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# **The family remembered: migrant South Asian doctors reflect on the influence of their families of origin**

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# Structure of the paper

- Family in the migration literature
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  - Family, migration and late life remembering
- Medical migration
- The South Asian geriatricians project
- Findings
  - Family as constitutive of the migrant
  - The family remembered in late life
- Conclusion



# Family and migration in the literature

- Countering binariness in themes of disruption and dislocation - linking source and destination - (Ryan ,2008; Strasser et al, 2009; Kraler et al, 2010)
- Presenting sense of continuity with source areas - the role of women in migration families (Bernhard et al, 2009; Pratt, 2008)
- The 'contributive family model' -effort and agency of migrants (Drotbolm, 2009)



# Family, migration and late life remembering

- The role of memory in constructing present migrant identity in late life (Thomson, 1999)
- The family as transnational - the 'culture constant' (Chamberlain, 1999)
- Family meanings in family myths (Thompson & Bauer, 1999)

Add to this a focus on:

- South Asian experience
- Patterns of professional migration
- Inextricable linkage of 'immigration and emigration' (Loyal, 2009)



## Medical migration

- Dependency of NHS on recruitment of overseas trained doctors since inception
  - Amongst UK trained doctors unpopularity of some specialties - geriatric medicine
  - Migrant doctors a mobile army of labour
  - 1974 - 60% consultant geriatric posts held by overseas trained doctors
- Post colonial legacy - socio-cognitive community involved post-graduate professional training in UK
- South Asian doctors overcame blockages to promotion in NHS grasping the opportunity which geriatric medicine offered.



# The South Asian geriatricians project

- 63 oral history interviews with retired and serving geriatricians transcribed and deposited in British Library Sound Archive and Qualidata
- Secondary analysis of 50+ interviews with early geriatricians carried out by Margot Jefferys, also deposited in British Library Sound Archive
- Documentary searches in national and medical history archives



## South Asian interviewees

- Countries of origin - India, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Burma
- Ages - 40 - 91
- Gender - 58 men, 5 women
- Professional status - all except one consultants
- Located - geographically dispersed but with clusters in North West, Wales and northern fringes of London
- All answered questions on professional life and about family life prior to migration



# Family life as constitutive of migrant: 1

## - Dr Mondal

‘I was brought up in a very loving family, as well as my brothers, so we have got, I come from a very large family, five sisters and we are five brothers, four brothers, but including me five. So altogether ten of us. So my father tried to educate all of us. I was the eighth child of my family. My eldest brother already gone in to medicine in India and he qualified because we have got a long, I would say er, he was quite older than er me because I’m the eighth. So we have got some medical background in my family because my uncle was a village doctor or you could say a town doctor, poor doctor, so there was a lot of influence on medicine. And my father always wanted me to be a doctor although I was not very keen in the beginning I want to do different things like engineering. (cont’d)



I wanted to be an engineer because I thought in those days engineers courses is four years, our courses is five years longer, and well paid. And I understand they're settled long before a doctor could settle. But my father was not happy about it, you know in those days he wants me to be a doctor like my brother. And I must, from my childhood he told me I had to go to England, to do higher education to serve the people, because there's very much a line that I should serve the poor, and my country.

Born 1949 in what is now Bangladesh. Interviewed by Leroi Henry, 30.04.09, British Library catalogue number C1356/56



## 2 - Dr Arunachalam

I think it was a fairly laid back family. I don't think my father was too worried about what was going on education-wise. My mother was a bit more focussed and although she didn't push us we got the impression that studies was important. I think we were fairly well off. I think, you know. But mother used to always talk about our older cousins that they went to university, that they were reading law or whatever and gently almost I think prodding us that ...I don't think the two of us took much notice of this, we just went on doing what boys do really. (laughs) (Cont'd)



...I think she was a very gentle lady but was also very cunning I think in sort of dropping sort of hints where stories and anecdotes, but never directly. We never got punished for anything because I think, as I said, they were fairly laid back. (laughs) It was, as I said, quite a happy upbringing. My father was interested in, when he was at university, he was interested in plays. He directed I presume Shakespeare, that sort of thing. So he had a whole heap of books and I at an early age discovered that he had books and another world really. So I used to read a lot...and I carried that habit right through my life and now I, you know, read. So I presume there was no one particular role model but general.

Born in 1937 in Sri Lanka. Interviewed by Leroi Henry, 14.01.09, British Library catalogue number C1356/16



## Family as constitutive

- Sample - highly varied geographically and socio-economically as well as politically and culturally
- Following examples within the family (Dr Mondal)
- Influence of mothers
- Growing up in a colonial and post colonial world
- Family investment and commitment (Dr Ali)



## The family remembered in late life: 1 - Dr Banerjee

‘He was an extremely er, courageous, honest, straight forward, very well disciplined person. And er, a lot of my characteristic has come from him. About approach, handling children, that sort of thing. He was a very good father, very kind, but he used to be very angry if somebody did something bad, dishonest or naughty that sort of thing. And perhaps it was he, my mother as well, it was he who taught us to be respectful to elders - always, how to behave with them even if they are talking rubbish.’

Dr Arup Banerjee, born 1936, India. Interviewed by Parvati Raghuram, 06.05.09, British Library catalogue number C1356/58



## 2 - Dr Bhowmick

‘So I had another now determination. A single one. I had to stay top. And from that day until I left medical school I have never been second...Because it would stop. The whole world closes and darkness comes down to you. So I was top in all the classes in medicine and until I finished my secondary school and everything. And then it was, thinking back, I think I now feel, yes I made it. I don't know other people will do it. I'm sure there are many examples like this. But this sort of abject poverty is [inaud] hard, you know what I mean. This is real, this is not story. This is real. I relive this often. Relived this with my children and other things. And I said the comfort they have got and the plenty they have got now, you know what I mean. (cont'd)



‘But this is one generation where ...but when I was studying medicine it was my father always coming. That he probably died from a ...ok he died from broken heart, but also something treatable perhaps, you know, an abscess or something. And it just makes you tears come down, so sad. But I was, I mean that’s long time ago.’

Born 1940 in what is now Bangladesh. Interviewed by Leroi Henry, 08.05.08,  
British Library catalogue number C1356/05



# The family remembered in late life

- Social values as part of a lived culture not just as a lever to migration - transferred and used as member of medical profession
- Economic habitus of family recalled as a model and guide
- Creation of individual 'founding myths' to frame accounts of choice and achievement



# Conclusion

- Counters binary counterposing of pre and post migrant family lives - ordering the disorder of migration providing starting points and rootedness (Yngevesson and Mahoney, 2000)
- Invitation to recall family of origin suggestive of its continuing value and influence into late life
- Substantive evidence of conditions and contexts of making of migrants
- Continuing significance of educational and philosophical values in individual lives
- Focus on more advantaged migrants through oral history interviews broadens out discussions of significance of family in migration stories
- Offers a link between 'brain drain' and social care literatures - for further research.