

Profile of an International Migrant from Punjab- A Case Study of Displacement and Pain of Separation

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Abstract

Migration from one place to the other is a universal aspect of a majority of creatures inhabiting this planet. All such creatures through a particular region due to the diversity of opportunities available to them in one form or the other. This has been the trend ever since life originated on this earth. Birds and animals flock to a region found cozy for survival. This tendency is found in Siberian cranes that travel about 5000 kilometers to reach India during winters. Coming on to humanity, this trend of migration is more visible in regions where there are not sufficient facilities available for the Homo sapiens to grow in harmony with the environment around them. As and when they find a particular aspect of that region not suitable for their all-round development or growth, they find it better to embark on a search for still better avenues. Punjab, a state known as food bowl of India, underwent a holocaustic change in its nature with Punjabis migrating to the Middle East, European nations and the U.S.A. to find what they could not get in their motherland. Incidentally, a majority of these Punjabis were from hardworking agriculturist families with a long lineage of farming as their chief occupation over the centuries. This forms an interesting case study as not only the hand to mouth but even the progeny of the affluent families made a beeline for the migration. They found it mandatory to their scheme of things to migrate at a young age and go the whole hog to wipe out the poverty looming over their families. Those from the affluent families made it a point to lead a life of standard and regularization.

Keywords: Homo sapiens, Migrant, Progeny

This paper is an effort to portray the circumstances and the mindset of the Punjabi migrants as they became foreigners for their own lands and decades later tried to find the logic and the validity behind migrating to other nations. The cultural, social and economic barriers they find after migration and on returning to their own lands necessitates them to be an adjusting creature decades after their migration from their motherland.

PROFILE OF AN INTERNATIONAL MIGRANT FROM PUNJAB:The life of a migrant immigrating to a foreign nation makes an interesting case study. Migration can be defined as “a process of moving, either across an international border, or within a State. Encompassing any kind of movement of people, whatever its length, composition and causes; it includes refugees, displaced persons, uprooted people, and economic migrants.”(1) Migration is a universal fact. A migrant leaves his motherland entirely because he has to begin a journey to the unknown lands in search of better avenues than the ones available to them at home. In the process of finding an alien nation congenial to him, the migrant might visit two, three or even

more nations before settling down in a country. Currently, IOM states that there are about one billion migrants around the world. This number includes 214 million international migrants and 740 million internally displaced persons (IDPs)(2) Taking the case of an international migrant from Punjab, we can have a deeper probing of the facts and situations encountered by the migrant Punjabi as he crossed over to an entirely different culture to begin his life anew. The paper is an exhaustive study of the profile of an international migrant who went to the Europe for better opportunities. In a tiny village (now a part of Hoshiarpur Municipal Corporation) in Hoshiarpur lives a family with a legacy of 200 years. The head of the family was Lala Bhagwan Dass, B.A., B.T. the Head Master of Government High School, Hoshiarpur. His three sons were highly educated, Dr. Hans Raj, MBBS, Sh. Jagdish Chandra, B.A., L.L.B. and Sh. Vidya Sagar, M.Sc(Hons.) Zoology. Sh. Jagdish Chandra did practice in District Court, traded for a small period in Yarkand, Tashkent (then U.S.S.R.), afterwards joined army and was later selected in the Ministry of External Affairs after the independence of the nation. From Smt. Sushila Devi, he had three sons and one daughter. Born in Dec, 1937, the eldest of the three sons, Sh. Sudhir Kumar had an ordinary childhood like other boys of his times. He studied from D.A.V School, Hoshiarpur. Then he joined S.B.A.C High School, Bajwara for matriculation. He did his F.Sc from Government College, Hoshiarpur. A young lad during the partition era, he was swayed by the cinema and smoking bouts with his friends. In the year 1956, Sh. Jagdish Chandra was posted in the Indian High Commission in France and the family left for Paris. Sh. Sudhir Kumar did his Diploma in Electrical Engineering as he was in India living with his uncle. With hopes for a bright future, new horizons to reach, he went to the Europe in 1958. Migration in its totality is a global and constant phenomenon. At levels of roughly 3 percent the share of migrants among the world population has remained remarkably constant over the last 5 decades.(3) Getting down among a host of strangers, he had no acquaintance, nowhere to go on the vast stretch of earth. This is the dilemma, the anxiety, numerous Indians face as they go out of their country in search of the El Dorado(4), the land with promises of health, abundant wealth and contentment to whosoever reaches it. It is otherwise that nobody reaches that land. Health and wealth are undoubtedly for the asking but contentment is never achieved. He moved around in a few European countries looking for a congenial atmosphere and ultimately settled down in England, in the city of London. London was fast growing in its stature and physical dimensions as a metropolitan city on the map of the world. Sh. Sudhir Kumar looked for reasonable dwellings and suitable employment to fulfill the aim with which he had left the shores of India. The family in the meanwhile was living in comfortable conditions. Being the eldest son, Sh. Sudhir Kumar was willing to be self-sufficient at the earliest without troubling his father for finances. He started doing small jobs in and around London. Salary was meager, still he was somehow getting on with the things by virtue of being single and with no liability. He lived in rented accommodation (as a majority of migrants do when they go

abroad) and cutdown his expenses to the minimum possible level. A time came during this period when his uncle Sh. VidyaSagar came to London with his daughter. As they were new to this place, it was automatically expected from the nephew to take care of the food and lodging of his relatives. In Indian families, this is still an appreciable feature (AtithiDevoBhava) prescribes a dynamic of the host–guest relationship which embodies the traditional Indian Hindu-Buddhist philosophy of revering guests with same respect as god. This concept of going out of the way to treat guests with reverence goes even beyond the traditional Indian Hindu-Buddhist common greeting of namaste (I bow to the divinity in you) used for everyone. (4), but now dwindling fast. A few months of tough period were bravely warded off through determination, grit and hard work. Sh. Sudhir Kumar changed his job and his uncle and his daughter shifted to some other part of London and found lodging for themselves. Family in Paris was getting on with things, kids learning French and living under the guidance and care of the parents.

A few years elapsed and Sh. Sudhir Kumar was now getting to terms with the life in London. He had not even once visited India and had developed a craving to go back to his birthplace, meet old friends and spend time doing the same things they used to do when they were young. One usually goes back to his native land when he is desirous to meet and be with his family. Separation and displacement are two factors in the modern world that take their toll upon a man suffering from them. He becomes a loser on different counts. The statement from The Myth of Sisyphus could rightly be quoted here- “Cut off from his religious, metaphysical and transcendental roots, man is lost; all his actions become senseless, absurd, useless”(5) Half of his family was away to Africa, father transferred to Indian High Commission there and his uncle along with his family lived separately in other part of England now. Sh. Sudhir Kumar put his heart and soul into work as it became the be all and end all of his life. It was a race run seriously and sincerely by him. He had no other flair, no liking, no yearning for entertainment. Strangely as contrary to a traditional Indian of his times, he believed in God but never went to the temple to pay obeisance.

As life was smoothening up, it was not possible that the flow of events runs calmly. Sh. Sudhir Kumar fell critically ill, and had nobody to bank upon. He was taken to a hospital. He needed care, attention and consolation. It was really tough for anyone in Africa to come to him as kids were small. Also his uncle was setting up his family base in England and but obvious he could not be by his bedside all the time. During this period, a godly intervention came to his help. Ms. Doreen, an Irish nurse working in the same hospital found that this particular patient has no attendant and nobody to console. She started nursing him and attending to him in her off time. This is the beauty of human relationships. We migrate to unknown lands with relatively no knowledge of foreign lands. We do not know a single soul in that land. Still someone comes to

our aid when we least expect this to happen. But for this support in an alien place, one develops a yearning in his heart to go back to his native land. Sh. Sudhir Kumar gradually improved in health and spirits and was in a position to get discharged from the hospital. At this juncture, both felt a pull towards each other. They did not know the base of this pull and they were unsure about togetherness. The naive, simple, soft spoken Indian was an impressive personality for Ms. Doreen, an Irish girl born in an entirely different background. Time elapsed and they felt this mutual pull too strong to be resisted. Ultimately, in Oct,1970, they got betrothed. Sh. Sudhir Kumar had not even an iota of doubt whether this woman of Irish origin would, on their visit to India settle in unknown surroundings coming from a city as developed as London. However, at the end of the day it is your mutual understanding with each other that really matters. Rest is all an illusion. And they had some common qualities like simplicity, sensitiveness and being considerate towards the needy and the downtrodden. Back home, the family members were also hovering between doubt and fear if the decision was altogether right.

The fears of the family members proved baseless and they were effectively quelled when Ms. Doreen became Mrs. Doreen Kumar. The father had retired from foreign service and the family had returned to their base in Hoshiarpur, Punjab. Sh. Sudhir Kumar had to suffer a loss when his mother Smt. Sushila Devi passed away in 1977. He was deeply inclined towards his mother and had regrets that as he had to migrate, he could not live for a considerable time with her. The younger brothers and sisters were all married by this time. An emotionally broken man, he came to India to perform the last rites of his mother, his Irish wife by his side, as she had promised him to stand by in moments of joy and grief.

Nineteen years to be precise, had passed as Sh. Sudhir Kumar returned for the first time to his native land after leaving Indian shores in 1958. A lot had changed in the aspect of the village which he had left. However the warmth in relationships and the urge to meet old friends had increased considerably. He loitered around the village with old friends who had children now, loads of responsibilities and means of income small. Sh. Sudhir Kumar, being a considerate fellow understood their position and never backed out from helping them financially. This is the pull of the native land, the old memories, sentiments that are too much for an emotional person. He took bicycle and visited all those places which he used to throng during his youth. A movie at Raj theatre followed by a glass of lassi at the sweet shop opposite to it was an experience relived by him. The free parking provided by that sweet vendor was an additional incentive. His brother in India tells that a few years back he got a phone call from Sh. Sudhir Kumar and he told him to give Rs. 5000/- to that sweet vendor in fond memory of the good time he had at that shop about 50 years back. How many of us are sensitive enough to any favour made to us by somebody? He had to return to India in unfortunate circumstances in 1988 when his father passed away. He was the head of the family now as is the custom in Indian families. He wanted

the children in the family to study as much as they could and carry on the glorious heritage of the family. He was willing to extend all possible help to them. During these visits to India, his wife stood by him. Although from a different culture, she perfectly adapted herself to the new environment.

Sh. Sudhir Kumar worked for a reasonable time in an aeronautics factory. He had comfortably settled down in London life. He had a cosmopolitan approach towards life. By virtue of that, he developed a lifelong affinity with a Pakistani, a Sri Lankan and few English people residing in London. From time to time, he wanted to help the people of the place from where he had begun his life journey. With that purpose, he entrusted his brother in India with the task of helping the needy and the downtrodden. He had everything now- a secure job, a comfortable home, a status in life. However the couple was not blessed with a child. This thing did not weigh upon the couple. They showered their love and affection on kids of locality.

He made it a point to raise funds for the unprivileged section of the society. His wife was also of immense help to him. They wanted to ensure that the kids of the family back in India should get the best guidance and upbringing. Time and again they kept asking about the requirement if any. The family became so much familiar with their Western relation that his wife Mrs. Doreen came to India twice alone. She was so much delighted to spend time amongst her family members. They being an educated family, no communication gap ever prevailed. She expected her family to visit the London home. With this aim, she asked her nephew to visit the U.K. They sent the sponsorship letter to their nephew in India and secured his visit to the U.K. in 1995. Not every journey in life has a comfortable downward slope. The moments of joy are a rarity in the stream of life. Happiness is but an occasional episode in the general drama of pain.(6) Just when we expect a smoothsailing, we are let down by age and circumstances. Mrs. Doreen Kumar suffered a paralytic attack in the year 2012. She had to be kept in a nursing home. Sh. Sudhir Kumar, a retired fellow by this time, had a fixed routine now. He went to the nursing home in the morning, sat by his wife for hours, shared the memories of the good time they had during their visits to India, Canada, the U.S.A. and other European countries and returned home when it was evening. The family in India was equally concerned about the health of Mrs. Doreen Kumar. He used to return home till late in the evening. This routine went on for almost one year. Ultimately the migrant from Punjab was once again left alone in bereavement, in the same status in which he was as he came to the U.K. about six decades back. His wife passed away in the year 2013. Loneliness loomed large on him now. He craved to go back to India, the land of his birth. However, his own weak condition rendered him unable to visit India even once after the death of his wife. Running around for his wife in her illness took its toll on him. He had weakened down considerably. He underwent a regular medical checkup and was diagnosed with spine cancer in Dec, 2013. With the advanced medical facilities there, he was expected to recover with time. However, it was not to be. He went on becoming weak with each passing day. He was hospitalized in April, 2016. The problem had covered the entire body by this time. His craving for one last visit to India remained unfulfilled. He took his last breath on May 05, 2016. It was a shock indeed for the family and friends back home. A loving son, a caring elder brother,

a jovial friend had gone to eternal sleep. Life is indeed a mixture of very strange situations and upheavals. A migrant who left his land in search of better avenues could not return one last time to his motherland. He died a lonely death. However his ashes were brought to India where they were thrown into the Ganges. The son of India had merged into the waters of the motherland though not in physical form.

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