the next chapter we will focus on the social and cultural practices of Sikhs in Japan and also examine the socio-cultural practices observed by them in their native villages in order to identify the patterns of continuity and change in their life.