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**THE COGNITIVE SIDE OF THE HUMAN
MOBILITY**

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By way of locating this paper, it may be mentioned that it was presented in the seminar theme, 'Changing paradigms of labour mobility'. Changing paradigms of labour mobility can refer to two distinguishable academic fabrics. The phrase 'changing paradigms' can refer to the decipherable shifts in the actual processes of labour migration and human mobility. It can also refer to another fabric that is, 'changing paradigms' in the manner and ways in which they become cognised and then presented in discourses. The object of this paper is the later one; that is, the conceptual complex involved in the social scientific representations of human mobility.

I venture, in this brief paper, to highlight some of the conceptual shifts that have occurred in the depiction and conceptualisation of human mobility in which 'labour mobility' is an important constituent. The conceptual aspects of 'labour migration' and the increased preference for the concept 'human mobility' have already been discussed elsewhere by this author in this journal itself (Raju. S, 2003). In that paper, I have also highlighted the shift from the increasing preference for the term 'mobility' rather than 'migration'. Therefore, these aspects are referred here only tangentially.

To carry out the present task, I skim through different conceptual complexes that refer to human mobility and highlight the multiplication and proliferation of concepts and figures of speech in social scientific representations. This multiplication and proliferation could be thought to be mirroring the changing life forms and worlds of those on the move across cultures. It may not be inappropriate to state that the concept of 'mobility' has been metamorphosing such that it cannot be situated within the confines of one or another 'paradigm' and discipline. Human mobility has become concerns of not only social sciences, humanities and medical sciences. It may be possible that intersections of or, may be, convergence of different paradigms make this concept more revealing. Nevertheless, it is argued here that there has taken place a "cognitive turn" in the social scientific conceptualisation of human mobility. This turn underplays the conventional

geo-territory-centric perspectives and projects the cognitive and experiential aspects of human mobility and movement. Therefore, one of the sub-arguments is that movement of labouring peoples across socio-spatial spatialities compel social scientists to reconsider those on the move not merely as labourers, workers, students etc. because they have life outside the reproductive scheme as well. Therefore, increasingly they are been considered as human beings to bring in more subtle and sublime aspects of their life.

The causes, means and effects of migration, its types, its relation with general societal process etc are well discussed. They are discussed in different social and medical¹ sciences. They are also studied from different perspectives by employing different methods and techniques. At present different paradigms co-exist in studying human/labour migration/mobility and different processes involved in it, the nature and composition of labour migration, consequences of mobility at the sites of destination and origin etc. Multiplication of discourse on migration at a geometric proportion, and co-existence of different paradigms in the social sciences and also in the actual practice of moving across the 'limits' are indicative of the general trend since the cognitive turn mentioned above.

One of the arguments of this paper is that changes taking place in the contemporary human movements in terms of their types, nature, means and consequences are such that no monisms—methodological, method based and conceptual—are credible. Further, it can be argued that complexification of human mobility is to be carried out in order to gain an idea of the fuzziness involved in such processes.

The co-existence of several patterns of human mobility has become the norm of the day. For instance it can be the nomadic movements of hunters, gatherers peripipetics of the deep forests, pastoralists, job seekers, traders,

¹ Medical science is keen on migration for different reasons. For instance, they are studying migration of DNA, relation between migration and spread of physical transformations, especially AIDS, migration related psychological and ethnic changes etc.

wanderers, tourists, pilgrims, those persistently chased by jet lag etc. There is also compulsive, seduced and voluntary trafficking of human bodies across national and internal boundaries. Apart from this type of mobilities across geographical or territorial spread, this concept of 'mobility' has been employed to refer to movement across various social strata. For instance, the concept of 'social mobility' represents this genre. Here the word 'social' can signify employment, caste, family status etc. Once again, the coexistence of heterogeneous human movements and their varied effects influence the contemporary condition of human existence.

The concept 'mobility' has already moved onto the central stage of academic discussion. Unlike the term migration, mobility and movement are concepts that can reveal and convey much more nuanced dimensions involved in the contemporary human movement. This might have been an academic reason that prompted scholars to employ the concept 'mobility' and movement along with migration and at times in distinction to it. Further, the spatiality and temporality implicit in the term 'migration' is restrictive in academic practice of the present day, for it signifies mainly the geographical and territorial dimension of human movement with the aid of cylindrical time. Because of this, the concept 'migration' has become restrictive and thus capable of capturing only a part of the complexity. Therefore, its potentials of delineation and exposition are either too limited or too broad.

Mobility can be conceived as a quality that makes possible movement across the limits that are perceived by each one on the basis of 'origins'— from places, regions, nations, states, homes, occupations, social stratum, power centres, genders, kinships, friendly and affinal attachments etc. Here, the term 'perceived' requires some explanation. The cognitive turn that I have referred to hinges on it. Rather than what is perceived as 'actual' what is prioritised here is perception which is a cognitive process. Position of the idea of 'origin' in conceiving mobility, either by the social scientist or those on the move is critical in modulating representations and self-representations/

judgement. The perceptions of the mobile about 'from', 'to' and 'now' are constituted in discourses of different kind and therefore distinguishable through an analysis of them. Mobility can also be conceived as a movement without referential relation to the notions of fixity and stasis. We will return to this point later to gain better quality.

The concepts and categories employed to describe and analyse labour movements have genealogical antecedents that stretch back to ancient past as well as to post-modernity and post-colonialism. These concepts and categories have proliferated to the extent that mobility has become a central event and it also signifies the evolving life experiences of people. That is, the coexistence of heterogeneous and at times mutually conflicting concepts and categories with totally incomparable genealogies is central to the evolving paradigm of the studies that concentrates on the question of labour mobility.

The theme of labour migration/mobility has caught the attention of several researchers and themes such as the relationship between labour mobility in search of enhanced quality of life, and social, cultural, economic and political change (Kearney, 1986); life worlds of poor/rural labourers in overcrowded cities (Parkin, 1969); the networks that enable people to move in search of work (Mitchell, 1969); moving away from home with the intention to return to home (Lloyd, 1979; Gmelch, 1980, Ballard, 1987, Raju and Sasikumar, 2006); the relation between migration (referring to those who migrate and those who stay back) and socio-cultural reproduction and development (Meillassoux, 1988); the link between local individual migrant and global modernising process (Frank, 1965) etc are conceptualised in diverse ways, although I refer here to only limited studies.

What is common to many of the 'conventional' migration studies is that they are influenced by the perspective and theoretical premise that human beings essentially tend to become rooted or wish to be located at some fixed location such that either push or pull is required for their movement away from their *locales*. Controlling one's movement, adopting perception about it,

ordering it, and executing it are conceived as resulting from the immanent desire to achieve a stationary state in life. Desire to be stable at a place or strata can be an ideology but its field of influence is limited because the forces related to movement are such that they force one to go beyond the referential fields of fixities, states and societies.

Move to settle elsewhere, move away to settle later, move to return, go on moving etc are being widely worked out by the labourers in spite of the controls over the free flow of them by nation states even in this globalised world where other factors of production are supposed to be flowing uninhibited. Individuals, communities and societies have moved ever since the historiographically depicted past, but today it is possible to affirm that there are only exceptional people who are not mobile. Given the understanding, it is possible to state that social scientists have thought that in order to understand oneself and the world outside, it is necessary to have a perspective from a single, fixed and homogenous point of view. But with the advent of reflexive sociology, critical theory and criticisms levelled against logo-centrism, such thoughts became problematic. For instance Keith Hart (1990) affirms that the world is not divisible into fixed units, territorial segments and the like. There are no more traditional, bounded worlds in which we occupy a place and position because everything is situated and on the move. Lives are conceived in terms of moving-between identities, relations, people, spaces, things, societies, cultures, environments, times etc. Life has become a sort of 'walk about'.

Movement has become indistinguishable from our daily life. There are instances in which it is thought that culture needs to be rethought in terms of 'travel'. (J. Clifford, 1992:101). Movement is no more considered as crossing of cultures rather movement itself has become a cultural act. Such realisation has given rise to the examination of human movement from divergent, complementary and incompatible perspectives and their operationalisation generated several conceptual complexes. They some times de-localise

concepts in terms of culture, territoriality, nationality, homogeneity, identity etc in such a way that creation of new concepts becomes unavoidable. Few examples can be invoked; they are the following: 'creolization' (Hannerz, 1987), 'massification'(Riesman, D, 1958), 'deterritorialisation'(Appadurai, A, 1991), 'compression' (Paine, 1992), 'multi-ethnicity', 'multi-culturalism', 'plural-society', 'hybridization' (Bhabha, 1990), 'interreferencing' (Geertz, Clifford, 1986), 'acculturation', 'synchronicity' (Tambaiah, 1989), etc. I am not spelling out what these concepts mean or what they suggest as in the present world to gain an idea about them is easy with the aid of computer networks. But what is important in this kind of a lateral review is to state that these concepts were coined to depict the life worlds of the mobile from incomparably different discursive contexts to interpret and represent the complexity of the human movement and momentary and transits near locatednes. It is no more the fixity/stasis that is underscored but the fluidity and liminality involved in the human movement. It is no more the 'rock logic' but 'water logic' that persuades the social scientists while depicting and analysing the process of movements.

All these categories and concepts refer to the life world of the mobile at the shifting destinations and the processes that posit the relations between the migrant and the native or the construction of 'we' and 'they'. More than the relation of migrants with his home country to be returned, they suggest to the condition of the individuals sustaining (due to multiple reasons) the migrant status. These concepts along with more general concepts such as 'subjectivity', 'ethnicity', 'nationalism', 'racism', 'identity', 'people of the soil', 'minority community', 'intruders', 'terrorists' etc together formed the terminological web in the discussions on movement, more specifically in the context of labour movement. Perhaps it is a time when we have to consider movement of soldiers, terrorists and vagabonds as labour movement.

Yet another, and very significant, change that is occurring in different paradigms of human movement and studies of migrancy is the introduction of

cognitive dimension into the studies of labour movement. The "cognitive environment in which human beings undertake their daily routines is a fixed one--if not stationary then at least centred"; this was an idea that gained considerable material repeatability in social sciences for a long time. But now such a view stands problematised. (Rapport and Overing, 2000, p.262). A statement, which captures the present rupture that has taken place in the contemporary conceptualisations of movement and mobility, can be invoked.

... socio-cultural fixity and stasis no longer persuade; the world is not divisible into framed units, territorial segments and the like, each of which shares a distinctive, exclusive culture, a definite approach to life. There are no longer traditional, bounded cultural worlds in which to live- pure, integrated, cohesive, place-rooted-from which to depart and to which to return (if there ever were), for all is situated and all is moving. Human society is fluid and inclusive, such that ways of life 'increasingly influence, dominate, parody, translate and subvert one another. ... There is a complex movement of people, goods, money and information- variously depicted as: 'modernisation'; the growing global economy; the migration of information, myths, religions, icons, languages, texts, entertainment, imagery, cuisine, décor, costume, furnishing, fashions, above all persons... (Rapport, N and Overing, J, 2000, p.263-64)

The cognitive dimension of human movement has gained significant attention during the turn of the twentieth century; one of the emerging paradigms is characterised by this. There is a tendency to move away from the notion of bounded socio-cultural units of analysis towards recognising individuals who move cognitively and physically through their lives. This move is in favour of an appreciation of those who imagine communities of their own belonging and invent tradition in their own ways (Anderson, 1983; Hobsbawm and Ranger, 1983). For instance, no more the concept identity is preferred, but identification. This entry of cognitive dimension can be one of the antecedents of the cognitive turn referred here. This point can be elucidated using few, among many others, exemplary terms that have already

gained popularity among those who analyse human mobility, they are: home, moments of being and irony.

In recent past, new labels are attributed to migrants. Today movement is no more reducible to the conventional typologies of labour migration alone, but besides it, we have travellers, visitors, explorers, exiles, vagabonds, refugees, perpetually displaced, nomads, soldiers, colonialists, terrorists etc; all of them cohabit in the contemporary world. Two extreme labels can be referred here, that is, 'exile' and 'refugee'. They are used not so much to highlight the issues of international law but to underscore the experiences on the ground of the exiles themselves (Harrell-Bond, 1986; Gilad, 1990) and to allude to the state of permanent in-betweenness or transnationalism (Gonzalez, 1992; Tedlock, 1996). They at the same time allude to the in-betweenness of the Classical and pre-Classical Diasporas of the contemporary migratory processes and they also suggest something beyond that. The terms 'diasporas' and doubly-diasporic are employed to refer to those populations away from home and distributed around the world who maintain a sense of themselves as present strangers who have an origin to return.

The route from nostalgia to Diaspora and from there to 'beyond origin' got extended to fluid mobility without an 'origin' and subsequently to a situation in which one could persist in this world without being influenced by the ideas of home, nativity, place, roots etc. It is also true that the mobile reconcile to the fact that one got to live like that to prevent oneself becoming pathological subjects. But then, one of the prevailing arguments is that these labels betray differences in evaluation and orientation, and differences in strategic dealings with the phenomenon of migration of everyone. For instance, the concept 'expatriate' is connected to voluntary detachment, whereas exile is connected to a sense of loss (Tedlock, 1996). This is the context in which home and homelessness of migrant labourers became a conceptual issue.

The present day migratory processes are conceptualised as transgressions of the so-called socio-cultural boundaries rather than something that takes place within circumscribed fields. For instance Edmund Leach (1977) and Schiller *et al.* (1992) bypassed the idea of closures and conceived individuals in terms of their behaviour of crossing socio-cultural specialities. To them also, there are individuals who move cognitively and physically through their lives and they imagine and invent communities with which they identify themselves. Once again, what is important is not 'a given identity' but 'identification' and invention of 'self' and the 'others'. Homes are no more conceived as stable physical spaces or sites of routinization of space-time, rather they are conceived as fluid spaces through which individuals continuously move (Minh-ha, 1994) and in turn constitute new spaces. The transnationalist concept brings a paradigmatic shift in conceptualising the relation between mobility and home due to the changed nature of human movement. One can be at home in movement and at the same time movement can be one's home as well (Berger, J, 1984). The moving populations dwell in a mobile and cognitive habitat rather than in a singular or fixed structure. Peter Berger *et all* (1973) proposed that modern social life can be conceived as plurality of social life-worlds between which individuals are in inexorable movement and come to be at home in none (homelessness). Home and homelessness are no more spatially or temporally conceivable but in terms of the cognitive experiences of the mobile. They are no more antithetical to each other rather they supplement each other to depict the life world of the mobile/homeless mindsets. These existing reflections which I have invoked here point towards the need to conceive the 'experience of time' of mobile individuals in terms of digitised yet discreet moments.

This is the conceptual foreground in which the coinage of Virginia Woolf (1976) entered to the thoughts of those who tried to understand the experience of 'time' of the mobile. The concept 'moments of being' suggests that whatever be the metaphysical 'is-ness' of our identity and existence, we are *in moments*; we experience our being in the world in discrete plunks. The

cognitive dimension of mobility is well captured in this conceptual ambit and 'being' turns on momentary homes, thoughts, feelings, paradoxes, apprehensions, emotions etc. This concept may be employed to imagine the life situations of those mobile labourers who move to gain social mobility and also those who move due to conjectural and structural reasons; it can be employed to capture the rendezvous experienced by the so called diasporic and homeless. One idea that can be put along with this is 'non-places'.

Looking through this concept of non-places gives the visibility that the socio-culturally construed closed and self-sufficient 'places' of relations, identity and history are semi-fantasies. Mark Augge (1995) suggested that modern life is of movement, networks and situations of interactions which can be conceptualised better in terms of 'non-place'. This is mainly because there has occurred a proliferation of transit points where people spent most of their living times: waiting rooms, routes, camps, lodgings, offices, stations, hostels, vehicles... . They are "palimpsests on which the scrambled game of identity and relations is ceaselessly rewritten" (Marc Auge, 1995:79). Any place can present itself as a non-spaces to the mobile; no place is completely itself and separate; all places are experienced as plunks in the moments of time and being.

The subjectivity of migrant can vary between the one who bears the feeling of 'I' left without a 'we' near to or with her/him and those who are unaffected by the question of 'I' and/or 'we'. Further, there are those who are overwhelmed by the experience of 'other than myself/my other self'. Whatever be the specificity of the subjective position and the subjectification one undergoes, mobility engenders self-distancing (conjectural and structural). This is where the concept of irony gains a space to capture the cognitive field of the mobile.

Irony has been a powerful figure of speech, but besides its lexical meaning it has gained social meaning in the modern world. It can be taken to depict a type of cognitive detachment from one's lived/imagined world. Such

a detachment could be the outcome of the technological revolution (Ortega y Gasset, 1956) and the changes that occurred in the *habitus*. In the social context, irony amounts to cognitive movement as an endemic mode of being; to follow Nietzsche, this movement amounts to constant 'revaluation of all values'. The mobile constantly treats the world ironically for every truth reached is recognised as contingent and perspectival.

One distances 'oneself' from history, identity, society; they appear to them metaphysical and fictitious. The question, where did I come from or where I am going appears to the mobile as anachronisms. Instead the question 'where I am' overwhelm one's life experience. The moments of being have become kaleidoscopic such that cognitive experiences of time/space of the mobile individuals and communities never reverse. When we say that mobility has multiplied and it has proliferated this is what they signify.

No more the human condition can be reduced to labour, work and action as Hannah Arendt (1958) has justifiably stated because they were the activities in which human beings engaged in; today what matters most is not so much the activity but moments of being and they constitute multiplicity, irreducibility, passages through technologies of self, constantly shifting inter-subjective positions and uncognisable complexities.

The rate of proliferation of both concepts and categories associated with the processes associated with human mobility and the patterns of mobility resist any kind of essentialism and reductionism in the representations of human mobility and the mobile labour. This resistance signifies the shifting paradigms of human mobility and the movement of labour across several boundaries belonging to different paradigms of sociality. This resistance seems to multiply itself such that both similarity and incompatibilities can be found in the emerging multitude of concepts and processes in the sphere of human/labour mobility. This resistance could be due to the permanent location of people on the move in liminal relations, spaces, stages and statuses.

Afterword

Of the conceptual changes that influence the unfolding of different paradigms of human mobility, it is the 'cognitive turn' that brings forth the nuances of its complexities most. The turn and its aftermath reinstate the Clifford. J's statement that culture need to be rethought in terms of travel; it hints at Louch's proposal that anthropology should be viewed as a compendium of 'travellers tale'. It validates the prophetic statement of Nietzsche that only motion can be viewed as actual immortality. The cognitive turn empowers us to identify mobility in any one, even in the bedridden, in this way study of migration is the study of all of us; no one is spared from it.

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