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Book Review

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Palriwala, R. and Uberoi, P. (eds.) (2008) ***Women and Migration in Asia, Vol. 5: Marriage, Migration and Gender*****, New Delhi, India and Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Sage Publications.**

Mainstream migration studies have by and large been inclined to focus on women either as economic migrants or passive secondary migrants. This approach has tended to rob women's migration decisions and experiences of all agency and emotion, focussing only on the economic motive. Similarly, the discourse on marriage migration, particularly of Asian women over transnational contexts has had a tendency to focus only on victimhood. The present volume of essays on the theme of marriage migration and gender effectively addresses this gap and moves beyond these readings to provide rich and refreshing insights into the various dimensions of marriage migration, such as the active strategizing of marriage to facilitate migration (and vice versa), the complexities of brokering such strategic alliances, and the impact of marriage migration on different aspects of family relationships, among others. Fifth in a series of volumes on Women and Migration in Asia, the book edited by Palriwala and Uberoi is an outcome of a conference held in 2003 on the larger theme. As mentioned earlier, the papers presented in this volume deal with the issue of marriage migration in much broader way than has been customary. More specifically, the papers explore systematically how marriage itself may result in migration, how migration strategies increasingly include marriage, the manner in which marriages involving migration are arranged, the nature of marriage transactions in transnational contexts, and the strains of marriage migration.

The twelve papers are arranged into four sections, each detailing one of the above mentioned themes.

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These are preceded by a fairly detailed and analytical essay by the editors exploring the links between marriage and migration. This essay, forming the introductory section, is easily the most discursive and presents useful insights into the question of marriage migration from Asian perspectives. Examining in depth the need to rethink marriage migration, the authors stress how such migration may enable adjustments in the traditional systems of kinship and marriage leading either to a greater rigidity or a flexibility in the same. Similarly, marriage migration has the potential to impact the division of work within the household, the marital equation. and the intergenerational relationships in both positive as well as negative ways. Marriages strategized to include migration and vice versa could also influence issues such as the relations of intermarrying families as well as other aspects of family life that had earlier on been taken for granted.

Commenting on the comparative perspective enabled by a collective reading of the essays in the volume, Palriwala and Uberoi argue that it throws light on how marriage remains invested with immense cultural value over much of Asia, demonstrates ably that the boundaries between the marriage and labor markets tend to be fluid and porous, shows that marriages involving transnational migration are the social and spatial strategies for upward mobility (often purely economic) and that kinship and marriage practices are accordingly either adjusted or bypassed to suit these strategies. Further, the transactions and display that typically accompany Asian marriages may be exaggerated in the context of marriages involving migration and hitherto may have been read as a comment on the changing status of women in particular social contexts. Thus while exorbitant dowry and high value gifts from bride givers to bride takers define daughters as liabilities, similarly spiralling bride price flowing from bride takers to bride givers have been seen as increasing value of women. In all, the authors argue effectively for the need to go beyond these readings towards a more nuanced understanding of both opportunity and adversity and of victimhood and agency that marriage migration ultimately entails. The opening essay thus sets the theme for the rest of the book and is a valuable piece of scholarship on the subject of marriage migration, succinctly introducing the main themes covered in the volume against a backdrop of the existing research perspectives on these issues.

Three essays on the theme of marriage as a migration strategy follow the introductory section and constitute the second section of the volume. Common to all three is the central thesis of marriage as a potent strategy to migrate and thus access an enhanced social standing within the community as well as a (perceived) set of better opportunities at the place of destination by individuals and communities. Three essays on the theme of marriage as a migration strategy follow the introductory section and constitute the second section of the volume. Common to all three is the central thesis of marriage as a potent strategy to migrate and thus access an enhanced social standing within the community as well as a (perceived) set of better opportunities at the place of destination by individuals and communities. While two of the essays in this section focus on marriage strategies that lead to international migration, the opening essay by Delia Davin examines marriage markets within China. Davin shows how the marriage field has enlarged in the wake of economic reforms and concludes that the uneven levels of development in rural China may have led to the outmigration of women from the potentially unattractive poorer areas (usually inland) into a widening marriage circle that includes

matrimonial homes in better off regions (coastal) by grooms who cannot afford the prevailing (higher) bride price in these more prosperous provinces. This may eventually have implications in terms of an ever declining sex ratio enabled by an uncompensated outflow of women from poorer regions. This trend is exacerbated even as migrant brides attempt to create social networks to battle their isolation by recruiting women from their natal villages and kin group as brides into the husband's kin group and village.

Rosario's essay on the marriage migration of Filipino women provides an extremely interesting insight into the manner in which these allegedly passive mail order brides actually actively strategize their (mail order) marriages by using the stereotype of the loyal Asian "babe" steeped in traditional family values to their advantage while securing for themselves the enhanced status that comes from acquiring an American husband. In this they draw upon a pre-existing cultural logic of desire that privileges "white love" or the inter racial tie between a white man and a Filipina. This essay for one provides an excellent example of how the difference in perspective can enable the same social phenomena to be viewed as victimhood in one case and agency in another. In fact both Davin and Rosario's essays, among others in the book, illustrate the non-dichotomous nature of agency and victimhood where one may ultimately enable the other.

Kalpagam similarly explores the phenomenon of American *varan* (literally boon) marriages among the Tamil Brahmin community who use such matrimonial strategies to expand their economic opportunities and enhance their social standing against a backdrop of dilution of social and political clout of the community as a result of the largely anti Brahmin Dravidian movement in Tamil society. Kalpagam's study shows how these matches are invested with immense prestige and provide an opportunity for the community to reclaim its standing and to widen opportunities through such alliances. An obvious fallout is the gross exaggeration of the assymetrical relationship between wife givers and wife takers under the tradition of *sammandi mariyadai* (respect for in-laws). While deeply insightful in their own right, one cannot quell a small disquiet at the privileging of the non-Asian or Western so deeply embedded into the psyche that it speaks of the continued colonisation of mindsets among the respondents in both studies (also in Gallo's essay in a later section) .

Typical of the Asian context is the complicated process of using agents or go-betweens to arrange marriages by matching prospective grooms and brides according to a set of social and economic criteria. Such marriages may easily be regarded as forced from Western and non-Asian perspectives. The two categories may at times but not always overlap. The changing and increasingly commercialised ways of brokering marriages constitute the central theme of the essays by Chia-wen Lu, Blanchet, and Gallo. The increasingly active role played by women, often migrant brides themselves, in brokering marriages is brought out by all three authors. Interestingly, while Rosario points to the use of cyberspace to negotiate and transact such marriages by Filipinas, Lu reports the re-emphasising of local networks by Taiwanese men to achieve the same end. Blanchet writes on the trafficking of Bangladeshi brides to northern India, pointing out the existence of separate markets for prostitution and marriage, even though at times the latter may leak into the former. This is also brought out in Lu's study with reference to the labor and marriage markets. The similarities in the traditions of *bandi bou* (captive wife) in the place of origin (Bangladesh) and *Kharidaien*

aurat (purchased wife) in the place of destination (Uttar Pradesh), together with other enabling forces, make for greater acceptability and continuance of such streams of traffic. The helplessness of the trafficked bride in the new spatial and social contexts is dwelt upon. In both cases of cross border marriage the role of dalals or agents who act as negotiators and traffickers with definite commercial interests is emphasised. However Blanchet does note the thinning out of adversity propelled marriage migration in favor of labor migration from the origin areas in Bangladesh. Interestingly however, Bangladeshi women continue to be trafficked by agents and dalals even from the new locales of their labor migration in India. It is tempting to draw similarities of this to the experience of southeast Asian and Chinese women as labor migrants prior to their marriage migration. The element of force and subterfuge that accompanies the experience of the Bangladeshi subjects separates their experience from those of the subjects of Lu's study.

Gallo's essay that forms the last one in this section illustrates how early streams of migrant Malyali women to Italy acted as agents facilitating marriage migration of their kin to Italy. The sense of duty to the community and the responsibility to enhance family standing is an important motive to which the respondents return to describe and explain their situation. This obviously necessitates the transfer of resources from the women migrants to their family, including the family of the husband's kin, in ways that may strengthen the marital equation while straining the familial bond.

Essays by Sheel and Biao deal with the issues of marriage transactions within transnational marriages. Focussing on the migrant Indian community in Canada, Sheel's essay brings out several significant insights. Among these are the manner in which ostentation, display, and transactions form an important way to display ethnic affluence and how practices such as dowry are increasingly strategized to expand the bride's natal family's spatial and economic opportunities thus making her a conduit for the channelizing of resources to suit this ploy. Biao, commenting on gender, migration, and dowry practices among information technology (IT) professionals, demonstrates the highly gendered patterns of such migration due to its association with the practice of body shopping which by its very nature tends to exclude women. Yet, the importance of women's labor in the household to maintain these migrant streams of IT professionals and the channelizing of financial resources through the practice of dowry in according a high cultural value to such professionals in the marriage market are among the points discussed.

The final section of the volume contains four essays that discuss the strains of marriage migration among different communities and contexts. Charlesly highlights the strain created by marriages involving *ghar damaads* (literally resident sons-in-law) among the Pakistani migrant community in Britain. The anxiety and vulnerability of the British Pakistani women who undergo marriages with Pakistani spouses for a variety of familial reasons is discussed. The burden of negotiating issues of masculinity and authority in a transformed and unfamiliar setting far from the support of the husband's own kin group creates frustrations among the *ghar damaads* by offering their wives a support system that normally patrivirilocal rules of marriage and kinship would dilute. This can lead to tensions in the marital tie. Strategized as a means to migrate and acquire citizenship, many migrant males inflict violence on their spouses and may move out of

such marriages or import wives from Pakistan once citizenship is acquired.

The manner in which women from the Sikh community have resorted to transnational migration at different points of their life course in order to circumvent the stigma of widowhood or separation forms the theme of Mand's essay. Drawing upon the experience of Sikh migrants to Tanzania and Britain, the author demonstrates how old women may negotiate the vulnerabilities of age by migrating into their children's home, and how separated women choose to stay on in the place of marriage migration even after the marriage itself is dissolved simply to escape the social stigma that would undoubtedly ensue in their natal homes as well as to provide themselves and their children with better social and economic opportunities. The exercise of the women's agency is implicated in these migration decisions.

In an insightful study, Abraham explores how the onus of maintaining their status as part of a model migrant community, combined with the existing laws governing international migration, may inadvertently combine to make women of the Indian diaspora deeply vulnerable to domestic violence in the United States. The role of nongovernmental organisations such as Sakhi in addressing these issues is highlighted. Similarly, the main themes of Singh's essay are the questions of child custody and the violation of child rights in the case of parental child abduction that may follow the breakdown of transnational marriages. The last two essays pointedly make clear the need to interpret and modify existing legislation to address the especial vulnerabilities of women.

Taken together the essays in the book provide important insights into the different aspects of marriage migration from a sociological perspective. In this, the book is a valuable addition to the emerging feminist discourse on migration. However, a stronger focus on the spatial could have greatly enriched the appeal of this volume. As is now well known and repeatedly re-emphasised in the volume, marriage is an important cause of migration within the patrilocal traditions of kinship over much of Asia. In such contexts, typically marriage would entail the bride's movement away from her natal home into the matrimonial home among her husband's kin. By ordaining relocation in a spatial context which is in all likelihood unfamiliar to the new bride, such marriage migration is an important spatial strategy in restricting her mobility, manufacturing compliance and ultimately maintaining the unequal gender relations within a patriarchal kinship system. A greater emphasis on the manner in which the changed spatial contexts, both absolute and relational, resulting from marriage migration, impinge on the everyday life worlds of migrant spouses or alternately, on the manner in which migrant spouses seek to recreate or reproduce certain aspects of their natal homes in the praxis of their mundane day-to-day life, either as a resistance or as a coping strategy within the new and not yet familiar spatial contexts could have enriched the work. While the introductory essay by the editors discusses this theme, a resonance of the same among the essays that comprise the volume is weak (the essays by Blanchet, Mand, Abraham and Charlesly do touch upon the theme but stop short of allowing it to become the main focus of their essay). Perhaps the disciplinary affiliations that emphasise society over space together with the place of spatial studies in the current hierarchies of knowledge production may have combined to unwittingly produce this gap.

Nonetheless by fleshing out the hitherto invisible migrant bride (or groom) and trying to uncover the reasons, strategies and negotiations that accompany the decision to marry and migrate, the authors have successfully brought to the fore themes generally untouched by migration studies from a purely demographic and largely androcentric perspective. Moving beyond the almost stereotypical images of the passive, victimised, perhaps mail-ordered Asian brides, the contributors have demonstrated in their essays how such brides use marriage as a strategy to access better opportunities and renegotiate their status in the kin group. The traditional mechanism of arranging marriages together with its various agents and actors is not abandoned in the case of transnational marriages (across national and often non-Asian contexts). Rather, it is extended and modified to suit such nuptial choices. Similarly, the economic liberalization and globalization witnessed over the past decade may have actually redefined marriage transactions and the pomp and display of wealth rather than diluting them. In fact, the latter seems to be fast becoming an expression of ethnic identity in a foreign locale.

The volume will be of immense interest to a variety of scholars and activists engaging with issues of gender and society in their work, particularly those seeking an Asian perspective to the same.

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