The Sikh community is one of the largest groups of Indians abroad and many studies of these migrants have been conducted. The Sikh temples which are called gurdwaras are seen at all the places where Sikh migrants have settled. As other Indian migrants, Sikhs too have struggled to maintain their social and cultural customs in the societies they have moved to. Inspite of facing difficulties, Sikh migrants have created a synthesis of their own culture with the culture of their place of emigration. This hybridity in migrants’ culture brings us an understanding of the migrants as Diaspora who are in a in-between world among their place of origin and their present residence.

This book focuses on the social and cultural practices of Sikh Diaspora in Japan which is not large when compared to other places.

The gurdwaras located in different cities like Kobe and Tokyo, are described in this volume as not only religious places but also socializing spaces where the Sikh culture thrives. The two gurdwaras represent diverse social contexts of Sikh migrants in Japan showing myriad features.

The volume shows how the Sikh Diaspora in Japan have struggled in their new world and created their own thriving culture through global and local networks.

Masako Azuma is a lecturer at the Faculty of International Studies, Kindai University, Osaka, Japan. She started working on Sikh migrants in Japan in 2004 and got her Ph.D. degree in sociology from Panjab University, Chandigarh, India in 2012. She is now working on transborder practices and experiences of South Asian migrants in Canada.
Sikh Diaspora in Japan

MASAKO AZUMA
Contents

Preface 7

1. Introduction 9

2. History of Migration in Japan and Case Studies of Sikh Migrants 44

3. Problems and Coping Mechanisms of the Sikh Diaspora in Japan 72


5. Conclusion 139

Bibliography 161

Index 171
It has been more than ten years since I started working on Sikh migrants to Japan for my Masters course. Because of the strict control of Japanese immigration bureau, many of Sikhs around Tokyo whom I had interviewed subsequently left Japan and returned to their home in India. Although some description in this book might appear dated, especially around Tokyo, it still can explain the true experiences of the Sikh diaspora in Japan.

The Sikh gentleman whom I met first in Japan surprised me due to his appearance of no turban and no beard, because I had believed that all Sikhs wear 5 Ks from a book I had read about Sikhism published in Japan. The surprise motivated me to study the reality of Sikhs in Japan, on which not much light had been shed till then. In the course of my fieldwork I found an abundance of data indicating the rich social and cultural diversity of the Sikh diaspora in Japan.

Looking into their social networks taught me that the strong ties with their relatives and friends were a gateway to a better quality of life in the global and glocal contexts. At the same time, it made me re-think of Japanese society, which tends to put more importance on individual responsibility and deals with family and relatives as annoying matters. Of course, we can see various designs in human relationships, however, my Sikh friends in Japan reminded me that family is one of the fundamental units of a happy society.

In my fieldwork, I also met some Japanese people who had become close friends of Sikh migrants. They narrated their
experiences of the internal migrant who shifted to present residence from other part of Japan. They also had overcome difficulties and problems as a stranger who had emigrated to a new place. Although there are many internal migrants in Japan, it is quite difficult to find out people who can have sympathy for international migrants from the country they have never been to. However, some Sikhs could meet these Japanese who kindly took care of them remembering their own experiences decades back. This also reminded me of migration history within Japan, though I couldn’t describe it in detail in this book.

More often, international migrants got close to Sikhs than Japanese in many situations. Especially, migrants originally from South Asia including Sikhs could share cultural base in their daily life. The South Asian network, which I could find through my research let me confirm that national boundary does not synchronize cultural boundary, that is, the cultural sphere does go beyond the national boundary. And the migrant is the one who has created hybrid culture through their transborder experiences.

Thanks to many informants whom I met through my research on Sikh migrants in Japan, I could hear true life stories, which made me learn of hybridity and creativity of culture.

Finally, I must acknowledge all professors, colleagues, friends, and family who motivated me all the time since my postgraduate days. I also express my gratitude to Manohar Publishers & Distributors and their editorial staff who helped me a lot in the course of this publication.

This publication was supported by a Kindai University research grant.

Osaka  
April 2018  

Masako Azuma
CHAP TER 1

Introduction

In the past decade or so the notion of diaspora has taken over the imagination of a variety of groups, be they academics, social scientists, policy makers and even members of minority ethnic groups in different countries who see themselves as diaspora. As a result there has been an explosion of writings on the diaspora phenomenon with social scientists outlining countless features of diaspora. It is now a term being used to describe nearly any group which is considered ‘deterritorialized’ or ‘transnational’, or which has roots in a land other than which it currently resides, and whose social, economic and political networks traverse the borders of nations and span the globe (Vertovec, 1999). One such group is the Sikhs who have become the subject of many a diasporic analysis. This research too is an attempt to study the Sikh diaspora. However, unlike the previous works on the same subject, we shall focus on the Sikh diaspora in a setting which has not received enough attention thus far, namely, Japan. For a long time the term ‘diaspora’ was used in connection mainly with the Jews who are dispersed all over the world after being driven away from their place of ethnic origin. However, in its new avatar the term is used to denote any migrant who lives in a place which is different from his or her birth place (Gilroy, 1993). The largest amount of diaspora studies have dealt with migrants in
Europe and North America (e.g. Schiller and Fouron, 2001; Levitt, 2001; Shukla, 2003; Kearny, 2004) probably because those areas have various and large migrant communities and have tried to manage harmonious coexistence for both local people and migrants. On the other hand, diaspora studies on other regions like Asia, South America, and Oceania are relatively less though these areas also have received a large number of migrants and have faced the necessity of making policies for accommodating different ethnic groups who have migrated to these lands and are trying to co-exist with the local population.

When we look at studies on Sikh migrants, we can find works which see Sikhs as diaspora (Cohen, 1997, 2008; Tatla, 1999; Shani, 2008). However, as has been the trend in diaspora studies, these also focus on Sikhs settled in the UK, the USA and Canada where the number of Sikh migrants is concentrated. The few studies of Sikh diaspora in Oceania and Asian countries do not go beyond short articles (Sandhu and Mani, 2006, 2008; McLeod, 2007).

In Japan there has been an increase in the number of migrants consisting of various ethnic origins for the last three decades. It has been seen that diaspora groups are incorporated in Japanese society, though it is difficult to say that they are considered sufficiently as members of Japanese society. Sikhs in Japan on whom this research will focus are one of the migrant groups whose study will hopefully throw some light on the social and cultural practices of diaspora in general and the Sikh diaspora in particular.

DIASPORA

The word ‘diaspora’ is derived from the Greek preposition dia (across or over) and the verb speiro (to sow or scatter seeds). Originally, diaspora was used to describe the Jews living in
INTRODUCTION

exile from the homeland of Palestine. In other words, diaspora suggested a dislocation from the nation state or geographical location of origin and relocation in one or more nation states, territories, or countries. Not only for Jews but also for Africans, Palestinians and Armenians, being a diaspora had involved their collective trauma and banishment, where they dreamt of home but lived in exile (Cohen, 1997; Braziel and Mannur, 2003). As Braziel and Mannur (2003) put it, diaspora can be seen as a naming of the ‘other’ which has historically referred to displaced communities of people who have been dislocated from their native homeland through the movements of migration, immigration, or exile. Since the 1990s, theorizations of diaspora have emerged in various fields like literature, sociology, anthropology, area studies, ethnic studies, etc. It is often used as a catch-all phrase to speak of and for all movements, and for all dislocations, even symbolic ones (Braziel and Mannur, 2003) and we can find plenty of discussion on the context of the recent usage of diaspora and the various perspectives on it.

For long the term ‘diaspora’ has been associated with the concepts of suffering, victimization and isolation due to its biblical origin. However, in the past decade, the connotation of the word has changed to include the processes of empowerment, enrichment and expansion. As Ang (2007) explains it, now the flow of people, cultures, and politics are very much associated with the rising significance of transnational migration. This is the consequence of the heightened process of globalization in the closing decades of the twentieth century. In this context, the term ‘diaspora’ has increasingly lost its paradigmatic association with the notion of exile from home and the myth of return and has become much more widely used to describe the condition and experience of dispersion which may not necessarily involve trauma and marginalization.
The understanding of the term began from defining it as the scattering of the Jews to countries outside of Palestine after the Babylonian captivity. However, it went on to get new meanings subsequently. For instance, it is seen as a dispersion of something that was originally localized (as a people or language or culture), or as spreading of people originally belonging to one nation or having a common culture to other places. This involves the movement, migration, or scattering of a people away from an established or ancestral homeland, implying people settled far from their ancestral homelands or simply put, any group migration or flight from a country or region. A common theme is the ambivalent relationship that many diasporic peoples have both to their host country and their homeland. The homeland is often remembered with fondness or longing, and the ‘hostland’ is often seen as intolerant or alienating; but also people may see opportunity in the new country and choose not to return to their homeland even when they are able to do so. The host country, after all, becomes home in a way, and exerts a lot of influence on people even as they retain allegiance to their older, ancestral home (Cohen, 1997).

Parrenas and Siu (2007) define diaspora as ongoing and contested process of subject formation embedded in a set of cultural and social relations that are sustained simultaneously with the ‘homeland’ (real or imagined), place of residence, and compatriots or co-ethnics dispersed elsewhere. They explain that diaspora entails displacement from the homeland under the nexus of an unequal global political and economic system, the simultaneous experience of alienation and the maintenance of affiliation to both the country of residence and the homeland and the sense of collective consciousness and connectivity with other people displaced from the homeland across the diasporic terrain.
These are simultaneous relations and seen in everyday practices of sociality, collective memory, economic exchange, and the work of cultural imagination and production.

Goh (2004) focuses on the features of diasporic space and time. Space and time intersect in multiple and complex ways in the logic of postcolonial cultures which cause identification of definitive moments of social influence and transformation. For instance, the production of a specific spatial trope; the church, the public square or garden, the town hall, the ghetto, the red-light district; is not confined to the period of actual physical construction, but incorporates the entire span of cultural influence and cultural production. This is historical cultural influence of a broad variety which recent diasporas have. He adds that these diasporic space and time cannot be regarded as isolated phenomena, but must be seen as an interactive space where the speed, volume, diachronicity, and diversity of subjective transactions and interventions constantly relate and renegotiate the social sphere and its significance.

Bathia and Ram (2001) note that the age of transnational migrations, border crossing and diaspora should be examined in terms of how individuals living with hybridized and hyphenated identities in borderland cultures and diasporic communities coordinate their incompatible and often conflicting cultural and personal positions. Gupta and Ferguson (1992) write that ‘in a world of diaspora, transnational culture flows, and mass movements of populations, old-fashioned attempts to map the globe as a set of culture regions or homelands are bewildered by a dazzling array of postcolonial simulacra, doublings and redoubling as India and Pakistan apparently reappear in postcolonial simulation in London . . . ’ (p. 10). The writings stress the deterritorialized aspects of culture and boundaries and hold
that fixed locales like society, community and nation cannot be the frame of culture. Further they explain that the concept and the boundary of ‘culture’ itself have a possibility to give essential comprehension of ‘culture’ and conclude that the end result of migrations is hybridity of culture. From their discussion we can consider deterritorialization and hybridity as the main features of diaspora.

In common sense terms ‘deterritorialization’ may mean taking the control and order away from a land or place (territory) that is already established. Another general meaning describes it as any process that decontextualizes a set of relations, rendering them virtual and preparing them for more distant actualizations. Anthropologically, when referring to culture the term is used to refer to a weakening of ties between culture and place. This means the removal of cultural subjects and objects from a certain location in space and time. It implies that certain cultural aspects tend to transcend specific territorial boundaries in a world that consists of things fundamentally in motion. On the other hand, hybridity means a thing derived from heterogeneous sources. Owing to the apparent lack of an essentialized or fixed identity, the hybrid stands as the perfect means for the understanding of pluralism, ambivalence and nonfixity. Because of its neither-nor nature, its intrinsic opposition to fixed binaries lets it remain in a perpetual state of flux. In the context of diaspora it involves the notion of re-creation of new meanings, practices, symbols, etc. Both the terms ‘deterritorialization’ and ‘hybridity’ are attractive for those interested in questions of identity and the constitution of subjectivity.

Mentioning that ‘diaspora’ is the term often used today to describe practically any population which is considered ‘deterritorialized’ or ‘transnational’, and whose social, economic and political networks traverse the borders of
nation states, Vertovec (2000) reveals three meaning of ‘diaspora’: (1) diaspora as a social form, (2) diaspora as a type of consciousness, and (3) diaspora as a mode of cultural production.

Diaspora as a social form is characterized by a relationship between (a) globally dispersed yet collectively self-identified ethnic group; (b) the territorial states and contexts where such groups reside; and (c) the homeland states and contexts whence they or their forebears came (Vertovec, 2000: 144).

Diaspora as a type of consciousness is a particular kind of awareness, which is characterized by duality, paradox and multi-locality. It includes, on the one hand, a sense of discrimination and isolation and on the other, also a positive sense of belonging to a particular identity. It is seen in current literature of diaspora among contemporary transnational communities that puts greater emphasis on features concomitant with a variety of experiences, a state of mind and a sense of identity (ibid.: 146-7).

Diaspora as a mode of cultural production means the world-wide flow of cultural objects, images and meanings resulting in variegated processes of creolization, back-and-forth transferences, mutual influences, new contestations, negotiations and constant transformation (ibid.: 153). This is similar to the example given by Stuart Hall (1990) who talks about diaspora identities as those which are constantly producing and reproducing themselves anew, through transformation and difference. Further, Vertovec believes that to grasp the myriad changes among diasporic communities, we need to take account of (a) facets of historically conditioned structure or context and (b) the processes of conscious intervention of social actors through mediation, negotiation, and contestation within and between self-defined social groups (2000).
TYPOLOGY OF DIASPORAS

When considering the most prevalent concept of diaspora, the Jews have usually been selected to illustrate the argument. However, Cohen (1997, 2008) gives credible meanings of diaspora, and proposes a typology of diaspora. He sees a common element in all forms of diaspora; these are people who live outside their ‘natal (or imagined natal) territories’ and recognize that their traditional homelands are reflected deeply in the languages they speak, the religions they adopt, and the cultures they produce (1997). Cohen categorizes diasporas into (1) victim diasporas, (2) labour diasporas, (3) imperial diasporas, (4) trade and business diasporas, and (5) cultural or deterritorialized diasporas (1997, 2008). A victim diaspora is meant in the sense of dispersal following a traumatic event in the homeland, to two or more foreign destinations. A labour diaspora indicates indentured workers employed in the colonial possessions and furthermore, people who shifted to other countries in order to get the opportunity for jobs including those that occur after colonial era. An imperial diaspora includes migrants from imperial countries to the colonies for furthering their imperialistic plans of expansion. A trade and business diaspora implies merchants who migrated to other countries to expand their trading business. A cultural or deterritorialized diaspora is characterized by four features: evidence of cultural retention of original culture; symbolic interest in retaining links to original countries; cultural artefacts and products showing shared concern between old and new countries; and behaving in ways consistent with the idea of deterritorialized diaspora. Cohen uses one or two particular groups as exemplary cases for each type. Africans and Armenians are shown to be analogous to victim diaspora while Indians are shown as examples of a labour diaspora. Trade diaspora have been
typified by the Chinese and Lebanese, the British have been represented as an imperial diaspora, and the peoples of the Caribbean abroad are characterized as a deterritorialized diaspora. However, it must be remembered that these are overlapping categories and some groups take dual or multiple forms while others change their character over time.

For Cohen, religions generally do not constitute diasporas in and of themselves, though Judaism and Sikhism are obvious exceptions. Because religions usually span more than one ethnic group and, in the case of faiths that have come to be widely spread around the globe, religions normally do not seek to return to, or to recreate, a homeland. Among Sikhs also there are some persons who converted to Sikhism under the new religious movement in the US, the UK and Canada since the 1960s (Coney, 2000) though they do not have ethnic origin in Punjab. However, in this book we will not discuss the details of these *gora* Sikhs. With broad agreement with Cohen, Vertovec (2000) suggests that Hindus too represent a kind of special case akin to Judaism and Sikhism.

Lee (2004) discusses three types of diaspora communities based on three types of psychological states, or forms of consciousness, which are: (1) idealization of homeland (nostalgia), (2) multicultural manifestation, and (3) transitional/transformational identity politics. These three types are used not to limit the diasporic experience strictly, but rather, to better understand the diasporic condition. In the conceptualization of idealization of homeland, the diaspora is defined largely in terms of distance from its homeland, with all the attendant implications of removal or exclusion and geographical, cultural, and psychical dislocation. This homeland idealism posits the homeland myth as a powerful and effective motivator of diasporic experiences (Lee, 2004: 54). In the diaspora in multicultural manifestation, with cultural pluralism fast becoming the norm for most societies,