

Roots & Routes

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Photo credit Dr. K. Ranju Rangan

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Editor's Note



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Dear Readers,
Greetings of the New Year!

Positive news regarding the rollout of coronavirus vaccines is coming out from various countries. Hopefully, it will provide the chance for all of us to resume our lives back to the 'normal'. However, it is imperative to mention that the previous year has taught us that the 'normal' functioning of the migration governance was deficient in ensuring implementation on the ground. The existing vulnerabilities of the migrants got exacerbated due to the pandemic, and the migration governance mechanism failed to provide solace to the people. We hope that the respective governments and non-state actors will start prioritizing the evidence-based data for ensuring the migration governance based on the principles of safe, orderly, regular and dignified migration.

Continuing its legacy with immense happiness, GRFDT brings to you its organisational Newsletter "Roots and Routes" for January 2021. The newsletter contains two reports, one movie review and an interview. The report titled "Broader and Nuanced Approach Needed for Emphasizing Positive Aspects of Migration", based on the inputs from the webinar on Objective 17 of the Global Compact for Migration (GCM), has been authored by Subhadip Mukherjee. Moreover, another report titled "Recognition of Skills: Just a Piece of Paper or Life-Changing Opportunity", based on the webinar on Objective 18 of the Global Compact for Migration (GCM), has been reported by Snehal. In addition to the GCM webinar reports, the newsletter also contains a 'Movie Review' titled "'Namesake' beautifully depicts the untold lives of Immigrants...!". Our Media Outreach Portal- "[The Migration News: People on the Move](#)" has published all these write-ups mentioned above. This issue also includes an Interview of Gopinath Nair, a migrant achiever, showcasing the challenges usually faced by migrants in the Gulf while also bringing the positive side of migration, thereby providing real-life accounts of his extended stay in the Gulf region.

We are looking forward to reading your inputs or insights on our newsletter's content, and hence feel free to email us at editorinchief@grfdt.com for any query or suggestions.

Happy Reading!

Abhishek Yadav

Broader and Nuanced Approach Needed for Emphasizing Positive Aspects of Migration

A panel discussion on GCM Objective 17, which aims at eliminating all forms of discrimination and promoting evidence-based public discourse to shape perceptions of migration, was held on 19th January 2021. The event was jointly organized by Global Research Forum on Diaspora and Transnationalism (GRFDT), Migrant Forum in Asia (MFA), Cross Regional Center for Refugees and Migrants, and The Civil Society Action Committee. The participants included six experts on migration who are involved in different professions. The session was moderated by Ms. Paddy Siyanga Knudsen who is a Migration Governance analyst.

Need for a social and legal approach to tackle xenophobia

The panel discussion began with Mr. Vasco Malta, who focused on the relation between the COVID-19 pandemic and the discrimination faced by the migrants. Mr. Malta, who is Head of Mission, International Organization for Migration (IOM), Portugal, pointed out that discrimination has been exacerbated due to the misinformation regarding COVID-19.

Since the beginning of the pandemic, numerous xenophobic incidents, hate speeches based on their real and perceived national origins have been reported to the IOM and UN.

***“We have received reports of refusal to sit beside people belonging to certain ethnicities on public transports. Kids are being bullied in school. Employees are being sacked based on their assumed nationality”:*Mr. Vasco Malta.**

Mr. Malta further pointed out that businesses belonging to certain racial groups are being forced to shut down. Migrants are suffering from discrimi-

nation in the context of healthcare, socio-economic and legal issues. There has been a massive rise in xenophobic rhetoric against migrants on social media.

He suggested two lines of interventions as the solution. First, a solid legal policy framework aiming to prevent xenophobia and hate crimes against migrants should be adopted. Second, a community-based approach to reduce prejudice and facilitating social cohesion should be cultivated. We need to urgently combat xenophobia and hate speech in online forums and promote evidence-based and stigma-free language in all communications.

Civil society organizations have to be involved

Ms. Elena D’Anna, the Communications Officer, No Cap Association, works at promoting fair working conditions. She elaborated on the multi-parameter ethic label, which certifies products that don’t involve any exploitation of workers, thus reinforcing worker’s rights.

The certification starts with the exchange of documents with an enterprise that is followed by inspections both by No Cap inspectors and DQA experts, a third-party entity authorized by the Ministry of Agriculture. If the first parameter of this label, the ethical work condition, is fulfilled, the product obtains the No Cap label. There are other parameters as well.

“If the product obtains No Cap Ethic label, No Cap work is then split into two levels-on one level, it ensures services related to the workers such as free accommodation, transportation to the place of work, legal assistance, and medical visits to the

workers. The enterprises are themselves encouraged to employ workers, both Italian and migrants, who have been victims of gang mastering or human trafficking. The other level is the distribution side. We promote No Cap products both on the communication and the commercial side, thanks to relations we've been building for the past 10 years with fair trade shops and national and international big distribution channels:Ms. Elena D'Anna

Ms. D' Anna believes that No Cap has been truly revolutionary because it goes from activities on the field to relations with other actors of civil society. It has helped a lot of migrants to be regularized in the Italian territory, moving them from ghettos to decent accommodations.

Individual and family conversations need to be examined

Ms. Eva Garzón, the Migration and Displacement Lead at Oxfam Intermon, stated that though the official data tells us that 3.5 percent of the world population are international migrants, within the public discourse it is assumed to be about 40 to 60 percent.

"A false narrative has been created contrary to the evidence. That's why it is important to bring the migration debate back to the field of evidence and data as the discourses that circulate regarding migration shape the individual behavior and institutional practices":Ms. Eva Garzón

According to Ms. Garzón, some people have been cunning in exploiting our deep-rooted fears through the anti-migration rhetoric. But through research, we have gained awareness about how our communication practices are important in shaping the public discourse on migration. Individuals and institutions can reinforce damaging stereotypes, and hence we need to emphasize the importance of individual actions in our professional capacities and family discussions.

Misleading information has played a huge role in creating negative perception of migration. Maldita.es is a fact-checking news outlet that fact checks information on migrants and refugees that they receive through the community.

Ms. Garzón stressed creating a strong value-based migration narrative that can substitute the criminalizing discourse. ***"We need to shift from a discourse of 'invasion', 'problem', 'crisis' to a discourse of 'project', 'entrepreneurship', 'aspiration', and 'family' which is what migration is actually about"***, said Ms. Garzón.

Trade unions crucial to ensuring the 'visibility' of migrants

The panel included a renowned labor rights expert, Mr. Mustafa Qadri, who is the Founder and Executive Director of Equidem. He began by reflecting on the work done by Equidem in the last 12 months amidst the pandemic. The low waged workers have been at the receiving end of the racial discrimination and the consequent modern-day slavery in the Gulf countries like Saudi Arabia, UAE, and Qatar.

When the pandemic hit these countries, the governments made discriminatory changes to labor protection laws that required the employers to protect the benefits of the nationals while making it easier for them to hire and fire, and weaken the protection of non-nationals on the other. These legislative changes amount to racial discrimination.

"These laws apart from being discriminatory acted as a green signal to employers to exploit workers- to keep them without pay in large crowded accommodations as the workers could not return home. At the same time, they were forced to keep working at much-reduced wages. This led to starvation, to severe anxiety, to even suicide": Mr. Mustafa Qadri

He also pointed out that most of the financial sup-

port by the government catered to the wealthy class. Migrants have faced discrimination in accessing medical care. While the Gulf governments promised free medical services to migrant workers if they tested positive for COVID-19, the service was very poor for low waged workers. They had to wait for a long time for the assistance of a medical professional. Many were put in overcrowded quarantine facilities and the quality of the food was poor as well.

For Mr. Qadri, the business communities need to take responsibility for making sure that basic international standards for work are available to the workers and that they are treated with dignity. He also stressed how important it is for the workers to form trade unions to collectively demand their rights. It will make sure that the business enterprises keep being accountable to the workers on issues of wage and working conditions even if the workers don't come from the same ethnic background.

Rhetoric of 'othering' has to be tackled through dissent

Mr. Marvin Hokstam, journalist and founder of AFROMAGAZINE, talked about his experiences regarding migration in different countries. He emphasized that migrants get discriminated against in almost every part of the world- western or non-western, and detailed the vulnerabilities of immigrants and their descendants.

***“Right-wing nationalists always remind you of your ‘otherness’. I have always deplored nationalism because it is stupid not to consider the wealth brought about by the migrants and travelers”:* Mr. Marvin Hokstam**

Having moved to the Netherlands eight years ago, he has been encountering racism since his arrival but not without being loud and clear about demanding the dignity he deserves as a human being. He pointed to the racist traditions of the Black Pete or Zwarte Piet, and how even years of anti-racist activism hasn't been able to abolish them.

Mr. Hokstam stressed that it is impossible for journalism to be objective when it comes to racism. Very often the journalists have sided with racists by calling anti-racism activists leftist terrorists. An activist was even asked to go back to where he came from. He, along with other journalists have called on a motion asking every Dutch journalist to uphold the ethics of humanity.

Institutions need to create trust among migrant communities

The last speaker was Mr. Andrew Khoo, who is a member of the Bar Council Migrants, Refugees and International Affairs Committee in Malaysia. He stressed how the issue of racial discrimination was prevalent in Malaysia, Myanmar, and Brunei before the advent of the pandemic.

For Malaysia, Brunei, and Myanmar, the issue of race is interlinked to religion. The interplay between racial, religious, and national identity becomes very important. The main source of discrimination lies in the very fundamental structure of these countries.

***“If we look carefully, these issues are present within the ‘locals’ because of the entrenched rights mentioned in the constitution. There has been an uneven playing field from the beginning because of certain privileges provided to some communities and it is often justified by citing historical circumstances.”:* Mr. Andrew Khoo**

Though certain privileges were time-bound, they have been continuing till now due to a lack of clarity in the constitutions. The arrival of migrants has further added to the crisis as the majoritarian forces have stoked up fears of loss of rights and privileges enjoyed by a certain group of citizens. As a result, the low paid migrant workers are restrained access to any form of immigration status. There are laws in place but migrants are often afraid of complaining to the police as they are instruments of the government.

He concluded by emphasizing that we need to find

out ways to make the complaint mechanism safer so that the migrants can live without any fear and work with their dignity intact.

Subhadip Mukherjee is currently pursuing his Ph.D. at The English and Foreign Languages University, Hyderabad. His interest areas include Postcolonial Studies, Transnationalism, Cosmopolitanism, Diaspora Literature, Literary Theory, Indian Writing in English, and Climate Fiction. Twitter profile @SubhadipMuk.

Video of the GCM Objective 17 is available at [GRFDT's official YouTube Channel](#).



Date: 19 January 2021
Time: 05:30 PM Indian Time (GMT + 05:30)

GCM OBJECTIVE 17: ELIMINATE ALL FORMS OF DISCRIMINATION AND PROMOTE EVIDENCE-BASED PUBLIC DISCOURSE TO SHAPE PERCEPTIONS OF MIGRATION

 <p>Paddy Siyanga Knudsen Migration Governance Analyst (Moderator)</p>	 <p>Vasco Malta Head of Mission, International Organization for Migration (IOM), Portugal</p>	 <p>Andrew Khoo Member, Bar Council Migrants, Refugees and Immigration Affairs Committee, Malaysia</p>	 <p>Elena D'Anna Communications Officer, No Cap Association</p>
 <p>Mustafa Qadri Founder and Executive Director, Equidem</p>	 <p>Eva Garzón Migration and Displacement Lead, Oxfam Intermon</p>	 <p>Marvin Hokstam Journalist and founder AFROMAGAZINE</p>	

All are Welcome. The event will be organized using 'Zoom' App. Send an email to convenor@grfdt.com in case of any difficulty in registration. Livestreaming: www.grfdt.com.

 <https://zoom.us/j/94138086684?pwd=dlhxRE14bDIGWHh3eGZFNHAvRUxNdz09>
Meeting ID: 941 3808 6684, Passcode: 335441

Recognition of Skills: Just a Piece of Paper or Life-Changing Opportunity?

A panel discussion on the Objective 18 of the Global Compact for Migration (GCM), ‘Invest in Skills Development and Facilitate Mutual Recognition of Skills, Qualifications, and Competences’, was jointly organized by Global Research Forum on Diaspora and Transnationalism (GRFDT), Migrant Forum in Asia(MFA), Cross-Regional Center for Refugees and Migrants (CCRM), and Civil Society Action Committee (CSAC), on 26th January 2021. The moderator, Mr. William Gois, Regional Coordinator, Migrant Forum in Asia(MFA), initiated the conversation by highlighting the need of equipping individuals with skills in the current era. He also raised the question: “Will acquiring skills solve all the problems of migrants and migration?” If we make skills a larger phenomenon in migration discourse, then we also need to deconstruct who will be benefited, Mr. Gois pointed out.

Need to Create Awareness Regarding Skills Training

Ms. Roni Pradhan Dhaubhadel, Coordinator for SaMi project, HELVETAS Swiss Intercooperation, Nepal, framing a point of view from the perspectives of Nepali labor migration, stated that Nepal is the labour sending country and is known for its low skill laborers. However, potential migrants of Nepal are not interested in skills training as they feel investing time and energy in it, is not worth it. They believe in earning more money by migrating as soon as possible and hence refrain from skills training programs.

***“So, the discourse of migration and skills training needs to be taken at ground level to sensitize them (migrant workers) and create awareness. The skills training program gives migrant worker negotiation powers”:* Ms. Roni Pradhan Dhaubhade**

Necessity of Mutual Cooperation

Mr. L.K. Ruhunage, Former Additional General Manager, Sri Lanka Bureau of Foreign Employment (SLBFE), highlighted the importance of bilateral agreements, Memorandum of Understandings, and regional processes in enabling cooperation between countries to ensure compatible and efficient skills development amongst migrant workers. “These instruments are considered as key sources of developing mutual interest and cooperation in skills development and skills recognition of migrant workers from sending and receiving countries,” Mr. Ruhunage pointed out. According to him, the certification has become important as many countries, before hiring, ask whether they are certified workers or not, for instance, as in the case of domestic workers. Migrant workers are often categorized as non-trained, low skills and trained workers, with trained workers being in a better bargaining position than others.

Mr. Ruhunage, referring to a 2015 survey in Africa and Europe by International Labour Organization (ILO), highlighted that out of over 151 Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) and Bilateral Agreements (BLAs) signed between countries, very few looked into skills certification. In the case of Asia, Mr. Ruhunage found 1660 MOUs and BLAs out of which only 7 had provisions on skills development and recognition.

***“It is a rare condition when welfare and the protection aspects related to migrant workers are considered in MOUs. One among them is an MOU between Sri Lanka and Italy which provides (Skills) training. This was a joint collaboration in which they authorized centers and appointed trainers. Another one is Korean BLAs”:* Mr. L.K. Ruhunage.**

Mr. Ruhunage concluded by ascertaining the need of incorporating skills training of migrant workers in the bilateral agreements forged between states.

Skills Certification Provides Negotiation Powers

Ms. Raquel Bracero, President, Board of Directors, Philippine Association of Service Exporters, Inc. (PASEI) said, “We at PASEI ensure that workers are highly paid. For that, we prefer to invest in skills training.” She underscored the necessity of skills development in facilitating overseas recruitment of workers. Ms. Bracero further stated that they have coordinated with the government through collaboration with the Technical Educational and Skill Development Authority (TESDA) in training potential migrants.

“Currently we are in the process of forging a memorandum of agreement wherein the purpose is to help our workers get highly paid for their updated skills”, she stated, adding that they are also framing modules in collaboration with the host countries, such as Care Industry modules with Austria and Farming, Poultry modules with Poland. Furthermore, they are focusing on the reintegration of repatriated workers, as during the pandemic over 400 people came back. The organization is also active in recommending policies to the government.

***“We are pitching for the highest salary that employers can give, and for that, we look into minimum wages of the host country and accordingly negotiate the salary. This at least provides equal rights in terms of income”:* Ms. Raquel Bracero.**

Ms. Maria Susan P. Dela Rama, Executive Director, Certification Office, TESDA, agreeing with Ms. Bracero, shed light on the importance of imparting technical education to medium level workers, which can improve their job prospects manifold. She highlighted various measures taken by the TESDA to provide technical education to middle-level manpower in the Philippines, including the implementation of quality assured competency-based framework of skills training. Also, the provision of assessment programs and scholarship programs, both for overseas and within the home country, is enabled to benefit migrant workers.

Progressive Learning Key to Better Work Opportunities

Mr. Salar Khan, Researcher in Progressive Education, Qatar Foundation, elaborated on the notion of skills certification from the progressive education perspective. He also traced why migrants cannot sustain themselves back at home after working decades at foreign lands, and detailed four areas that can help migrant workers to sustain themselves back home or in the host country.

First is ‘Life Long Learning’ which includes specific skills as well as financial literacy. Financial literacy will help them make better decisions and avoid migration back and forth. The second is access to ICT education. A developed country such as Qatar does not yet have room for ICT skills. However, organizations such as ‘Reach Out to Asia’ have better connection programs where they use the ‘Train the Trainer Model’ to teach or train the workers acquiring ICT skills. The next is ‘Literacy and Numeracy’; it will help migrants to grab better opportunities. The last is ‘How to identify legal knowledge as a skill’. This refers to the importance of legal knowledge and up to what extent migrants should know legalities so as to not get exploited at the hands of their employers.

Mr. Salar Khan, citing an example, elaborated how the government can create better opportunities and reintegrate migrant workers through skills programs. “The implementation of certain programs by the government has better value than private sectors,” Mr. Khan stated.

An example of this is the ‘Supreme Committee of Delivery and Legacy’ which is in charge of organizing the FIFA World Cup 2022. Through their skill development programs, they are empowering workers working on constructing the stadium. This is done with the intention that after the completion of their work at the stadium, the workers can proceed further with an additional set of skills

at their disposal, which might help them to secure a job.

Mr. William Gois concluded the session by pointing out the need for cooperation between the host country and the origin country of migrant workers in securing skills development. The host country needs to recognize that these skills coming into their market are contributing to the development of the country, and hence facilitate the transaction of skills amongst migrant workers. For the source country, this shall be a great way to empower and monetize its demography as well. The discourse of skills training and recognition must be driven by concepts of partnership, cooperation, and interdependence. One needs to understand that skill

certification is not merely a point of entry to a destination country. It is more than that since skills traverse the whole landscape of the migrant worker's existence as a lifelong asset.

Snehal is a Pune based journalist doing her little and loves to read books, finds her peace in food. Her areas of interest are gender studies, international migration, and social issues. She wants to be a pantomath who loves to explore and travel the world. She loves to express herself in the form of creative writing and digital art.

Video of the GCM Objective 18 is available at [GRFDT's official YouTube Channel](#).



Date: 26 January 2021

Time: 05:30 PM Indian Time (GMT + 05:30)

GCM OBJECTIVE 18: INVEST IN SKILLS DEVELOPMENT AND FACILITATE MUTUAL RECOGNITION OF SKILLS, QUALIFICATIONS AND COMPETENCES



William Gois
Regional coordinator,
Migrant Forum in Asia
(Moderator)



Roni Pradhan Dhaubhadel
Coordinator, SaMi project/
Helvetas Swiss Intercooperation Nepal



Raquel E. Bracero
President, Board of Directors,
Philippine Association of Service Exporters, Inc. (PASEI)



L. K. Ruhunage
Former Additional General Manager of the Sri Lanka Bureau of Foreign Employment (SLBFE).



Maria Susan P. Dela Rama
Executive Director, Certification Office, Technical Education and Skills Development Authority, TESDA



Salar Khan
Researcher in Progressive Education at Qatar Foundation

All are Welcome. The event will be organized using 'Zoom' App. Send an email to convenor@grfdt.com in case of any difficulty in registration. Livestreaming: www.grfdt.com.



Register: <https://forms.gle/V4m2gAZVsWvwsUVF7>

‘Namesake’ beautifully depicts the Untold Lives of Immigrants.....!

The simplicity and subtle tone of the film tries to speak louder the notion of immigration. The movie based on Jhumpa Lahiri book beautifully traces the loneliness and emptiness in an individual due to migration. ‘Namesake’ indicates the whole idea of standard of living and better opportunities at the pretext of migration which is just for the namesake as the title suggests.

It is a fascinating piece of art reflecting the issue of migration and the complexities occurring from it. The film directed by Mira Nair entwines Indian tradition and American modernity. The movie also depicts the cross cultural conflicts with tenuous ideas of India. The film starts from Kolkata, India and ends in Kolkata doing a whole round. In between the journey has all the ups and downs portraying two generations, one which migrated and another which are born in the host country.

The opening short takes glimpses of actual Kolkata- the slums, yellow taxi honking and the brownish fabric of India. Mira has tried to create the contrast by capturing New York in whites, black, greys and pastel interiors whereas Kolkata in brownish colours of chaos and slice of life. The dialogues, soundtracks reflect solitary; the long silence conveys the solemn.

The story is set in the 1970’s Kolkata where Ashoke (Irrfan Khan) decides to migrate to New York due to a few shocking incidents in his life accompanied by wife Ashima (Tabu). The movie captures the journey of the Ganguli family in America. The first half shows the mutual companionship between the two and the initial years in America. The initial days were hard to engirdle in the land far from

home. However, later they coped up when they found people of their own kind- Bengali families in the foreign land to be part of their happiness.

The conflict starts when the second generation- the couple’s children have different aspirations and mind sets. The young genera

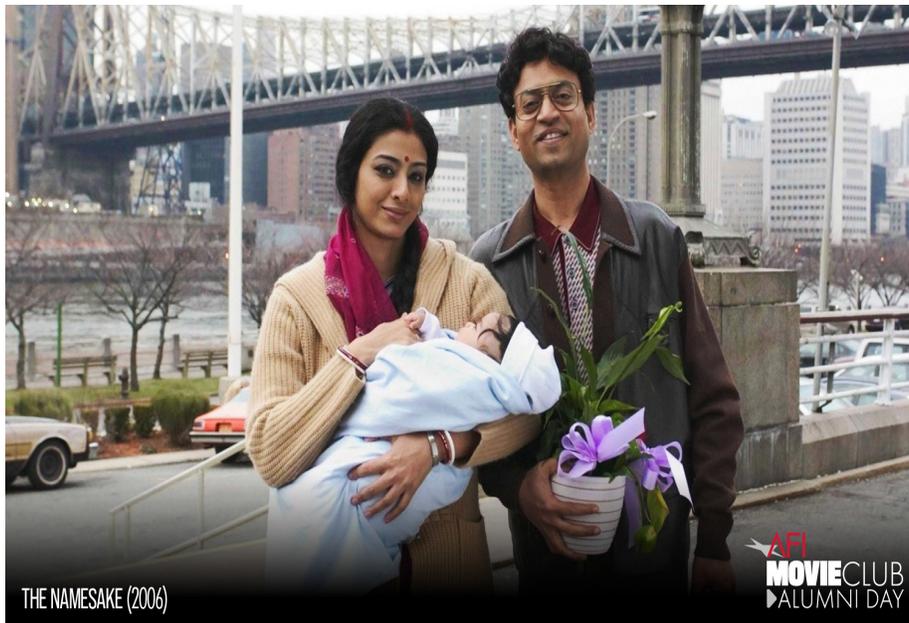


Photo credit American Film Institute

tion has adapted to American culture whereas the Ashoke- Ashima are still struggling to cope up with these generational as well as cultural transitions. The film even cherishes tiny moments of their lives to give the film a flavor of realism – “Remember this always, remember you and I we made this journey, remember we went to this place together when there was nowhere left to go”. However, the movie tries to contradict the cross cultural scenario in the climax.

The movie contains a story which over the time becomes the Ganguli family's legend and also influences the life of Ashoke. This story involves the Russian author Nikolai Gogol's book 'The overcoat'. This book is also one of the reasons why Ashoke decided to migrate and keep the name of his first born as Gogol. Which later becomes a joke and that frustrates his son Gogol (Kal Pen). The writer in a way uses Nikolai Gogol's 'The overcoat' as the analogy. The overcoat is assumed to signify a new beginning coming out from the past. Similarly, immigration in film is the overcoat for Ashoke.

The writer has added soul to the movie through dialogues. Few lines from the poem- 'Daffodils' is used which indicates loneliness. A dialogue in the film affirms one won't ever regret travelling the world- "It is a dream, sparkling, clean streets, nobody spitting on the road, you are young, you are free, pack your pillow and blanket and see the world you will never regret it".

Several times, the drivers of migration has been debatable, the movie rightly captures that drivers

are more of a micro sense and subjective in nature. One rail accident changes the whole perspective of Ashoke towards his life. Hence he makes a choice to immigrate and build a better life. The movie also highlights the marriage migration, where a woman has to migrate with her husband. This movie depicts the untold lives of immigrants and their changing relationship equations. It is a must watch as it gives deep insights of one's life of whom we envy but reality is different than it looks. Movie hooks you up to the raw emotions expressed by the characters. One can feel the essence of unsaid words and the sadness of pain even when life is slightly better.

Snehal Mutha is a Pune based journalist doing her little and loves to read books, finds her peace in food. Her areas of interest are gender studies, international migration and social issues. She wants to be a pantomath who loves to explore and travel the world. She loves to express herself in the form of creative writing and digital art.

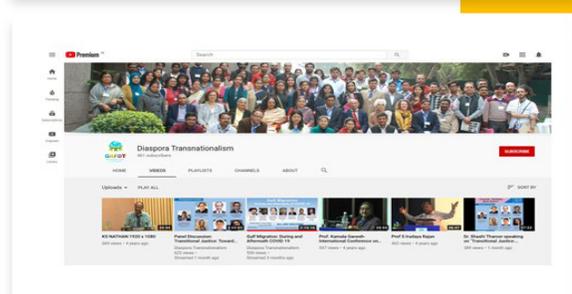
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“I told myself, if you don’t take this opportunity, if you don’t take that risk now, you will never be able to achieve something”:
In Conversation with Gopinath Nair

Roula Hamati: To be honest, I couldn’t be more excited about our next achiever. And this is not only because he is the father of a very close friend, but because our next achiever is actually somebody who is very positive, who has a very fun spirit and who’s actually a very genuine soul. And I think these are the words that will describe best **Mr. Gopinath Nair**, anyone who knows them already can, you know, get to know his fun spirit is always smiling. He’s always engaging, and he’s always happy. But he is also somebody who has been a migrant and who has been a migrant for a very long time, actually, for more than 35 years, I think, and we’ll get to hear the real story. And he is somebody who is a self made man, somebody who started from a humble beginning, but actually went on to, to work very hard, and also to make it in life. So I’m very, very happy to be engaging in the session with **Mr. Gopinath**. And doing this as a dialogue, because we’ve always had these kinds of dialogues. And we thought it would be a very good idea if we actually do this dialogue one more time. But instead of doing it privately, why not do it publicly with everybody else and have the participation and have this kind of fun energy and engagement?..... Okay, so **Gopi**, you’ve left to Qatar in the 1970s. I think, if I’m not mistaken, you left in mid 70s.



Ms. Roula Hamati in Conversation with Mr. Gopinath Nair

Gopinath Nair: Yes! It makes mid 70s. But I will go back to the history a little bit. That happened in 1967 when I was 17 years old. You know, I mi-

grated to Bombay, my first migration was to Bombay within India, from my home state of Kerala after doing my high school education, and the purpose of migrating to Bombay was to look for a job and to find a livelihood. And you know, Bombay is a commercial hub of India. It’s for anybody, it’s easy to find a job. But with my minimum education, it was not easy. But believe me, I’ve found one within three months, I landed in Bombay. That, happened when I was 17 years old. I appeared for the first job interview, I was scared. And now I’m 71. I’m sitting in a webinar for the first time in my life. I’m not scared, but I’m with you and others. You know, I just heard Victor. Wonderful stories, by how I have totally different stories to talk about. Well the job I found in Bombay paid me \$2 a month. And I worked in that organization for about three years, I moved out... to another organization where my starting salary was equivalent to something like \$10. I spent for about four to five years in that company. And my last salary in that company after almost eight years, was about \$25 per month. That’s not enough to have a decent or a comfortable life in Bombay. So, I started asking myself what next? But I had found the answer. Rome is not built overnight, how patience, things will work out in your favor, gain experience, you can go up the ladder, and you can improve upon your living standards. Well, I used to stay when I was getting this something like this \$25 a month, I was staying with six others in a one room,

kitchen apartment or rented apartment, where I used to sleep on dining table to make space for others to sleep on the floor. So, at that time I work we are firm believers, believers in God, and by the grace of God, I got an opportunity in the Middle East. And that I mean.

Roula Hamati: so can I ask you so I mean, you were describing how life wasn't back in India and your first job and how difficult it was to get a job. And then there was this opportunity to go in the Middle East. And you know, we all know how, you know, I think this was in the 70s 75, the Middle East was a different place, a difficult place to live until today, I think a very difficult place.

Gopinath Nair: I had absolutely no clue about the country where I'm going about the organization where I'm going to work, I had no clue about the terms and conditions under which I will be asked to work. But I told myself, if you don't take this opportunity, if you don't take that risk now, you will never be able to achieve something. So, I took that risk. And the job opportunity originally came for my brother. And he gave it to me saying that he is not interested to leave the country. Because he was very well employed. And he was more than happy with his job. So, the person who and my brother was with a family man, he was settled in life. So, you didn't want to disturb his family life as well as his well established job. So, the person who came in at the end to interview me from the company in the Middle East. He said, Can we meet you at my place of residence in Bombay on a Sunday morning? I said yes. And then he wanted to meet me at eight o'clock because he wanted to go out and on 9:30-10 after breakfast. So, he said, let's meet at eight. So, I went and found the place where he was living few minutes before eight o'clock. But I waited outside his apartment where he was leaving for a few minutes, and then went back to the door and rang the bell at eight o'clock in the morning. This gentleman who opened the door list, are you **Gopinath**? I said yes. He looked at the watch. And he said you got the job.

Roula Hamati: So, punctuality actually got you?

Gopinath Nair: Yes. So, I learned a lot from that minute. And it took about a month for the organization to process my employment visa and organize my contract and things like that. And I joined the company in 1976. Right in the middle east, I joined the company as an executive secretary. And I was I was initially given an employment contract on a bachelor status or a two years period. So, it was like I knew my job is only for two years. I went there and because of my hardships, and in living condition in Bombay, something I had in mind, I need to own a roof on my head, which I can call my home. And believe me, that ambition was fulfilled within the first two years of my employment in that organization, I owned an apartment in Bombay.

Roula Hamati: If I can ask you this, so when within the first two years, you've gotten the first thing off the list, you own the home, what was the second thing on your list?

Gopinath Nair: Well, then I realized within the two years, I realized that the going is good. My employer was looking after me. And I was, of course, no strings attached. Other than my brother and mother who lived in Mumbai. Then I thought, okay, you have a house to live. But you need to go back and look for a job. So, I was not prepared for that. And organization was prepared to give me continuous contract for indefinite period. So, it's like, every two years, they would give me a new contract, with new terms with new salaries and benefits, and so on. So I continued for 32 years in that organization, renewing my contract on a two yearly basis....

Roula Hamati: And you're still there. It's amazing. Yeah. Can I ask you, I mean, 30 something years in Qatar, it's such a long time. And I am in Qatar right now. And I, you know, we know how Qatar is. It's not necessarily the easiest place to settle in. If I can ask you to remember kind of two moments that imprinted on you? Well, one, you know, and negative moment that a very difficult moment that you you've had to live and another one that's really positive and those 30-30 something years, what would you say are?

Gopinath Nair: The negative followed by the positive within no time?

Roula Hamati: Really, okay, I'm curious.

Gopinath Nair: The negative was that I went there as a bachelor. And four years after working in that company, I got married, I came back to India on holiday, I got married. And my wife and I had a son, you know, we had to wait only for a year to have a son. And it took almost seven years, my wife and son could not join me in Qatar. Seven years after marriage. They were living in India with my wife's parents. And I was called as a married bachelor, living in Qatar. But then the reason when I asked for the family status, family visa and things like that, the company said that you were

hired on a bachelor status, and therefore we cannot consider giving you a family status. So, I continued for working as a married bachelor for seven years. And the life we had was through hundreds of letters, exchange of photographs, telephone conversation, and so on. And every time when my wife opens a letter from me, she will look for the word visa, family visa in that letter. You know, if she doesn't, if she doesn't find that two words in that, then she will keep the letter to be read later on.....

For watching the entire interview, please access the GRFDT's official [YouTube Channel](#) "Diaspora Transnationalism",



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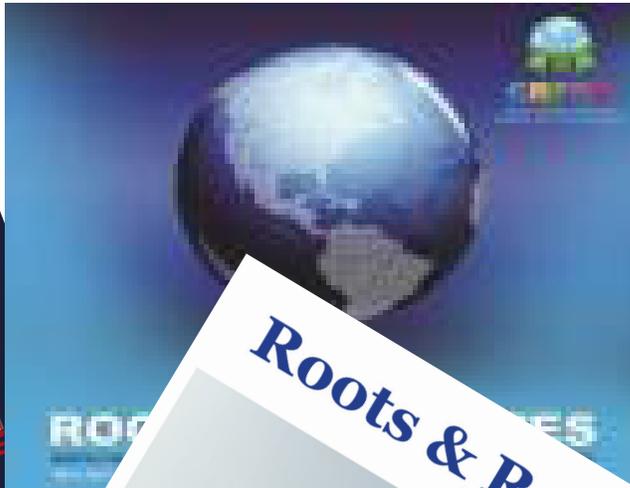
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