CARIM India – Developing a Knowledge Base for Policymaking on India-EU Migration

Co-financed by the European Union

Isolation, uncertainty and change: Indian immigrant women and the family in northern Italy

Meenakshi Thapan

CARIM-India Research Report 2013/09

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Research Report
Case Study

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Isolation, uncertainty and change:
Indian immigrant women and the family in northern Italy*

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CARIM-India – Developing a knowledge base for policymaking on India-EU migration

This project is co-financed by the European Union and carried out by the EUI in partnership with the Indian Council of Overseas Employment, (ICOE), the Indian Institute of Management Bangalore Association, (IIMB), and Maastricht University (Faculty of Law).

The proposed action is aimed at consolidating a constructive dialogue between the EU and India on migration covering all migration-related aspects. The objectives of the proposed action are aimed at:

- Assembling high-level Indian-EU expertise in major disciplines that deal with migration (demography, economics, law, sociology and politics) with a view to building up migration studies in India. This is an inherently international exercise in which experts will use standardised concepts and instruments that allow for aggregation and comparison. These experts will belong to all major disciplines that deal with migration, ranging from demography to law and from economics to sociology and political science.

- Providing the Government of India as well as the European Union, its Member States, the academia and civil society, with:

    1. Reliable, updated and comparative information on migration

    2. In-depth analyses on India-EU highly-skilled and circular migration, but also on low-skilled and irregular migration.

- Making research serve action by connecting experts with both policy-makers and the wider public through respectively policy-oriented research, training courses, and outreach programmes.

These three objectives will be pursued with a view to developing a knowledge base addressed to policy-makers and migration stakeholders in both the EU and India.

Results of the above activities are made available for public consultation through the website of the project: http://www.india-eu-migration.eu/

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Abstract

Based on fieldwork with immigrants of Indian origin and with Italian doctors, social workers, teachers, and employers around Fidenza and Parma in northern Italy, this paper seeks to understand the social and cultural dilemmas of being an immigrant in Europe. The dilemma of isolation and uncertainty is most starkly understood by migrant women in their fraught experience of being marginalised and excluded in both the domestic sphere as well as in the social worlds they inhabit. This paper seeks to decipher the multiplicity of experience in bounded urban spaces as well as in rural farms in the region. Isolation and 'strangeness' is not only that which excludes, marginalises and separates but is also sought after as that experiential mode that proffers safety, security and a closed form of belonging. At the same time, educated migrant women seek to gain access to a social world that remains for the present outside their grasp. What forms of belonging do all women seek to fulfil their private, individual goals as well as their social commitments? Are there dimensions of sociality that are individually transcribed and culturally scripted? How are these strategically negotiated and navigated? How do migrants seek to transcend given forms of inclusion to create new 'ways of belonging' These are some of the questions that the paper engages with.

"A 37 year old Indian migrant in Italy killed his pregnant wife because she loved wearing western clothes and he wanted to punish her for going against Indian traditions.

The Indian -- whose name was given as Singh Kulbir -- told police in Piacenza city in northern Italy that he strangled to death his 27 year old wife -- named as Kaur Balwinder -- before throwing her corpse in the Po river, the AKI news agency reported.

Investigators said Kulbir, who worked for an agricultural company, killed his wife to punish her for dressing like a Westerner against Indian traditions. Balwinder's body was found floating Sunday in the Po river near Piacenza, a total of 153 days after she went missing.

The mother of a five year old boy, Balwinder was three months pregnant, according to the Piacenza Sera news website. Another Italian news agency AGI said the accused killed his "excessively westernized" young Indian wife because he feared he would lose her.

The woman's father reported her disappearance May 1.Her husband told the military police that he was sure she had left home because she wanted to leave him. Kulbir, however, has no criminal record. He confessed when his wife's body was found on the river bank near S.Nazzaro di Monticelli D'Ongina. The body was spotted by two girls walking in the area.

The AGI report said Balwinder lived for about 10 years with her husband in Baselico Duce village, on a farm where the man looked after the cattle.

She was a housewife and occasionally did domestic jobs and was known and liked by other mothers with children attending the local kindergarten. The other women had organised a search party when she disappeared.

Her husband too led a normal, quiet life and was seen taking their little boy to school.

The woman's family has lived in Tuscany for around 20 years."

ROME, MAY 29, 2012 **India Today.in**

Introduction

This paper begins with a brief news item on May 29, 2012, about an 37 year old Indian man, who works with cattle in northern Italy, kills his pregnant, 'westernised' wife because she wears western clothes which he perceives as a threat to his familial life. If other immigrants are to be believed, he also suspected her of having an affair with another man. In any case, his masculinity was threatened and for him, its restoration meant her annihilation, never mind if she was his wife, the mother of his three year old son and of another baby, yet to be born, and had a right to life. Her family, who had lived in Tuscany for twenty years, could not save her from either her worsening marital situation or from the extreme step taken by her husband. This is the reality for a large number of the Indian migrant women who live in northern Italy, in isolated, rural households where their husbands tend to cattle and live in the broken down barns provided by the employers. But this is not the only reality. Contrary to opinion among members of the Italian community, all Indian women are not victims, slaves to domestic labour and male domination, excluded from decision making, and inhibited by custom and tradition.

In a recent paper, Ambrosini (2012) emphasises the politics of exclusion that prevails at the level of local policies and draws our attention to 'cultural exclusion' as one of the forms of exclusion practised by local bodies. Such forms of exclusion however exist in the terrain of policy that may be contested, appealed against and put aside. The cultural exclusion that exists in the *mental-scapes* (to extend Appadurai's terminology) of the host community are however another matter and need to be addressed in our discussion of cultural policy that seeks to exclude through the rhetoric of inclusion that prevails as a political ploy at different periods of time.

This paper is about migration and settlement; it is about women and men, in that territorial and imagined space we call home that exists in the here and now of our presence but also through memory and affect in our past. It is about transnationalism not only through the multiple ties that bind migrants to different countries and different lives but also about how host societies view 'others' in a cultural space they claim their own. Transnationalism, I argue, is not only about the connections between migrants and practices in dual or more spaces, but also importantly, about their interaction and relationships with members of host societies who engage with them in different contexts as employers, medical practitioners, social workers, and others. It is therefore very much dependent upon the migrants' *experience* of transnationalism as constituted in the 'here and now' of the multiplicity of experience. With a focus on gender, this paper seeks to unravel some of the multiple understandings of culture and identity that emerge from the predicaments in which both the migrants and their Italian hosts find themselves.

I focus on the community of Indians, not as a homogeneous entity, but as a diverse group who come together at different times, and in a variety of spaces, to constitute themselves (whether in the Sikh or Hindu temples, in markets, in their own or one another's homes) and thereby affirm their collective identities, as belonging to a particular though diverse ethnic group. It is understood that this self- constitution of the community as a distinct group with appropriate markers of language, religion, 'culture', and behaviour is partly in response to the experience of 'difference'.[1] An emphasis on 'difference' however in no way elides our understanding of how gender is a marked category in itself or how normative standards are applied by those who are more powerful, here, the members of the host society.[2] This is no way bestows an essentialising character on their constitution as a community as they are simultaneously engaged in a process of engagement with others, as individuals and in the

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[1] As argued by Avtar Brah, 'difference in the sense of social relation may be understood as the historical and contemporary trajectories of material circumstances and cultural practices which *produce the conditions* for the construction of shared identities' (Brah 1996: 118).

[2] See Choo and Ferree (2010) for a further understanding of the fetishization of 'difference'.

collective, outside their particular communities, and this is as much a part of their individual and collective trajectories as is the celebration of their particular cultural identity. In fact, I would like to argue that culture as 'a medium of social interaction' …'confers *agency* within a field of sociality and power relations' (Werbner 2012: 215). This argument facilitates the view that culture, 'in conferring agency, is a field of transaction and relatedness';…that as a '*discursive imaginary* of selfhood, identity, subjectivity and moral virtue constitutes a field of power' (Ibid.: 216, emphasis in the original). The cultures of migrants are therefore significant, 'a force generating social conflict, defensive mobilization, and creativity' (Ibid.). In this way, cultures of migrants must be viewed as a medium for expressing agency and value among members of a community as well as with other communities, as this paper will address.

The family is at the heart of the community in which the migrant is embedded and I invoke the recent work of Ralph Grillo that urges us to reinstate the family at the centre of analysis as 'it foregrounds an important site in which relations of gender and generation are articulated and/or in terms of which they are conceptualised, and around which debates circulate' (Grillo 2008: 19). The family in this paper is central to the definition of the migrant's identity as an engaged member of the society in which she is located as well as produces the conditions for her to stand as a different 'other'. Women's abilities and aspirations for cultural integration in themselves are understood by host society members but from within a bounded ethnic space that is viewed as creating barriers to fruitful integration. In other words, the family is crucial as that emotional, collective space that offers support for the migrant but is also perceived as a differentiating space that encourages isolation and exclusion.

I also examine the spaces and practices within which interaction with the host community is located and negotiated and how together such interaction constitutes society in everyday life that is marked by inequality, struggle and contestation. Members of the Indian community, especially women, who are isolated and therefore the most vulnerable, push in different ways to bring about and express this cultural exchange which they see as being crucial to being "understood" and in a sense, appreciated and valued by the host society. This brings gender into the forefront of our analysis: how do men and women from immigrant communities come to inhabit and experience migrant bodies and selves in transnational spaces through encounters that are steeped in emotions as much as they are framed in social and legal structures of domination and injustice?[3]

The experience of isolation is most starkly understood by migrant women in their fraught experience of being marginalised and excluded in both the domestic sphere as well as in the social worlds they inhabit.[4] It is an embodied, social and cultural experience of migrant women in transnational spaces. A key question is whether such isolation is in continuation of their life in Punjab for Indian immigrant women or does it suggest a new kind of experience? Isolation in this case is not only that which excludes, marginalises and separates but is also sought after as that experiential mode that proffers safety, security and a closed form of belonging. At the same time, educated women seek to gain access to a social world that remains for the present outside their grasp. What forms of belonging to women

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[3] Emotions and affect are intimately connected to the experience of migration. Following Sara Ahmed, I argue that emotions are crucial in aligning 'some subjects with some others and against other others' (2004: 117). Emotions thus circulate between individual and collective bodies and signs and are expressed through the multitude of experience that frames the encounter between subjects and collectives. This however is not to suggest that emotions are located in the private worlds of individuals and are therefore 'inside' and are expressed 'outside'; rather, 'they create the very effect of the surfaces or boundaries of bodies and worlds' (ibid.). Emotions therefore move in and out of boundaries, conjure up borders based on feelings of difference and hate, fear and marginalisation, alienation and aloneness, affinity and inclusion. The question of course arises as to how we may understand emotions in a social context as they play themselves out in everyday life. We need to therefore focus on emotions as they frame actions, express actions, give rise to actions and are therefore in a sense, 'social actions intertwined with …structures of power in specific temporal and geographic contexts' (Boehm and Swank 2011). See also Svasek (2008).

[4] For a recent review of gender, family and migration, see Brettell (2012a), and in the context of Italy, see Andall (2000). See also Campani (2000), Chell-Robinson (2000), Salih (2003), Thapan (2005), Metz-Gockel, Morokvasic and Munst (2008).

seek, to fulfil their private, individual goals as well as their social commitments? Are there dimensions of sociality that are *individually* transcribed and *culturally* scripted? How are these strategically negotiated and navigated? How do migrants seek to transcend given forms of inclusion to create new 'ways of belonging'?[5] These are some of the questions that the paper expects to engage with. Based on fieldwork in the Emilia Romagna region of northern Italy, this paper seeks to decipher the multiplicity of women's experience in bounded urban spaces as well as in rural farms in the region.

The field and method

There are now a total of 129, 516 Indian nationals holding residence permits (as in 2010 ISAT) in Italy although the number of those who do not yet have their permits or are irregular have not been added to this figure. Italy has not always been on the destination map for immigrants from India but there has been a significant upward flow in recent years. This is due to the relatively easier entry as compared to other European countries such as Germany and France as well as the several amnesties that have regularised irregular workers. The first migrants, according to Bertolani, 'arrived in the late '70s: they were above all 'pioneers', who separately tried the luck with the hope to be able sooner or later to enter UK, Canada or USA... In this period Italy had open frontiers and had no adequate immigration laws; it became above all a transit path, while migratory flows tended to be oriented elsewhere' (Bertolani 2013). However, once they arrived in Italy, they tended to settle down quickly with the help of familial and kin networks and gained employment in one form or another, often working for low wages to start with. Many of them now view Italy as their final destination.[6]

Table 1 below provides the break-up of the Indian population in Italy based on 2010 data. The largest number of Indian immigrants in Italy reside in Lombardy followed by the Emilia Romagna region. Their propensity in this region as well as their main form of employment in the dairy farm industry led to my interest in this particular group that has been a relatively low researched area in Italy. There has been a steady growth in the Indian immigrant population in Emilia Romagna as Figure 1 and Table 2 show us. Moving into the Emilia Romagna region (Table 3), we find the highest Indian population is in Reggio Emilia, followed by Parma that includes the town of Fidenza and its surrounding areas. I thus chose to focus on this particular region for my research with the Indian immigrant farmer community.

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[5] See Levitt and Glick Schiller (2007) who distinguish between 'ways of being' and 'ways of belonging' in social fields.

[6] For a comprehensive review of immigration to Italy in its political and socio-cultural contexts, see Grillo and Pratt (2002). See also Ambrosini (2012), Ambrosini and Caneva (2012). For a consideration of aspects of Punjabi migration to Italy, see Bertolani (2012, 2013) and Bertolani, Ferraris and Perocco (2011).

Table 1. Distribution of Indian Population per Region (2010)

Regione	Residenti	%Totale	%Maschi	Var. Anno Prec.	Comuni
Abruzzo	570	0,5%	61,6%	9,8%	92
Basilicata	545	0,5%	75,8%	50,1%	67
Calabria	2.683	2,2%	80,7%	53,6%	135
Campania	2.762	2,3%	70,1%	56,6%	251
Emilia-Romagna	16.123	13,3%	58,5%	9,3%	267
Friuli-Venezia Giulia	2.294	1,9%	60,2%	9,3%	87
Lazio	14.586	12,1%	63,0%	24,6%	196
Liguria	1.300	1,1%	47,7%	17,3%	66
Lombardia	46.372	38,3%	59,4%	10,8%	920
Marche	3.744	3,1%	59,7%	9,7%	116
Molise	345	0,3%	69,9%	29,7%	51
Piemonte	3.370	2,8%	58,5%	15,1%	301
Puglia	1.917	1,6%	75,8%	46,1%	149
Sardegna	311	0,3%	60,5%	29,0%	55
Sicilia	1.168	1,0%	61,0%	63,1%	134
Toscana	5.173	4,3%	54,8%	8,3%	177
Trentino-Alto Adige	1.429	1,2%	64,5%	10,9%	95
Umbria	1.526	1,3%	62,5%	14,6%	60
Valle d'Aosta	72	0,1%	61,1%	-27,3%	14
Veneto	14.746	12,2%	60,3%	8,6%	362

Source: ISAT 2010

Figure 1. Indian immigrant population in relation to the total foreign population in Emilia Romagna: 2005-2012

Source: Rete Intercultura, Fidenza
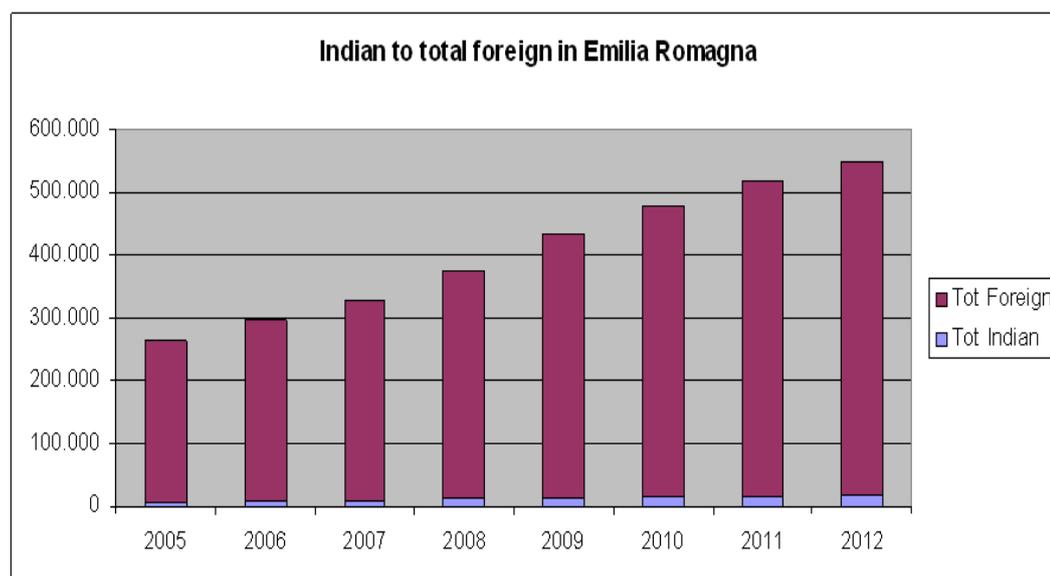
Table 2: Indian Migrants in Emilia Romagna Region 2005-12 (in 000)								
	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012
Male	4.581	5.248	5.731	6.414	7.413	8.575	9.424	10.117
Female	2.951	3.416	3.898	4.539	5.433	6.183	6.699	7.143
Total	7.532	8.664	9.629	10.953	12.846	14.758	16.123	17.260

Source: Rete Intercultura, Fidenza

Table 3. Classification of provinces of Emilia Romagna region ordered by number of Indian residents, 2011

Province	Indian Population as on 1 January 2011					% Entire foreign population	% Change over previous year	
	Male	Female	F/M	Total	%			
1. RE Reggio Emilia	3,662	2,822	0.771	6,484	40,2	9,39	(+)7,8	
2. PR Parma	1,897	1,234	0.651	3,131	19,4	5,69	(+)10,2	
3. MO Modena	1,635	1,079	0.660	2,714	16,8	3,04	+10,0%	
4. PC Piacenza	1,176	781	0.664	1,957	12,1	5,05	+8,4%	
5. BO Bologna	599	411	0.686	1.01	6,3	0,98	+13,0%	
6. FC Forli-Cesena	160	116	0.725	276	1,7	0,66	+11,3%	
7. RA Ravenna	132	144	1.091	276	1,7	0,63	+16,5%	
8. FE Ferrara	120	86	0.717	206	1,3	0,75	+9,6%	
9. RN Rimini	43	26	0.605	69	0,4	0,21	+16,9%	
Total Region	9,424	6,699	0.711	16,123		3,2	+9,3%	
Total Indians in Emilia-Romagna	16,123		(3,2%)	Total Indians in Italy			121,036	(2,6%)
Total Foreigners in Emilia-Romagna	500,597			Total Foreigners in Italy			4,570,317	

Source: http://www.tuttitalia.it/emilia-romagna/statistiche/cittadini-stranieri/india/

Emilia Romagna is one of the richest and most advanced regions of Italy with a total population of 4.4 million. There are nine provinces among which falls Parma with a population of 431, 419 people. At the end of 1999, 2, 830 Indians, of whom 1, 159 were women constituted 2.6 % of the grand total of non-EU 'resident foreigners' in the region of Emilia Romagna (Italian official statistics, as cited by Grillo 2002: 6). In 2012, the figure has risen to 17, 260 of whom 7,143 are women (see Table 2). Fidenza is a municipality and district in the province of Parma in the Emilia-Romagna region. There are 13 municipalities in the district of Fidenza, among which also lies the municipality of Fidenza. Fidenza is well known for the large number of dairy farms and in 2012, the Indian population constituted the largest segment of the '*stranieri*' population in Fidenza district: i.e. 1,725 Indians out of a total of 13, 058 foreign persons, of whom 719 are women (Statistica.Parma 2011). In 2004, there were only 589 people of Indian origin in the district, moving to 1, 082 in 2008 and to 1, 725 in 2012 (ibid.). This high growth is a result of movement due to strong kin networks and the proclivity of Indian immigrants to help in the employment and migration strategies of kin. (See Table 4 and Figure 2.) Women immigrants however show a lower level of mobility as compared to men and this is due to their mobility being linked to family reunification which necessarily allows for a gap in the movement of men (who generally come first), followed by women.

Figure 2. Indian immigrant growth by gender in Emilia Romagna: 2005-2012
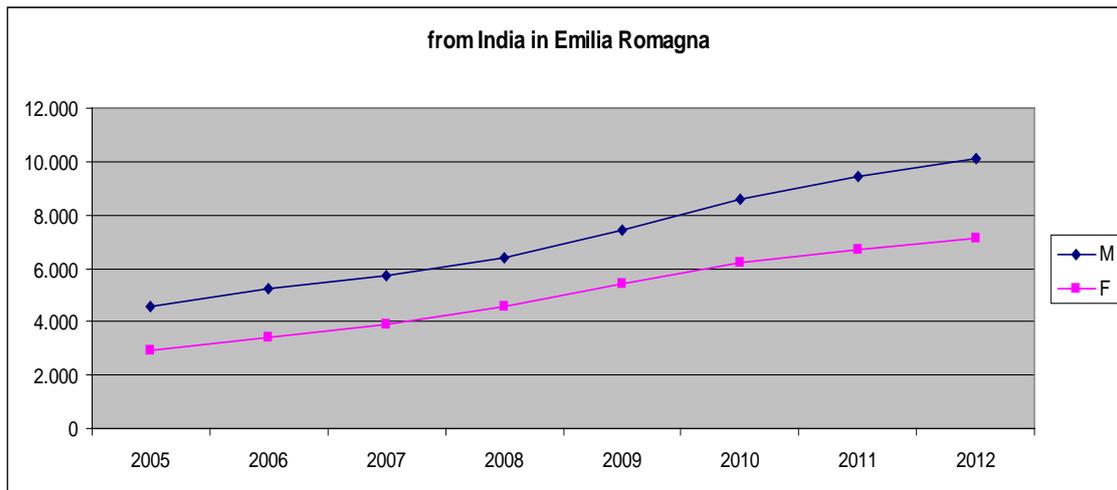
Source: Rete Intercultura, Fidenza

In Figure 3, we further note that there has been an increase in 2012 over 2011 in the immigrant population, as compared to other foreign populations, in Fidenza. Every fourth new immigrant is a Romanian and every fifth new immigrant is an Indian. This is significant and has considerably raised the total Indian immigrant population in 2012 in Fidenza over all other foreign populations.

Figure 3. Annual addition to migrants by nationality in Fidenza
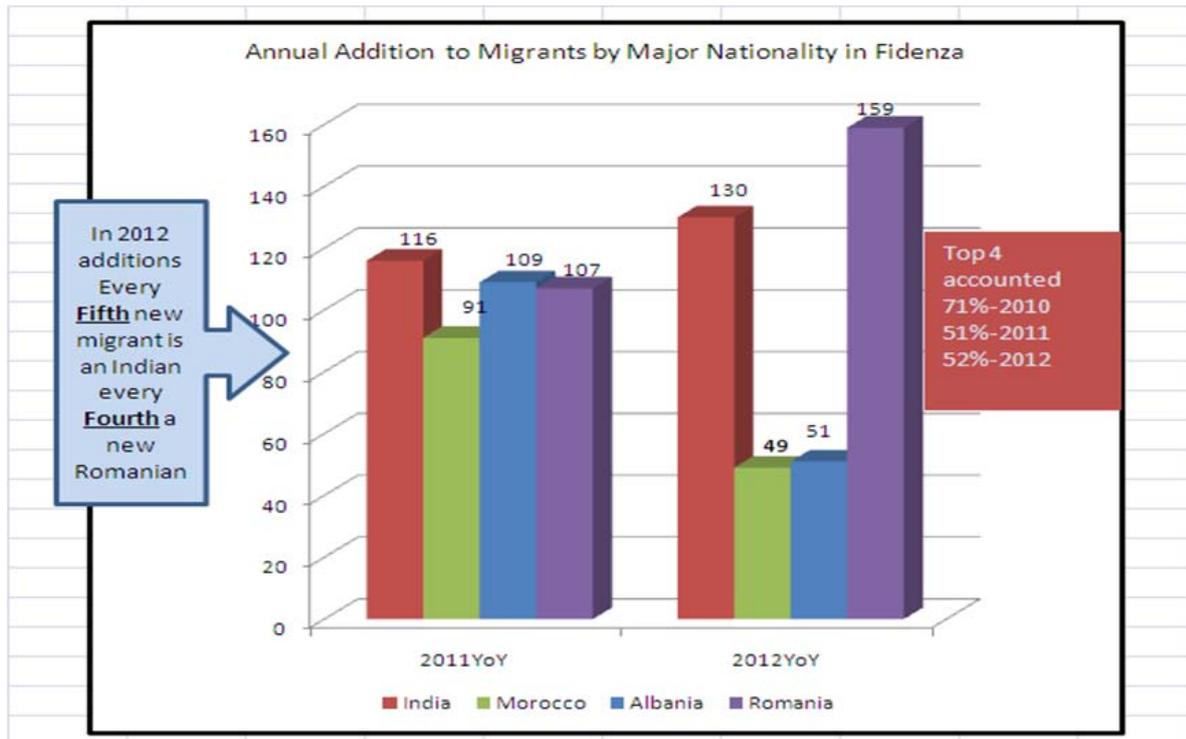
Source: Computed by the author based on data supplied by Rete Intercultura, Fidenza

Immigrants of Indian origin around Fidenza and Parma in northern Italy were selected for this study according to location, gender, social class, age and educational background. Almost all interviews were conducted in the district of Fidenza and in a high school in Cremona in Lombardy during visits scheduled between 2010 and 2012.

These Indian immigrants have lived in Europe for between 15-25 years depending on the trajectories for migration undertaken by them. In addition, there are more than a 130 Indians, out of a work force of 200, mostly from Punjab, working in a well-known slaughterhouse for pigs in the region. I met and interviewed 30 men between the ages of 35-60. Those with very little formal education are employed in the agriculture sector, primarily dairy farms, slaughterhouses, and small factories in the largely rural areas and small towns of Emilia Romagna. Interviews and focus group discussions were also conducted with 50 school going young adults (aged15-18 years) and other youth (18-21 years). I met several women as well: some were engaged in factories, or in laundries, or working is small boutiques or shops. Most were homemakers and unemployed. I made several visits to the region of a week to two-three weeks each time, spending every day meeting a cross section of the Indian farm worker community, NGOs working with immigrant populations, immigrant associations, employers, school teachers and administrators, students of Indian origin, both boys and girls, and women at home, in the Sikh gurudwara and Hindu temples. I also interviewed a young Indian woman in Vicenza who runs the only non-formal organisation I encountered for the welfare of Indian women. In addition, I met and interviewed 37 Italian people including social workers, teachers, doctors, employers, trade union officials, police officials, members of local governments, church functionaries, translators, cultural mediators, NGOs of different kinds, and others. Interviews with Indian immigrants were conducted in Punjabi and Hindi and with Italians in English, using an interpreter each time.

Table 4. Indian Nationals holding residence permits (*permessi di sorggiorno*)
by category, Italy 2010 (January 1)

		Total		Male		Female	
Category		Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
Work		62,259	48.1	*57,146*	69.3	*5,113*	10.9
	of which dependent worker	58755	45.4				
	self employed workers	2153	1.7				
	workers who are looking for job	1351	1.0				
Family		60,226	46.5	*22,736*	27.6	*37,490*	79.6
Religion		4,642	3.6	*1,078*	1.3	*3,564*	7.6
Study		1,302	1.0	*875*	1.1	*427*	0.9
Refugee status		14	0.0	*8*	0.0	*6*	0.0
Asylum Seekers		-	0.0	*29*	0.0	*1*	0.0
Humanitarian reasons		79	0.1	62	0.1	17	0.0
Health		158	0.1	26	0.0	132	0.3
others		806	0.6	*443*	0.5	*363*	0.8
Total		129,516	100.0	*82,403*	100.0	*47,113*	100.0
Source: Istat		100		63.6		36.4	

Source: ISAT, compiled by author

The family and the project of migration

The family is crucial to the migratory project of the Punjabi community in Emilia Romagna and elsewhere in Italy as well. The decision to emigrate is never an individual decision, but taken by the family as a whole, or within the community. The number of men who have obtained residence permits

through family reunification is very high: 60, 226 (Table 4) and indicates the strong network of family and kin that works well in furthering the mobility of family members over a period of time. Migration for the Indian immigrant is therefore a 'kind of collective investment, of which the main beneficiary is the family, which derives financial resources and social prestige from the investment of its human resources abroad' (Compiani and Quassoli 2005: 146). In other words, the centrality of the family and the significance of kin networks is critical to the migration enterprise. Kin networks are central to the lives of Punjabi and Sikh migrants and function as 'sponsors for immigration of other individuals and families by enabling and controlling the integration of newcomers into the Italian labour market and society' (Bertolani 2012: 68). The family plays a definitive role in the migrant's life, exercising social control, especially over generations and sets the rules for the maintenance of traditions and customs imported from India. These are crucial to the life of the immigrants and set the tenor for relationships within the family, between spouses, with the children and with members of the older generation who often reside with the son and his family. The content of culture is therefore primarily determined by family members for whom the status of migrant brings social prestige and honour, not only in the diaspora but more importantly, in the community in Punjab.

Migration out from the Punjab to the developed western countries, Australia and East Africa has been a tradition among the Sikh and Hindu communities in the Punjab.[7] The tendency to move is part of the culture of migration that prevails in the communities in this region. Singh and Tatla refer to this as the propensity of Sikhs for example to 'return' to their 'most permanent tradition – that of roaming' (2006: 33). Other scholars emphasise more recent political and social trends in the Punjab as compelling factors that influence decisions to emigrate. Chopra (2011), for example, discusses the importance of prevailing social and political conditions in Punjab and argues that in Punjab it is difficult to disassociate 'the urgency to send young men abroad' from the 'transformative politics of Khalistan' (2011: 5). Gallo and Sai refer to the 'hurt memory' of different historical episodes, such as the military storming of the Golden temple in Amritsar or the riots against the Sikh community in 1984, that is built into the diasporic consciousness of the community around the world (2013). Such episodes no doubt have resulted in the emigration of Sikhs in larger numbers post-1984 but it is not clear whether this is indicative of the breakdown of trust between communities and the memories of hurt and violation or of a culture of migration that influences families to send at least one member out of the home on a migratory project. As Mahipal Singh, now an agent in Milan, tells me: 'There was a general wish of the family for me to go out. In Punjab in every household, there are family members who go out for better opportunities. It is like a tradition'. An agent suggested that Mahipal should come to Italy. His father himself who was known figure in the community wanted that his sons should do 'something good' with their lives. This 'doing good' lies essentially in the migratory project on which profound value is placed and which is deeply embedded in Punjabi culture.

Employment patterns of Indians that prevailed in the 1990s included predominantly those of agriculture (farm labourers), the food processing industry (cattle raising and food production), the tanning industry, circuses (service jobs) and to a much less extent, domestic work and low-skilled services (Bertolani, Ferraro and Perocco 2011: 135). Most of the farm labourers who originally arrived in the province of Latina in Lazio in the 1980s and 1990s found work in Latina, Rome and Viterbo where the main method of employment was that of 'undocumented labour' (Compiani and Quassoli 2005: 150). They slowly moved upwards with the help of family and kin networks to the regions of Emilia Romagna and Lombardy where they were offered better work conditions and wages. 'Secure employment' in this sector has resulted in Indian immigrants remaining here without seeking to move out towards industry or other services (Bertolani, Ferraro and Perocco 2011: 136). The strength of their social networks in general has contributed to their upward mobility. In the 2000s, the Indian immigrants have strengthened their position and consolidated their gains and benefitted by the reconstitution of family life, health care, social and other services in the region. The dairy farming

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[7] See for example the work of Singh and Tatla (2006).

sector in the region has come to be increasingly dominated by men of Indian origin who are perceived to be good workers with cows. This leads to the conclusion that the 'productive field' of dairy farming has resulted in the Indians carving out an 'ethnic niche' for themselves, 'access to which takes place almost exclusively as members of kin-networks' (Bertolani, Ferraro and Perocco 2011: 144). Almost all those Indians who were interviewed for this study have minimal education and work experience prior to their immigration to Italy through other countries in Europe. They have a variety of stories of entry, the difficult and arduous journey, the lack of financial resources, the exploitative and greedy 'agents' who arrange for their documents for large sums of money, and always, a life of struggle and enormous strain bordering on despair and loneliness, especially for the women, very few of whom are employed outside the home.

Isolation and strangeness: women's experience of migration

Isolation is not an experience that emerges from women's past experience in the Punjab, or even in other regions of India, where women are surrounded by family and have access to other women friends and members of the community. Isolation is therefore very much an outcome of international migration. It is the cause of the psychological experience of complete loneliness, psychological exclusion and loss by the Indian women who are house bound and prevented from seeking employment or moving outside the home. At the same time, there is an effort by women to move out of this experience through seeking medical help in some cases and pursuing an engagement with the Italian population in different ways. In this way, this paper seeks to emphasise that recognition of one's condition, and the limitations it gives rise to as well as the struggle for its resolution is the first step in resisting the conditions that form the basis for the silencing and oppression of women.

To begin with, women's migration from India falls into two categories. One is the lesser known category of single, educated women arriving in Italy through kin networks primarily in search of employment, and later marriage. Families in the Punjab in India are increasingly seeing this as a strategic form of migration and as a long term strategy for settlement, not just of the concerned woman but of members of her family back home. These women are educated, with undergraduate and sometimes postgraduate degrees, and arrive in Italy through a sister or cousins, often having paid money to do so, but are unable to find a job, especially in Fidenza or Parma. However, in Cremona, they often find employment in coat stitching factories where hand stitching work is required. Once they settle, they continue the tradition of enabling the mobility of other kin through marriage and other reunification strategies that serve to only enhance their own position in the marriage market in India.

The more common form of migration among women is that of dependent migration, primarily through marriage. These women, among my respondents, have a little education, sometimes more than their husbands, and experience a double burden of exclusion: prevented by their partners from working outside the home or going out into Italian society, most women remain indoors out of what they consider their own choice. At the same time, their lack of familiarity with the Italian language restricts their mobility and interaction with the host community. This develops in them a view of their life in Italy as restricted and guarded and they regret the community life they have left behind. Being in Europe has certainly brought change in their lives: the children are in good schools, they have financial security, but they have empty hearts, deadened by lack of engagement with the world around them. At the same time, the family and family honour remains paramount to their way of being, whether in India or in Italy. Hence, family honour, enabled by migration, compels them to follow their partners into unknown territories and compliance to patriarchy obliges them to obey the rules set by the traditional head of the household.

Members of the host community (especially school teachers and social workers) unfailingly complain about the inability of Indian women to visit their children's school because 'they don't drive', 'they don't speak the language and don't want to learn either, don't want to mix with Italian people, they want to stay separately', etc. Their *responsibility* to participate, to integrate with the host

society is therefore reiterated by these officials/agents of the state who are appalled at the lack of will amongst the Indian community, as compared to other ethnic groups. They add that they are willing to work with them but find Indians 'a closed community, who listen to their own music, speak their own language, watch their own television channels, and do not seek out participation in Italian society in any way'. An obstetrician also commented, 'Indian women are pregnant all the time. They have no idea about contraception and never ask either. Their husbands will ask'. The most striking demand from the Indian men is to know the sex of the foetus and if it is a girl child, they seek to abort it. The women tell her that they will be forced to do the abortions whether or not they want to when she counsels them that abortions after 12 weeks is illegal in Italy. This form of gender discrimination exists only among the Indian community and has been increasing in recent years. This is the most damning indictment of the community and a point of cultural difference that surpasses all forms of understanding for the Italian medical community. The medical doctors add, 'Most Indians have scabies and tuberculosis is common amongst them. Diabetes is also very common among young Indians, as early as 15 or 16 years of age. Indian patients are never punctual, and they always ask for an injection. Italian patients come to us for prevention but Indian patients come only when they are sick'. There is also a constant comparison with other migrant communities by the medical practitioners and the Indian men are constructed as more weird, and the women more isolated, than other communities.

At the same time, without seeking to condone the Indian community's behaviour especially in the context of female foeticide which needs to be dealt with as a criminal act, there is in the articulation by the Italian doctors, a shutting out of an ethnic community for its apparent self-closure, an unwillingness to explore the dimensions of participation and what it entails for members of all communities, how the paths of being a migrant are traversed, how they both complicate and are also confounded by the predilections of being unemployed, and dilemmas of being woman, isolated and 'foreign' in another society. As pointed out by Bimbi and Vianello (2012), such a form of labelling exists within a 'politics of victimisation' wherein there is a racialisation of migrant women. They consider this a form of 'symbolic violence' and argue that this takes place within the 'gender power field' that is intersected by race and class (Ibid.). It reflects the view that women who do not speak the same language as 'us', and are so dominated by their male partners, are necessarily doomed to a life of misery and hopelessness and locked into a world where no movement or liberation is possible.

In addition, there is a way in which 'immigrant family life is disciplined by a system of political controls bound to strict economic requirements that impact the geographical location of their intimate relationships' (Bonizzoni 2011: 327). While families of Indian origin do not stay apart for long periods due to their propensity for family re-unification, political and economic control makes them seek out forms of self-closure and emotional self-sufficiency so that they are not dependent on external factors or agencies for any form of 'help'. The only exception appears to be the Catholic Church with whom there is interaction in a friendly, interactive and socially productive way.[8] While I therefore do not want to emphasise a cultural approach to integration and thereby neglect the structural dimensions that affect integration, it is important to identify the strategies that emerge from within family lives enabling integrative processes as much as they preclude them.

There is a heterogeneity in the Indian community which is however perceived as a broad homogeneity by the host community. The differences between women are important and the diverse strategies used by women need to be recognised. For purposes of analysis in this paper, I divide migrant women in this region into roughly three categories although these categories are not distinct and there may be many more differences or merging across categories than what is observable. The underlying connections between the categories lies in the women's forms of engagement and participation in the host society. Caroline Brettell refers to such forms of engagement as 'civic' in

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[8] I observed this not just in Fidenza, but in Busetto where the Catholic priest made it a point to visit Punjabi Hindu families who were clearly not part of his congregation on a weekly basis providing them with friendship and support.

nature, i.e. 'how immigrants become civically engaged and hence construct, with their own agency, a sense of "belonging" in their new home that may or may not have to do with … political indicators' (Brettell 2012b: 133). Such forms of engagement lie outside legal and formal citizenship norms and are to be understood in the context of agency and a search for belonging through various forms of behaviour. As Brettell puts it, 'people claim citizenship and belonging through what they do, not through what is accorded to them' (Ibid.: 132). At the same time, it would be presumptuous to assume that all Indian immigrant women partake in such activities; there are variations among them depending on social class, educational levels, and motivation for asserting their rights for civic participation and ultimately, integration.

The first category is of those women who do not have very high levels of education, and are mostly housebound, and yet, they must find ways of connecting with the world, from within that space. Nayanjot is in her thirties, she lives in a large independent house, owned by her husband and her brother's family, who live on the ground floor, while Nayanjot lives upstairs with her husband their two children. She is not allowed by her husband to work outside the home. She says she would like very much to go out to work so that she can earn some extra money, have an income that she can call her own. She only goes with her husband to the Sikh temple, the *gurudwara*, which constitutes her main social activity. In her words, 'I have great love for the language here but cannot do much. I don't have time to learn the language. My daughter's teacher gave me a telephone number to call for learning the language but I have not done it yet. I have a licence to drive but can't really do it. I am afraid of driving. I can't help the children with the Italian home-work, so I would have loved to drive (and learn the language). But my husband does not encourage me to learn it, he asks me, *tumne kaunsa professor banna hain*? (You are not planning to become a professor, are you?) So it very difficult,' she concludes. Her husband does not allow her to go anywhere and when they are free, they spend time with each other. Nayanjyot's desire to learn Italian, drive a car for which she has a licence, to go out and work, is suppressed by her because of her commitment to her family and its stability. At the same time, she has found strategies for circumventing the controls exercised over her by her partner whose authority must remain paramount in the domestic sphere. In other words, Nayanjyot must submit her desires to maintain her partner's sense of self as a male and yet realise her goals as much as she can. She uses the domestic space to sew clothes and is a seamstress within the Indian community. She thus tries to establish linkages with other women although she cannot do the same with members of the host community. She is able to share and enrich her somewhat lonely life through some interaction in the Sikh temple. At the same time, she is reconciled to being at home as the home atmosphere, she says, is good and her husband is 'nice' and this enables her stay at home as that is what she has to do: *andar hi rehna hai* (I have to stay inside). Nayanjot also finds succour in religious experience that she now insists is fundamental to her identity as a 'good' Sikh. She visits the *gurudwara* regularly and on her visits to India, sees this as a major expedition, spending a week in a different *gurudwara* each time, she says, to experience her religion. Nayanjyot is not alone in clutching at religion for engaging with others, with her 'true self' and at the same time, portraying herself in ways that are appropriate to the community, thereby gaining for herself a place within the community. She must maintain family honour at all costs and for her, the perfect solution is the religious experience, acceptable to all. This however further marks her ethnic identity. She now continuously wears a black headscarf putting her into a unique 'cultural' slot vis-à-vis the host community who see her within an essentialised trope of belonging to a religiously marked ethnic community.[9]

For women such as Nayanjyot, her unspoken and invisible aspirations will be fulfilled she imagines by the children in the family: she wants to help one of her daughters become a doctor as she could never realise that dream herself as she was poor and there was no one to guide her. Nayanjyot's eleven year old daughter however aspires for a career in design but this does not trouble Nayanjyot because she knows that her daughter will in any case have a more successful life than hers. Nayanjyot's tears

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[9] Subsequent to the interview, Nayanjyot is now driving her car and visiting the children's school to interact with the teachers.

and her silence spoke clearly about the emotional agony she undergoes as a result of complete exclusion that comes out of her own domestic space. She is captive to her family but will never go against it. The metaphor of 'sinking hearts'[10] for the women of Indian origin is therefore not without significance. Women in such a condition however do seek out help by turning to medical doctors for relief, to religion for sustenance, and to their children and domestic space as that haven that will ultimately liberate them. None the less, this category of women experiences isolation and its outcomes in the most severe manner.

The second category of women include those who are educated, and choose to stay at home to take care of very young children or the elderly. They are critical of other Indian women and families whom they view as bringing a bad name to the community as a whole through their attitudes towards themselves and the host community. Raminder is in her thirties and first came to Italy, as a young bride, following her husband who works with cattle at a dairy farm near Fidenza. She has a B.Com Honours degree from Guru Nanak Dev University, Kapurthala, in Punjab and met her husband, who has a postgraduate degree, while they were both students of Chartered Accountancy in Punjab. Raminder hoped to find employment in Italy and learnt coat stitching by hand to find employment as a seamstress in a factory but was unable to do so. Once she was pregnant with her first child, she decided to give up her search for employment and focus on her home and children. She has an opinion about other Indian women (in the first category) whom she finds depressed and sick primarily due to 'being neglected by their husbands', as she put it. Such women find comfort in frequently visiting India and often complain of being depressed (by saying they have been bewitched *mere te kitne jadu kar ditta'*) in order to draw attention to themselves. These families indulge in the Punjabi mentality of 'showing off' through an excessive display of wealth even though they may not use any heating at home. She seeks to distance herself from such families whom she feels convey an incorrect picture about all Indians to the host community. There is in her analysis a class bias as she considers this category of Indians as a 'low class category' of uneducated and inactive Indian women Her main concern is to show the host community that 'we are not a part of that category of Indian people who are uneducated'. This stay-at-home mother therefore has worked hard to establish a very good relationship with teachers in her children's school which she regularly visits with her husband. She has started hosting a stall at the Parent Teacher Meeting (PTM) dinner where she makes it a point to highlight some aspect of Indian culture whether it is through the display of Indian clothes or jewellery or with the inclusion of some other cultural form. Through the showcasing of Indian crafts and culture, Raminder wants to 'change the Italian mentality towards us. It may not be a five star reception', she says, 'but time will tell…'. Eventually, she hopes that Italians will recognise the differences among Indians and appreciate her for what she considers her 'genuine' efforts for civic engagement; already, she proudly asserts that teachers at school have been asking about her and she is clearly thrilled that her creativity and presence is being acknowledged.[11] This category of Indian woman is markedly different from the first one as through a form of civic engagement in a public school, she seeks to change the Italian mind-set about the Indian community. Women like Raminder are probably not the norm in the community of immigrants who reside in the rural areas around Fidenza. The strategic forms of intervention however need to be recognised and addressed within an overall framework that seeks to view women as agents in search of different methods through which engagement may take place.

At the same time, cultural difference itself results in an organised effort to combat difference, marginalisation and exclusion through forms of engagement in the public sphere Emerging from the emotional desire and need of one woman for what she describes as the 'Indian feeling of togetherness', she formed the only organisation (in northern Italy) that exists for Indian migrant

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[10] This phrase is provided by an Italian psychiatrist in his description of the Indian women who come to him for treatment: they all complain to him of 'sinking hearts' which he construes as an outcome of their loneliness, despair and complete seclusion.

[11] Cf. Brettell (2012b) who examines the relationship between Indian women migrants in the US and the Parent Teacher Association (PTA) in their children's schools.

women for their integration into Italian society. This is *Navchintan* (literally, *nai soch,* new thoughts or new beginnings) in Arizganano near Vicenza. *Navchintan* is a an association, with other Indian members, started by Monisha in October 2010. The woman behind it is a fiery Monisha Kumar who came to Italy in 1993, soon after her wedding in 1992. She is well educated with a B.A. from Guru Nanak Dev University in Amritsar, in Punjab, and a B.Ed. from Maharishi Dayanand University, Rohtak. Her parents are educated Punjabis: her mother used to teach Hindi in a school in Phagwara in Jalandhar district while her father was a sergeant in the Indian Air Force. Monisha works in the tanning industry as a colour coordinator and also as a cultural mediator with the local government.

The inception of *Navchintan* lies in Monisha's experience of cultural loss, of having lost the feeling of togetherness and of being completely alone; this compelled her to initiate an organization that would be concerned with the welfare of Indian women in Italy. It was at a moment of personal loss of a cultural experience that is firmly rooted in a particular festival in India, that she experienced the emotion of reaching out to others. *Teej*, the Hindu festival that she pined for, is renowned for its celebratory flavour. Hindu married women celebrate *Teej* for marital bliss, by fasting for the well-being of their husbands and children. There is a lot of singing, dancing and feasting at the end of the fast. A significant aspect of the festival is the application of henna, *mehndi*, on the hands and feet of married women and Monisha longed for the application of *mehndi* and the fragrance of *mehndi* in her new life in Italy. She asserts that it was out of this sense of cultural loss that the urge to seek togetherness within the Indian community was born to help herself and other women to engage more meaningfully with the world around them. The main aim of this organization is to 'teach Indian women how to interact with school teachers, doctors, other Italians'. At the same time, Monisha realises the need to mobilise women against domination and urges them to come out and participate in different events and activities. Using the colloquial '*appe*' (we), she addresses them at a meeting, telling them that 'we ourselves need to do everything ourselves and change our lives, not depending on any external help', adding 'we need to work shoulder to shoulder (*mode laga ke)* to change the world'. Monisha belongs to that category of rare women who mobilise other women for change and independent decision making. She is very motivated, organises several meetings on a weekly and monthly basis, and is deeply loved in the community for her sincerity, hard work and leadership capacities. Women want change and unable to take the first step themselves, turn to Monisha and *Navchintan* for help.

Initially, Monisha sought funds from the Mayor for language classes which she conducted for Indian women at times suitable to them. Slowly however, the funds for language classes has dried up and now Monisha has found another way to seek out integration: by involving the Italian community in Indian cultural events. She has therefore organised cultural events where, along with other Indian women, has dressed up an Italian woman as an Indian bride and asked her to play out her role expressing appropriate emotions. Similarly an Italian man was dressed up as an Indian bridegroom and all the nuances of Hindu weddings were shared with the Italian community who attend these cultural and dance shows in large numbers. 'They must experience our lives as we experience them', says Monisha. Through such forms of mutual interaction, Monisha hopes to bridge the gap between the Indians and Italians. She says, 'it is not just about us learning how to speak Italian and live like Italian people. They too must learn to live like us'. Culture in this view is a shared, mutually constructed culture, far from an idea of a single monolith cultural trope that seeks to integrate or appropriate another culture within it. Monisha's story also shows us that it is also an experience of cultural loss on the one hand that seeks out a cultural merger on the other. This is the most fascinating part of Monisha's construction of her experience of strangeness and exclusion and of wanting change, not by a return to her own culture, but in this territory, which is now her home, of being instrumental in the cultural merging of different cultures. This cultural inscription of integration has emerged from an individual trajectory but is none the less oriented towards a collective effort to bring about change. At the same time, the three, and perhaps several other, categories of women exist at the intersections of not only gender relations but also class, status, and education that are constructed on the shifting axes of domination and agency and are no doubt essential to their differing experience of migration.

In seeking to understand the relationship between gender and generation, we move to a consideration of the experience of young women in high school in Fidenza and in Cremona, where we once again encounter the experience of isolation and seclusion.

Young women and social exclusion in high school

The relationship between gender and generation is complex and fraught with the dilemmas of being older, uneducated, married and 'alone' in Italy on the one hand, and being educated, single, young and also very much 'alone', on the other. Young women in high school in Cremona are rather explicit about the forms of social exclusion they experience that tends to push them back into their safe havens of the family and community. Seventeen year old Sukhvinder for example wants to return to India, as 'everything is there': food, family, the family home in the Punjab. *Dada, dadi* (grandparents) are there, father's sister is also in Punjab. There is also the realization that this will not actually happen as if she studies in Italy, she will most likely look for a job in Italy. She says, about her life here, 'There is change in my life, in my "*bol chal*" (behavior) but inside no real change, Ï do not know why'. She goes out with school friends in Cremona and shops for clothes but with other Indian friends only, "*khule dil naal*" (literally, with a free heart). Being here is very different from India; she had thought that it would be very good "*bahut vadiya*" but found it difficult as did not know the language and the way of life. In India it is more free "*khula khula*", here she stays inside the house. The family remains integral to her self-definition as it is in the family that she finds comfort, in the memories of family left behind and in the family that is present. She concludes, 'family means "*sab kuch*" (everything)'. Manjeet initially felt good about going abroad, Europe was considered very beautiful, 'I was scared also thinking if I am not able to adjust with other people or merge with them. When I left Punjab, I was crying and crying, my eyes were swollen, left the little cousins whom I knew since their birth and they played in my lap, left my school friends with whom I played. I felt "*kuch kho gaya hain, wapas nahi milna*". (I have lost something and will never get it back)'. Manjit has never returned to India.

Family in this case is tied not only to the emotional experience of togetherness but also to the experience of loss, with that of territory, home, friends, neighbours, that accentuates the feeling of being out of it all, being homeless, rudderless and afloat in this uncertain world that now constitutes the everyday in a swiftly changing world of experience. At the same time, it is family here to which woman now clings as that resource that offers safety and comfort, in spite of the oppression, differentiation, and domination, from the exclusion outside.

Another young woman in high school experiences the feeling of there being 'nothing outside. If we wear *salwar suit* (Punjabi dress for women), they look at us. My father doesn't like to see me in jeans. When I was little, students would hate me, you are black, *kaali hai*, don't speak much, as I spoke less. I used to feel very bad and cry when I was young, now it is okay. When I used to feel very bad I used to answer back, I used to tell my teachers also, who used to help us. We are all treated alike by them'. The experience of exclusion remains: "*hate*", for example, is a prominent word in their vocabulary of describing their experience of cultural assimilation: many students "hate" me in class, '*naphrat karte hain*' they won't even talk to me, they think we come here to take away work. At first I felt bad, but now it is better. I feel "*aukha*" (strange) but better when I learnt the Italian language. In class, children are difficult, outside its OK'. The experience of belonging depends on relationship and interaction, emotional ties, and an attachment borne of interaction and togetherness. Being different excludes the feeling of belonging and emphasises the feeling of marginalisation. As Colombo et. al. put it, 'The place that is experienced as one's own and as the basis of the fundamental experience of feeling "at home" is construed ... within relational and imaginative dimensions, rather than within a spatial one' (2009: 40). The bodily and sensory experience of difference is a very critical part of the experience of 'who' you are as an immigrant. Young students of Indian origin in high school say that their bodies

are experienced as 'smelly' by other students.[12] They are often told that their food smells, or their hair smells, or their bodies smell: that in any case they give off a smell that is experienced as distasteful and abhorrent by the host community. This for the Indian students is most humiliating experience of difference that they have encountered in their everyday life. They cannot change their bodies and therefore the sense of being different and other is in some sense permanently marked and fixed through their very existence.

The experience of being different is particularly painful in the middle school years when Italian students are most harsh in their criticism of Indian students who are often told to return to India, to stop wearing turbans, and stop coming to school. Indian youth tolerate their taunts by ignoring them because it is what they call their *'majboori'* (i.e. they have no choice but to tolerate them). It is however the experience of being isolated and alone that stands out sharply in their memory of their middle school years and affects their experience of high school as well. Fangen et. al. examine such feelings of isolation and rejection within the context of 'social exclusion' and distinguish between *'feelings'* of being excluded and physically not being allowed access (Fangen et. al. 2012: 4). While migrant students have access to schools and good relationships with their Italian teachers, they experience social exclusion at a very emotional level from their peers. However, 'social exclusion' in the context of migration is very complex and it is important to examine it as a 'process' that cannot be neatly slotted into either/or situations (ibid.). It then becomes apparent that exclusion is not necessarily an emotional experience vis-a-vis 'others' in alien contexts but takes place within the community as well.

Girls in high school view the Italian people largely in terms of their experience of the Indian community in Italy who suspect them of having boyfriends and gossip about this endlessly amongst themselves. The Italians, on the other hand, are on the whole more loving and gentle and treat them with respect. None the less, even these migrants did not hesitate to point out that they are 'different' from the Italians who think that Indians do not interact with them. This is accentuated by their experience of the Indian community as quarrelsome and difficult which is not appreciated by the Italians and this, the girls say, makes them 'feel bad'. This sense of 'feeling bad' is linked to the emotional experience of shame vis-a-vis their own community in relation to the host community so that difference is being experienced on two planes: within *and* outside the community. Similarly, the girls do not have any relationship with the Indian boys in school with whom they are afraid to speak. They do however freely interact with Italian boys in school. There is in this articulation of sameness and difference a complexity based on relationships, norms and values in the Indian community itself that prevents them from being independent in their relationships with Indian youth in the same way as they are with their male Italian classmates. The difficulties this engenders amongst themselves and in their experience of being different in Italy is based on the Indian community's lack of trust and willingness to accept another lifestyle or relationships that are different from their own established ones. The youth thus feel isolated within the Indian community as much as they do in the Italian community. This places an undue strain on the young migrant who is simultaneously struggling to keep herself afloat in the school as a marked person as well as a 'good', 'virtuous' and 'respectful' girl in her own community. As we can see, gender is critical to how Indian youth view the other: girls value relationships with Italian youth and teachers and seem to desire such relationships in order to successfully achieve their goals of integration. This is however not the case with Indian boys who emphasise difference and accept the fraught situation, seeking to avoid conflict with members of the Italian community.

The family and the household are therefore significant spaces in which identities are not just constituted but also performed, negotiated and reformulated. Increasingly, however, there are instances of youth breaking out of the constraints imposed by the family as the conservative ideas and lifestyles begin to conflict with what the youth experience as a more liberated and independent

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[12] This is the most humiliating form of exclusion experienced by migrants caused by an acute feeling 'of temporal and bodily disjuncture' that occurs when 'other bodies do not respond as anticipated' (Wise 2010: 923).

European culture.[13] Their socialisation in particular social landscapes as a consequence of their familiarity with the Italian language and culture learnt in school and with peers steers them in this direction. They constitute the category of young women and men who engage with Italian society in diverse ways through their education, linguistic skills, occupational and employment patterns, to accomplish their goals for integration and upward mobility.

Concluding comments

Inequality, contestation and struggle are fundamental features of migrants' lives everywhere. This is compounded in the case of women inasmuch as their struggle is against forms of gender domination and inequality as well. This is not a new conclusion and has been pointed out by several scholars earlier. However, it is important to recognise and understand the heterogeneity amongst women belonging to a variety of social and economic backgrounds and to seek to focus on their very different and nuanced strategies of integration based on the cultural and social pathways undertaken by them in their journeys of integration in Italy.

Women experience the dilemma of isolation and strangeness in alien spaces, not only vis-à-vis social and cultural others but, much more harshly, through the intimate space of the household. The mostly uneducated and unskilled women, relegated to the domestic sphere in an alien geographic space, experience conflicting emotions: of pride because they are now in Europe, that coveted territorial space that holds high value among kin and neighbours back home. As a consequence, they have dignity and status in their own community. At the same time, they are completely alone, often without employment or help, making sense of a totally different way of life, culturally, socially and economically. They are deeply distressed about their condition and find themselves sinking into oblivion as it were because of the twists and turns of life that have brought them to this condition. Men on their part experience a direct threat to their masculinity which may be diminished by alien laws and services which seek to 'interfere' in the private domain and may, they imagine, help women gain ascendancy in the domestic sphere. They seek to strengthen their masculine identities through further strictures that tend to remove women from the public sphere into the carefully controlled domestic space.

This is nothing new in itself and acquires urgency when we seek to understand dilemmas of belonging and strangeness in cultural and social spaces less traversed or inhabited. In his recent work, Ash Amin reminds us, 'Europe is on the verge of rejecting universalism and multiculturalism as a way of living with diversity, replacing it with a disciplinarian approach towards strangers and minorities' (Amin 2012: 113). The disciplinarian approach requires migrants to want to integrate for their benefit and that of the children. This is clearly rejected by these migrants as a consequence of the social processes of confinement and exclusion that are experienced both culturally and in the political and economic domains. The impact of the latter are felt most crucially when there is recession and unemployment which results in job insecurities and causes greater anxieties in the familial space. Having to submit to strict regimes of domination and control in terms of the host society's legal requirements is compounded by the inability to keep one's job. This necessarily results in tensions and insecurities in the family and the household, the role of which I would not like to underplay, in the exacerbation of the experience of strangeness and isolation in everyday life. Strangeness is emphasised as a way of being that exists for all migrants regardless of their status. At the same time, it acquires a quality that is sought after as it enables a certain privacy in this attempt to contend with and understand another society. To seek refuge in strangeness and isolation is therefore a strategic ploy by women, and men, who try to remain without too much effort at the edge of an incomprehensible and alien society.

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[13] I have examined this movement and its implications in the life story of an Indian young woman Guddi in another paper, Thapan (n.d.).

In this context, a question we seek to answer by way of conclusion is as follows: what is the way forward?. No doubt, there is a need to guard against the victimisation of women *within* the community as well as address the larger problem of integration in different contexts through multiple lens that may address and open up numerous possibilities for integration. At the same time, this paper clearly suggests that 'culture' is not a fixed or marked category of difference. 'Culture', as discussed in this paper, we may conclude has been enabling and transformatory and therefore reiterates our view that culture is not a homogeneous or a static entity, as the possibilities of change are ever present. This transformatory potential that lends agency to actors is however dependent on several intersecting conditions such as gender, class, caste (whose presence is certain but which I have not examined), ethnicity, education, employment status, and nature of interaction with members of the host society. The presence of aspects of culture, as a conservative force, based on certain beliefs, values, and attitudes, may also prevent the articulation of change. The celebration, and indeed even the articulation, of cultural diversity is therefore a tightrope walk, and to negotiate this, we need policies with some teeth that are not mere apologies for populism or political ploys, and can actually be implemented on the ground, for the benefit of all people who inhabit common ground in a rapidly growing and changing world.

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