

Indian and Nepalese Women Living in Finland

Tuomas Martikainen & Lalita Gola

Tuomas Martikainen, PhD, Postdoctoral Researcher, Academy of Finland, Department of Comparative Religion, Åbo Akademi University, tuomas.martikainen@abo.fi

Lalita Gola, MSc

Full report: Tuomas Martikainen and Lalita Gola (2007): *Women from the Indian Subcontinent in Finland: Patterns of Integration, Family Life, Employment and Transnationalism among Marriage Migrants*. Publications of the Population Research Institute, the Family Federation of Finland.

1. Introduction

Migration from the Indian subcontinent is a relatively new and, hitherto, minor phenomenon in Finland. Nevertheless, Indian migrants have been the target of some attention, as many Information and Communication Technology (ICT) enterprises have recruited engineers and programmers from India during the last decade. Also, Finns in the country's larger cities have recognised an increase in the number of ethnic shops and restaurants that are run by people from the Indian subcontinent. Names referring to distant places and new flavours, such as *Bombay Express*, *Curry Palace* and *Nanda Devi*, are becoming more and more common. However, what have gained much less attention are the dependants of these often male migrants. Professional migration is also about the migration of partners, children and relatives (Forsander et al., 2004: 154-155). The phenomenon has also been referred to as *tied migration* (Parvati, 2004). Other important issues include the creation of ethno-cultural organisations, transnational ties, flows of remittances and new challenges to local institutions and practices (Castles & Miller, 2003).

Immigrants from the Indian subcontinent began to arrive gradually during the last decades, and their number has grown steadily since the 1990s. In 2006, there were altogether 4,764 people born in Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka living in Finland, and they constituted 3% of all foreign-born and 15% of all Asian-born residents. This group has an imbalanced gender structure, as 64% of them were male in 2006. Thus, in absolute numbers, we are talking about a rather small group of immigrants. However, what is of broader importance regarding these nationalities is that the majority of them arrived in Finland because of work, study or marriage. They include very few refugees or asylum seekers, and even then mostly of Sri Lankan origin (Statistics Finland, 2007; DOI, 2006). In this sense, these people in many ways represent the particular form of migration that is expected to grow significantly in the near future (MOL, 2006; VN, 2004). Therefore, the results of this study have broader significance, as they may reveal some of the developments and current situation that non-refugee populations face in Finland. Even internationally, "There are few studies that explore international tied migration amongst the skilled" (Parvati, 2004: 308).

Research on international migration, ethnicity and integration has become a well-established field of study in Finland since the late 1990s. Many studies have been published in recent years, but people from the Indian subcontinent have gained only limited attention (ETNO, 1999; 2004). A rare exception is Akhlaq Ahmad's (2005) doctoral dissertation on Pakistani men in the Finnish labour market. Also research that has focused on the combination of gender, family and work is a relatively new area of focus. This study is the first publication dedicated exclusively to issues connected to Indian and Nepalese migrants in Finland.

2. The Aim of the Study

The main aim of this study is to present a holistic picture of the lives of women and families from India and Nepal in Finland. The study concentrates on issues connected to the process of migration, family, ethnic community, societal participation, employment and future life prospects in the new country. A central focus is on labour market integration, including the associated experiences and expectations. In addition, the study identifies good practices as well as problems with regard to the activities of Finnish authorities in migration and integration affairs. Furthermore, as this is the first broader presentation of people from India and Nepal in Finland, it also sets the field for further research and tries to identify possible themes for later study, while providing elementary information upon which subsequent research can stand.

The primary materials of the study consist of statistical information provided by Statistics Finland as well as qualitative interviews with fourteen Indian and two Nepalese women living in Finland. In addition, interviews with four representatives of cultural, ethnic and religious organisations working with this population are included. All of the interviews were conducted by Lalita Gola, M.Sc., in the Helsinki region between January and August in 2006. The interviews were conducted in Hindi and English. The statistical information was obtained from Statistics Finland in August 2006 and covers information from 1990 to 2005.

This study is one of results of the MONIKKO Project – *Gender Equality and Diversity in Work Organizations* – running from 2005 to 2007 and financed by the EQUAL Community Initiative of the European Social Fund (ESF). The project emphasises the importance of gender equality, while taking into consideration the wider perspective of diversity. It examines differences and similarities between the two sexes, regarding such elements as age, ethnicity and family situation. The head of the project is Professor Kaisa Kauppinen from the Finnish Institute of Occupational Health. MONIKKO is directed by the Finnish Institute of Occupational Health and it consists of five subprojects (MONIKKO, 2006).

3. Results

The aims of the study were (A) to present a holistic picture of the lives of women and families from India and Nepal in Finland that is (B) combined with a focus on labour market integration, (C) to identify good practices as well as problems with regard to the activities of Finnish authorities in migration and integration affairs and (D) to provide elementary background data about migrants from the Indian subcontinent for this study and subsequent research. The study's original material consisted of statistics provided by Statistics Finland and 20 semi-structured, thematic interviews conducted by Lalita Gola in the Helsinki capital

region between January and August 2006. Sixteen interviews were conducted with Indian (14) and Nepalese (2) women. The women are divided into two groups in the analysis: *the wives of ICT professionals* (abbr. ICT, N=10) and *the wives of ethnic restaurant workers and entrepreneurs* (abbr. ER, N=6). The statistics were analysed by cross-tabulation. The interviews were analysed by thematic content analysis, mostly through a realist reading of the texts. It was expected that the interview sample over-represents women with higher education and those better off in general. These aims of the study were operationalised into nine research questions, to which the answers are provided in the following.

(1) What constitutes the Indian and Nepalese population in Finland?

Migration from the Indian subcontinent to Finland has been a minor phenomenon until now. In 2006, there were altogether 4,764 people born in Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka living in Finland. They constituted 3% of all foreign born and 15% of all Asian born. This group has an imbalanced gender structure, and 64% of them were male. Indians are the largest group and form 52% of the group. With the exception of Sri Lanka, all other groups are male dominated. Both the Nepalese and Indians are heavily concentrated in the Uusimaa (capital) region. Seventy-six percent of Nepalese and 68% of Indians lived near Helsinki, and most others in the vicinity of the cities of Tampere, Turku and Oulu. These areas are also those with the largest ICT companies. The vast majority of Indian and Nepalese migrants hold their native citizenship. The age structure of these groups is slightly older than of immigrants in general – something to be expected in work-dominated immigration. Eighty-six percent of them moved to Finland at 15–64 years and only 13% under the age of 15. Men are well employed, approaching the national average, but among women unemployment is higher – a little below average among immigrants.

Marriage usually occurs within the same national group, even though this is slightly more common for women (78%) than men (64%). Single mothers are not common; only 7% of women live alone with their children. Families with an Indian, Nepalese or Sri Lankan parent had 1,311 children in 2005, of which 385 were among the same national groups. This appears to be in contrast to the family situation, but can probably be explained by the later arrival of spouses from the countries of origin. We may thus expect that the proportion of children with two immigrant parents is going to rise in the coming years. Most of the children are still very young.

We also looked at whether the original male domination of migratory flows was followed by a later increase in the number of female migrants, diminishing the imbalance in gender ratios. That did not find support in the material. The gender ratios for Indians have been stable (34%) in the 2000s, and have even decreased for the Nepalese from 2000 to 2006 by 2 percentage units. A plausible explanation is that, simultaneously with increasing female migration, corresponding or stronger male migration has continued, so that the gender balance has not yet begun to stabilise. This notion is supported both by the relatively high rate of endogamous marriages and by the significantly higher ratio of male (48 %) versus female (24 %) single dwellers above the age of 15.

(2) What is the human capital of the interviewed women?

All interviewed women are first generation migrants and were between the ages of 25 and 40 years at the time of the interview. Most of the women migrated between 1995 and 2005, and the majority moved directly from India to Finland. The majority (15/16) were still nationals of

their country of origin. Fifteen were married to a man from the country of origin and one was married to a Finn. Five women were currently at home with children full time, the rest were working. Most of the children had been born in Finland. None of the women had migrated to Finland solely on their own initiative, but in almost all cases the move was in some way related to marriage or to their husband's work. They had received their elementary, secondary and further education in the country of origin, even though some had taken additional courses in Finland. The ICT wives had a higher educational level. All women spoke English and Hindi, and thirteen spoke three or more languages. All ER wives spoke at least some Finnish, while only half of the ICT wives did. Linguistic acculturation is thus taking different paths in these two groups.

The human capital of these women appeared to suit Finnish labour market demands rather well, as most (11) were working. Those who were not were either on maternity leave or not currently interested in working. In the case of these women, their foreign educational background did not appear to be a major obstacle to entering the workforce, as has often been suggested in research literature. As many of the women worked either in ICT-related or ethnic restaurant businesses, the results may not be that surprising in the end, but rather highlight the different, segmented labour markets that are available to immigrants (Bommes & Kolb, 2006). Thus, we cannot say that human capital alone explains the women's generally good experiences in the labour market, but rather, that the women have found their niche in a segmented labour market.

(3) How and why did Finland become the country of destination?

The decision to migrate is one of the sharpest dividers between the experiences of the ICT and ER wives. All of the ICT wives had made a mutual decision with their husband to migrate to Finland, whereas the ER wives had migrated as a natural consequence of marriage to a spouse living abroad. There was often a time gap in migration, as the husband often came earlier. Three of the ICT wives came a few months later, while the rest arrived simultaneously with their husband. In the case of the ER wives, the migration gap was significantly longer, sometimes several years, and they all arrived after their husband had already been living in Finland. Even though most women (15/16) initially entered the country because of their husband, the process itself had taken different paths. The majority of women came to Finland directly from India or Nepal. This was the case for all ER wives and for five of the ICT wives. The rest of the ICT couples had one or more international settlements in-between, usually in a western country. This bespeaks the greater global mobility and wider labour markets among ICT professionals, some of whom could be described as transmigrants. On the one hand, they have a global labour market with work opportunities in many countries. On the other hand, when they decide to settle, they are faced with much more restricted possibilities of finding opportunities for career development in their own organisations.

Over half of the women had no or little prior knowledge of Finland. The main channels of information were their husbands or relatives already living in Finland. In addition, some had searched the web, read books or watched documentaries on television. Living costs and arrangements, work culture and other cultural issues were generally not well known to the respondents. Early on, weather was the greatest worry for several women, but information about everyday life was scant in almost all cases. Most of the women actually said that they had become more independent, self-reliant and had gained more self-confidence. As a result of a lack of social relations, the initial phase of settlement was often experienced as more stressful. Information about Finland upon arrival or soon thereafter was available, but it was

usually offered only upon request and in a language (Finnish) they could not understand. Complaints about the lack of information in English were an ongoing theme in many interviews.

The selection of Finland as the destination country was in most cases related to existing connections, but they were usually only possible connections. In other words, prior knowledge of Finland was a necessary but not sufficient requirement in this context. It can also be argued that most of the people could have ended up somewhere else. The ICT professionals have a global labour market available to them, and in their case, it appears that the reputation of Nokia weighed more than Finland as such.

(4) How do transnational connections affect life in Finland?

Almost all (14/16) of the women said that they visit relatives in India or Nepal. Annual visits were most common, but gaps of up to four years were also mentioned. ICT families were more active in making visits, presumably because of more regular work schedules, better income and more recent arrival in Finland. Beyond travel, contact was kept via telephone (14), the Internet (11; e-mail, chatting, Skype) and regular mail (1). The most common frequency of contact was once a week or every two weeks. The women also often had relatives in other countries. Only three respondents reported having no relatives outside Finland, India and Nepal. Visiting relatives in these countries was less common, and only five respondents said that they had done so. However, keeping in contact through the Internet and by telephone was quite common. This implies that most of the women are able to follow quite closely how their families and relatives are doing and what is happening in their country of origin. Additionally, nine women said that their relatives from their country of origin had visited Finland at least once.

In terms of remittances, ten women reported having supported their relatives at least occasionally, while six had not done so. Many also noted that most goods were cheaper in India and Nepal, so there was not much sense in such support. Remittances turned out to be less common than expected, but existed nevertheless. Moreover, there were no mentions of remittances from India or Nepal to Finland. Even though the majority viewed remittances in a positive light, the issue had also been a source of frustration for some.

Thirteen respondents said that they kept up with at least some form of media from their country of origin. These included music CDs, movie DVDs, Internet and satellite television, especially Zee TV. Eight of the women reported that they had Zee TV, which they watched actively. Satellite television was more common among the entrepreneurs (4/6) than the ICT families (4/10). The media were used mainly for entertainment (serials, movies, etc.). Eleven of the women reported following politics in their country of origin and three more said they heard the news through their husbands. There were significant differences in how intensively they followed developments in their native countries. The majority followed politics with less intensity. Almost all of the women said that they followed Finnish media at least to some extent. The need for media in one's native language can also become actualised through children, with the family often viewing television-watching in the native language as a way for the family to relax together.

Transnational connections between Finland and India/Nepal in terms of travel were not very frequent, usually only once every one or two years. However, other forms were rather common. Most women kept contact with their relatives in the country of origin and also, to a lesser degree, in other countries.

(5) What changes have taken place in family life as a result of migrating to Finland?

The conception of family is one of those features that differ quite extensively between Finland and India/Nepal. There are, of course, different types and perceptions of families in each country, but more often the family norm in Finland is the *nuclear family* whereas in India and Nepal it is the *extended family*. The ICT wives were more often in support of the nuclear family (4/10) in contrast to the entrepreneurs' wives, among whom only one preferred it. Nevertheless, the extended family seemed to be the primary reference point.

Thirteen of the women had children (N=19). All entrepreneurs' wives had children and most (5/6) had two. Seven of the ICT wives had children; six of them had one and only one had two. In other words, the ICT families had smaller households. Altogether five women stayed at home to take care of children. The children were mostly in day-care or kindergarten (5) and at school (10), and to a lesser extent at home (3). Six of the children were in English-language and nine in Finnish-language day-care or schools. The ICT families had a clear preference for English-language education, whereas the entrepreneur families sent their children mostly to Finnish-language schools.

People spoke a variety of languages at home. The most common familial languages were Hindi/Nepali or a combination of Hindi and English. The language between the spouses and the children was often different. Many also spoke to their children in English, to give them at least elementary skills. This was motivated by a possible future move to some other country, as was the case with regard to the choice of English-language education. Finnish was the language used at home in one family.

The majority of the families lived in two- or three-room apartments in suburbs in the capital region. All of the spouses of the interviewees were working. The ICT spouses worked mainly for Nokia, but also in a few other companies, and all ER spouses worked in ethnic Indian or Nepalese restaurants. The spouses' educational backgrounds were similar to those of their wives. The sharing of domestic tasks in families varied somewhat. There was some sharing in twelve families, but it was not common if the wife was at home. The most common activity in which the husbands did not participate was cooking. The vast majority of respondents had kept their appetite for Indian food and were satisfied to see an increasing variety of Indian products both in ethnic shops and local supermarkets. It appeared that in about half of the families all domestic tasks were divided fairly equally. Relationships between neighbours varied from nonexistent to warm.

Homes are major sites in the construction and maintenance of ethnicity as well as the practice of religion. Most women reported having at least some artefacts in their homes to remind them of their country of origin. These included photos, paintings, carpets, religious pictures and so on, but apparently in only a few homes they had a prominent position. However, at least one apartment was fully "Indian style" inside. Many women also mentioned that they represented culture at home through food and cooking and, apparently, the associated smells. A few women also mentioned that they liked to dress in Indian clothes while at home.

Ethnicity and identity become both challenged and reconstructed as a consequence of international migration and resettlement. The women identified themselves mostly as Indian or Nepalese, in particular among ER wives. The ICT wives had more flexible identities, and five of them identified themselves as Indian-international/European/Finnish. Most women

were clearly very proud to be Indian or Nepalese. Fifteen were Hindu and one was Sikh. Almost all of the women said that they were religious at least to some extent, and followed religious norms and practices. The most common religious practices at home were worship at the home shrine, fasting and celebrating religious festivals.

It appeared that the idea of extended family provided psychological support to most of the women, even though the family form itself had changed. The role of the family was also one of the most important signifiers of their identity in contrast to the Finnish family ideal and life in Finland in general. The majority of the women seemed quite satisfied with their family situation, even though many missed their extended family. They were generally quite satisfied with their housing and their spouses' participation in domestic tasks.

(6) Are ethnic networks an important resource?

All of the women stated unequivocally that contact with people of the same ethnic group or national origin was important to them, and all had at least some such contact. The usual frequency of meetings was weekly or biweekly. Common places to conduct the visits were at home or various kinds of get-togethers. Some took part in a regular women's group. Social networks, be they friends or other acquaintances of the same ethnic/national group, were primarily forums for using the vernacular, discussing topical issues and sometimes seeking advice. Very few reported that they were important in finding employment, even though their usefulness in many other issues was noted. Some of the meetings were gender-specific.

The celebration of Indian festivals, especially *Holi* and *Diwali*, was considered of major importance. Alongside the Indian Embassy, the central cultural and religious organisations are the *Finnish-Indian-Society, FINTIA*, the *International Society for Krishna Consciousness in Finland (ISKCON)* and the *Saraswati Sindhu Cultural Association (S3S)*. In addition, we can mention the Sikh Gurdwara in Sörnäinen run by *The Gurdwara Community of Finland* and the *Aarambh Association*. The central functions of the cultural and religious associations seem to be religious or cultural praxis, transmission of culture and religion to the next generation, socialising with fellow-ethnics and enjoying spare time. The socialising dimension is important, because the gatherings are among the few opportunities for children to learn to behave in a larger crowd that consists mainly of people of the same ethnic group. However, not all individuals were too fond of all Indian-related meetings and events. They were, for instance, found repetitive.

Ethnic networks were important for psychological and social wellbeing, and in terms of general information about Finland, but their role in providing labour opportunities was not strongly indicated. There is, however, no doubt that the existence of an Indian and Nepalese community as well a number of organisations providing services to it is of major importance to the Indians and Nepalese living in Finland.

(7) To what extent is there contact with mainstream society?

Fifteen of the women reported having at least one Finnish friend. The usual number of Finnish friends was between two and five, and three women mentioned having ten or more. The frequency of meeting them was a little less than with ethnic friends. The situation could imply that it is easier to form friendships with co-ethnics than with Finns. As the workplace was often mentioned as the place where Finns are met, this underlines the importance of work

in social integration. Naturally, also school and day-care are important places for such encounters.

Most women said that they had experienced some racism or discrimination, but only a few considered the majority population hostile. A more common response was that the majority population viewed them as a suspicious minority. It also appeared that ICT wives had fewer experiences of racism than ER wives, even though the data did not permit a detailed analysis. Discriminatory behaviour or outspoken racism appeared to have a rather insignificant place in most people's lives. It was also often noted that there are many Finns who are highly interested in the lives and cultures of people of foreign origin.

Discussions of family and gender roles are a prominent part of the ethnicity discourse. The majority said that differences existed and that Finnish women were more independent, dominant, outgoing and self-reliant both in public and in domestic settings. This was not always seen in a positive light, though. Many respondents felt that Indian and Nepalese women had a more secure role as wives and thought of it as superior to the position of Finnish women.

While respondents were aware that they could be viewed as 'immigrants' and while many noted that people sometimes made 'faces' at them, only few noted experiences of outspoken racism or discrimination – or at least divulged such. The strongest feelings of exclusion were actually connected to the role of Finnish language in society and to the more restricted opportunities that English speakers have.

(8) What is the women's labour market position and relationship to employment?

About half of the women said they had work experience from India. When the women began to look for employment in Finland, they used somewhat different strategies, but only a few mention the role of the employment office as important. Most had found work through relatives or acquaintances, or through their own initiative. One of the respondents named her residence permit status as a barrier in applying for work in the early stages of her stay in Finland. Finnish skills were named by many as an obstacle to finding work. Several women reported getting bored staying at home, and wanted to find something else to do. For some, participation in volunteer work has been one way, but for many, work has been the number one option. Even women who were currently at home with children planned to look for employment later.

Half of the ER women worked in an ethnic restaurant, often a family business. About half of the ICT wives worked in an ICT-related company, but there were also other professions. In other words, the same professions dominated among the women as among their husbands. High taxation was a common complaint among the entrepreneurs' wives, as was the bureaucracy related to being an entrepreneur. The women rarely mentioned financial difficulties, and most were satisfied with their salary at work.

The services of local employment offices were mentioned occasionally in the interviews, but more often in the context of courses and language education, as one needs to be a registered job seeker in order to participate in the courses.

(9) How do the women see their future in Finland?

Seven women viewed a permanent stay in Finland as the most likely scenario, five also looked forward to applying for Finnish citizenship and one was already a Finnish citizen. Four of the women were quite certain that they would not continue living in Finland and would return to their country of origin in retirement age at the latest. Five of the women were still unsure about their future. While most women considered it useful to obtain Finnish citizenship if they were to settle permanently, they gave it widely varying degrees of importance. Some mentioned that even in the case of a permanent stay, citizenship would not be necessary. This may imply that they had not experienced any major obstacles in their lives as a result of being a 'third country national'. Dual citizenship was considered by many as a good opportunity.

The option of moving to a third country or back to India was more prominent among the ICT respondents. That was already clear from the choice of English-language education for their children. Expectations regarding their children's future were mostly connected to a good education and to the children becoming "good adults". Five of the ER women expressed a preference for a future Indian or Nepalese spouse for their children, whereas the majority of the ICT women had no such preferences. This implies that among the less educated, there are more traditional expectations regarding children's future marriage patterns. However, it was implicit in all cases that the children were expected to marry for life and not adapt to other life patterns that are common in Finland, including cohabitation and multiple marriages.

Generally speaking, future developments did not appear to have a central role in the women's lives at the time of the interviews. Most were apparently living quite comfortably and were mainly occupied with work and family issues. Only a few expressed a clear discomfort with particular issues. The same respondents also appeared to have a lower threshold to moving somewhere else.

The hypothesis was that planning permanent settlement is closely bound with the acquisition of citizenship and consideration of the children's future. The hypothesis found partial support. The future of children was obviously a major concern for all women with children, but the issue of citizenship provided more diffuse answers. Apparently, applying for citizenship was not a top priority for most women at the current stage.

References

Ahmad, Akhlaq (2005) Getting a Job in Finland: The Social Networks of Immigrants from the Indian Subcontinent in the Helsinki Metropolitan Labour Market. Helsinki: University of Helsinki, Department of Sociology.

Castles, Stephen & Miller, Mark (2003) The Age of Migration: International Population Movements in the Modern World. Third Edition. New York: Palgrave.

DOI=Directorate of Immigration (2006) Tilastot [statistics].
<<http://www.uvi.fi/netcomm/content.asp?article=1945>> [Read: 31.5.2007]

ETNO=Etnisten suhteiden neuvottelukunta (1999) Maahanmuutto, pakolaisuus, siirtolaisuus ja etniset vähemmistöt 1990-luvulla. Työhallinnon julkaisu 238. Helsinki: Työministeriö.

ETNO=Etnisten suhteiden neuvottelukunta (2004) Muuttoliikkeet ja etniset vähemmistöt Suomessa 1999-2004. Työhallinnon julkaisu 343. Helsinki: Työministeriö.

Forsander, Annika; Raunio, Mika; Salmenhaara, Perttu & Helander, Mika (2004) Sykettä ja suvaitsevaisuutta: Globaalin osaamisen kansalliset rajat. Helsinki: Edita.

MOL=Ministry of Labour (2006) Government Migration Policy Programme. Government Resolution 19.10.2006. Työhallinnon julkaisu 371. Helsinki: Työministeriö.

Parvati, Raghuram (2004) The Difference that Skills Make: Gender, Family Migration and Regulated Labour Markets. Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies 30:2, 303-321.

Statistics Finland (2007) Statistics Online. < <http://www.stat.fi/til/index.html>> [Read: 31.5.2007]

VN=Valtioneuvoston kanslia (2004) Väestökehitykseen vaikuttaminen – tulisiko syntyvyyttä ja maahanmuuttoa lisätä? Tulevaisuusselonteon liiteraportti 3. Valtioneuvoston julkaisusarja 31/2004. Helsinki: Valtioneuvoston kanslia.