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Module Structure

Description of the Module

Items	Description of the Module
Subject Name	Sociology
Paper Name	Sociology of the Indian Diaspora
Module Name/Title	Transnationalism and the Indian Middle Class
Module Id	Section V Module 4
Pre Requisites	Familiarity with the concepts of diaspora, transnationalism, transmigrant, globalization
Objectives	This module seeks to : 1. Examine the concept of transnationalism in the era of

	<p>globalization</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 2. Explore the different aspects of transnationalism 3. Elaborate on the features of the new Indian middle class 4. Describe the relationship between diasporas, transnationalism and the new Indian middle class and evaluate its implications.
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Transnationalism and the Indian Middle Class

Section V Module 4

QUADRANT 1

1. INTRODUCTION

Transnationalism is not a new phenomenon, but in contemporary times, its dimensions have become more elaborate and transformed in scale and intensity. It has also gained prominence as a field of academic study. In recent years, the subject has gained the awareness of people outside academia as well, and with new developments like globalization and liberalization, the field has also grown with fresh insights and theorizations. Its definitions, area of study and scope are being debated. Its literature and scope is expanding, and its usage in interdisciplinary works such as migration, and developmental sociology, increasing.

But what does Transnationalism truly mean ?

1.1 Definitions

Transnationalism describes a condition in which, despite great distances and notwithstanding the presence of international borders (and all the laws, regulations and national narratives they represent), certain kinds of relationships have been globally intensified and now take place paradoxically in a planet-spanning yet common – however virtual – arena of activity (Vertovec, 1999: 1)

According to Glick-Schiller et al (1995:48), transnationalism is a process by which immigrants maintain multi-stranded social relations that link their society of origin and their settlement destinations. They also emphasize that immigrants maintain a social field that stretches across geographical and political borders.

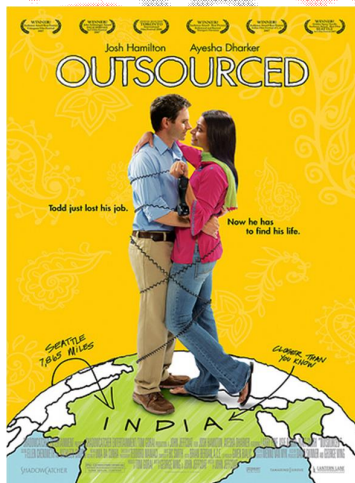
1.2 New Dimensions of Transnationalism

In the pre-globalization period, most Indian diasporas did maintain some kind of links with the homeland. There were a few, for example some communities of indentured labour in the colonial period in the Caribbean, Fiji and South Africa, who because of the distance and lack of communication facilities, completely lost touch with relatives back home. They carried

with them and nurtured cultural practices from home. But they were not transnationals in that they were completely settled in their destination countries. But there were others, like Gujarati business communities of the same period, who kept business, trade and marital links with not just their home state but even with the villages they came from. These communities did display elements of transnationalism. But the scale and scope of present day transnationalism is different; it has many ramifications and implications

Transnationalism as a process in the sociological sense has developed in specific ways at the present time due to the many changes in migration trends. This is due to a number of factors that enable free movement of capital, goods, people and ideas. People are no longer just crossing boundaries and setting up a new life; rather they are making to and fro trips between homeland and hostland and maintaining concrete networks of linkages, which arise from this back and forth migration.

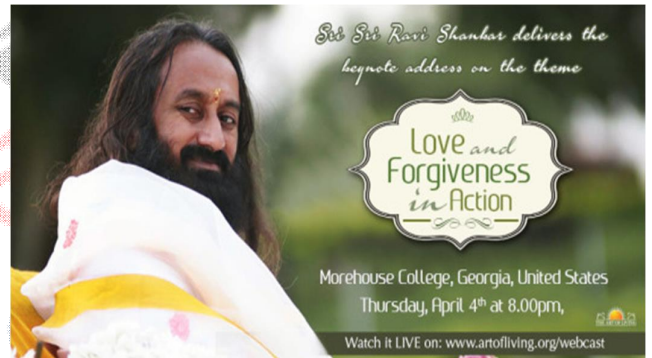
An older example - and in many ways the beginning of corporate transnationalism - are the MNCs. Companies - due to the impetus of globalization - have developed and grown not only within their own nation states, but across different nation states. These companies have maintained solid links with their -home i.e. head quarters. These links include - the office culture, its management style etc. The TV series '*Outsourced*' is a rather humorous take on the cultural and social differences, and the social situations that arise from the interactions among the people who work in an MNC.



Posters of American (NBC) television sitcom '*Outsourced*' (source : www.google.co.in.imghp accessed: 5th May 2015)

Religious organizations have not been immune to the winds of transnational change. Many religious groups and institutions originating in India have chapters abroad as well. These branches abroad allow for migrants to remain in touch with the culture and religion of their home country. These institutions help transmigrants, to maintain ties to their homeland, and act as a socializing agent for the second and third generation transmigrants. ISKON (International Society For Krishna Consciousness) is a prominent example. Then there are organizations and movements centering around living spiritual gurus like Satya Sai Baba, Amritanandamayi, Sri Sri Ravi Shankar . These religious groups, not only function within the arena of the spiritual, but are also more in touch with the rather earthly side of life , and have set up educational institutions and charity foundations in their host countries as well as in India.

ISKCON Spanish Fork, Utah, USA (source : www.google.co.in/imghp accessed:5th May 2015



Advertisement for public address by Shr Shri Ravishankar source : www.google.co.in/imghp accessed:5th May 2015

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Recruiting advertisement by Teach for India, a chapter of the International Teach to Lead group. (source: www.google.co.in/imghp accessed: 5th May 2015)

Bill Gates at health drive sponsored by his Foundation in India. source : www.google.co.in/imghp accessed:5th May 2015

Development projects constitute another well-developed transnational field. People are realizing that practically functioning and impactful solutions to social problems are available. They don't need to brainstorm a solution but a collaboration is efficient. Organizations are pooling resources, hiring consultants, adopting programs from various organizations across



nation states to set up development projects, building awareness, setting up funds to help those in need. Red Cross, Gates Foundation, Teach to Lead, are a few of the many foreign organizations donating to causes in India and working with people in the Indian social sector to bring about positive change.

While all these are obvious examples, two other definite markers of transnationalism are

the returning investment from the diaspora and the marked increase in the people travelling abroad.

Brain drain has been a concern among the intelligentsia of the country for years. A comforting trend, in recent years, is that many migrants are returning to India with a broader skill base and technical knowhow; or investing in businesses in the country. These investments are coming in via social linkages from among family members, friends, and colleagues. Family business are expanding abroad or partnering with companies abroad. Educational institutes are getting funding from high placed alumni and even hosting lectures by them. There is a definite return of social and economic capital to the homeland. The module by Aparna Rayaprol in this course gives many examples of 'Return Migration' and its link with Transnationalism.

Raheja LakeHomes in Powai is an example of a gated community catering to NRIs, expats, return migrants and local affluent families all of whom form part of the transnational circuit of globalizedIndians. source : www.googlee.co.in.imghp accessed:5th May 2015

Travelling is all about broadening horizons, it is a part of true learning. But let's not deny that it's a mark of social status i.e. how many countries you have visited and how many times you travel in a year. The Indian population has bestirred themselves greatly to conquer the known world. Summer holidays are time to tour Europe or visit cousins in USA, Canada or UK. The more adventurous are going off to far off locations. As a whole, the country is now travelling. It's about becoming a global citizen who is aware of cultures beyond those found in their own backyard. Transnational networks have made this possible. Well known hotel chains, family who lives there, food chains that match the palette of the tourist all come together to make travelling less daunting than it was, let's say, 15 years ago. According to an article in the Business Standard, Trip Advisor a well-known travelling website has seen a 21% rise in Indians travelling abroad.

<p>USA based well established professional Hindu family seeks alliance from good looking well educated girl height 5'6" or taller for their very handsome son 31/6 ft very well placed with leading MNC highly paid. Family will be in India in End of Feb. Reply with B/P & contact. Caste no bar</p>	<p>Cosmopolitan, w. settled match for NM Brahmin girl (M.A, BeD), Dec. 80/5ft from a decent South Delhi family. Delhi/NCR only. Caste No Bar. Contact:</p>	<p>ALLI well from fair i (divc marr DLL: PA. Gur. Clas marr</p>
<p>ALLIANCE invited from well Edu. B'ful Yadav girl from Haryana & Delhi for fair & handsome Yadav boy <i>(divorcee, non materialized)</i></p>	<p>RENTED MNC (US Co.) 67,000 SBI 1,80,000 AVON India 3,50,000</p>	<p></p>

Matrimonial ad for American Indian groom looking for an Indian bride (source : www.googlee.co.in.imghp accessed:5th May

A significant marker of vigorous transnationalism is the sacred bond : Marriage ! No longer are matches limited to national borders. Match making aunts, grandparents and bureaus are providing eligible matches from across the seven seas. A true story from my own family circle is that of two IT professionals, both working in the US in the same firm (Deloitte Touche Tohamatsu) in different departments. They had seen but not met each other. The parents of the girl back home in Chennai were scouring the pages of a matrimonial cum horoscope matching magazine brought out by the Kancheepuram Sankara matham, a religious organization. Bio data of boys and girls from Tamil Brahmin communities had been listed in it, including age, gotram, height, weight, qualifications, place of work, emoluments, etc. The parents found the boy working in Deloitte in the list, the horoscopes matched and other biographical details were deemed suitable. They wrote to the daughter about the young man working in her office, after having sought the permission of his parents in Hyderabad. The two met at office in the US and in due course, got married to each other. Among those searching for partners themselves, a globalized world has led to many cross national marriages, which has led to massive academic curiosity about the nature of socialization, family life, cultural amelioration and the likes.

Transnationalism is reflecting these changes- wrought by itself onto itself. Over the years it has changed and yet remained the same. An understanding of these developments will help get clarity on the current avatar of Transnationalism.

2. CONCEPTUAL AND THEORETICAL DEBATES IN THE FIELD

The definition provided by Glick-Schiller et al (1995:48) quoted above, is a reflection of fresh insights that have emerged. Along with this has come new interest and consequently various developments in the academic approach to the subject on how the current changes need to be analyzed. In the initial stages of the new discovery or rediscovery of transnationalism, the debate was around what the core area of analysis was and whether or not transnationalism in itself was a serious enough theme to warrant a separate field of study.

In a critical review of the field, Michiel Bass et al (2012:12) argue that for academicians like Peggy Levitt, Luis Guarinizo, Steven Vertovec and Alejandro Portes, there was a new pattern of behavior and new circumstances among the new migrant groups which was clearly observable, and therefore - definitely in need of a new approach in terms of academic research. Thus in their studies or those who collaborated with them, there was a need to find and label what they were observing as actually being 'new'.

Fresh conceptualizations of Translocal and Transnational fields, spaces and formations, and various other terminologies were introduced and critiqued by leaders in the field. Among these came the new term 'Trans migrant', which went on to become the unit of study for various future researches. But the need for this reconceptualization was not limited to the field of transnationalism alone. Nina Glick Schiller et al (1995: 48) state that the ensuing reworking of concepts and terminology of transnationalism would be needed to understand

matters in other disciplines as well. For instance, within migration studies - the newer forms immigration and the experiences of immigrants.

There were many criticisms and critiques that came up during this phase. One of these critiques was, that the existing definitions were encompassing too many things. According to Michiel Baas et al (2012), in response to this critique, Thomas Faist developed an institutional approach to transnationalism. He spoke about it, as being centered in transnational social spaces which he defined as the combination of ties, positions in networks and organizations, and networks of organizations that extend across borders and multiple states. According to him, these states were above all dynamic social processes, not static unilaterally observable understandings of ties and positions. And these social processes were not fleeting, rather they were sustained by a spectrum of weak to strong institutionalized forms.

This was just one of the many debates that were raging on within the field. Another strand of discussion was centered around the idea of transnationalism as a process

2.1 Debate on Transnationalism as a process.

The concept of transnationalism as a process can be said to have developed by the analysis of globalization and its effect on migration. While migration studies and research have been used heavily in transnationalism studies, globalization studies on the other hand have been used to question the utility of transnationalism as a separate field. Globalization is seen as a facilitator for transnational lifestyle and has helped transmigration develop.

Therefore the question arises: can the two concepts be isolated from one another. Isn't transnationalism just another name for globalization? Isn't it a matter of old wine in a new bottle? Or are we dealing with a distinctly new phenomenon?

There are various different takes on this debate. In the book 'Transnationalism and the diaspora' Michiel Baas et al (2012,; 5-6) describe the various approaches to the theme. Alejandro Portes' approach is that transnationalism is not so much a new perspective as much as a rather novel phenomenon resulting from the modality and intensification of the process of improvement in communications and transportation, which in itself is intrinsically driven by technological development. Another approach by Smith and Guarizino speaks about there being two types of transnationalism - 'one from above' and 'one from below'. Transnationalism 'from above' is more or less synonymous with globalization which concentrates on macroeconomic processes that are not anchored in any specific territories. The transnationalism 'from below' on the other hand concentrates on the studies related to the relationships of people across two or more different nation states. On the other side of the debate, for some like Sklair, Glick-Schiller and Fouron, globalization and transnationalism are overlapping, however the latter is just more limited in scope than the former. This limitation arises from the transnational process being anchored i.e. affected by the various geographical territories to which it is linked which global processes are not.

After the definition comes the unit of study. And this has been no more insulated from change than the definitions. These changes are talked about in the next section.

2.2 Shift in the focus of Transnational Studies.

There has been a discernible shift, in what transnational studies looks at, within its scholarly framework. Earlier, the focus was on the burgeoning multinational corporations, which were seen as the core figures within transnationalism and the major originator of its effects. However, now the focus is on diasporas and migrant populations i.e. non-state actors. This focus on the actors will help academicians in understanding the 'what' and 'why' of transnationalism: by looking at the networks of communication, exchange and trade that these migrants have built.

This approach has a strong base, within the sociological field, since sociologists perceive the trio - migrants, their country of destination and their country of origin - to form a triangle, within which is encompassed everything - from social ties to religious organizational locations - which can span across multiple countries and geographies.

Although transnationalism is understood to have existed long before sociology's interest in the subject, the work of Linda Bausch is considered to be the foundation from which future studies and development in this field have emerged (Michiel Baas et al 2012:2)

3. IMPACT OF TRANSNATIONALISM ON THE INDIAN MIDDLE CLASS

In India, the phenomenon of transnationalism has brought about discernible changes in the lifestyles and aspirations of the middle class, during a period when the middle class itself has expanded tremendously and become heterogeneous.

3.1 What is the Indian Middle Class ?

The old middle class was a product of British rule and the new occupations and professions it created. The traditional feudalagrarian structure disintegrated, and the upper castes with their tradition of learning and ruling became urbanized and professionalized. This group formed the basis of the middle class which played a key leadership role in the consequent reform and national movement. This middle class, which continued for some decades after independence was characterized by values of austerity, simplicity, emphasis on learning and education (Mishra 1961)(Varma 1998)

Indian society, economy and polity underwent radical changes from the 1970s onwards and more particularly from the 1990s. Among the important developments was an expansion of the middle class with a change in composition as well as guiding values. With the onset of the LPG era, it went from "village-republics and agrarian communities" (Jodhka and Prakash 2011:44) to a finance based economy which looked towards foreign investment to take it to the next rung of development (Sassen 1991). This was the arena, in which developed the 'New Middle Class' of the market that it enabled was the bait - for multinational companies

and FDI ; aspiring for affluence, while simultaneously being vulnerable to excessive consumerism and its consequent negative social and cultural effects.

Many scholars such as Satish Deshpande (2003) and Pranab Bardhan (1994) have pointed out that the middle class is a force to be reckoned with. Their possession of human and cultural capital allows them to strongly impact the state and its policies. In turn, the policies are furthering the reach and impact of the middle class while simultaneously bringing about various change in the middle class.

3.2 Indian Middle Class : How many are there ?

There is a running debate on the strength of the middle class, and consequently, on who falls within this grouping. Various scholars and statisticians have used different definitions and scales which utilize parameters ranging from per capita income, to expenditure and saving trends, to demarcate this section of society from the rest.

The use of income as a defining criterion, often exclusively, has been the dominant economic approach to the Indian middle-class. According to the National Council of Applied Economic Research (NCAER), the country's middle class has grown considerably in the past 25 years, more than tripling to reach 300 million. . According to a combined NCAER-CMCR 2010 report, the Indian middle class - calculated in households - numbered 10.7 million in 2001-2002; which increased to 28.4 million in the year 2009-2010.

3.3 Composition of the new Indian Middle class

Income Based

A picture of the composition of the middle class can be seen via E Shridharan's (2010:411-414) categorization . He uses MISH (Market Information Survey of Households) data which looks at, the middle classes as intermediate income groups in non-manual occupations, situated between a tiny, rich upper class and a majority of low income and manual occupation groups. (Ibid)

According to the MISH there are 5 income groups based on annual income as reported by the head of the household.

- high (above Rs. 140,000)
- upper middle (Rs. 105,001 to Rs. 140,000)
- middle (Rs. 70,001 to Rs. 105,000)
- lower middle (Rs. 35,001 to Rs. 70,000)
- lower (up to Rs. 35,000)

Shridharan , calls the high income group the 'elite middle class', he combines high and upper middle class into the 'expanded middle class' and finally combining the top three income groups , he labels it the 'broadest middle class'

Data shows that both in rural areas and urban areas, in the top three income categories there has been a marked increase in number of households, from the year 1990 to 1999. However there has been a decline in the number of households in the lower two income categories.

The broadest middle class counted only 26% of the population in 1998-99. While the elite counted for 6% of the population in the same year. Of the 26% broadest middle class - salary earners were 35% (102 million people) The self-employed totalled 70 million (or 24% of this broadest middle class). Cultivators, the emerging agricultural middle class in the rural areas constituted a further 26% (75 million people) of this broadest middle class.

Consumption based

That the new Indian middle class has become consumption-oriented is now a well-established fact. These are visible in the discretionary spending on non-essential goods like branded clothes and gadgets, packaged foods and credit cards, to give just a few examples.

India's shift to a consumer society will only accelerate as more people become connected. (Mackenzie Report, 2010) and this connectivity has started happening.

Combined Income and aspiration based

A Mackenzie study done in 2010, also talks about different groups of seekers earning annually between 2,00,000 and 5,00,000 rupees and strivers with incomes of between 5,00,000 and 1 million rupees who will become India's huge new middle class. Strivers, the upper end of the middle class, tend to be senior government officials, managers of large business, professionals and rich farmers. This is the group that has transnational linkages.

To put it in a nutshell, the new middle class is not only much larger than the old middle class, but it is much more heterogeneous, including a range of social groups and communities including lower castes and previously marginalized groups. The above glimpses of the numerical strength and social composition of the new Indian middle class help us to understand its place within the dynamics of transnationalism. One can say that among the many categories within the new middle class, only the relatively wealthy categories are able to leverage the advantages of transnational networks.

3.4 Evaluating the effect of transnationalism

To gauge the effect of transnationalism and transmigration on this section of the Indian middle class, it needs to be evaluated across various domains:

- economic domain, which involves understanding how remittances and class differences in migration affect development

- political domain including role of the state and boundaries in political affiliations

social domain the changes in social life, family and kinship bonds and gender relations
cultural and religious domain where norms, values and movements come into play

Economic Impact

Remittances from abroad reflect the strength and spread of transnational financial networks. Both professional and semi-skilled and unskilled labor remit money. According to the World Bank report 2010, India is the largest recipient of international remittances in the world. In terms of the percentage of GDP, remittances equaled about 3 percent in 2003 with the sharpest increase in transfers during the period 1991-1997. This trend has only gone to sharply increase up to USD 46.4 billion during 2008-09 from USD 21.1 billion in the year 2004-05 (ibid). RBI (2006) suggests that 35% of international remittance flows originated in the Middle Eastern Region, 35% in North America, 20% in Europe and 10% in other countries.

Remittances not only benefit individual families enabling them to achieve economic security and social mobility but also enable regional development in certain districts and states where migration is high, like Kerala, Punjab, Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh.

Transnationalism by enabling chain migration and employment, ie migrants helping relatives and friends to follow them, enhances the flow and impact of remittances. The logic of transnational economy is to recruit qualified personnel irrespective of location, race and gender. Thus, with the increasing presence of middle class women in the skilled professional work force, they enter into the transnational economy and the enhanced household income has its role in wealth generation and social mobility of the family.

The Ministry of Overseas Indian Affairs, Govt. of India is encouraging financial flows from emigrants by providing information on and incentivizing investments through organizations like the 'Indian Investment Centre' (ICC) and the Overseas Indian Facilitation Centre They are also changing laws around taxation to account for Indian citizens leaving India in any year for employment abroad (NRIs). The Indian government has enacted the Foreign Exchange Management Act in 2000 which facilitates the transfer of foreign currency especially when it's directed towards the setting up of new businesses locally. The status of students was also changed to that of non-residents allowing them to receive up to US\$ 1 million a year from relatives in India. Specific rules have also been applied to the taxation of remittances such that overseas Indians can receive a 100% tax reduction on exports from Special Economic Zones. Since 2006 India has signed a number of bilateral agreements to avoid double taxation of individuals opening enterprises or moving between India and other countries.

Return migration

There is no longer just a one way movement since Indian professionals abroad are returning to work in India as well bringing with them the foreign expertise, knowledge and more

networking links for India to avail of. Some return for good, starting new enterprises in India, leveraging their transnational networks. Others come for an assignment or a posting. Either way, they manage to set themselves up drawing foreign salaries/income from abroad with the specific conveniences of life styles available in India. This also draws middle class Indians residing in India to partake of the transnational nexus.

Return migration is considered a triple win for the home country. The receiving country is able to fill up its labor shortages while the migrant is able to earn well and upgrade skills while maintaining links within the homeland as well. For the sending country there is a temporary outflow of workers, investment by return migrants and finally upgradation of national skill and knowledge basis. Return migration in addition to bringing monetary benefits, brings back managerial and technical know-how which stimulates economic growth. This in turn attracts more migrants to return, adding to the national repertoire. This creates a cycle which benefits the sending country in the long run with the return of high skilled migrants which can be considered the other plus point of migration after remittance have been already collected.

But this is also dependent on the approach of the government and its policies towards returning migrants. Keeping this in mind and with the goal of reversing the country's brain drain problem to brain gain opportunity the Ministry for Overseas Affairs which was set up in 2004 has introduced many initiatives to facilitate the flow of reverse migration.

Political impact

Politically the phenomenon of transnationalism has exposed middle class Indians to the workings of democracy elsewhere in the world, and made them aware of what they need and want for themselves; this has translated into support for whom they feel are best suited to giving it to them. This political awareness and willingness to engage with electoral politics is a major change in the middle class. Political parties have to become more aware of these emerging desires and cater to the globalized Indian middle class vote bank accordingly.

Since the political and industrial class are very deeply linked in India, the upper middle class and their transnational links are a major source of funding and support for the various political figures and their parties. The recent example of PM Modi going to the US was largely due to the huge international support base that he had there. The political situation in many countries affects the nature and intensity of transnational networks. Thus the Indian middle class looks towards the national government to ensure good relations with other countries and to ensure the safety of their family and financial stakes abroad. As a result the politically inclined New Indian Middle class with its global networks and its international expectations has major political clout within the politics of the country.

Social impact

Socially, India is affected in a big way as a consequence of those who migrate to foreign lands as well as those who come back, and the transnational networks they are able to access. Factors such as social status, marriage alliances, gender roles and public/private expression

are all changing as a result of these global linkages. The practice of maintaining links with family and close relatives across national borders is not only creating a social link, it is becoming incorporated within the identity of those left behind – they have a son/daughter/sister/brother abroad – is an piece of information very easily offered when these people are spoken of, as an indicator of their economic and social status. Older generations are becoming technologically savvy in order to stay in touch with their children and grandchildren. The concurrent prevalence of affordable mobile phones, digital tablets and laptops are all increasingly being used as means to stay in touch with family abroad.

Leaving aging parents in assisted homes is still not an acceptable cultural norm in India – which believes in taking care of its own. However with adult children working and settling abroad, this phenomenon is growing. Since it can prove financially and logistically complicated for the elderly from India to migrate abroad for most middle-income households, there has been an unsurprising increase in senior citizen homes within the country. A few years back this had been a publicly discussed issue with movies being made about changing family roles and bonds due to families becoming more transnationally mobile.

In the case of marriage and migration abroad the new communication channels helps greatly to expanding marital networks but keeping the rule of endogamy intact. Finding a spouse is no longer limited to national boundaries and community marital networks can extend across continents. One only has to scan the matrimonial columns of prominent newspapers to see a plethora of ads asking for or offering an NRI or green card holding spouse. Articles that ran in the DNA Newspaper: –Marriage market’s most unwanted: NRI grooms – U.S. recession drops demand for NRI grooms – reported that in the post-9/11 period which was also followed by the global recession there was a noticeable decline in demand for NRI males among parents in India trying to arrange marriage of daughters. This was primarily due to the fact that families were not sure of the financial viability of grooms from abroad during that period..Marriage with NRIs has in itself over many years brought many issues of deception and abandonment of brides to light, forcing the Indian government to come up with new laws pertaining to child welfare, child custody, registration of NRI weddings etc. Indian government and NGOs on this subject work collaboratively with organizations abroad meant for safeguarding rights of married Indian women staying in that country. In the earlier era issues such as these were never even considered.

For those couples who decide to give birth to and raise children abroad, it has become very common for both sets of grandparents to visit individually, with each set of grandparents staying for up to 6 months. This allows for cheaper child care, and at the same time ensures that childrearing is as close to the Indian style as possible. Additionally grandparents’ presence and support in child rearing also allows both the husband to continue professional obligations and the wife to recuperate after the pregnancy and child birth. In some cases both husband and wife have jobs in which case it is beneficial with grandparents tending to the needs of the newborn, which not only saves money but also ensures a greater trust and comfort at home. Such senior citizens of the Indian middle class can be seen regularly commuting between their home in India and children’s home abroad, usually in the summer months.

3.5 Culture changes in the New Middle Class

Cultural and religious activities of the middle class have not changed significantly. The population has accommodated globalization and everything else that comes with liberalization within the cultural and religious norms. The middle class still saves, but also invests. As well as spends but spending patterns have changed. It spends more money on education, healthcare and various technologies of communication which in a sense is still oriented towards ensuring stability for oneself and the family.

A steady job is still socially desirable yet the field no longer holds as much importance as it did just a few years ago. Gender relations are also noticeably changing with women working out of the home but still being expected to handle the major share of household duties. Men are also increasingly being seen in otherwise female domains such as the studying of Arts and Humanities as well as involving themselves more in child rearing and other responsibilities.

Marriages are still arranged but the onus and freedom of finding a partner is now more in the hands of the individual, within certain parameters. Overall of course there is greater knowledge and to an extent tolerance of the differences that arise through transmigration. However within the Indian context the effect is culturally felt more so by the transmigrant than by the non-migrant.

3.6 Transnational Religion and the New Middle Class

Religion is becoming globalized in every sense of the word. Transmigrant links have ensured that religion of every kind and nature is found in every corner of the world. Religion as a buffer system is the only way of making it relevant to the fast paced lives of the new transmigrational generation. The middle class has availed itself of this phenomenon very fast.

Organized religious agencies are now catering to the not so religiously aware, which means simpler rituals using more accessible materials with a lesser focus on elaborate rituals and dogmas. Religious books are available in English, sermons on digital formats such as CDs and downloads, with online links and even a paraphernalia directed at the consumerist middle class. In fact the youth are the target audience with funky T-shirts, trips to religious places and other pseudo-religious activities which may direct their attention to the religious doctrine. Religion is equally a commodity for sale as well as spiritual balm for those seeking inner peace. One can look at various religious institutions as different companies looking for patronage, and they provide a different amenities for those who are members of their club. All of this needs monetary inflow, and the transnational networks that are maintained by various cultural, linguistic and ethnic groups are definitely a source for this change.

Charity as an extension of the religious mandate is also become a major thrust area for transnational links with the local population. The urban middle class are seen to choose their pet projects which they wish to support and then they will continue to spread the word among their social networks across the globe.

4. ACCESS TO TRANSNATIONAL LINKAGES

For the urban middle class, it is easier to use the linkages available to them because their network is wider and also because either they are professionally skilled or they are studying towards more attractive prospects. As such they are able to harness and leverage these networks towards finding better jobs, seeking higher studies abroad or finding better marriage prospects.

The rural middle class however is still constrained by their lack of skilled knowledge. So, they are unable to really access higher level opportunities outside the country. The nature and structure of their social world across geographies tends to be more horizontal, rather than vertical in terms of social hierarchy. Due to this absence of the dimension of social mobility, most rural middle class get monetary support and ease of access to travel abroad but better job prospects are still difficult. The end result is a relative increase in the quality of lifestyle and opportunities, but the true breakthrough of vertical mobility is out of reach.

The middle classes are seen as the movers and shakers of the economy which results in their linkages being deemed significant. The middle classes are also the source of the skilled labor that aids in the growth of the country. The government and the economy are aided when the transnational linkages of the middle classes are utilized either for economic, social or cultural purposes. This is because transnational links can also be about technical knowhow which can prove to be a critical factor in the growth curve of any nation.

