

**The Impact of Kinship on the Economic Dynamics of
Transnational Networks:
reflections on some South Asian developments**

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As the constraints of space and time steadily diminished in the face of rapid developments in the technology of communications, a bewildering variety of translocal networks have sprung as those involved have sought to make the most of the novel entrepreneurial opportunities which have consequently emerged. But whilst these ever more spatially extended networks are both a cause and a consequence of the ever more globalised socio-economic order of which every one of us is now a part, it is now becoming apparent that transnationalism is much more of a Janus-faced phenomenon than was once assumed. Given that one of the most overt manifestations of globalisation has been the ever more spectacular growth of transnational corporations, most of which were launched ‘from above’ – or in other words from the metropolitan heartlands of Euro-America – it is easy to see why the phenomenon was misread. A relatively small number of such behemoths (at least some of whom have now gone ‘offshore’) have colonised huge chunks of extractive, manufacturing and commercial activity with such great success that the only serious challengers to each such network’s position of global hegemony appears to be restricted to other similarly organised transnational corporations. Moreover the strongly hierarchical and tightly bureaucratically organised enterprises largely determine the economic parameters of the world in which we live, in the sense that they help to stabilise the relatively secure environment of high-waged Euro-America, and to open up new opportunities for labour-intensive manufacturing in populous but low-waged regions in Southern and Eastern Asia. Meanwhile those self-same processes have also created an ever more disadvantaged global periphery, most of whose inhabitants are still dependent on near-subsistence agriculture, but whose needs and concerns have become steadily more irrelevant to the calculations of the lords of the global economy.

Yet although it is precisely this dimension of globalisation which the protestors at Seattle and elsewhere were seeking to highlight, closer inspection soon reveals that transnational networks can operate just as well in a counter-hegemonic as in a hegemonic format. Hence the emergence of these processes of networking ‘from above’ have also been accompanied by an explosive growth of entrepreneurial initiatives ‘from below’, with the result that many millions of people have been able to disentangle themselves from the marginalised positions

out on the periphery in which they had hitherto been confined, and to tap into the much richer spectrum of opportunities available in some sector of the metropolitan core. However the two processes are by no means mirror images of one another: transnational networks which press up from below are very differently structured from those which bear down from above. In the first place interpersonal relations within them are very differently structured, for the vast majority are participating members, linked by informal ties of reciprocity, rather than being paid employees; in consequence their principle initial asset is not so much access to financial capital, but to its members' collective capacity to use their own internal resources of social, cultural and psychological capital to mobilise on their own behalf.

That said, these processes of mobilisation 'from below' have had almost as far reaching impact on the contemporary character of the global order as have the much more heavily publicised processes of transnationalism from above. One of the most striking features of the past half century is the extent to which people of non-European descent have become the prime movers in this sphere, such that countless millions of people have left peripheral regions in Asia, Africa and Latin America to seek out better opportunities in one sector or another of the metropolitan world. Nor is this merely a matter of migration: as entrepreneurs in transnational space, such migrants are invariably very active networkers who remain heavily involved with their kin whose domicile has remained unchanged, and who are no less keen to keep their overseas born offspring aboard. However such networks are sustained on a very different basis from the vast majority of those operating from above. Each is invariably informally organised, for their strength and stability is rooted not in the application of formal bureaucratic procedures, but in much personalised ties of reciprocal trust, which are in turn invariably grounded in a sense of common kinship.

Nevertheless the resulting networks can be extremely varied in their structure and character, not least because those who are engaged in uphill struggles against socio-economic exclusion cannot afford to be choosy. Indeed since their best means of doing so is by exploiting the opportunities available in otherwise unattractive niches, and then by using these as footholds on the basis of which to inch their way yet further forward, the very alterity of their outlook, and a creative ability to spot opportunities which others have missed, is the secret of most transnational networkers' success. But since they undertake these operations on an informal rather than a formal basis, their key asset on which they draw in developing their

contextually-oriented strategic manoeuvres is the resources of their ancestral social, cultural and psychological capital – whatever shape or form it may have.

1 The dynamics of transnational networking

Whilst it is easy enough to wax lyrical about such entrepreneurial processes, very close and careful questions still need to be asked about just what such cultural capital consists of, how it is deployed, as well as the extent of the internal contradictions which are inevitably embedded within it – above all because the literature on transnational migration makes it clear that those involved rarely, if ever, act alone. Not only do the vast majority of migrants move along increasingly well-worn paths, but the way in which those paths were initially constructed, the way in which participants continue to move along them, and the strategies of adaptation which they adopt at their destination is very largely rooted in the networks of inter-personal reciprocity in which they were involved prior to their departure. Moreover these networks of reciprocity are very largely organised and articulated in terms of common kinship.

That this should be so is hardly surprising. Having set out with minimal material assets, neophyte entrepreneurs find that the obstacles strewn in their path are becoming steadily more serious. During the past few decades every metropolitan centre has progressively tightened its immigration controls, with the express intent of excluding those are ‘poverty stricken’, ‘ill-educated’, and ‘un-skilled’. Secondly even if hopeful entrepreneurs do manage to circumvent these outer defences – if necessary by taking a mortgage on their future wages in order to buy their way through – they invariably find themselves directed straight to the bottom of the labour market at their destination; and even if they do manage to gain a legitimate right of abode, which is invariably tough task in its own right, they still face a steep uphill struggle against the forces of discriminatory exclusionism which are routinely directed at those who are visibly of alien origin.

In the face of such massive disincentives, it would seem reasonable to expect that the scale of these entrepreneurial inflows would at least have attenuated, even if they did not dry up altogether. In fact the reverse is the case: not only is there an ever growing crowd of potential immigrants clamouring at its gates of every metropolitan economy, but all attempts to stem this inflow have been nugatory. Why should this be so? Straightforward economics provides one part of the explanation. As the gulf in wage-rates, and hence in living standards, as

between the global economy's metropolitan core and its largely non-European periphery becomes steadily wider, so the incentive to move from one sphere to the other becomes steadily stronger – and all the more so when the range of income-earning opportunities available at the bottom of the metropolitan labour market is much wider than many commentators appreciated. Supply is simply filling demand. The communicative aspects of globalisation also adds to the pressure. Since satellite dishes are now to be found even in the remotest parts of the non-metropolitan periphery, the metropolis, with all its wealth, beckons ever more actively. No wonder millions of adventurous young men throughout the periphery dream of making their way to paradise.

Dreams are one thing: implementation is quite another. With that in mind it is worth noting that despite their immense scale, migrant flows are far from random. Rather they are strikingly concentrated in spatial terms, since the networks through which they are organised run specific towns and villages to an equally restricted range of destinations overseas. These pattern are far from static, of course. As conditions change well-established flows may shrink dramatically; but in that case they are usually replaced by movements to a new, and hitherto unexploited destinations. It is easy to see why this should be so. Firstly long-distance migration is a challenging task, and one which is fraught with danger: hence the vast majority of migrants aim to build on the achievements of their predecessors. Those who cannot look to predecessors for guidance are at a severe disadvantage. Secondly the entry costs in terms of tickets, passports has always been substantial, and those costs have steadily escalated for those who have no alternative but to purchase their way through immigration controls. This has further consequences. In the first place successful transnational migration has become ever more dependent on access to agents who know the ropes, and who can guide their customers past these increasingly substantial obstacles – at a price, of course. The media's much vilified 'snakeheads' are but one example of those who provide this essential service. Secondly the severity of these difficulties can be sharply reduced if one is also in a position to draw on the resources of one's extended family.

With this in mind, two strategies have proved particularly useful. Since settlers in most – although by no means all – metropolitan destinations can eventually gain full rights as citizens, which in turn normally confers a right to family reunion, those who achieve that status can at that point call their wives, their children, and sometimes their elderly parents to join them overseas. Likewise marriage with a fellow villager who has gained permanent

rights of residence overseas can provide a very effective means of tapping into the opportunities of transnational entrepreneurship. Kinship is also crucial in another sense, for even if these avenues are unavailable, a potential migrant can invariably look to other members of the kinship network within which he is embedded, be they his immediate local family, or other kinsfolk who have already established themselves overseas to provide him with the loan to cover the initial entry-costs facing those wishing to enter these transnational spaces. Given all this, it is hardly surprising that emigrant outflows are so tightly spatially concentrated: emigration becomes, quite literally, a local industry.

A parallel set of factors also ensures spatial concentration at the other end of the chain. With few immediately marketable skills other than a willingness to turn their hands to whatever income-earning opportunities came their way, little or no command of local linguistic and cultural conventions, no significant financial assets, let alone the strong tendency towards racial and ethnic exclusionism displayed by most members of the indigenous majority, newcomers inevitably looked to their kinsmen and fellow-villagers to show them the ropes. Networks of mutual support grounded in such mutual understandings swiftly emerged as those involved set about establishing themselves in this alien and largely hostile environment. However the growth of such networks was rarely an obstacle to further spatial mobility, especially in the early days of settlement. Since it was the network itself – rather than its physical location – around which all this revolved, onward movements to take advantage of niches which offered marginally better pay and conditions were commonplace, although once again in response to information transmitted through the network.

Nevertheless each such nascent colony gradually developed stronger local connections. As the size of the settlement increased, as residential accommodation began to be bought rather than rented, as small businesses began to be established, and above all as wives and children were called over to join the pioneers, its members were able to order the greater part of their personal and domestic lives according to the social, moral, religious, linguistic and of course familial conventions which they had routinely deployed prior to their departure. These strategies – which did not, of course, exclude the acquisition of a growing level of familiarity with the cultural and linguistic conventions deployed within surrounding social order – proved highly adaptive. Besides permitting those who used them to construct a comfortable and familiar home from home within the context of an otherwise alien socio-cultural environment, they also provided them with a route to greater economic security – and indeed

prosperity. By dint of an immense amount of hard work, extensive mutual cooperation, and an extremely frugal approach to consumption, the great majority of transnational entrepreneurs soon managed to reach a level of financial security which was significantly better than that enjoyed by members of the poorest sections of the local population amongst whom they had settled. To their kinsmen back home, however, that was wealth indeed.

Nor was the end to upward mobility. Whilst achievements of most members of the first generation of transnational entrepreneurs were relatively modest by metropolitan standards – despite the exceptional few who were successful enough to have made their way into rich lists of millionaires – many of their locally born and bred offspring promptly took advantage of the opportunities available in the metropolitan educational system, and pressed their way yet further upwards and outwards through the employment market. Hence whilst many of the first generation did not fully implement their entrepreneurial dreams, many of their children certainly have. In the light of such success, it hardly surprising that so many of their kinsfolk are still clamouring at the gates: no matter how heavy entry costs may now have become, they have excellent reasons for believing that if only they, too, could cross the barrier, the terms of their own material existence would be similarly transformed.

In the midst of global economy in which capital, goods and information move ever more freely but where the mobility of labour is ever more tightly restricted, there can be no dispute that such entrepreneurial strategies have offered, and continue to offer, networkers from below a highly effective means of escaping from the comprehensively peripheralised position to which they would otherwise have been condemned. To be sure such processes have as yet had relatively little impact on the structure of the global socio-economic order; on the other hand it has certainly provided a fortunate few with a very effective means of bucking the system. No wonder so many others are currently seeking to follow in their footsteps.

2 The practical modalities of network construction

Whilst it is now possible to innumerable system-bucking transnational networks whose parameters are broadly congruent with the model set out above, the precise structure of each such network, as well as the trajectories of adaptation – and of success – to which they give rise are almost infinitely varied. Moreover one of the principal sources of these variations is plain to see. Since global political and economic developments are constantly transforming the character of the terrain across which entrepreneurs from below are seeking to construct their networks, and since their very marginality leaves them far more exposed than most to

the impact of these changes, flexibility is essential: unless the members of each such network constantly monitor these changes, and devise appropriate strategic responses, all their efforts can easily be undermined. That said, my central concern in this chapter is not so much to explore the various possible responses to these external (and in that sense ‘environmental’) patterns of opportunity and constraint, but rather to follow up Smith and Guarnitzo’s suggestion that one of the most challenging analytical tasks which we currently face is

“to determine how transnational networks work, and in that sense how principles of trust and solidarity are constructed across national territories as opposed to those which are locally based and maintained. What discourses and practices hold these networks in place? How are social closure and control organised across borders to guarantee loyalty and curtail malfeasance? How do transnational relations interact with local power structures, including class, caste and racial hierarchies? More generally, how does translocality affect the sociocultural basis supporting transnational relations and ties?” (Smith and Guarnitzo 1998: 26)

Developing an adequate response to these highly pertinent questions is of necessity an extremely challenging task. Whilst they ultimately require generalised (or at least generalisable) answers, the data on the basis of which one might set about doing so is of necessity highly contingent, since the precise modalities of such processes can be expected to display enormous amount of variation from network to network. With this in mind I will deliberately reduce the number of variables we need to consider by restricting the remainder of my discussion to developments within just three transnational arenas – those constructed by migrants from Mirpur District in Azad Kashmir region of northern Pakistan, from the Jullundur Doab in Indian Punjab, and from Sylhet District in eastern Bangladesh in the aftermath of their passage to Britain.

2.1 Kinship networks as an entrepreneurial resource

In all three areas, as indeed as in most of the remainder of South Asia, reciprocities of kinship provide the most important foundation for almost all kinds of inter-personal relationship, and hence of network construction. And since it is around the modalities of kinship and marriage – whether articulated at the level of the household, the extended family or the wider *biraderi* (descent group) – that almost all forms of networking take place, my central concern in the remainder of this chapter will be to explore the specific ways in which local variants of these modalities have affected (as well the way in which each has been affected by) the processes of global entrepreneurship in which their users have engaged.

At least to a first level of approximation, the kinship systems in all three areas display many commonalities. Across the whole broad sweep of the Indo-Gangetic plains patrilineally extended families are the basic unit of property-ownership, and hence of household organisation. Such families are strongly corporate in character, with the result that their assets are viewed as the common property of all their members. Nevertheless relationships between them are strongly hierarchical, particularly by gender and by age: superordinates are expected to exercise authority over and to take responsibility for their subordinates, whilst subordinates are expected to respect and obey their superordinates' instructions. Cross-gender relationships between young unmarried people who are other than the very closest of kin are regarded as unacceptable, so marriages are therefore invariably arranged – although as we shall see, the rules governing such arrangements are strikingly different in each area. Last but not least, whilst each such corporate family is held together by ties of unlimited mutual commitment, each is in turn set within a wider network of extra-familial kinship ties of both descent and marriage, which are grounded in similarly structured – although rather less intense – feelings of mutual reciprocity.

Access to the cultural capital embedded in such networks has proved to a very considerable asset. The strongly corporate nature of such extended families has not only meant that transnational entrepreneurship has collective foundations, but also that whoever is selected to try his hand in such an exercise can expect to receive support from its collective financial assets to cover his entry costs. By the same token all such departures are by definition 'temporary': not only do migrants' rights in the group's corporate resources remain undiminished throughout their absence, but they are if anything reinforced, given that the entire group also expects to make a similar claim over the fruits of his labours whilst overseas. In other words the network of reciprocities between emigrants and those who stay behind guarantees their mutual investments in each other.

Nor is that all. Since each such corporate family is in turn embedded within an even more extended network of *biraderi* reciprocities, and since these ties also provide the channels along which flows of chain migration develop, the final destination of those who join the chain is invariably one in which their kinsfolk have already begun to settle. Hence they are far from being alone: rather they have immediate access to a ready-made network from whose members they can ask for assistance and support as of right. Moreover similarly structured linkages can also be established between those whose prior connection was

extremely distant (as through a common friend in a distant village) or even non-existent. Where those involved share a common ideological outlook, they frequently construct networks of quasi-kinship which are similarly structured, if not quite so tightly binding, as those on which they are modelled. Such patterns of network-building grow out of – whilst also oiling the wheels of – processes of chain migration, whilst also greatly facilitating the subsequent processes of settlement and colony-building. The structural consequences of all this are far-reaching. The arrival of each new pioneer at an opportunity-rich destination in the metropolitan core potentially gives rise to the emergence of escalator which reaches out to an equally specific location far away on the global periphery. Once set in motion such kinship-powered escalators provide an ever-expanding stream of kinsfolk and fellow-villagers with a relatively effortless opportunity to move upwards from the periphery to the metropolis, subject only to the success of the metropolitan authorities' efforts to impose immigration controls.

2.2 *Peasant values*

Before proceeding further it is also worth taking cognisance of a further vital asset on which such entrepreneurs, and most especially those from South Asia, routinely draw: their prior experience as peasant-farmers. Whilst the term peasant has strongly negative connotations vernacular English, the skills and assumptions in terms of which such small-scale subsistence land-owning self-cultivators routinely deployed prior to their departure can also be highly adaptive in metropolitan contexts. Once again it is not difficult to see why. Over and above a taken for granted awareness of the benefits that can accrue from collective activity – as, for example, in the extended family – peasant farmers are invariably strongly committed to self-sufficiency. Bitter experience has long since taught them that outsiders are not to be trusted, especially when they are the tax-gathering agents of rapacious landlords and rulers: peasants therefore invariably place an extremely high premium on independence and autonomy. In the context of a working assumption that outsiders will never have anything but their own exploitative interests to heart, peasants routinely mistrust everyone but their own immediate kin. But even in that context – where reciprocity is taken for granted – peasants normally proceed in as frugal a manner as possible: dependency is avoided like the plague.

Peasant farming demands an intense level of physical commitment in a whole series of self-sufficient projects which are carefully, confidently and entrepreneurially organised. Long term financial planning is taken for granted, for peasants farmers do not depend on weekly

wage packets, and still less on the daily dole that they hand out to the landless labourers (who are in their view the epitome of fecklessness) whom they parsimoniously engage. Hence their economic horizon stretches not just from harvest to harvest, but from generation to generation. Children offer an irreplaceable source of long-term security. A commitment to frugality and long-term asset management is therefore deeply embedded in their everyday lifestyles.

But although the greater part of the urban proletariat in the metropolitan world may well be of peasant ancestry, such values stand sharply at odds with the those into which their descendants have subsequently been socialised. A world of weekly wage packets, of social security, and above all access to cheap credit which enables a plethora of consumer products to be enjoyed long before the money to pay for them has actually been earned, is entirely alien to the peasant experience. Moreover the foolishness of those who take such a world for granted seems self evident. Isn't it obvious, ask the peasants, that the jobs on which this whole structure depends might be just as vulnerable as is next year's harvest is to an unexpected drought? Can't they see that living in hock places necessarily places them at the mercy of loan sharks? And that children are much better viewed as an investment than a financial burden? Yet despite the comprehensive lack of fit between peasant values and those which underpin contemporary consumer capitalism, this certainly does not handicap those who have recently arrived from the rural periphery. Quite the contrary. Not only do they take it for granted that will have to look after themselves, but they also have access to a wide range of strategies by means of which to do so. So it is that although they invariably have little alternative but to find an initial toehold with the local underclass, they nevertheless routinely display a remarkable ability to embark not just to survive in, but begin to generate a surplus from, their engagement with conditions normally associated with severe poverty and gross exploitation.

2.3 Savings and capital accumulation

How can that be? Since they are used to working for themselves, few migrants of peasant origin are seriously disturbed by the prospect of working a twelve hour day, seven days a week – at least for a short period. No-one has any intention of doing so for ever. Rather such a burst of activity is invariably viewed as a means to an end: to improve the long-term socio-economic prospects of oneself and one's family. In such circumstances it also makes sense to fall back on a basic rural diet (of lentils and home-baked bread in South Asian contexts), so

dramatically reducing one's living expenses. Likewise housing and even beds can be shared, especially if one set of occupants works on the night shift and the other on days. Of course such behaviour is in no sense a *normal*: no-one would dream of adopting such barren lifestyles on a routine basis. Rather it is the outcome of a comprehensive commitment to deferred gratification. Hence their ultimate objective either to return to the peace and luxury of their own home village, weighed down with their fruits of their labour elsewhere, or of pressing their way upwards and outwards into a less demanding and more comfortable niche in the metropolis – or better still, of both. Those who adopt such a strategic outlook clearly have a great deal going for them. Though the level of success achieved varies a great deal between individuals in any given network, and even more so as between differently constituted networks, those involved invariably display much higher levels of mobility than their immediate rivals in the labour market: members of the systematically demoralised indigenous proletariat who fill its lower reaches.

Even so, their success is dependent on much more than mere frugality. However much they may be cultivators at heart, most peasants are prepared to engage in almost any income-generating activity. Waged work may indeed be an option, but even so most much prefer to work for themselves. Hence South Asian of all backgrounds invariably seek to supplement their wages by developing a 'side-business'; and should these prove successful, as they very often do, they may well switch over entirely to self-employment. In so doing routinely act as bricoleurs, constantly scouring their immediate environment for opportunities, and skilfully exploiting all those niches in which the entry costs are low, and where the potential for profit is largely a function of the scale of effort and ingenuity which the entrepreneur – together with all the other members of his extended family – is able to deploy. Hence the favoured niches into which South Asian entrepreneurs have begun to move in substantial numbers include taxi-driving, take-aways, market stalls, corner shops, clothing manufacture, house-renovation, car-repair workshops and so forth. In doing so they are beginning to put the local waged for unskilled waged labour firmly behind.

However a further characteristic of those of peasant background are their ambitions – if not, for themselves, then certainly for their children. In sharp contrast to the well tamed members of long-established urban industrial proletariats, peasants have never been socialised to failure. They know all about social exclusion, of course: larger landlords, merchants and agents of the state have always treated them with disdain. But whilst they harbour an acute

sense of the inherent rapaciousness of all those fortunate enough to have clambered into such positions, they also take the view that that if only their sons could gain access to education, and could be persuaded to work hard enough at their books, they too could find their way to the top of the pile. Out on the periphery, the prospect of pulling this off is remote: educational services are ill-developed in the countryside, whilst those schools which are well enough staffed to provide an escalator to the top are beyond both the spatial and the financial reach of mere peasant farmers. Conditions in the metropolis could not be more different. State education of a reasonable quality is universally available, and the obstacles to rapid upward educational mobility are clearly very much less. Hence peasant migrants invariably go to great lengths to press their children to take advantage of opportunities from which they themselves were excluded.

2.4 *Status competition*

In South Asian contexts status-competition strongly reinforces this drive for upward mobility. Although every corporate family within a given *biraderi* normally views itself as being of equal worth to – and hence as having as social status which is principle no different from – that all of its other members, most such *biraderis* are wracked by vigorous processes of internal status competition. The roots of this paradox are easy enough to explain. Precisely because each corporate family is strongly committed to maintaining itself in a condition of non-dependency, and to protecting its members reputation men and women of honour, each is also constantly on guard against the prospect that their nominally equal kin might steal a march on them either by becoming dramatically more wealthy, or by besmirching their honour in some way. To those who feel that their social standing has thus been compromised, two main options are open. Either to show that the their rival's to personal honour are specious, or to find some alternative route to wealth – so allowing them to catch up with, and better still to surpass, their rivals' achievements. Processes can have a far reaching impact on the dynamics of transnational entrepreneurship.

In the first place the initial pioneers of such migratory exercises are invariably drawn from corporate families who feel they have fallen behind their neighbours in material terms, but whose membership contains a superfluity of relatively inactive young adult males. When the remainder of the group's members can cultivate it landholdings with ease, sending off at least one of its otherwise under-employed young man to seek his fortune in the global labour market is clearly an attractive option. However the rationale behind such a move is far more

complex than a simple ‘escape from poverty’. A better view is that the family has chosen to redeploy some of its surplus labour in a cash-rich environment, to invest some of its accumulated savings in sending him there, in the confident expectation that he will subsequently be able to substantially reinforce the family’s capital resources, which can then be profitably and productively invested in projects such as buying additional agricultural land, rebuilding the house in which the family lives, arranging prestigious marriages for its as yet unmarried daughters – so thereby radically enhancing the whole family’s social standing.

Yet although transnational activity may provide a new remedy for those who had temporarily fallen behind, its knock-on effects were much less unprecedented. As those families which had previously been overshadowed press their way back into the sunlight, so those who had previously enjoyed that position found themselves slipping back into the shade. Hence in *biraderi* after *biraderi* more and more families began seriously to consider the benefits of transnational entrepreneurship, if only catch up with the upstarts who had the temerity to seek to outshine them. Processes of this kind soon became self-sustaining. Provided that the barriers of immigration control could be successfully circumnavigated, virtually every family in many of the villages from which the earliest pioneers were drawn has by now gone transnational.

3 The internal dynamics of transnational networks

Transnational spaces can be occupied in a wide variety of different ways. At the outset, most South Asian peasants who set off overseas simply saw themselves as adding a long-distance spatial dimension to long-established forms of local practice. Temporary waged employment was not in itself a novel phenomenon: all that was new was the distance travelled. Nor was their destination significant in its own right. To be sure urban Britain was viewed as a honey-pot in material terms, for it allowed them to earn and save with unparalleled swiftness, but beyond that most of the early sojourners regarded it as a social and cultural no-man’s land. Hence even if their physical absence proved to be relatively lengthy, they still regarded themselves as full members of their corporate families back in South Asia. It follows that as far as they themselves were concerned, participation in the global labour market was but a passing phase, since their objective in doing so was to add to their family’s *local* resources of capital and prestige.

3.1 Remittances and the organisation of transnational space

In the longer run members of the networks in which they were caught up began to occupy transnational space on a very different basis, especially when their presence overseas turned out to be a much more long-term enterprise than the earlier pioneers had ever envisaged. That said, it is also worth noting that almost all of those who reached adulthood at the home base before moving overseas – and who were therefore thoroughly socialised into the values and expectations of the local social order – retained a significant part of this mindset, even though their overseas born and raised offspring had moved on elsewhere. Hence whilst those born overseas have largely lost interest in the status-games being played out in their villages of origin, their elderly parents and grandparents frequently continue to devote a great deal of energy – and as much as the family's capital resources as they can lay their hands on – into building grand houses and investing in agricultural land back in the arena which they still consider to be their real home. So it is that as long as members of that generation are still alive – or in other words for at least half a century after mass migration began – Britain's South Asian transnational networks have been (and no doubt will continue to be) conduits for the transfer of a substantial volume of capital back to by now well-established settlers villages of origin.

That said, the scale and direction of asset-transfers within any given transnational network normally varies very considerably over time. The scale of remittances normally rises to a peak in the immediate aftermath of emigration, for once the entry-cost of getting overseas has been paid off, most sojourners send the greater part of their savings back home at the earliest possible opportunity. However once emigrants are joined by their wives and children, as almost always eventually occurs, the scale of remittances drops sharply: the living expenses associated with family life overseas are inevitably very much greater than those incurred by lone males committed to comprehensively deferred gratification, with the result that their capacity to save drops sharply. Remittances – which in this context frequently take the form of consumer goods rather than cash – are much more a symbolic indication of the absentees' on-going commitment to their extended family than a serious transfer of capital assets. Whilst this pattern may continue for many years, it is by no means the end of the matter. Once such settlers' overseas born children have reached adulthood and hence begun to generate incomes of their own, elderly retirees with fewer responsibilities can begin to revert to their former passions. As they begin to play the status game back home much more actively once again, so

the scale of remittances frequently begin to rise sharply once again, and is very often associated with a renewed construction boom back home.

However such retirees' booms also have a limited lifespan: since such retirees overseas-born children rarely share their parents' passion for the acquisition of real estate back home, most quietly sell the greater part of their parents' carefully acquired holdings after their deaths, and remit the greater part of the proceeds back to the universe which they themselves inhabit.

3.2 Marriage, migration and the developmental cycle in domestic groups

As Edmund Leach long ago emphasised in his classic analysis, every domestic group follows its own distinctive processual trajectory, whose precise course is determined on the one hand by the unpredictable incidence of life events such birth and death, and on the other by its members' decisions' with respect residence, marriage, household formation and so forth. Those decisions are in turn governed by group members' conventional expectations about the way in which interpersonal relations within the household should be organised, and further conditioned by its members' efforts to manoeuvre their way to their own advantage through the obstacles and opportunities facing them in their immediate environmental context.

Once one takes all this aboard, the simplified analytical schema which I have presented so far is rendered a great deal more complex, above all because one has to take much more careful cognisance of the consequences of the specific conventions of kinship, household formation and above all of marriage in terms of which network members operate. Once this is borne in mind, it soon becomes clear that what might otherwise appear to be some thoroughly arcane differences in patterns of household organisation, and most especially in rules and conventions governing choices of marriage partners have had a far-reaching impact on the way in which the transnational networks established by peasant migrants from Mirpur, Jullundur and Sylhet have developed over time, and indeed over the way in which they currently operate.

3.2.1 Female seclusion and its consequences

One striking common feature of migration from all three areas is that the pioneers were exclusively males. Although the great majority were married, their wives and children remained resident in the extended household headed by the migrant's parents. This can be

glossed in a number of ways. In the first place it reflected the strength of the north Indian view that in no circumstances should honourable women strike out into extra-domestic arenas by themselves – in sharp contrast to Sri Lanka, Indonesia and the Philippines, where an exceptionally high proportion of transnational entrepreneurs are women. Secondly the elders took the view that if those who left were unencumbered by domestic responsibilities whilst also being bound by ties of affection and loyalty to their wives and children, they would find themselves under pressure both to maximise their savings, and to bring them back home at the earliest opportunity. This also reflected the elders' concern to sustain the corporate unity of the extended family: as long as their daughter-in-law and her children were still living with them, they had a backstop against the prospect that their son might be seduced by the glamour of foreign ways, forget his corporate obligations, squander his savings – or worse still, fail ever to return home at all.

Be that as it may, virtually all the Indian, Pakistani and Bangladeshi men who made the passage to Britain did eventually bring their wives and children to join them. The forces that eventually impelled them to do so are not hard to discern. Lone male residence in Britain was hard going: it turned all the pleasures and comforts of domesticity into a distant dream, but even when they did return home on lengthy furloughs – those who adopted a strategy of inter-continental commuting regularly did – the discovery that their children had forgotten their father's very appearance during his absence was disturbing in the extreme. As the years passed, so the attractions of domestic reunion in Britain became stronger and stronger. What is very striking, however, is although the original pioneers from all three areas arrived in Britain at much the same time, there were immense variations in the speed at which the process of domestic reunion took place.

The Jullunduris, the majority of whom are Jat Sikh, were by far the quickest to do so: most of the male pioneers brought their wives and children to join them between two and four years after first arriving in Britain. The Mirpuris took good deal longer, partly by choice, and partly because Britain's has begun to interpret its immigration rules much more stringently by the time they got around to preparing the necessary application, thus introducing a further element of delay. Anything between five and twenty years might pass before Mirpuri settlers were finally joined by their wives and children. Finally the Sylhetis from Bangladesh characteristically took even longer still, so much so that when they did finally make the move a significant number of men who had by now reached late middle age took the opportunity to

set the wives to whom they had long been married to one side, and instead imported a new and very much younger partner.

Just what it was that precipitated these huge differences? The rules of female seclusion, *purdah*, was undoubtedly a very significant factor, for these rules were interpreted in strikingly different ways in each of the three areas with which we are concerned. Whilst Sikh women in Jullundur are expected to behave with extreme modesty and circumspection in the company of their husband's older male kin, the rules of modesty impose few restrictions on their physical mobility: hence women routinely set off for the market, and go to school and college, by themselves. In both Mirpur and Sylhet, however, that is still regarded as quite scandalous. To be sure such women may move with relative freedom between immediately neighbouring households, especially if – as is most usually the case – they are inhabited by her immediate kinsfolk; however they can only step further afield if fully veiled, as well as being accompanied by a male chaperone. Given these differences, it is easy to see that a passage to Britain would be regarded as a much more alarming – and challenging – exercise when viewed from a Mirpuri or Sylheti rather than a Jullunduri perspective.

3.2.2 *Marriage rules and their consequences*

Yet although attitudes to *purdah* undoubtedly had a significant impact on decisions with respect to family reunion, these were by no means the principal cause of the radical differences in the speed with which that took place. Instead variations in each group's characteristic domestic developmental cycles – which are in turn largely grounded in different conventions about who may, and may not, be chosen as a marriage partner, turn out to have a far greater causal impact.

Let us begin with the marriage rules deployed by Jullunduri Sikhs (and Hindus, for that matter). Whilst it is routinely expected that all marriages should be arranged between families belonging to the same caste, these rules of endogamy are also accompanied by a parallel set of exogamous restrictions, such that one's partner may not be chosen from one's own patrilineal descent group (*got*), nor from that of one's mother, one's father's mother or one's mother's mother. The central consequence of these rules is that every marriage – which is revealingly termed a *riste*, a relationship – must in effect be contracted with strangers; whilst they must of course be members of the same caste, they may only be arranged between

families which have no prior agnatic or affinal ties. This has a far reaching impact on the micro-politics of the extended family.

In the first place as sons and daughters reach marriageable age, families have no specific prior obligations with respect to accepting or making offers of *riste*: since each affinal linkage is established afresh, strategic choices are largely governed by whatever long-term interests the family perceives as being most urgent. Secondly newly-married brides cannot expect to find any immediate allies amongst the other womenfolk in the extended household: the absolutely critical relationship between mother-in-law and daughter-in-law has therefore always to be negotiated from scratch. Thirdly, and consequently, even those in-marrying brides who do establish a working relationship with their mothers-in-law still have a strong incentive to engineer a partial 'peeling-off' of their conjugal partnership within the wider structure of the extended family, which is best achieved when she and her husband (and of course their children) establish a more or less autonomous domestic unit of their own. Last but by no means least, the on-going strength of in-marrying women's individualised linkages with their natal *biraderis*, and most particularly with their brothers, is always a powerful potential source of refuge and assistance should women run into difficulties either with their husbands or their in-laws.

In nearby Mirpur, however, marriage rules take a very different turn. Although the basic conventions of family and kinship within which they operate are very similar to those deployed by Hindu and Sikh Jullunduris, the Mirpuris, as Muslims, add a crucial extra twist. The complex rules of exogamy outlined above have no place in their world, and instead the inner limits as to whom they may or not marry are governed solely by the rules of incest. Given that these are closely congruent with those set out in Leviticus, there are no restrictions on marriages between cousins (whether cross or parallel), as is equally the case throughout the Islamic world. However in Mirpur, as in much of the rest of northern Pakistan, this is taken one step further: close-kin marriage is actively preferred. My own observations suggest that at least 60% of all Mirpuri marriages are contracted between first cousins, and a very substantial proportion of the remainder are contracted between slightly more distant kin.

Just how is this exceedingly high frequency best accounted for? Whilst the basic rules within which they operate are derived from the *qur'an* and *hadith*, this active preference for close kin marriage is derived from a more locally specific aspect of their kinship system: the

expectation that brothers and sisters have rights of first refusal with respect to the *riste* of their siblings' children. It is worth noting that this is rarely the determinant of exactly who will marry whom. Since the great majority of sibling groups are large, and such *ristes* can as well be established with offspring of the mother's as the father's sibling group, there is normally a good deal of choice. Indeed as we shall see, this often precipitates fierce squabbles over whether it is to be the husband's or the wife's sibling group which is to be favoured with the available *riste*. Even so, these conventions impose a crucial constraint on marriage choice, particularly in transnational contexts. Even if a family places most of its available *ristes* with non-kin for very good reasons – whether to cement a business or political deal of some sort, or simply because their own children have other priorities – the reminder of their kindred will almost certainly feel short-changed, since the mutual obligation which should have governed relationships between them have been overlooked. That said, it is also worth emphasising that many Mirpuris take the view that cousin marriage is an intrinsically advantageous strategy, since it is not only a highly effective means of reinforcing *biraderi* solidarity, but also of ensuring that daughters will not be mistreated by their in-laws.

High levels of close kin marriage have a far-reaching impact on patterns of inter-personal relationship within each domestic group. Perhaps the most significant difference between Mirpur and Jullundur is that although brides are still symbolically transferred from their natal to their in-law's extended family at marriage – if only because the rituals themselves are constructed in such a way as to emphasise that very point – only a very small minority of brides are strangers to their affines: on the contrary the bride's mother-in-law is very frequently her aunt. Precisely because they are *not* strangers to one another, the level of female solidarity within Mirpuri households – although far from being wholly untrammelled – tends to be a great deal higher than amongst the Jullunduris. Further considerations reinforce the same point. In a Jullunduri context, all the women married into any given village will have been drawn in from a huge penumbra of neighbouring villages lying anything between one to ten miles away, with the result that each conjugal pair (together with their offspring) have access to their own individuating network of affinal ties linking them to the wife's *peke* (her natal village). This not only further undermines the prospects for solidarity between resident wives, but also provides conjugal couples with an important source of external assistance should they wish to claim greater autonomy within the agnatically extended family.

The Mirpuri picture is quite different. Whilst the rules of *pardah* may severely restrict women's spatial mobility, the much smaller geographical spread of marital ties means that many of the women living in the immediate neighbourhood – and indeed her own immediate in-laws – will be her kin. Much follows from this. Locked as they are into exceptionally tight-knit kinship networks, so much so that most people are related to each other several times over, peeling away their husbands away from their agnatic loyalties is a much less urgent priority for Mirpuri wives than it is for their Jullunduri counterparts. Secondly, and just as importantly, because women's own kinship networks are much less seriously disturbed by marriage than they are in Jullundur, let alone the fact that the best way of advancing their own interests is through the strategic manipulation of their offspring's *riste*, most women find themselves drawn much more firmly into these already much more highly in-turned networks than is normally the case amongst the Sikhs and Hindus of Jullundur.

The situation in Sylhet differs yet again, and for a whole variety of reasons. Once again the basic structure of the corporate extended family in Sylhet is very similar to that found elsewhere, but in their case unilineal descent groups (known as *gushti* rather than *biraderi*) are considerably shallower, as well as being much less tightly organised. As a result households and groups of households (*ghor* and *bari*) are not only rather more autonomous, but given the uncertainties arising in Bengal's extremely riverine environment, can also experience radical changes in socio-economic status over relatively short periods of time. Agnatic networks therefore tend to be much less all-embracing, as well as much less socially and spatially far-reaching than they are in either Mirpur or Jullundur. There are also significant differences in marriage patterns. Whilst the Sylhetis, as Muslims, have no objection to cousin marriage, such unions are much less frequent in Sylhet than they are in Mirpur. Instead marriages are primarily arranged on a strategic basis (much as in Jullundur, but without the constraints imposed by *gotra* endogamy), in the expectation that the affinal alliances so constructed will enable the family to advance its material interests, and above all its status.

Once again this has far-reaching implications for patterns of inter-personal relationships within the household and extended family. Because rural settlements in Sylhet are dispersed across an endless expanse of *padi* fields, nucleated villages of any size are extremely rare: most residential aggregations contain ten households or less. Given the rules of *pardah*, the women of each *bari* not only live in a condition of relative isolation, but also tend to find

themselves much more vulnerable to male exploitation than do their counterparts in Jullundur. The reasons for this are not hard to identify: over and above the impact of *pardah* and the smallness of each *bari*, high rates of exogamy not only undermine women's ability to draw on their resources of their own kindred just as seriously as they do in Jullundur, but in so doing also preclude the development of the tight-knit 'underground' kinship networks from which many Mirpuri women derive such power. With so little leverage over their husbands' behaviour, it follows that Sylheti women's most effective – and in some cases their only – route to power and influence is through their offspring, and above all through their sons.

3.2.3 *Migration and family reunion*

With the advantage of hindsight, it is easy to see why the overseas bridgeheads constructed by the early transnational pioneers proved to be far more permanent than anyone responsible for establishing them ever imagined: the material advantages to which they gave access were just too great for it to make any sense to close them down. Nevertheless the process of exploiting those advantages brought its own costs – most notably those associated with sojourners' physical separation from their wives and children. In the face of all this a shift in policy was ultimately almost inevitable, and in the light of what we have seen of the internal dynamics of their extended families, it is hardly surprising that the Jullunduris were the first to make the decisive break. In addition to a growing awareness of the much higher standard of living and range of opportunities which they could ultimately expect to enjoy if they were to construct a more or less permanent base for themselves in Britain, the establishment of more or less autonomous conjugal households within the overarching context of a corporate extended family was broadly congruent with expected developments in a Jullunduri context. Not only were wives only too willing to gain greater autonomy from their mothers-in-law, but such a partial peeling-away of a conjugal couple and their offspring was by no means unusual – even if doing so at a distance of five thousand miles was wholly unprecedented. That said, most emigrants also went out of their way to means of signalling that their objective in so doing was not to undermine the corporate unity of the extended family, but rather a strategic move to enhance it.

Sons were therefore careful to make substantial remittances before taking their wives and children abroad, and to continue to make it quite clear that they were still strongly committed to the family's corporate development despite their physical absence overseas. Those claims

had considerable substance. As a result of being plugged into a transnational network, those who stayed back home not only gained access to a continuous inflow of remittances and prestigious consumer goods, but also to a realistic prospect that either they themselves – or failing that their offspring – could also move abroad, as and when it seemed appropriate to do so. Most Jullunduri families therefore found that transnational extensions of their network was a thoroughly beneficial development: a comprehensive commitment to mutual reciprocity could still be sustained even when one of the family's conjugal units moved more or less permanently overseas. In these circumstances it is hardly surprising that most overseas entrepreneurs took up the option of family reunion as soon as they found it strategically convenient to do so.

Mirpuri migrants played the game very differently. Although they set off for Britain at much the same time as their Jullunduri counterparts, and with much the same objectives, the great majority stayed locked in the remittance maximizing phase for much very much longer: ten to fifteen years frequently elapsed before they finally brought their wives and children to join them. It was not that the Mirpuris were any less keen to exploit the opportunities associated with transnational entrepreneurship, but rather that they set about doing so in a rather different way. For them, family reunion proved to be a much less urgent priority. Not only were they even more wary than their Jullunduri counterparts about exposing their wives and children to what they perceived as the comprehensive amorality of the British cultural order, but their wives were also a good deal less eager to make the passage to Britain – unless they received unwelcome news suggesting that an errant husband got himself over-involved with an English girlfriend. At that point the restrictions of *purdah* were frequently ignored: wives set out in person sort the matter out.

Nevertheless long-term emigrants sorely missed all the comforts of home, and soon devised a solution to the problem: transnational commuting. In the course of collecting life-histories I encountered case after case of men who had first arrived in Britain ten, fifteen or twenty years previously, but who had in fact spent little more than half the intervening period in Britain. In between they had taken a whole series of more or less extended furloughs back home. For them, Britain became a location where money was earned but all gratification was deferred, so allowing them to enjoy the fruits of their labour – and to invest in both land and housing – on each of their periodic returns. Just as in Jullundur, their manifest success encouraged many others to follow in their footsteps. Migrants therefore went out of their way

to assist their a wide range of kinsmen, friends and fellow villagers to make their way to Britain. Indeed that pattern soon became so well entrenched that as soon as migrants' sons were old enough to be employable, their fathers began to take them along on their foraging trips to Britain. Such a strategy became particularly appealing when it became clear that a selective utilisation of their right to family reunion was an extremely convenient means of evading the increasingly stringent controls on labour migration.

From the Mirpuri perspective the logic of this strategy was quite clear. However unattractive Britain might be as a site for permanent domestic residence, the cash income to which they could gain access by working in its textile industry was far more plentiful, as well as far more reliable, than anything they could hope to extract from their fields. In the absence of their wives and children, men could be expected to work long hours whilst spending little, and so to maximise their savings; and the more men a *biraderi* could rotate to Britain, the larger and more secure the remittance inflow they would generate.

At this stage Jullunduri and Mirpuri entrepreneurs were choosing to occupy transnational space on a very different basis. Whilst the Jullunduris moved swiftly towards the establishment of domestically complete outliers, which in turn provided the foundation for the construction of thriving British-based ethnic colonies, the Mirpuris extend their arenas for meaningful social interaction beyond their home base. Transnational commuting provided them with a means of browsing the opportunities they had identified in the British sector of the transnational labour market without – or so they thought – becoming over-committed to it.

In the absence of any intervening factors, it is an open question as to how long that pattern would have continued to be sustainable. But that was not to be: all manner of further contingencies gradually undermined the viability of this strategy. The first of these was thoroughly paradoxical: an effort by the British authorities to close off the chink in the immigration rules which Mirpuris had begun to exploit with increasing frequency. Noting that they were utilising their rights to family reunion by bringing their sons (and very often their nephews posing as their sons) to Britain one by one shortly before they reached school leaving age, so enabling them to enter the labour market a few months later, the authorities hit on what they evidently considered to be a cunning ploy: to require those making use of this right to bring their entire family over to Britain in one go, rather than doing so in

selective dribs and drabs. But the authorities' attempt to plug a gap turned out, in the event, to open a flood-gate.

In the first place an increasing number of Mirpuri sojourners began to take the authorities' demand at face value, and to bring their entire families over to Britain. However they had also carefully scrutinised the regulations, and noted that they did not require their wives and daughters to take up permanent residence in the UK. So it was that after a brief visit, many of their wives and daughters set off back to Mirpur, leaving all the male members of the family in Britain. However the very arrival of women – albeit on a temporary basis – also broke the mould. From the late 1970s onwards an ever rising number of Mirpuri sojourners began to adopt a similar strategy to their Jullunduri counterparts, and to establish fully fledged domestic units in Britain. Thereafter family reunion soon became quite unexceptional, and Britain's Mirpuri population to swell exponentially, much to the authorities' alarm.

Nevertheless it would be idle to suggest this was the sole reason for the Mirpuris' change of strategy. Other factors included the interpersonal tensions which had begun to build up within many families as a result of transnational commuters' lengthy periods of absence, together with the ever-increasing degree to which Mirpur's local economy had grown dependent on the remittance inflow produced by these transnational connections. The agricultural and commercial foundations of Mirpur's economy was much weaker than that of Jullundur, and productive industry was virtually absent. In no sense, therefore, did remittances add gilt to the gingerbread: rather they generated a vast inflationary bubble of apparent prosperity of which it was only possible to take full advantage by active participation in transnational networks. At the same time Britain's economy was also changing. Although an ever increasing number of Mirpuri transcontinental commuters were being drawn into Britain's textile and heavy engineering industries during the course of the 1970's, most of these enterprises – which were heavily dependent on cheap labour to keep their near-obsolescent machinery in operation – were tottering towards their final collapse. But the crunch could not be avoided. As recession struck at the end of the decade, mill after mill closed down, and transcontinental commuters found that the jobs to which they had confidently expected to return after completing their furlough were no longer available. Nor did staying put prove to much of an alternative. Even those who did hang onto their jobs soon began to find themselves being made redundant – with little or no prospect of finding alternative employment. Transnational

commuting, dependant as it was on sojourners' ability to take lengthy furloughs, had ceased to be a viable strategy.

By the time this occurred, a substantial number of Mirpuris had in fact brought over their wives and children to join them on a permanent basis. However in the face of these additional adversities, virtually all the remainder now decided that the time had come to do the same. Economic recession in Britain might be causing all sorts of setbacks, but nevertheless the resources on which they were in a position to call in Britain, most particularly in terms of access of welfare services, were far superior to anything available in rural Mirpur: pressing onwards into the transnational arena offered most British-based Mirpuris a much more attractive set of options than did drawing in their horns and returning home. There were only two categories of people to whom this did not apply. Firstly elderly men who had reached pensionable age, and whose sterling-based state pension offered them – once exchanged for rupees – a secure and substantial income-flow for the remainder of their lives; and secondly younger men who had accumulated substantial savings, and felt that this was an opportune moment to implement their long standing dream of a permanent returning to their home base.

Sadly, that rarely proved to be a viable option. As most such returnees soon discovered, it was very much easier to spend money back home in Mirpur than it was to make it. In sharp contrast to Jullundur, where remittances have added gilt to the gingerbread of a thriving local economy, the paucity of Mirpur's productive base is such that the scale of local economic activity is now almost entirely a function of the inflow of remittances. Hence those who sought refuge from recession-hit Britain by returning to Mirpur in the early nineteen eighties could not have chosen a worse time to try to implement their long-standing dreams, since the very phenomenon from which they were seeking to escape was wreaking even more serious havoc back home. Hence most of the hopeful returnees soon became deeply frustrated by their inability to identify any kind of profitable activity in which to invest. As they watched their accumulated savings drain away at an alarming rate, most decided that they had little alternative but to try their luck in Britain once again.

Last but not least, we must also consider the way in which migrants from Sylhet eventually adopted a similar change in strategy. As we saw earlier, the Sylhetis not only interpret the rules of *pardah* as strictly as do the Mirpuris, but gender inequalities within the household are such that Sylheti women have even less bargaining power than do their Mirpuri counterparts.

In such circumstances it should come as no surprise that whilst Sylheti peasants have an exceptionally long history of entrepreneurial involvement in the transnational labour market, they were the last to abandon the strategy of transnational commuting. Hence women of Sylheti peasant origin were rarely to be seen in Britain until the early nineteen eighties. But although family reunion has proceeded apace since then, the material circumstances within which this occurred were far more adverse than those experienced by the other two groups. With hindsight, the Jullunduris took the plunge at by far the most opportune moment. Throughout the nineteen fifties, sixties and early seventies there was an almost unlimited demand for semi-skilled industrial workers, and housing in inner-city areas could be bought very cheaply; reunited households were still at an early stage in their developmental cycle, most couples were still young, and rarely had more than one or two children; and since Jullunduri women had no compunction about going out to work, most households could rely on two wage-packets. Given their overall commitment to frugality, most Jullunduris soon reached a position of economic security, such that they were able to offer positive assistance to those of their kinsfolk who found their way to Britain, and to provide a significant degree of support to those who had stayed back home.

The Mirpuris found the going considerably tougher. Firstly they had, over the years, sent a much higher proportion of their accumulated earnings back home, if only because of their delay in implementing family reunion. Secondly the economic circumstances in which they did so were far more adverse: the very industrial sector which had enabled them to act as transnational commuters was by then in terminal decline, and soon collapsed completely. Thirdly their families had by then entered a much later stage in their developmental cycle, and hence contained many more children. Fourthly, and perhaps most importantly of all, their assumption that it was quite inappropriate for respectable women to take employment outside the household meant that dual income households were exceedingly rare: indeed levels of unemployment were so high that a large proportion relied solely on social security benefits.

That said, most Sylheti households found the going tougher still. Although Sylheti ex-seamen established their first residential bridgeheads in the docklands of East London as long ago as the nineteen thirties, from which many began to break out into the catering trade, firstly as kitchen staff and then as restaurateurs in their own right, when the post-war industrial boom took off a high proportion of Sylheti newcomers followed the Mirpuris into the mills of England's northern industrial cities. But whilst the great majority of their Mirpuri

counterparts had begun to reunite their families – and were therefore tied down to the houses which they had recently bought – by the time that severe recession struck, most Sylhetis were still living in all-male households, and were therefore able to move on down to London where jobs were still relatively plentiful, although accommodation was as scarce as it was expensive. So it was that when the Sylhetis finally moved towards family reunion – as they, too gradually acknowledged that transnational commuting had ceased to be a viable option – they had for the most part regrouped in the east end of London, and most especially in Tower Hamlets. But here the housing market was against them. The cheap terraced houses which their Mirpuri and Jullunduri predecessors had bought with such alacrity were not by then available, even in Tower Hamlets, and they were therefore left with little alternative but to take up tenancies in elderly and extremely run-down municipal housing blocks. Given the uncertain employment base on which they relied, the very large size of their households (particularly in the light of the accommodation available), the lateness of most their younger members' arrival in Britain, their lack of familiarity with English, let alone the intense hostility of most of their more indigenous neighbours to their very presence, the Sylhetis of Tower Hamlets soon found themselves facing particularly severe levels of socio-economic distress. But whilst the existence of such distress was relatively easy to measure in statistical terms, such that the whole community soon came to be identified as suffering from some particularly severe forms of racial deprivation, those who applied that categorisation were for the most part ill-informed about the processes of transnational entrepreneurship which had brought them to that pass – or of the extent to which they might begin to use those self-same resources to lever their way out of the holes in which they consequently found themselves.

4 Marriage and the ongoing dynamics of kin-based networks

Set within the context of the developmental cycle of domestic groups, and indeed of the ongoing dynamics of kin-based networks, marriage is far more than a conjugal partnership between two individuals: rather it lies at the core of the way in which the domestic group – and indeed the corporate extended family – renews itself so that it can proceed onwards into the next generation. In the absence of an ensured process of renewal, kinship networks simply fall apart. Yet just why and how does marriage play such a key role? In the first place marriage not only ensures the legitimacy of the children of any given conjugal partnership – which is of course a key issue when the extended family is a property-owning corporation – but is also the precursor to the establishment of a stable domestic environment within which the children can be socialised into the group's own specific norms and values. However to

fulfil that role marriage partners must also be carefully selected: if the in-marrying mother is unfamiliar with those norms and values, there is a strong likelihood that her offspring will not be appropriately socialised, and hence incapable of sustaining the reciprocities on which the network is based into the next generation.

That point is well taken in most peasant societies, and most especially in South Asian: indeed it is one of the principal factors behind the maintenance of the rule of caste endogamy, for by restricting the choice of partner to ones own community, one can thereby ensure that incoming brides will be thoroughly familiar with the relevant norms and values, and hence able to socialise her offspring in an appropriate way. Moreover such commitment to endogamy is of particularly far reaching significance when kinship networks go transnational. If high levels of endogamy can be sustained, such networks have an excellent prospect of being able continuously reconstitute themselves. If not, networks are likely to be an evanescent phenomenon which run into the sands once their founders have passed away.

Beyond this, it is also worth remembering that in the context of a social universe in which the basic operational units are patrilineally extended families, marriage also plays a further crucial structural role: the inter-family affinal linkages to which every marriage gives rise provide every family to engage in a further process of optional network-construction – for in sharp contrast to the inescapable character of agnatic ties within the *biraderi*, such affinal linkages are not hereditarily pre-ordained. In other words they open up a huge area of choice, and hence of opportunities for strategic negotiation. Yet just how are these opportunities played out? As we shall see the answers devised can vary enormously from group to group, and from context to context – with further far-reaching implications for the way in which transnational networks work.

4.1 Jullunduri strategies and their consequences

As we saw earlier, few Jullunduri settlers waited for much longer than a couple of years before reuniting their conjugal households in Britain, at which point they were still at the early stages of their developmental cycle. However it did not take long before their oldest children began to reach their late teens, with the result that they began to turn their minds to one of the most challenging problems facing all South Asian parents: choosing an appropriate *riste*. Not that they faced any shortage of offers. Precisely because they had established themselves in Britain, and because all potential in-laws could thereby expect to plug directly

into all the benefits open to transnational networkers, their offspring were regarded as extremely attractive catches on the Punjabi marriage market. Since they stood at the top of a buyers' market, offers of *riste* were abundant: what ever position they had occupied prior to their departure, they were now in a position to pick and choose. But on what criteria?

At least at the outset, most Jullunduri parents continued to operate in terms of the routine conventions deployed in rural Punjab. In this context aspects of the prospective partners' personal characteristics – such as their height, age, skin-colour, outlook and horoscopic data – were undoubtedly expected to be in broad match with one another, such considerations had never been the decisive factor in the decision making process. Instead considerations of status were invariably of far more pressing concern when it came to arranging *riste*. It is easy to see why. Since by far the most effective measure of every corporate extended family's standing within the nominally egalitarian *biraderi* was the prestige and standing of the families into which they succeeded in marrying their daughters, and to a slightly lesser extent the scale and quality of the dowries which the family's in-marrying brides brought with them, making the appropriate strategic choices with respect to their offspring's *riste* had always been a key feature of intra-*biraderi* political manoeuvring, above all because it was this which ultimately connected each family's material status with its position in the hierarchy of *izzat*. In the long run families with depleted material resources could never hope to keep up with families whom they had formerly regarded as their social inferiors, but whose new-found wealth enabled them to begin to make much more strategically advantageous *ristes*.

Given that so many of the early Jullunduri transnational entrepreneurs were drawn from families who had for one reason or another fallen behind in the status game, they were particularly keen to make up lost ground in this way. Hence when it came to choosing spouses for their offspring, they not only conformed to all the conventional restrictions on marriage choice, but also took the opportunity to radically enhance their social standing by accepting the most prestige-generating *ristes* available. In doing so they rarely considered making matches with their fellow settlers' offspring: after all, they tended to occupy much the same relative position in the status hierarchy as they did themselves. Instead they overwhelmingly looked back to their home base in Punjab, and ideally to families with extensive landholdings, or who had built up large business enterprises, or whose members had achieved senior positions either in the military or the civilian bureaucracy. But although not everyone necessarily reached the dizzy heights to which they aspired, networking through

ristes offered excellent opportunities for entrepreneurial reciprocity: those who had already established themselves overseas could much more firmly underpin their new-found position of prestige, whilst the recipients of those *ristes* could provide themselves with a ready-made entry-ticket into transnational space.

This was underlined by the emergence of a very significant shift in patterns of post-conjugal residence, particularly in the case of Punjab-based grooms. The residential destination of Punjab-based brides in such transnational unions was quite straightforward: since they had always been expected to become members of their in-laws' household, they moved to Britain to join their husbands at the earliest possible opportunity. But whilst the parents of grooms who had married British-based brides were normally equally keen that their newly acquired daughters-in-law should at least put in an appearance at the home-base of the extended family which they had joined, few if any expected that they would become long-term members of that household. Quite the contrary: given the extent of the material advantages associated with a residential shift to the UK, few brides stayed for very long. Instead they moved back to Britain, where they were joined by their husbands as soon as the immigration formalities were complete. Although substantially driven by considerations of relative status, such marriage strategies also added several additional dimensions to the process of transnational networking. In the first place it provided a very straightforward means of by-passing the ever more stringent controls on primary immigration which the British authorities had by then begun to impose, and in doing so extended the migratory component of transnational networking was thereby extended by a further generation; secondly, and just importantly, since the in-marry brides and grooms were for the most part born and bred in rural Punjab, the 'first generation' of settlers, and especially the loyalties and expectations within which they routinely operated, was quite directly reinforced.

Nevertheless as time passed it soon became quite clear that conjugal unions which had been constructed on this basis could all too easily run into severe problems. However logical and appropriate the criteria which they were using to arrange such *ristes* may have seemed to the parental generation, and however much effort parents may have put into keeping them on an even keel – for having set up the *riste*, they had an obligation as well as an interest in ensuring that they worked out satisfactorily – a significant proportion began to exhibit alarming cracks. In seeking to get to the bottom of why this tended to occur, it is worth emphasising that in sharp contrast to the expectations of most Euro-American observers,

remarkably few of those young people whose personal future was being determined on this basis had any objection in principle to the prospect of their parents' choosing their conjugal partners. Even though they might have spent the greater part of their childhood in Britain, most young people had simultaneously been socialised into the norms of extended family life: in consequence they were not only well aware of their parents' expectations, but also felt that they owed them an inescapable duty of obedience. Secondly and consequently, it was quite clear that if they wished to retain the benefits of extended family membership, whose emotional benefits most of them valued a great deal, they had little choice but to conform to the established procedures: there was no other way in which endogamous – and hence socially acceptable – marriages could be arrived at. Last but not least they had no reason to doubt the depth of their parents' concern for their future happiness, or that by taking such decisions themselves, they removed a substantial burden of responsibility from their children's young and necessarily inexperienced shoulders.

This is no place to discuss the merits and demerits of the practice of arranged marriage *per se*, other to note – as its proponents routinely emphasise – that it appears to offer a very effective prophylactic to the sky-high levels of marital breakdown currently found throughout the Euro-American world. That said, it soon became apparent that a significant minority of these transnational matches had begun to run into serious difficulty, not so much because they had been arranged, but because they had been badly arranged. It goes without saying that choosing a partner on behalf of someone else is an even more onerous burden than doing so on one's own behalf, and that one can as easily make a serious mistake in either case. However the prospect of parents making an ill-informed decision in this context were particularly severe, for even though their British born offspring may still have been thoroughly at home with Punjabi behavioural and moral conventions – such that they had no substantial objection to an arranged marriage – the efforts which members of the older generation put into making an appropriate choice were often undermined because their failure to take sufficient cognisance of the extent to which the more non-domestic aspects of their British-born children's upbringing had begun to transform so many aspects of their personal lifestyles. Because they were so much more skilled in cultural navigation than were their parents, members of the upcoming generation felt wholly at ease within a wide range of cultural contexts – including those which were broadly English in character. Hence the personal styles and values which they deployed when they stepped beyond the immediate

purview of the older generation often differed very radically from anything with which their parents – let alone their newly acquired spouses from Punjab – were at all familiar.

The implications of these disjunctions differed by gender. Where a young man who had been brought up in Britain found that he had been provided with what he felt was a goose of a wife from Punjab, there was a relatively easy way out. Relying on established Punjabi conventions of gender, it was easy for such young men to leave their newly acquired appendages at home, and to go out and enjoy themselves with their friends – perhaps even girlfriends – before returning home late in the evening. However frustrated their wives might be by such behaviour there was very little they could do about it – until or unless the dread day arrived when they failed to come home at all. By contrast the immediate outcome tended to be a good deal more severe – and certainly a great deal more explosive – in the inverse context. Husbands who had recently arrived from rural Punjab could easily find his confidence – and even his vision of his own manhood – was severely undermined when faced with the fact that his wife was much more attuned to English ways, and thus far more at ease in English contexts than he was himself. In such circumstances a couple whose relationship was developing perfectly well in Punjabi contexts could easily find themselves confronted by vast rifts the moment they stepped out into cultural and social territory with which the husband was not familiar. Some husbands saw the problem coming, and wised up fast. Others were not so quick or so flexible, and in that case it was all too easy for them to become intensely jealous of their wives' superior linguistic and cultural competence, especially if the position of autonomy which they expected to occupy was further undermined as a result of finding themselves trapped in a position of humiliating dependency as *ghar jouain* (resident sons-in-law) in their in-laws households. The resultant contradictions precipitated a huge range of unhappy outcomes, such that clinical depression and/or severe domestic violence was often a precursor to comprehensive marital breakdown.

As problems of this kind became both more frequent and more overt, many members of the younger generation became steadily more critical of their parents' established strategies when it came to choosing *ristes*. Two major lines of argument were advanced. Firstly that their parents failing to take sufficient cognisance of their children's personal priorities, and of the extent to which their British experiences had conditioned their personal outlooks; and secondly that by restricting their search to the Punjab, a far more attractive pool of potential partners – the offspring of other Jullunduri settlers in Britain – was being unnecessarily

overlooked. Whilst many parents initially resisted those arguments, partly because they felt that they represented an unacceptable challenge to their authority, and partly because they feared that British-raised sons and daughters-in-law might prove to be a great deal more unruly than those raised in Punjab, it did not take long before there was a general change of mood. There was no immediate cost in doing so, since no matter how many attractive offers of *riste* they continued to receive from Punjab, they were under no obligation to respond positively to any of them. Meanwhile the scale of the Jullunduri settlement in Britain had by then grown to such a size that there were plentiful opportunities to continue to play the status game to which they had been so avidly committed in Punjab on a wholly local basis. Hence it did not take long before Britain – and beyond the entire scope of the Jullunduri global diaspora – became the primary arena of choice, and it was only when parents were wholly unable to find a suitable match for their offspring within that arena that they began seriously to consider offers of *riste* from Punjab.

As this occurred, the criteria of choice also began to undergo a steady transformation. Whilst the rules of caste endogamy and descent-group exogamy are still for the most part obeyed, the extent of potential *ristedar's* landholdings back in Punjab began to be of less and less significance, to be replaced by an equally careful examination of their business and professional achievements overseas. Allied to this the educational achievements of potential spouses, and most especially their prospects of building a professional future for themselves has also now become vital measure of the worth of every potential *riste* in what has now become a fiercely competitive marriage market. Educational qualifications are therefore crucial: without having gained an undergraduate degree, preferably in Medicine, Science, Economics or Law, preferably acquired in one of the more prestigious civic University rather than in one of the recently promoted ex-Polytechnics, families cannot expect to receive really attractive offers of *riste* for their sons. By the same token parents seeking to find such husbands for their daughters cannot hope for their offers to be taken seriously unless their daughters have also acquired broadly similar qualifications.

It is also worth noting that there is a further sub-text to these processes, for what really matters is not so much that parents should themselves arrange such marriages – although they are invariably ready and willing to do so should that be necessary – but that matches with an appropriate format should give every appearance of being arranged. Hence whilst back-channel negotiations between young people themselves have often been commonplace, an

ever-increasing number of Jullunduri marriages are a product of personal courtship, whose roots are subsequently presented as being far more traditionally grounded than was in fact the case. That said, most young overseas-raised Jullunduris are far from oblivious of the potential advantages which accrue from the transnational networks of which they are a part, and the further benefits which can be gained from their strategic exploitation. Hence besides retaining a strongly instrumentalist outlook in their approach to their personal affairs, such that they frequently deliberately look out for partners who are likely to be in a position to aid and abet their future career plans, the marriage market (and the networks) within which the most successful of them now operate is now explicitly global in character. However to those with internationally bankable educational qualifications, the maintenance of connections with Punjab itself is of little significance. What is emerging instead is an increasingly dense set of linkages, many of which are articulated through marriage rather than through descent, between materially successful Punjabi families who have established themselves in Britain, Hong-Kong, Singapore, Kenya, Vancouver and California (for example). Not only do they all share broadly similar lifestyles, but they also operate within a broadly similar educational and professional technoscape; and although these still strongly caste-specific networks have by now moved very largely offshore, the reciprocities of kinship which underpin them are proving to be a highly effective means of sustaining a series of linkages which enable information, ideas, capital and of course the members of the network itself to move strategically around in transnational space to their own advantage. At present these linkages appear to be promoting a very substantial flow of highly educated young Jullunduris who have been born and raised in Britain to the much more open, as well as substantially better paid, employment market in Canada and the United States.

4.2 *Mirpuri strategies and their consequences*

In sharp contrast to the Jullunduris, most of the first generation of British-resident Mirpuris were finally joined by their wives and daughters at a much later stage in their domestic group's process of development: indeed by the time that that occurred, many parents had already arranged their eldest children's marriages, and hence were deeply involved in strategic manoeuvres with respect to the placement of their as yet unmarried children's future *ristes*. Given that they also made those decisions within the context of a very differently constituted set of marriage rules, it is hardly surprising that the dynamics of transnational network construction in which they subsequently engaged turned out to follow a very different trajectory from the one we have just considered.

That is not to suggest, however, that marriage rules and their implications were the only issues at stake. Given that its local economy was so much more ill-developed than that of Jullundur, and that the opportunities for socio-economic advancement back home were even more tightly circumscribed, the 'pressure to migrate' (as the Immigration Authorities chose to describe it) from Mirpur was indeed substantially greater than from nearby Jullundur. Just as significantly, a further consequence of Mirpuri settlers much delayed switch to family reunion was that when were at long last ready to begin arranging their offspring's marriages on a transnational basis, Britain's immigration laws had become a great deal more draconian. By then marriage to a British passport holding spouse was one of the few remaining ways in which potential migrants from South Asia could still legitimately enter the UK. In the face of these pressure it is hardly surprising that frequency with which marriages were arranged between the British passport-holding offspring of British-based settlers and Mirpur based spouses soon began to soar. However in their case there was no subsequent decline in this inflow: well over half of young British-based Mirpuris still contract such marriages – almost always with their cousins. As a result the transnational networks within British Mirpuris operate exhibit a radically different structure from those which their Jullunduri counterparts have built around themselves.

Yet before going on to consider either the nature or the consequences of these differences, we must first subject the reasons as to just why the Mirpuris have continued to behave in this way to close analytical examination, for even though their distinctive marriage rules may indeed lie at heart of any such explanation, any suggestion that the Mirpuris have continued to behave in this way because they were mindlessly following a wholly deterministic set of customs, such that they were quite literally incapable of behaving in any other way is wholly insupportable. Mirpuris were and are no more 'slaves to custom' than the Jullunduris. Quite the contrary. Their behaviour – particularly in the context of transnational network construction – is just as strategically driven is that of any other group; and no more and no less than anyone else, they have drawn creatively on the resources of their own specific cultural capital to pursue their own equally self-determined goals as they ventured out, equally firmly from below, into transnational space. And to the extent that kinship was a key component of the networks of reciprocity which they constructed in order to facilitate that enterprise, the specific characteristics of their kinship system inevitably had a far reaching impact on the precise ways in which they set about doing so, and on the ways in which those

networks subsequently operated. It could not be otherwise. Hence there is no need to establish that their long-standing preference for close-kin marriage would make a difference. What is anything but self-evident, however, is the precise way in which members of kinship networks which were so structured, as well as the patterns of inter-personal relationships which were generated in that context would affect – and in turn be affected by – a large scale move into transnational entrepreneurship. Exploring these issues provide us with yet another opportunity to examine the range of ways in which transnational networks work.

Although Mirpuri parents plan their children's *ristes* just as strategically as do their Jullunduri counterparts, they do so with a rather different set of considerations in mind. In the first place the drive to improve one's own extended family's status viz-a-viz its immediate agnatic rivals is far less significant: indeed the issue cannot, by definition, arise when bilateral cousin marriage is the norm. Secondly where that is indeed the case, marriage does not give rise to – or permit the strategic manipulation of – an individuating network of alliances with members of socially distant descent groups: rather both agnatic and affinal ties are confined with a relatively small compass, and very frequently overlap. This certainly does not mean that both types of relationship are not open to strategic manipulation: quite the contrary the choice of exactly where to place one's available *ristes* offers endless opportunities to reinforce, to confound and/or to undermine such strategic linkages.

With this in mind it makes sense to suggest that one of the most driving forces behind the operation of Mirpuri kinship networks is the opportunities which they offer for the exercise of personal power, and that these considerations tend to be particularly salient when it comes to arranging *ristes*. Moreover in the case of women, such power is rarely rooted in authority, since formal authority is overwhelmingly ascribed to men. How, then, do women gain access to power? Above all by making the most of the relationships through which persons are obligated to them, be it their filial ties with their sons and daughters, the alliances which they are able to construct (and the debts of gratitude which they are able to incur) with their own siblings' sons and daughters, and/or the subservience that they are in a position to extract from their own daughters-in-law. Such manoeuvres are by no means unique to women, of course. Men also participate in such manoeuvres, although they tend to play the game in a much less subtle way, not least because they can always fall back on their authority in order to trump all such calculations. Be that as it may, once such processes of inter-personal manoeuvring are set in train, no-one can afford to ignore them. In the face of efforts by more

powerful members of the *biraderi* to strategically advance their interests, it is only to be expected that everyone else will start to do the same, if only to protect their own interests and concerns; and just as in the wider transnational arena through which the *biraderi* as a whole is seeking to manoeuvre to its own advantage, those with limited power often have little opportunity to bide their time until niches of opportunity begin to open up, and then to make deft use of their limited assets in an effort to make the most of them. Networking skills are as vital a component of success in domestic contexts as they are in the process of making the most of transnational space – and no-where do the dynamics of these two processes link up more comprehensively than with respect to the issue of mate selection.

Although the marriage of young people holding British passports with their Mirpur-based cousins was undoubtedly an excellent way in which each *biraderi's* could facilitate its collective interest maximising the scale of its foothold in Britain, it would nevertheless be quite idle to suggest this pattern of *riste* distribution was the deliberate outcome of collective planning. A better view is that all this was the outcomes of a multi-dimensional process of decision making, and that although the very substantial additional material opportunities available in transnational space undoubtedly tipped the playing field very firmly in a British direction, it in no sense inhibited the operation of the game itself.

In the first place those who were responsible for establishing these transnational *ristes* (and not infrequently the actual spouses themselves) already had close emotional ties between themselves, which were not infrequently reinforced by a longstanding informal agreement that their offspring should be brought together once the time was ripe. Secondly those had not yet made the transnational leap took it for granted that those of their siblings who had managed to make the passage to Britain were under an obligation to share their good fortune, and that a failure to fulfil that duty repudiated the values of kinship itself. Thirdly those on the receiving end of those pressures were by no means averse to making a positive response, since those whom they favoured with their children's *ristes* could thereby be placed under a debt of gratitude, which was best repaid through loyalty to their sponsor. In other words it became yet another route by which personal power within the extended family could be strategically enhanced. This was yet further underlined by the fact that most parents of British passport holding offspring had an extensive degree of choice with whom amongst their relatives was to be favoured with their choice: a decision had to be taken as to whether the *riste* was to go to a member of the husband's, or of his wife's, immediate *biraderi*, and

beyond that as to which of the available sibling's children was to be chosen; and given that the commitment to cooperation within most *biraderis* are matched by interpersonal feuds and conflicts which constantly threaten to undermine its unity, the negotiations – and the deals – associated with these processes were, and still are, complex in the extreme.

Yet although the underlying skew in the playing field, let alone the fact that the number of young Mirpuris reaching marriageable age was rising steadily, so precipitating an ever-escalating transnational inflow of both brides and bridegrooms, and although these unions were also susceptible to much the same kinds of inter-personal tension as those which we previously explored in a Jullunduri context, there outcomes in this case were very different. The first point to be noted is that when a union is established between two cousins, and when there have also been a several other conjugal exchanges between the two sibling groups, comprehensive marital breakdown has far reaching implications: not only is one thereby crossing ones aunts and one's uncles as well as one parents, but the knock-on effects of such a breakdown may also put such pressure on other parallel unions that they, too, collapse. In other words no matter how poor the underlying conjugal relationship may be, the couple are under particularly intense pressure to keep up appearances. Secondly and just as importantly, young Mirpuris who were doubtful of their parents' priorities in selecting *riste* found it much more difficult to persuade them to change their minds, since the older generation could and did argue that they had a duty to give priority to their kinsfolk's offers of *riste*: in no way was it a matter of open choice. Thirdly Mirpuri parents displayed a marked tendency to regard such suggestions as offering an unwelcome – and no doubt Western-inspired – threat to their personal power, and to take the view that such potential rebellions were best nipped in the bud. Hence they displayed a marked preference for formalising their children's *ristes* as soon after the age of sixteen as possible. Not only were children of that age much less well placed to challenge their parents' authority, but there was also an excellent prospect that if one provided teenagers who had previously been subjected to some strict rules of gender segregation with an opportunity to engage in sexual activities on a wholly legitimate basis, there was an excellent prospect that their natural passions would get their relationship off to a good start. Moreover if pregnancy should result from their activities, there was an equally strong prospect that the responsibilities of parenthood would tie them down even more firmly within the *biraderi* network.

In comparative terms, one crucial additional point emerges from all this. In the Jullunduri case, potential spouses educational achievements quickly became crucial components in the calculus of *riste* construction; and since it soon became self evident to parents, no less than to the young people themselves, that educational qualifications were the *sine qua non* of making the attractive matches, all young people came under particularly strong pressure to press their way upwards through the educational system. But whilst most Mirpuris were at least in principle as keen that their offspring should become doctors and lawyers as their Jullunduri counterparts, many fewer have as yet seen those dreams implemented. In the first place Mirpuri parents' own lack of education (given that educational resources have long been very much more sparse in Mirpur than Jullundur) meant that they were largely unfamiliar with the practical modalities of educational success. Secondly, and just as importantly, since marriage negotiations were primarily driven by strategic manoeuvres within the *biraderi*, the educational qualifications and potential job prospects of the prospective spouses were normally viewed as being only of marginal significance. Hence not only have many fewer Mirpuri children as yet made the spectacular educational breakthroughs which were commonplace amongst their Jullunduri counterparts even in the early days of settlement, but to the extent that Mirpuri kinship networks are very much more circumscribed than those established by the Jullunduris, even those few successes have had much less of a ripple effect than occurred amongst the latter. Hence even if one is careful to control for the stage in its developmental process which the community as a whole has so far reached, there can be little doubt that the younger generation of British-based Mirpuris have not been nearly so educationally and occupationally successful than their Jullunduri counterparts.

Nor, in consequence, have Mirpuri affinal networks gone anything like as comprehensively 'offshore' as those amongst their Jullunduri counterparts. Given that the Mirpuri diaspora is much less global in character, such that its members have as yet established no significant toeholds on the far side of the Atlantic, they still largely operate within a much more spatially restricted arena. Yet more important still, since their networks loop endlessly back to the *biraderis'* home bases in Mirpur, the escalators which they have so far established work much more effectively as a means of transporting personnel from the periphery to the metropolis than they do as a means of facilitating movement upwards and outwards through the metropolitan socio-economic order. But if the Mirpuris' achievements consequently appear unimpressive in the extreme when measured in terms of conventional metropolitan yardsticks (e.g. Berthaud 1998, Modood et al 1997), they are very much more substantial

when viewed from a transnationalist perspective. In straightforward demographic terms, the sheer scale on which Mirpuris are continuing to move from the periphery to the core is very striking indeed: *ristes* alone are currently generating an inflow of around 10,000 spouses per annum – figure which is probably closely matched by the number of British-based Jullunduris who move across the Atlantic to seek their fortunes in North America. But if the Jullunduris' search for enhanced prestige has led to them to invest heavily in the acquisition of educational and professional assets, which has in turn led them to build networks which facilitated the movement of their human capital ever further offshore, the Mirpuris on-going commitment to inward movement of human capital to the UK is matched by an equally strong proclivity to invest their financial capital back home: my current investigations suggest that British Mirpuris currently remit somewhere between £200 million and £300 million to Pakistan each year. However the opportunities for productive investment remain as limited as ever, with the greater part of this enormous cash flow going into the construction of spectacular private residences, which are designed not so much for living, but rather to make a very public indication not just of one's achievements, but of the extent to which those outshine those of one's immediate kinsmen. As is to be expected the most avid players of this game are those who were born and brought up in Mirpur, and for whom such constructions provide a very effective means of publicly celebrating a life of achievement.

At the same time a number of powerful counter-currents have also begun to emerge – at least some of which are artefacts of the responses which parents have been driven to adopt in response to the increasingly strict requirements of the immigration authorities. One of the most significant of these is that the sponsor (whom the British authorities routinely identify as the spouse, rather than his or her extended family) can support the incoming partner 'without recourse to public funds'. Hence if their daughters are to gain permission for their husbands to join them, they need to have spent a significant period in period in paid employment, and also that they have acquired suitable accommodation in which to live. In the face of such pressures the long-standing expectation that young women should not take paid employment outside the household has by now been largely swept away, such that established patterns of gender relations are now coming under ever more serious pressure. What impact all this will have on patterns of interpersonal relations within the extended family, and beyond that on the current popularity of transcontinental marriages with Mirpur-based cousins remains to be seen.

4.3 *Sylheti strategies and their consequences*

Given that the Sylhetis took so much longer to bring their wives and children to Britain, few parents found themselves confronted with the issue of when and where to arrange their British passport holding children's marriages until the early 1990s. However given the sharpness of the gender hierarchy in terms of which they routinely operated, the fact that husbands were on average fifteen years older than their wives, and that most of them also took the view that there was a strong prospect that young girls would swiftly run off the rails – particularly in a British context – if they were not married as soon as possible after they had passed puberty, most Sylheti fathers regarded the arrangement of their daughters' marriages as an urgent priority. What, though, would govern their choices?

In common with almost all other South Asian settlers their initial reaction was to look back home for potential sons-in-law. But whilst their basic marriage rules were closely akin to those of the Mirpuris, such that they regarded cousin marriage as wholly permissible, their actual preferences were very different, since they did not share the Mirpuri assumption that siblings had a right of first refusal when it came to arranging each others' children's marriages. Instead they tended much more towards the Jullunduri view – that marriages which enabled one to establish affinal ties with well-connected in-laws were an excellent way in which those who had made substantial economic progress could advance, and indeed cement, their extended family's position in the local status hierarchy. As Gardner (1995) shows, the marriages of members of better off families back in Sylhet – many of whom had achieved that position as a result of their transnational connections – were very much more likely to marry at a substantial distance from their home base even before the process of family reunion had begun to take off on any scale. Hence it was hardly surprising that when fathers returned to Sylhet to arrange marriages for their British-based offspring, most took advantage of their ready-made opportunity to break their way yet further into the upper echelons of the social hierarchy. The incentives for doing so were strong. Relatively poor families were thereby able make highly prestigious connections, and even if they had only managed to establish the most moderate of footholds in Britain, their bargaining power had become so great that they were able to make substantial financial demands on potential in-laws before agreeing to any given match. That not only led to a substantial inflation in dowry payments, of which land tended to become an increasingly significant component, but also to a comprehensive reversal of the normal flow of prestations as far as their daughters'

marriages were concerned, such that the groom's parents were also required to offer a substantial 'dowry' – which once again frequently took the form of assets in land – before the match was allowed to proceed. Needless to say these dowry payments in land were of little significance to the spouses themselves, since they invariably took up residence in Britain at the earliest possible opportunity. The acquisition of additional property in land only made much sense within the context of a parental – and above all a paternal – agenda.

Just how long this pattern will continue is hard to tell. Given that many members of the older generation are still firmly wedded to the acquisition of property in land, to protecting their daughters' honour, and to the maintenance of at least an appearance of absolute personal authority within the household, the tendency to maintain this pattern of preferences will undoubtedly remain strong. However in sharp contrast to their Mirpuri counterparts, if they were to respond to pressure from their British-raised children to delay the age at which their marriages are arranged, and above all to consider the possibility of setting up those relationships on a more local rather than a transnational basis, Sylheti parents would not risk the ire of their kinsfolk back home, since there is no expectation that they should have preferential treatment in such contexts. As yet it is still too early to tell, since such marriages have only begun to be arranged with any frequency during the course of the past decade. However my own expectation – for what it is worth – is that return marriages to Sylhet will become steadily less frequent in the years to come, and that in that sense, at least, they will much more closely emulate the Jullunduris than the Mirpuris.

But before bringing the whole of this discussion to a conclusion, one further point is worth mentioning: the distinctive trajectory which the Sylhetis are beginning to trace through both the employment market and the educational system. I shall be very brief. Whilst the Sylhetis were extremely badly hurt by the recession in heavy engineering and textiles in the early 1980s, so that many who had hitherto been employed in the Midlands and the North moved down to London, largely to take up jobs in clothing manufacturing, during the last five years employment in that sector has also largely disappeared. Luckily, however, Sylhetis have been immensely successful in opening up a new employment niche in the restaurant and take-away trade.

'Indian' restaurants, most of which were run and staffed by Sylheti settlers, began to appear in Britain in the mid nineteen fifties, and since then have enjoyed an exponential pattern of

growth. Chicken tikka marsala, a dish unheard of in India, let alone in Sylhet, has of become England's favourite fast foods, and Restaurants and Take-aways aimed at satisfying the huge popular demand for curries can now be found even in the smallest of towns. With a turnover of several £billion a year, substantial profits are being made in the trade, which is also a vital source of employment: over 60% of Bengali men aged between 20 and 30 are currently employed in the catering trade. This could, of course, prove to be a dead end: although catering undoubtedly provides a means of survival, the hours are long, and most of the profits go to the owners – who are most usually members of the older generation. Nevertheless it worth remembering that the section of Britain's minority population whose younger members have achieved by far the most rapid degree of upward mobility – the Chinese – also initially colonised exactly the same niche.

In this respect the academic achievements of the current crop of young Sylhetis are very striking. Despite many handicaps, including the recentness of their arrival in Britain, their parents poverty and lack of education, and their concentration in often ill-resourced inner-city schools, Bengali children – the vast majority of whom are of Sylheti parentage – are not only proving to be remarkably successful at school, but the girls are beginning to significantly outperform the boys. To be sure the current performance of Bengali children may still only be marginally ahead of their Pakistani counterparts, and good deal less spectacular than those of the Indians. However the moment one factors in the length of time which has passed since family reunion took place, it becomes quite clear that the upward curve being followed by Sylheti children, and most especially by Sylheti girls, may well prove to be closely congruent with those followed by the Jullunduris. Quite apart from the patterns of upward mobility through the employment market which such educational success is likely to precipitate, it can also be expected to have a far reaching impact on marriage strategies.

In the first place young people who are educational successful are well placed to argue that their marriage should be delayed until their education is complete – not least because they can very plausibly insist that they are much more likely to be able to catch a prestigious spouse when they are fully qualified as a doctor, a lawyer, and so forth. Moreover once they are professionally qualified, they are also much better placed to insist that they should make such choices themselves. But whom will they choose? Current developments suggest that whilst most well-qualified young Sylheti women would much prefer to marry husbands of a similar background to themselves, suitable matches are extremely hard to find, especially

since the relatively small number of well qualified young Bengali men are not only more prepared than they to leave the matter in their parents hands, but also prefer – other things being equal – to marry spouses who are significantly less well qualified than they are themselves.

5 Conclusion

It will by now be self-evident that Jullunduri, Mirpuri and Sylheti networks – and by extension those which have been constructed by members of all the other many components of the South Asian presence in Britain – are currently developing in radically differing ways. Nevertheless they share many commonalities. Each is a specific example of entrepreneurship from below, and each has enabled a substantial number of people from relatively peripheral regions in the Indian subcontinent to break their way into metropolitan Britain, and to take advantage of the radically superior material opportunities available in that context. Moreover if one returns to the questions about how transnational networks work with which we began, it is quite clear that in this context, at least, it is above all through the principles and practice of kinship reciprocity that translocal networks of trust and solidarity have been constructed and maintained, and through which structures of social closure which guarantee loyalty and curtail malfeasance have been sustained, no matter how great the degree of spatial separation between network members may now be. We are also in a position to answer a further question posed by Smith and Guarnizo: namely as to

“whether transnational practices and relations are merely an evanescent phenomenon, which will not last beyond first generation migrants. Or, by contrast, are transnational social practices becoming an enduring characteristic of global social organisation?”
(*ibid*: 15 – 16)

At least in a South Asian context – and the same may well apply elsewhere – group endogamy appears to be a key feature in the long-term maintenance of transnational networks. Hence as long as conventions of endogamy continue to be adhered to, and the figure for almost all of Britain’s South Asian communities rarely falls below 80%, there is a strong probability that such networks will be sustained. But however sound this conclusion may be, we should take care before making any assumptions about the direction in which causality flows: in all the situations which have been considered here, it is the perceived benefits of network membership, rather than mere custom, which has underpinned continuing high rates of endogamy.

Beyond this, however, generalisation becomes an increasingly difficult task. That transnational networks interact with local power structures of class, gender, race and caste wherever they touch ground is plain to see – not least because transnational networks affect those very structures as much as they are affected by them. However because the dynamics of all these processes are so often grounded in the specificities of the kinship system within which each group operates, there is nothing that is routine or regular about the trajectory which each such working network begins to follow over the longer term. Whilst careful analysis may enable us to gain a *post-hoc* understanding of just what has recently been going on, the extent to which each group's precise trajectory of adaptation has emerged in response to a huge mass of largely unforeseeable contingencies renders all future predictions intrinsically unreliable.

What is undeniable, however, is that most of the current crop of transnational networks do indeed work, at least in the sense that they bring benefits of some kind to all their members. What is equally clear is that the most crucial asset in the hands of entrepreneurs from below is their own cultural capital, much (although by no means all) of which is embedded in their kinship system. However this is not to advance a 'culturalist' argument in any straightforward sense, for in no way am I suggesting that cultural capital does *determines* behaviour. On the contrary it is much better understood as a complex set of ideas and possibilities, located quite as much at a collective as an individual level, which network members are in a position to draw upon to plot their way forward on their own terms, and which enables them creatively to circumvent the obstacles which obstruct their chosen path. Moreover precisely because those involved are engaged in entrepreneurship from below, their very alterity is a crucial dimension of their capacity for agency: it is precisely because of their capacity to act and to organise themselves in unexpected ways (at least from the perspective of the hegemonic majority) that has enabled them – and indeed continues to enable them – to succeed, despite the odds piled up against them.

Yet just how unique are these processes? In the first place it is worth noting that such strategies are no less relevant to those who have reached much more exalted positions in the global economy. Similarly structured networks which are if anything even more global in character by highly qualified people of South Asian, Chinese and Japanese descent, and in each case it is highly personalised ties of descent, of quasi-kinship and above all of marriage invariably holds the edifice together. Only time will tell as to whether such strategies will

enable those involved to beat the more formally structured Euro-American transnational corporations which currently bestride the world at their own game. Nor is that the end of the story. Whilst the escalators which now stretch from a few selected locations far out on the periphery into the hearts of most metropolitan cities may provide some of the most spectacular examples of transnational entrepreneurship, similar networks are also emerging along all manner of other vectors. Some are still explicitly transnational, such as those which lead to the oil-rich states of the Middle East; others, such as those that lead to Shanghai, Dhaka, Bombay, Delhi, Karachi and Cairo may nominally be translocal, since those involved have not crossed a national boundary to reach their destination. But whatever the situation within which such developments occur, it would be most unwise to assume that extended kinship reciprocities – and the potential which they offer for building and maintaining trans-local networks – will necessarily prove to be anything like so fragile as they have turned out to be amongst those whose heritage is primarily European.

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