

Multicultural Symbiosis and Diaspora Identity: Bangladeshi Muslim Community in Japan

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This paper presents my thesis, which is an ethnographic research on the lives and experiences of Bangladeshi Muslim Community in Japan. A qualitative study, conducted in Tokyo, Chiba, Saitama, Oyama, Tochigi, Bando, Mito, Ibaraki and Tsukuba, broken into different categories. Personal participation in numerous community events including Happy Bengali New Year celebration, English New Year celebration, Bangladeshi Victory day celebration, fasting during Ramadan, the two Eids, scholarly lectures and other religious, cultural events. Interview individuals from first and second generation, focus group discussion and survey Bangladeshi Muslims between 2015, 2016, access to Bangladeshi community and religiously affiliated websites. A total 131 migrants participated to my study. Data are collected and conducted in Bengali, which I translate later on into English and coded and categorized into themes and then coded into sub-themes (for the purposes of analysis); outlines the many facets of their identities. Literature on the relevant issues and newspaper are reviewed.

Migration from Bangladesh is a well-known phenomenon. A good number of people who are Bangladeshi origin now reside in different countries of the world. All the countries except Japan does not admit long-term residents officially, there is a good segment of Bangladeshi diaspora population living in Japan (Siddiqui, 2004:16). While immigration policy of Japanese Government is more stringent so as to keep Japan from foreigners, considerable number of people from Bangladesh comes to Japan each year through various documented and undocumented channels as migrant workers (Mannan, 2014:32).

There is no accurate data about the number and destination of Bangladeshi members in Japan. A 2004 study attempted to collate information from informed sources, 22,000 Bangladeshi lived in Japan (Siddiqui, 2004: 15). Recently, Bangladeshis are one of the smaller populations of foreigners in Japan. As of 2016, Japan's Ministry of Justice recorded 12,022 Bangladeshi nationals among the total population of registered foreigners in Japan. Currently Bangladeshi Muslims can found in almost all parts of Japan, they face the challenge of adaptation. Bangladeshis in Japan go through the painful and gradual process of adjusting to a new world. Language barriers, health and Medicare, lack of interaction with the community and society, inadequate housing and, most important, living in constant fear of the law, are the serious problems (Mannan, 2014: 38). Very little is known about the adaptation pattern of this population group in Japan. Despite the long evidence of migration from Bangladesh to Japan, it remains an under-emphasized issue which has not received any attention by scholars. The migrants' population of Bangladesh, who live in Japan, passed their most valuable time of life in Japan. Despite the long time living in Japan, life experiences of Bangladeshi are not

much known. The purpose of this study is to ascertain the identity development of Bangladeshi Muslim migrants currently residing in Japan. The findings of this study will provide information of a little-known community, Bangladeshi immigrant living in Japan.

In order to explain the theme of the paper certain conceptual notions and terms are used. There are conceptual issues on identity, culture identity, adaptation, assimilation, integration, ethnic identity, in-betweenness, diaspora and transnationalism which are defined for the purpose of understanding the Bangladeshi group. In order to better understand the formation of the Bangladeshi diaspora in the Japan, this study will use three broad aspects of characteristics of a diaspora: 1. dispersion, 2. maintaining a distinctive identity in the host society and 3. home country connection according to Morad, Haque and Alam, in "Contextualizing Formation of Diaspora of Bangladeshi Immigrants in the UK(2014). Another concept, Multicultural symbiosis has come into recent usage. This is akin to "Plural Accommodation" meaning living together for dignity and survival. The study makes a brief discussion on the above concepts and decides on a frame-work for analyzing the Bangladeshi Muslim in Japan.

Living between three worlds, they have syncretized their Bangladeshi culture with their Japanese socialization within an Islamic framework. The result is the construction of what I have termed multicultural symbiosis (多文化共生) identity. Some elements of the diaspora are also visible in the Bangladeshi community. For this research diaspora has been viewed as communities of migrants settled in and owing allegiance to host countries while at the same time are aware of their origin and identity and maintain varying degree of linkage with their country people and with other migrants' communities in Japan. They fostered a sense of community and were expressions of Bangladeshi identity, their Islamic identity as a powerful mobilizing entity include them Muslim community in Japan and become a part of global Umma but they also promoted links with the host society. I argue that the integration of Bangladeshi Muslim diaspora community, multicultural symbiosis and well established, successful good migrants identity concepts negotiating the complexities of the host society and providing its members with the voice, visibility, belonging, representation and confidence partake in the wider Multicultural Japan.

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