

Book Review

Rashid Amjad (ed.) *The Pakistani Diaspora: Corridors of Opportunity and Uncertainty*. Lahore, Pakistan: Lahore School of Economics. 2017. 337 pages. Price PKR 750.00.

The book “The Pakistani Diaspora, Corridors of Opportunity and Uncertainty”, which is edited by Rashid Amjad, is a collection of 17 academic essays on Pakistani migrants and Pakistani diaspora in different countries. This book presents diverse viewpoints in the study of diaspora. This book does not just analyse the size of the diaspora in a chronological manner, but it also provides important understanding of the cost and benefits associated with migration and assimilation of the migrants’ families in new environments.

In the first paper, the author tries to capture the salient features and dynamics of Pakistan’s “age of migration” across home and host countries. By 2017, the estimated diaspora was at 9.1 million – almost 5 per cent of Pakistan’s population. The labour class started to migrate to the UK in 1950s while highly skilled professionals started moving to the US and Canada in 1960s. The unskilled and semiskilled workers began to move to the Middle East in 1970s and due to easing off their visa policies in 1990s, migrants began moving to Europe, Singapore, Thailand, Malaysia and Australia from Pakistan. According to the author “A large number of people face losses in the struggle to migrate to foreign countries. A majority of illegal migrants are imprisoned in different countries while trying to reach Europe while dozens are killed on their way to Greece.”

The distinction among migrants, migrant workers, and diaspora communities is not always clear, and it is important to frame a simple working definition of “diaspora communities.” At the start of the article the author, Fareeha Zafar states, “the official Pakistani diaspora was estimated 8 million in 2014, although many believe this number could be significantly higher (between 10 to 15 million).” According to Weber (2011), “Diasporas are made historically: they continuously are in a position of negotiating about their rights and full association in their adopted nations”. The Pakistani diaspora has carved out a social, cultural, political, and economic space for them in the migrant world due to globalisation. They are well attached to their culture and religion and promoting the positive image through festivals in London and New York. The most prominent thing is that women of Pakistani origin have become more visible at the social, cultural and political level. Because of improved transport amenities, the generations that are born in the host countries now visit their home country.

The third article, “The Pakistani Diaspora in the United States” by Michal Kugelman, starts with the statement that the US is home to diasporas from many countries of the world and in term of size Pakistanis do not stand out as a prominent diaspora. According to the Migration Policy Institute, more than 450,000 Pakistanis and

their children live in the US. Nearly two-thirds of all Pakistani immigrants in the country are American citizens—the third-highest naturalisation rate of a group of 15 diaspora communities studied by MPI-2015. However, as compared to Pakistanis, the Indians hold key jobs in the media industry, the IT industry, and in Silicon Valley because of effective lobbying in the US Congress. The Pakistani are well educated, and the well-off diaspora is playing an important role in US society despite the harassment and discrimination. However, the Pakistani diaspora has not become a part of the US political system yet.

The fourth article, “The Pakistan-Europe Corridor” by Fareeha Zafar, talks about migration from Pakistan to Europe. According to the author, it has progressed through three phases but with an estimated annual outflow of 0.8 million, the future of potential migrants remains uncertain. There is no uniform approach to integrate immigrants due to anti-immigrant sentiments in Europe and Pakistani immigrants in Europe cannot portray a rosy picture due to the security situation in the rest of the world. The fifth article is not directly related to Pakistan, it focuses more on anti-immigration. Due to an uncertain security situation in the world, Europe is still not clear about immigrants. On the one hand, they need skilled labour, while on the other hand, anti-immigrant sentiments have escalated in their societies. So, most of the European countries are inclined to anti-immigrant policies.

The sixth article discusses the European refugee crises, which began in 2015 when a huge number of refugees began making the journey to EU to seek asylum, travelling across through the Mediterranean Sea or through Southeast Europe. The influx of refugees to Europe is likely due to a moderate loosening of fiscal policy leading to a positive impact on economic activity in the short run. In long term, migration is expected to increase the labour supply, thus encouraging economic growth while easing the financial problems that an ageing population tends to create in a social security system.

Article seven, entitled “The Pakistani Diaspora in the Gulf” by Nasra Shah, claims that the research on Pakistani diaspora in the Gulf is almost nonexistent. Migration to the Gulf has been a lifeline for many families and has helped alleviate unemployment and underemployment in Pakistan. The annual outflow of Pakistani workers has risen consistently since 2005, with about 700,000 workers leaving the Gulf in 2014. The impact on Pakistani workers is especially large as many of them are engaged in semi-skilled or unskilled jobs and can be easily replaced by workers from a less expensive source country. She proposes that strategies should be formulated for easing reabsorption of returnees in the home country.

The article, “The Cost of Migration from Pakistan to Saudi Arabia and the UAE” by Rashid Amjad, G.M. Arif, and Nasir Iqbal explains the role of “visa consultants” and cost of attaining work permits for the Middle Eastern countries. In the GCC region, the annual placement of Pakistanis low-skilled workers (labourers and farm workers) remains large. According to BEOE statistics, during the past two decades a significant number of Pakistanis have been placed in the GCC region. Securing a job in the UAE or Saudi Arabia, the survey found, entails terrifyingly high cost of migration for low-skilled workers as they pay approximately \$3,500 in the shape of fees for their employment. The survey also found that the cost of migration is quite different between two countries, namely UAE and Saudi Arabia. The average cost to work in United Arab Emirates was \$2,358, while for Saudi Arabia it was almost double at \$4,290. The situation is grim, and

it is very hard to identify the reasons for this difference, or why there is an apparent preference for working in Saudi Arabia. It may be that as compared to UAE, wages, working conditions and cost of living are more attractive in Saudi Arabia. For example, average earnings in United Arab Emirates are \$387 while in Saudi Arabia average earnings are \$480. It is essential to study the visa market in Pakistan in greater depth. While this article focuses on unskilled migrants and high costs in shape of visa fee, subsequent work should analyse, among other things, how key players and agents function and the role they play in the visa market.

The ninth article “Worker’s Remittances and the Pakistan Remittance Initiative” by Asma Khalid quantifies trade deficits, low inflows of foreign investment, and excessive reliance on debt inflows to finance the current account deficit. Although Pakistan has managed to divert a large share of remittances to official channels over the past few years, informal inflows remain significant. Low level of financial literacy, implying that people are unaware of and/or are unwilling to use banking facilities in the country. Going by conservative estimates, with the help of Pakistan Remittance Initiative (PRI) commercial banks could potentially tap an additional US\$ 5 billion from the informal market.

In the tenth article, which is titled “The Impact of Transnational Marriages on Pakistani Spouses in Britain”, Marta Bolognani argues that in the context of marriages, a common thread in the discussion is the presupposition of the existence of a migrant spouse of a typical character and nature. Therefore, assimilation and adjustment are assumed to be the responsibility only of the migrant and the role of the British counterpart is not given much importance.

The eleventh article is “Pakistani Diaspora Communities in Norway: Part of a Transitional Social Field for How Long?”, which is written by Marta Bivand Erda’s. The article focuses more on Pakistani diaspora communities in Norway and describes as part of a transnational social field that spans not just Norway in Pakistan but also other diaspora countries. Most Norwegian Pakistani families are now part of a history of migration that goes back half a century. Over time, the dynamics, strength, nature of this migration, and their ties to Pakistan have changed. The children of Pakistani migrants, who were born in Norway and are now Norwegian citizens, see themselves increasingly as Norwegian, fully and equally participating in the Norwegian society. Despite the ambivalence among youth related to an Islam phobia climate, there are voices clearly calling for the descendants of Pakistani migrants to see themselves as fully Norwegian, but also to value their Pakistani heritage.

The political participation in the UK is the topic of the twelfth article, which is penned by Parveen Akhtar. According to the author, the UK has the second-largest overseas Pakistani population after Saudi Arabia and by 2031, an estimated 2.6 million Britons are likely to have Pakistani ancestry. On 5 May 2016, the son of an immigrant Pakistani bus driver was elected as mayor of London but in Pakistan, it would be almost implausible for children from lower-middle-class backgrounds to end up holding a high political office. According to Akhtar, Pakistani immigrants tend to arrange transnational marriages within families, as a way to spread opportunities among their relatives back home. The government has perceived these marriages as economic migration and seen as posing a serious threat to native customs and culture. The argument rests on the premise

that these marriages often lack romantic legitimacy. Thus, the British government has introduced rigorous policies to control such unions. The article also argues that the Pakistani diaspora is insignificant in the political life of the UK. However, now the Pakistani diaspora is represented in the British political system, Sadiq Khan, the mayor of London being one such example. The article provides a collective political biography of Britain's Pakistani diaspora and assesses the shape of future political linkages between the UK and Pakistan.

In the thirteenth article titled, "Circuits of Knowledge: Learning from the Pakistani Academic Diaspora and Teaching Them in Return", S. Akbar Zaidi tries to engage with some of the issues affecting the state of the social sciences in Pakistan in the second decade of the 21st century, where the emergence and presence of diaspora academics play an increasingly important role. There is no denying that the social sciences are undergoing a revival in the country and that its diaspora and linkages with individuals and institutions in the West have a role to play in this. Diasporas play an important role in the economic development of their native countries and remittances have provided relief to Pakistan's current account and spurred domestic growth by injecting demand into the economy.

Tari Saigol in his article titled "Transnational Business and Investment Possibilities: The Role of Pakistan's Diaspora" argues that the Pakistani diaspora accounts for relatively little FDI and the bulk of remittances go towards supporting workers' families in Pakistan from which some part is spent on purchasing real estate as a form of investment and on philanthropy, especially in the wake of a natural disaster. In 2015, the Pakistani diaspora remitted about US\$ 19.3 billion to the country accounting for 7.2 per cent of GDP and 65.3 per cent of its exports of goods and services (World Bank 2017). Based on the experience of Indian and Chinese diasporas the author recommends a series of measures that would help Pakistan make more effective use of its diaspora.

The purpose of Piyasiri Wickramasekara's essay, "Engaging with Diasporas: Lessons from India and China", is to highlight the Chinese and Indian experience of engaging with their diaspora by explaining some definitional and methodological issues and to draw some lessons. The author has drawn two important lessons. Lesson one is creating an overall policy environment and incentives that are conducive to investment, and lesson two is creating a problem-free environment for foreign investors. The sixteenth article, "Migration and Development: Some key lessons" by Manolo Abella, explains that despite the horrendous conditions that often characterise migration millions of people especially those living in poor countries or those suffering from violent civil conflict still see migration as their main avenue for escaping poverty and finding some security. Staying at home is not an "inferior" good, so more people opt to stay on reaching a level of income that offers enough comfort and security for the family although threshold income is not the same nor unique in all countries. Demographic, political and social determinants may be more important factors than income levels in some countries. Migration, especially of the highly-skilled, can entail high social costs when it reduces the productivity of others but may also motivate many more people to invest in education and training than the number who will eventually leave.

The last chapter by Ibrahim Awad, which is titled “Engaging Diaspora in Development” explains that political and economic stability is a critical factor for attracting contributions to development. In the absence of a stable macroeconomic framework, diaspora members will be reluctant to transfer financial resources or to make investment in home countries. This brings out the importance of general macroeconomic and regulatory policies and not only of measures especially targeted at diasporas.

In sum, the book under review offers important insights into migration and the experiences of the migrants. However, a concluding chapter, or a section, in the book should have been devoted to policy recommendations. The addition of such recommendations would have improved the quality of the book and aided the readers in Pakistan to better understand the problems the Pakistani diaspora face in different countries. Finally, the author has grouped 17 different papers into a book. However, some papers, (such as papers 5, 6 and 15) have no direct relevance with the Pakistani diaspora. The book is weak in theoretical perspective and focuses more on policy. Although the book has certain shortcomings, it is an important contribution to the academic discourse on migration and the issues faced by the Pakistani migrants in host countries.

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