

A case of capital-rich under-development: The paradoxical consequences of successful transnational entrepreneurship from Mirpur

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No other District in Pakistan has seen a higher proportion of its population engage in transnational migration than Mirpur, and from nowhere else have a higher proportion of such migrants successfully established themselves in Britain. Yet despite the intensity of the trans-local linkages which have thereby been created, and the huge flow of remittance capital into a District which otherwise occupies a thoroughly marginalised position on the global periphery, in no way has this served to stimulate any kind of sustainable pattern of economic development. This article sets out to place these developments in their appropriate historical, political, environmental, local and global contexts in an effort to establish how and why it is that the Mirpuris' otherwise sophisticated and successful entrepreneurial capabilities have not led to more successful and sustainable outcomes in their home base. There are good reasons why the lessons that can be learned in Mirpur could well be applicable elsewhere.

'You're going to Mirpur? So many people have gone to England, they are all rich. Big houses, so many cars: they have everything they want there'
(Taxi driver in Rawalpindi)

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As the scale of labour migration at a global level grows ever larger by the day, there are some very real senses in which ‘trickle down’ has indeed begun to take place—at least for a fortunate few. This is not so obvious when impoverished small farmers set out for the shanty-towns which surround virtually every megapolis in Asia, Africa and Latin America in a desperate search for better opportunities. However, those with the good fortune to have found their way into the metropolitan centres in Euro-America have a much better prospect of carving out a brighter future for themselves and their families in our increasingly globalised world. Achieving that goal is, of course, far from straightforward. Having entrepreneurially pressed their way into such arenas ‘from below’ (Smith and Guarnizo 1998), such transnational migrants still find themselves faced with the challenging task of negotiating their way through and around the institutionalised patterns of racial and ethnic exclusionism which are routinely strewn in the path of such ‘alien’ interlopers.

However, this article is not concerned with the scale and character of those obstacles, nor with the often highly effective strategies which many of these ‘interlopers’ have begun to deploy in order to circumvent these obstacles, nor even with their success in no doing: rather it is to explore what consequences successful transnational migration may have for the home-base areas from which the migrant flow initially took off. In this sense Mirpur is no exception. In almost every country in the non-industrialised world similar developments can be found. Hence the inhabitants of a specific region, area, and sometimes simply a small cluster of villages are similarly identified as having ‘made it’ in the global labour market, with the result that everyone with the good fortune to live there is popularly regarded as having become as rich as Croesus—at least by local standards. But although it is self-evident that an enormous amount of new-found wealth has arrived in such areas, on just what basis has it been sent? Is the inflow merely a flash in the pan—or will it continue for the foreseeable future? On what is it spent, who made those decisions, and why? What impact have these developments had on the structure of the local socio-economic order, as well as that of the wider society within which these developments have been set? And perhaps post pertinently of all, what factors have governed the course which these processes have actually taken within this specific context? Are there circumstances in which different and more positive outcomes could have been achieved? In seeking to address these issues I will rely very largely on my own ethnographic observations of developments in the area made during the

course of a series of visits there—very briefly in 1972, then for a month in 1981, the best part of a year in 1984–85, and finally for a further three weeks in 2000—which were made to complement my much more detailed explorations of socio-cultural developments amongst South Asian settlers in the UK.

I

The export of labour from Pakistan

As in many other parts of the global periphery, the prospect of working overseas as a means of radically enhancing one’s own, and one’s family’s capital assets is in no way an unfamiliar notion in a Pakistani context. Indeed it is widely accepted that those who have the wit and above all the good fortune to pull it off can expect access to untold wealth, especially if they can manage to establish a base in the metropolitan core of the global economy. Over the years Pakistan has been a major exporter of manpower. During the 1980s, when Pakistan’s engagement with the global labour market reached its apogee, more than two million Pakistanis—or nearly 10 per cent of the country’s entire adult male labour force—were working overseas, with the result that by 1983 the inflow of foreign exchange in the form of remittances from migrant workers was larger than that generated by all other physical exports combined (Planning Commission 1984; Gilani et al. 1981). Parallel with developments in a host of other manpower-exporting countries from Morocco to the Philippines, migrant remittances had come to play a crucial role in the national economy: they were quite literally keeping it afloat.

Whilst the global stock of migrant labour has since grown steadily larger during the course of the past two decades, the market has become increasingly competitive. As an ever growing number of hopeful entrepreneurs set off each year in search of work, global demand for unskilled labour has at best remained static, and in some spheres has shrunk dramatically. This has certainly been so in Pakistani emigrants’ favourite destination, the oil-rich states of the Middle East. When both the price and the volume of production shot upwards in the late 1960s, bringing unprecedented wealth to the sparsely populated desert Sheikdoms of the Persian Gulf, there was huge increase in construction activity as each sought to provide themselves with a more modern infrastructure. Jobs were available aplenty, wages were comparatively high, and hundreds of thousands of migrant workers from Pakistan began to take the short hop across the Indian Ocean to take advantage of the new opportunities. However, the

real bonanza did not last for long. As major infrastructural projects began to be completed, and as inflation steadily eroded the real value of oil exports, the demand for labour began to fall sharply just as Bangladeshis, Thais, Indonesians and many others began to force their way into the transnational labour market. To be sure, a fortunate few amongst the Pakistani pioneers did find immense prosperity in Dubai and Saudi Arabia, but as time passed the prospect of others following in their footsteps became increasingly small. As wage rates steadily declined, especially for those with few skills, the once-widespread dream of making one's fortune in the Middle East has faded, and Western Europe, and above all North America, have become recognised as the only arenas in which there is a realistic prospect of implementing such plans. Hence even though the difficulty and cost of reaching those destinations has been rising in direct proportion to the height of the barriers of immigration control, which have progressively been erected around every part of the metropolitan world, finding one's way through those barriers—no matter what the basis of doing so may be—is popularly viewed as offering access to untold opportunities.

Experience in the Gulf

Yet just how have those who have managed to break through—whether to the Gulf or the metropolitan heartlands—actually fared? Most of those who were able to surf the waves of global opportunity as far as Western Europe and North America have indeed gained access to enormous prosperity, at least in local Pakistani terms. Nevertheless it is now quite clear they are very much amongst the fortunate few. However, the experiences of those who got no further than the oil-rich Middle East, although much greater in number, have been much more mixed. To be sure, a few Gulf settlers did make vast fortunes, but these were usually either the very earliest of pioneers, or (more usually) members of Pakistan's small but well-educated élite, most of whom took advantage of prior family contact to make the most of local opportunities.

But although the wealth of such entrepreneurs in Dubai (which is closer to Karachi than the national capital in Islamabad) led many of their compatriots to conclude that migration automatically gave rise to immense rewards, the vast majority of those who followed in their footsteps made much more modest progress. Even so, this still seemed quite substantial in local Pakistani terms; hardly anyone failed to return without a large-screen television, as well as sufficient cash savings to comprehensively

rebuild their family house. But once stripped of its superficial gloss, most Pakistanis' experience of the Middle Eastern dimension of the global labour market was a chastening experience.

Although a short passage across the Indian Ocean introduced them to an immensely wealthy world, its downside was only too obvious. Even though the local population was Muslim like themselves, religious brotherhood—as they soon discovered—was of little significance with respect to those who were not Arabs. Pakistanis, and most especially those working as unskilled labourers, were routinely treated as the lowest of the low. Even at the best of times they had very limited bargaining power, but their room for manoeuvre contracted yet further as the arrival of migrant labour from ever further afield rendered competition all the more vicious. Thus whilst most (but by no means all) Pakistani returnees from the Gulf came home richer than they left, their achievements were often substantially less than those for which they had hoped.

Migration fever

Why, then, does migration fever persist? However remote the imagined places may be, satellite TV has shrunk the world. Hence even the poorest families in Pakistan now have access to images of what they perceive as the consumer-driven paradise of Euro-America. It is also well known that even rural Pakistanis can gain access to it, given that this is now a routine trope in Bollywood films. Moreover, the means of access to that world is signalled by travel agents in every major *bazaar*, who routinely advertise their ability (albeit for sky-high fees) to assist hopeful entrepreneurs to squeeze their way through immigration restrictions to the other side of the fence. Such is the strength of the temptation that plenty of takers still come forward to pay these wildly inflated fees demanded, even if they often have to mortgage themselves to the hilt to raise the necessary cash. After all, some do indeed make it to the other side—even though many are apprehended along the way.

However, the prospect of those who lack prior contacts making a success of transnational migration is becoming increasingly remote, if only because the exclusionary walls protecting the most alluring targets in Euro-America are now so robust that lone individuals have little chance of penetrating them. Nevertheless these barriers are far from being wholly impermeable, for those with access to the requisite assets—no less of kinship than of capital—can penetrate them with relative ease. From this perspective, those Pakistanis whose kinsfolk have already managed

to establish a foothold elsewhere in the global arena can be seen to occupy a very specific position of privilege.

Transnational networks amongst the élite

Most members of Pakistan's relatively tiny well-educated élite can be so identified. Although routinely described as 'feudal' by their many critics, most members of this élite now occupy senior positions in the military, or in government service. However, few such families have been content to rest on these locally-achieved laurels: almost all have by now sent at least one of their offspring overseas for higher education, most usually to the United States. England is much less favoured than it once was: not only are the fees extracted from overseas students extremely high, but British authorities are extremely reluctant to offer a permanent right of abode to people of South Asian origin, even if they have gained post-graduate qualifications during their stay. By contrast, these can not only be obtained more cheaply in the United States, but there are few obstacles to taking a job once one's studies have been completed, and a green card usually follows before long.

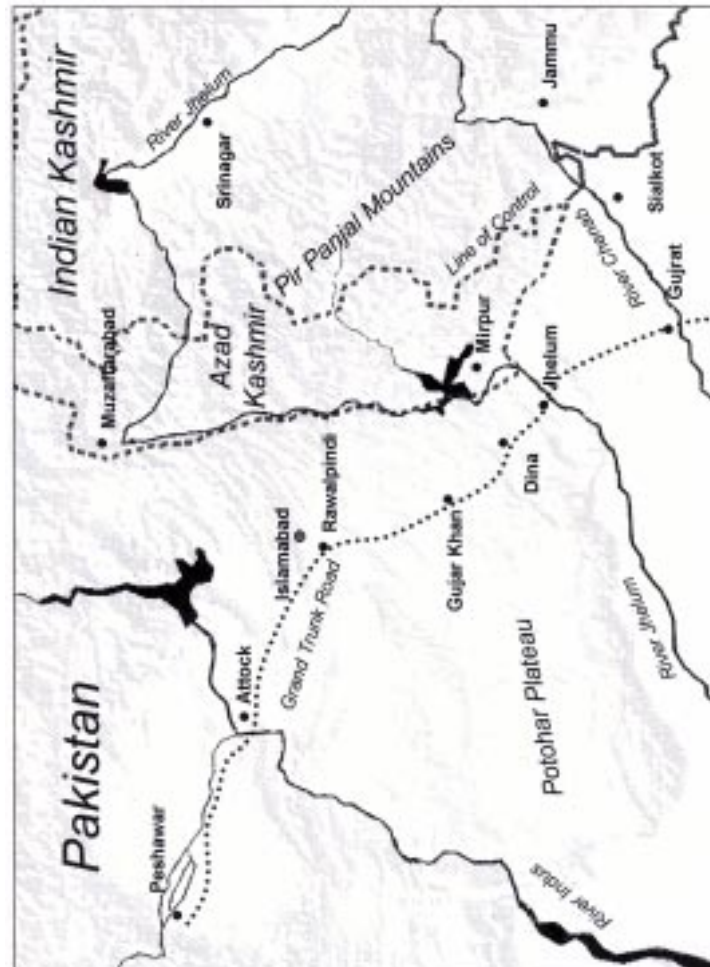
Those who obtain permanent rights of residence—whether in the USA, the UK, or Australia—not only secure their own future in transnational space, but also put themselves in a position where they can enable others to join them, either as spouses or as family dependants. As a result transnational activity has become a routine component of everyday life for most members of Pakistan's élite. Almost all its members now have offspring who have put down roots in Euro-America, either because they went there for their education, or because they were sent as brides to join such highly educated husbands. The resultant bridgeheads not only make visits overseas much more straightforward, but also open a relatively straightforward avenue to overseas residence for all members of the extended family. Nor is that all. Acutely aware of the fragility of Pakistan's economy, most élite families have long since taken the opportunity to squirrel away to bulk of their savings in non-depreciating currencies overseas. Hence they experience few constraints on global mobility. With globally distributed kinship networks, many older members of the élite have become frequent flyers. For those who consider themselves leading members of polite society in I-8 (Islamabad), in Gulberg (Lahore) and Clifton (Karachi), regular shopping trips to

London—with Harrods as the principal target—are now absolutely *de rigueur*; and such visits are so much more pleasant if one can stay with one's relatives, rather than in some anonymous hotel.

That Pakistan's élite should have taken systematic advantage of transnational opportunities should come as no surprise: kleptocratic élites throughout the global periphery have also adopted similar strategies. Nevertheless there are some good reasons why members of Pakistan's élite should have become particularly skilled exponents of this art. First, a high proportion of those who make up Pakistan's current élite arrived as footloose refugees from India in 1947: for them the land of Pakistan is, therefore, only in the loosest sense their real home. Second, and just as significantly, they have made just as extensive a use of the tight networks of reciprocity within their largely endogamous *biraderis* (descent groups) to consolidate their position of hegemonic dominance within the Pakistani state. Having developed these strategies within their immediate local arena, their redeployment on a global scale was quite straightforward.

If transnational activity is, therefore, by no means an unusual or unexpected phenomenon in Pakistan, it is also accompanied by a routine expectation that its principal exponents will and should be members of Pakistan's much privileged élite. Given those expectations, that the success of such a manifestly 'undeserving' group as the Mirpuris in reaping the benefits of transnational entrepreneurship is a source of both wonderment and surprise. After all, the élite reason, Mirpur lies in the peripheral border region of Azad Kashmir, whose population is routinely viewed as 'backward' by the inhabitants of more 'sophisticated' areas to the west and south. Before mass emigration took off, Mirpuris were undoubtedly less well off than their neighbours: Azad Kashmir has long been one of the poorest, most marginalised and hence infrastructurally ill-supported parts of Pakistan. Yet despite having no significant assets on which to rely other than their labour power, migrants from this area have proved to be supremely transnational entrepreneurs. Well over half the District's population now lives overseas, and as much as two thirds of Britain's Pakistani population is drawn either from Mirpur District itself, or from areas immediately to its north, west and south. As the map shows the east is effectively closed off by the cease-fire line between the Indian and Pakistani-controlled parts of Kashmir.

II

*Emigration from Mirpur*Map 1
The Potohar Region

How is all this to be explained? It is worth noting that in comparison with in-comers from elsewhere in the subcontinent, the Pakistanis (of whom the Mirpuri population forms such a large component) are one of the least upwardly mobile sections of Britain's South Asian population (Modood et al. 1997). If, however, one rates the Mirpuris solely in terms of their capacity to transform their initial position as subsistence farmers eking out a living on the global periphery into that of permanent residents of the metropolitan world, their success as sanctions-busting people-shifters on a global scale has been astounding. Despite the immense efforts made by successive British governments to stem the inflow of non-European settlers during the past forty years, much of which has specifically been directed at the inflow from Pakistan, very little has in fact been achieved. No other group has been more adept at exploiting every available loophole, such that, for example, over 10,000 Pakistani spouses—the majority of whom are from Mirpur—are currently being granted right of entry into the UK each year (Ballard 1999; Home Office 2001).

Hence as far as the inhabitants of most of the rest of Pakistan are concerned, the Mirpuris have hit the jackpot. Despite their origins in a hitherto insignificant District in the outer foothills of the Pir Panjal, its inhabitants appear to have made better progress through the global game of transnational snakes and ladders than any of their neighbours. So how is their success to be explained, and is that success really all that it seems? Before addressing these questions in detail a few preliminary remarks are in order. First, although the Mirpuris have undoubtedly been immensely successful entrepreneurs, there is no evidence that they are *more* entrepreneurially-minded than their neighbours. If so it could well be that their success is best attributable not to a higher complement of skill, but to the fact that they have been the fortunate beneficiaries of a diverse series of historical contingencies. Second, we will also need to take a very sceptical view of what 'success' has actually entailed. As we shall see, jealous outsiders can all too easily mistake that which glistens for real gold.

Emigration from Mirpur in a historical context

Given the District's location, its population has long been relatively impoverished. With a relatively high population density per cultivable

acre, landholdings have always been substantially smaller than those in Punjab proper, and given that the terrain made irrigation difficult to organise, leaving no alternative but to rely on rainfall, crop yields were comparatively low, although relatively reliable (Ballard 1983). Nevertheless it was exceptional in one crucial respect, for the District stands at the point where the Rivers Poonch and Jhelum come together before breaking out of the forested hills into the largely treeless plains, thence to become navigable. Not only did this subsequently render it an ideal location for the construction of a large hydroelectric project, but long before the Mangla Dam was even dreamed of it was an equally ideal spot for building the boats which carried Punjabi merchandise down to the ancient port of Lahori Bandar where the Indus delta spills out into the Indian Ocean nearly a thousand miles to the south. It is worth emphasising that this trading connection is in no sense a modern phenomenon: excavations at Lothal in Gujarat have uncovered a port which also served a similar purpose more than 4,500 years ago (Allchin and Allchin 1982: 173). One further specificity is also worth bearing in mind: the South Asian tradition that the construction and navigation of boats is a seamless whole. Hence a prior spell in the boat-building yard is a necessary component of a boatman's apprenticeship.

Why might this matter? When I first began researching Pakistani migration to Britain, I was extremely puzzled as to why so many of the earliest settlers were drawn either from Mirpur District, or from the equally remote Attock District a 100 miles further to the north-west. Part of the puzzle was solved when I discovered that virtually all of these pioneers were ex-seamen, and that the vast majority of the stokers who were recruited to work on British steamships sailing out of Bombay and Karachi from the 1880s right through until the late 1940s (when oil replaced coal) were drawn from these two Districts. But this time the shift simply deepened the puzzle yet further. Just how had men from these two Districts so far from the sea come to monopolise this particular niche in the labour market, just as men from a few localities such as the equally remote District of Sylhet in northeastern Bengal had gained a similar monopoly in steamships sailing out of Calcutta and Chittagong (Adams 1987)?

Putting together these South Asian conventions of ship construction and seamanship, the history of water-borne trade between Punjab and the Indian Ocean, and the strategic geographical location of both Mirpur and Attock Districts, a plausible explanation for these developments

begins to emerge. Given that landholdings in these hilly areas are very much smaller than those in the open and well-irrigated plains further to the South, the operation of the developmental cycle within peasant farming households has often led to them being burdened by a temporary excess of male labour. Families in such a position have every reason to send off their sons to earn a cash income elsewhere, which will then supplement the group's collective resources. However, it is reasonable to assume that in this case they also took advantage of an additional contingency: the presence of boat-building centres in their immediate neighbourhood, through which they could also gain access to employment in the long-distance river trade. If so it follows that men from these two areas will have played a salient role in—and may even have virtually monopolised—employment on the boats which had for centuries sailed back and forth between the Punjab's manufacturing centres and its *entre-pôt* at Lahori Bandar on the shores of the Indian Ocean.

The arrival of the British in South Asia had far-reaching consequences for this long established pattern of trade, especially when railways links running inland from Bombay and Karachi finally reached Lahore during the 1870s. As soon as this connection was made, the slow and labour-intensive river trade was undercut by rail transport, which was so much swifter, and probably cheaper too. All the long-distance boatmen were thereby rendered instantly redundant. However, by a stroke of good fortune this disaster appears to have struck just as the British merchant navy was switching from sail to steam, thus generating an urgent demand for men willing and able to fulfil the most challenging task of all on the new steamships: stoking the boilers. It would appear that this was swiftly identified as an opportunity which was too good to miss. Before long a small number of Mirpuris and Chhachis from Attock District—who I can only assume were ex-boatmen—managed to secure a virtual monopoly of the post of *sirhang* (engine-room labour foreman) on British ships operating out of both Bombay and Karachi. By the early years of the 20th century the whole process was so well-established that a British official observed:

'From the north-east corner of Chhach large numbers of men go out as stokers on the P. & O. and British India boats and come back shattered in health but full of money. Others used to go as hawkers to Australia, and indeed there are few parts of the Empire that someone from Chhach has not visited (Attock District Gazetteer 1907: 51).

What, though, about the subsequent connection with the UK? In yet another fortuitous coincidence, large sections of British industry were experiencing extreme difficulty in recruiting unskilled manpower just as all the elderly steamships began to be decommissioned in the aftermath of the Second World War. In these circumstances Mirpuri seamen took the obvious next step: having got themselves discharged in British ports rather than Karachi, they joined those of their compatriots whose ships had been torpedoed beneath them during the Second World War, and had subsequently been directed to work in labour hungry munitions factories in Birmingham and Bradford (Dahya 1974).

With these bridgeheads in place, an ever-escalating process of chain migration soon took off. The demand for labour in West Midlands foundries as well as in the textile mills of the Pennine region was virtually inexhaustible, and the wages on offer were nothing short of spectacular by local Mirpuri standards. Transnational activity began to grow exponentially. As soon as each new arrival had established himself, he would promptly set about assisting his own kinsfolk to join him. Having thereby constructed a whole series of conveyor belts which led straight to the heart of Britain's industrial cities, a large proportion of Mirpur's population have been able to take a relatively easy ride directly from the periphery to the metropolis, and in doing so play an elaborate, but for the most part highly successful, game of cat and mouse with Britain's immigration authorities (Saifullah Khan 1977).

In this respect fortune once again smiled on the Mirpuris, largely as a result of the relative generosity with which Commonwealth citizens are treated in Britain once they have been granted permanent right of abode. This usually occurs little more than twelve months after having first arrived, and with such rights under their belts the first tranche of immigration controls which were imposed during the early 1960s had very little impact on Mirpuri immigrants. Indeed the voucher system, which required potential migrants who were Commonwealth citizens to show they had a job to go to as a prerequisite for the grant of a visa, proved to be a godsend. The foundries and mills in which most migrants by then worked were still acutely short of hands, so foremen were only too ready to sign papers which enabled their existing employees' kinsfolk to come and work there too. Nor was the abolition of the voucher system much of a setback either, for they promptly fell back on their rights of family reunion to call over their teenage sons—although much more rarely so their wives and daughters—to join them in Britain. But when the immigration authorities sought to close this 'loophole' by refusing entry to

settlers' sons unless they were also accompanied by their wives and sisters, the move had the opposite of the desired effect (Ballard 1996). By now the community had become well rooted in Britain, with the result that an ever-increasing number of settlers began to take the view that it was now both safe and sensible to call the female members of their families over to join them.

In switching to a strategy of family reunion, Mirpuris were merely following a lead which had already been set by immigrants from elsewhere in the subcontinent. In the 1970s, however, a further dimension began to cut in: the extent to which the operation of their distinctive marriage rules might provide a vehicle through which to extend the process of chain migration for a further generation. In sharp contrast to their Hindu and Sikh counterparts, Muslim custom and practice in Mirpur not only permits close kin marriage, but actively promotes such unions: over 60 per cent of all marriages are contracted between first cousins (Ballard 1990; Shaw 2001). As a result the inflow of settlers from Mirpur has been sustained long after the initial process of family reunion was complete. The reason is quite straightforward: British-based Mirpuri parents still exhibit a strong preference for arranging the marriages of their locally-born offspring with the sons and daughters of their immediate kinsfolk back home, virtually all of whom promptly apply for entry permits to Britain. So it is that around 10,000 newly married Mirpuri brides and grooms currently enter the UK each year, almost all of them coming to join their British passport-holding cousins (Home Office 2001).

The dynamics of transnational networks

Whilst this inflow further reinforces the scale of the Mirpuri presence in Britain, the traffic is far from being one way. Whilst only a tiny minority of settlers have ever returned to Mirpur permanently—not least because both standards of living and income-earning opportunities are so much greater overseas than they are back home—their passage to Britain has not significantly undermined their involvement in networks of kinship reciprocity. It is easy to see why: not only were inter- and intra-*biraderi* reciprocities the principle vehicle through which the migration process was itself organised (Werbner 1990), they also provided the foundation for the processes of strategic adaptation which settlers deployed as they set about re-establishing themselves on their own terms in their new environment. Given that kinship remains the principle vehicle for the articulation of processes of translocal entrepreneurship, *biraderi*-based

networks are certainly not being eroded by their geographical extension: rather they have now become arenas within which capital resources—whether of information, ideas, resources and of course members of the network themselves—have begun to circulate on an increasingly global scale.

In doing so those involved have had no hesitation in bending technological advances to their purposes: information exchange has not only become much speedier, but its content has grown steadily richer as letters have successively been replaced by audiotapes, telephone calls and, most recently of all, by the Internet. Likewise, long and expensive voyage by sea have now been replaced by air travel, which has itself become increasingly cheap. Physical movements back and forth have become steadily more frequent. The result is plain to see: amongst the Mirpuris no less than any other section of the South Asian diaspora, a complex web of *biraderi*-based networks now supports the ever more active circulation of assets on a global scale.

Moreover the population base which supports this transnational activity is expanding exponentially. Already at least a quarter of a million strong, Britain's Mirpuri population is still rising rapidly. Not only do more than half of all British-based Mirpuris still obtain spouses from back home, but their fertility rates, although slightly lower than those in the previous generation, are still close to double replacement level (Ballard 1999). This has not only led to a rapid growth in the scale of each of their still highly localised ethnic colonies, but has also precipitated an equally rapid escalation in the scale and frequency of visits back home. Whether made in order to provide medical assistance to ageing parents, to attend marriages, funerals and other rites of passage, to oversee the construction of a long dreamed-of house in which to enjoy the pleasures of retirement, or to sort out festering disputes over property, virtually all such visits are driven by the imperatives of kinship; and since each such visit yet further reinforces the binding strength of such networks, they are thereby perpetuated further. Given that the majority of British-based Mirpuris remain in active communication with their kin back home, they also visit them as frequently as their finances allow. As a result, the best part of 5,000 free-spending visitors from Britain now arrive in Mirpur every month, and between them remit somewhere between £500 million and £1 billion back home each year. All this has had a far-reaching impact on the District's local economy.

The new face of Mirpur

Thanks to the scale of the District's transnational connections, visitors to Mirpur now find themselves confronted with a very different set of visual images from those which they would have encountered half a century ago, and which can still be encountered in much of the rest of rural Pakistan. Despite its unpromising location in the bare and badly eroded outer foothills of the Pir Panjal, the absence of any kind of industrial base,¹ its contemporary lack of agricultural self-sufficiency, let alone the consequences of having had the greater part of its spatial core flooded by the Mangla Dam, Mirpur District appears—at least on the face of it—to exude prosperity.

As visitors drive up the busy main road into Mirpur town,² they are greeted by spectacularly designed multi-storey residences climbing up the hillside, and the same pattern continues within the town itself. To be sure many plots still await development, but the majority now host buildings which would not look out of place in affluent Islamabad. Nor is this just an urban phenomenon: if anything there has been an even more spectacular building boom in the countryside on the far side of the Mangla reservoir, where almost every hamlet seems to boast three, four and even five-storied buildings rearing into the sky. In sharp contrast to the rest of rural Pakistan, there is hardly a bullock cart or a bicycle to be seen: instead cars and swarms of Japanese motor cycles fill the roads. The *bazaars* and *qasbahs* seem equally prosperous—at least in comparison with those elsewhere. Many support at least one western-style hotel: the accommodation on offer is very limited, but their restaurants and function rooms are frequently filled to capacity. Businesses which proudly announce themselves as 'Supermarkets' also do well as they set about meeting visitors' essential needs for tomato ketchup, cornflakes, Nescafé, lemonade and Coca-Cola. Likewise a series of newly constructed off-street 'Plazas' mimic their metropolitan counterparts by playing host to a warren of smaller shops selling all manner of consumer goods: ladies' shoes, ready-made clothing, crockery and cutlery, childrens' toys and all sorts

¹ Even the logging industry has now come virtually to a halt, largely as a result of over-exploitation of the forests in the immediate post-British period.

² The old town has long since been swamped by the waters of the dam, although its ghostly ruins reappear every summer when the water level is low. New Mirpur is built on a stony (and hence largely barren) alluvial outcrop about a mile further to the south.

of decorative domestic trinkets. With the exception of the élite, who, as we have seen are dismissive of Mirpur's attempts at sophistication, visitors from elsewhere in Pakistan are invariably much impressed: thanks to the scale of Mirpur's transnational connections, the District gives every appearance of becoming steadily richer and more prosperous, more progressive, and hence more 'modern' than any other. Indeed as many residents of Mirpur town now proudly boast, 'it is just like Islamabad'.

III

The impact of the new wealth: Economic development—or economic dependency?

Yet just how accurate are these perceptions? That a huge volume of financial capital has flowed into the local economy during the course of the past half century is clear enough: indeed during the 1970s Mirpur became one of the most over-banked areas in the entire subcontinent. All five of Pakistan's major banks eagerly established branches in every village to soak up the flood of remittance income. Business is much quieter today, however. As the 1980s progressed the inflow of remittances from the UK through official channels has declined sharply. As a result most rural branches have now been closed down, although the larger units into which they have been consolidated still have crores of rupees on deposit. However, there have been several dimensions to these changes. In part the decline has been real enough. Not only did settlers' propensity to save drop sharply once they had reunited their families, but having done so many also found themselves facing another unforeseeable—but in this case most unwelcome—contingency. In the early 1980s the textile and heavy engineering industries on which they had hitherto relied for employment hit the buffers: as a result a high proportion of the adult males found themselves made redundant, and a large proportion of those who were aged over forty when the collapse occurred have never again been in regular employment.

However, since then much has changed. Despite the devastating impact of this recession-induced setback, the earning power of the younger generation gradually came on stream during the 1990s. This was largely a result of the opening up of all sorts of new niches for income generation, most notably through various forms of self-employment such as taxi-driving and take-aways (Kalra 2000). But just as family incomes began to recover, an ever-increasing number of the earliest settlers began to

reach what they regarded as retirement age. This introduced another set of contingencies. Many of the early settlers began to seriously explore the prospect of implementing a long-standing dream: to construct a spanking new residence in the land which they had cherished in their memories for so many years. Moreover, the prospect of doing so began to look ever more realistic. As the value of the Pakistani rupee declined precipitously during the late 1990s, the purchasing power of their sterling savings back home in Mirpur began to increase by leaps and bounds. Hence there was a sudden upsurge in the scale of remittances from Britain to Pakistan, although in this case a large proportion of the funds were routed through informal *hawala* banking systems. These offered much speedier rates of transmission, as well as substantially higher exchange rates than those available within the formal banking system.

So it is that at least in terms of capital, money is no great problem in Mirpur. Most of the local banks still have a huge volume of funds lying on deposit, the bulk of which was sent back by migrants during the earlier years of prosperity; and as Mirpuris in Britain have gradually grown more prosperous, the remittance flow has once again revived. As the recipient, once again, of a powerful cash boost from overseas, Mirpur's local economy can only be described as capital-rich, a condition which it has now enjoyed for the best part of three decades. On the face of it all this might have been expected to have a very positive effect, since lack of access to adequate working capital is routinely identified as one of the principal obstacles to economic development in rural areas on the global periphery. Yet although this obstacle has been entirely eliminated in Mirpur, there has been little sign of real and sustainable economic growth, for the bulk of the capital inflow has been invested in real estate: either in buying land, in building houses for themselves and their families, or in the construction of commercial property. One of the central consequences of all this is that the value of land, and especially those plots which might conceivably be suitable for residential or commercial development, has been subject to quite spectacular inflation. This has, of course, enabled a number of canny speculators to make a great deal of money through buying and selling real estate. Nevertheless it is quite clear that the paper profits—and the apparent prosperity—thereby generated are only as stable as the continued inflow of remittances.

However, as we have seen, that inflow is far from stable. As a result, Mirpur has witnessed a series of short-term housing booms, the first of which reached its peak during the mid-1970s. By then the pioneer generation of migrants were flush with savings: few had yet called their wives

and children to join them in Britain, and the industrial recession of the early 1980s had yet to set in. The resulting boom in house construction generated an escalating demand for bricks, cement, steel reinforcement rods, electric wiring and so forth, as well as the labour needed to turn these raw materials into housing. The *bazaars* began to boom, and this encouraged many returnees to invest in the construction of rows of shop units in every apparently commercially viable location. Those which found tenants brought in excellent rents, at least whilst the boom was on.

But the 1980s brought on even swifter collapse. As the level of remittances dropped sharply, Mirpur's local economy experienced a sharp recession. The demand for building materials faded away, and with it the volume of commercial activity in every *bazaar*. It also became clear that there was a huge oversupply of speculatively built commercial property: whole rows of newly-built shop units never saw a tenant, and soon began to fall into decay (Ballard 1983, 1989). Yet although my observations of the situation in the mid-1980s led me to make some very gloomy prognoses for the likely course of economic development in Mirpur, my next field trip to Mirpur in early 2000 revealed that the worst of my predictions had been wholly unfounded. Whilst Mirpur's local economy remains as dependent as ever on remittance inflows, these did not go into permanent decline. By the turn of the millennium large-scale investment in real estate and especially in housing had picked up once again, as had commercial initiatives in the *bazaar*, even if both proved to have moved off in some novel directions.

A dynamic perspective on transnational connections

Although local communities on the global periphery whose members have established a bridgehead in the prosperous metropolitan core are in a position to reap all manner of advantages from their transnational connections, it is now becoming quite clear that these connections have an internal dynamic of their own. In the Mirpuri case the impact of two sets of factors has been particularly salient: first, the effect which processes of growth and retrenchment in the wider British economy have had on the income-generating niches which Mirpuri settlers have carved out for themselves, and second, the operation of developmental cycles within the settlers' domestic groups. These processes have begun to interact with one another in increasingly complex ways.

The impact of the economic dimension of these processes is obvious enough: given the strength of the transnational linkages which have now been established between the settlers' home base and their bridgeheads in urban Britain, levels of economic activity in Mirpur are increasingly a function of the levels of prosperity enjoyed by settlers in the UK. That is not all, however, for this association has been further conditioned by the passage of domestic groups through their own characteristic developmental cycles. The same may well be true elsewhere.

Way back in the early 1960s when mass migration to Britain first took off, the vast majority of those who left were young men, almost all of whom were either unmarried, or had recently been provided with a spouse in the hope that that attachment would be a further guarantee against them going astray. The initial objective of virtually all these early pioneers was quite straightforward: to earn and save as much as possible as quickly as possible to supplement their families' collective capital assets. Hence as soon as they had paid off the cost of moving overseas, they began to remit the bulk of their saving back home. Parallel with the behaviour of rural emigrants the world over, these remittances were invariably invested either in buying more agricultural land, or in renovating—or better still in comprehensively rebuilding—the family home. But since this *modus operandi* requires an almost total deferral of gratification, no one can keep it up for ever. At some stage migrants conclude that they have reached their target and hence return home, or—at the other end of the scale, begin to feel sufficiently secure to transfer their domestic world to their new environment by calling over their wives and children. There is also an intermediate option between these two extremes for those who stay on abroad for many years: to punctuate their hard life of labour with periodic furloughs back home.

Whilst virtually all South Asian settlers in Britain have by now abandoned the spartan existence of the sojourner's life-style as a result of having reconstituted a full-fledged domestic world around themselves, the speed with which they have done so has varied enormously. In this respect the Mirpuris were a great deal more tardy than their Sikh and Hindu counterparts from across the border in India. Although they had also established their initial bridgeheads in Britain in the early 1950s, by the early 1970s the Sikhs and Hindus had largely completed the move to family reunion just as the Mirpuris were beginning to show the first signs of moving in that direction. But regardless of just when the transition occurred in any given community, the changes precipitated by the arrival of wives and children were far-reaching.

As former sojourners scraped together all the resources they could lay their hands on to buy, renovate and extend a house in which to accommodate their reunited families, the all-male households in which settlers had previously lived lives of the utmost frugality (Hussein 2000) soon began to disappear. But since their reunited families required a much higher level of spending than before, and since they also had to contend with a severe recession—and very often with redundancy—during the late 1970s, the scale of the remittances which they were in a position to make dropped precipitously.

However, that episode is now two decades behind us, and much has changed since then. In particular an ever-increasing number of the early settlers have begun to reach what they consider to be retirement age, not least because their offspring—most of whom are now British-born—have by now become the principal income earners within each extended household. As a result many elders' thoughts are turning towards the fulfilment of a long cherished dream: to build a really spectacular dwelling back in their home village in celebrating of the prosperity they have achieved during the course of a lifetime of labour overseas. However, in what can only be regarded as an equally unpredictable contingency, the sharp growth of the number of elders wishing to implement such plans also coincided—as we have seen—with a sharp inflation in the value of their sterling savings in rupee terms, and the prospect of turning such dreams into reality has become ever more enticing. However, a further factor stirring up this mixture has been the intensely competitive character of interpersonal relationships in Mirpuri contexts, which is itself the outcome of constant efforts by members of the largely endogamous *biraderi* to upstage one another. This tendency is once again deeply rooted in local cultural traditions.

As is commonplace throughout the Punjab region, well over half the local population belongs to one or the other of a small number of castes of peasant farmers. Within each such caste, the members of every family—be they Muslim, Hindu or Sikh—take it for granted that they are in no way inferior to any other in the *biraderi*. However, this fierce commitment to equality is also accompanied by a deep-rooted suspicion (and sometimes a paranoid fear) that one's rivals, and most especially one's immediate neighbours, are busy seeking to compromise one's own family's position of honourable autonomy: by sneakily getting ahead they are implicitly placing rivals in their shadow. Once this mindset is well-established, members of every family soon begin to subject the behaviour of all their neighbours to the closest critical scrutiny, partly to

ensure their rivals are not getting too far ahead, and partly to accumulate the ammunition to undermine their pretensions, should their rivals have the temerity to seek to outshine them. Besides generating endless bickering within each *biraderi*—so much so that the consequent centrifugal tendencies often appear to be only marginally outweighed by the common interests which hold the group together—these processes have had a far-reaching impact on Mirpur's built environment. Given the strength of these forces of mutual competition, every successive returnee tends to be driven to engage in a yet more spectacular housing project than any of those completed by his immediate neighbours.

The second housing boom

The result of all this has been a second housing boom, which has in many ways proved to be even more spectacular than that which peaked during the late 1970s. Whilst the location of the new construction initiatives in much the same as before, since most returnees remain as determined as ever to build on their own home ground, their design is startling novel. Not only do the new buildings rear three, four or even five-storeys into the sky, but they often call dramatic attention to themselves through elaborately eye-catching external decorations. Such is the strength of the visual impact of these buildings that one is forced to ask what these constructions are actually *for*, especially when one discovers that almost all are barely furnished within, and that the building itself was very often locked almost as soon as it was completed. Having finished the job, the owner had simply returned to Britain. A second striking feature of the current crop of houses, for which the term 'skyscraper' is often not out of place, is that they contradict all the well-established local conventions of house construction. Most of the old-style houses, including those which were built during the 1970s, rose no more than two-storeys; moreover they were invariably hidden behind a high bare wall running right round the larger plot within which the house stood. A house concealed behind these outer walls was almost completely hidden from external gaze, enabling family members—and most especially the women—to conduct their domestic affairs in complete privacy.

How can the change in style best be accounted for? Whilst the houses which returnees constructed during the first housing boom can be described as machines for living in, since they provided more rooms, more space and more privacy, albeit with sufficient external markers to underline the family's material success, the new constructions completely

reverse these priorities. Far from being machines for living in, they are best understood as vehicles which very publicly express the extent of their builder's achievements, most especially in comparison with those of their immediate neighbours. Hence the competitively driven urge to add extra storeys and ever more flashy decoration, as well as the prominent location of so many of the new edifices. But although such buildings are very effective symbols of 'modernity' and 'progress', they are not of much use for anything else. No one ever sits—or would wish to sit—and publicly expose themselves on their lofty balconies; such brazen behaviour would be viewed as quite shameless. And whilst these buildings may have cavernous (and secluded) interiors at ground level, these are not for living in on a regular basis either—although they provide a spectacular arena within which to host marriage celebrations and so forth, and for which all the necessary furnishings and equipment can be hired in on a daily basis. In other words, what these buildings are clearly not designed or maintained for is to facilitate a comfortable domestic life on a permanent basis.³

Urban developments

Although the greater part of Mirpur District is still thoroughly rural in character, albeit with an increasing number of 'skyscrapers', changes which are equally paradoxical in character have recently begun to manifest themselves in Mirpur town itself, as well as other rural commercial centres. In addition to an ever-growing multitude of small specialist shops, the most striking recent development is the construction of off-street shopping arcades known as Plazas, into which a great deal of investment is now being poured. Although considerably smaller-scale than similar developments in Lahore and Rawalpindi, such developments explicitly mimic 'modern' architectural styles. However, their principal current purpose in settlements such as Dadial, Chakswari and Akalgarh can only be understood with reference to some much more 'traditional' considerations: the high degree of gender segregation which has long underpinned the local social order.

³ In this respect I noticed a striking contrast between the building styles favoured by returnees from the UK and elsewhere in Europe, and those from the Gulf, who had no prospect of taking up permanent residence overseas. Gulf returnees displayed little interest in building 'skyscrapers'. Instead they preferred the secluded courtyard style which is much more in keeping with the demands of everyday domestic life.

In Mirpur—as in much of the rest of the Potohari culture zone—the rules of gender segregation are particularly strictly interpreted. Since traditional expectations held that it was not appropriate for women to leave their residential *dhoks* (hamlets) without good reason, women were effectively excluded from the *bazaar*; and because it was, therefore, very much a male space, it was men—or failing that children sent off by their mothers on specific errands—who made almost all household purchases. Women could usually only make purchases on their own account from the female pedlars who regularly brought round large baskets containing cloth, shawls and other trinkets for sale from door-to-door.

Despite the material impact of the District's transnational connections, and the fact that the rules of gender segregation have been substantially rewritten in the diaspora, these conventions still retain a powerful hold in rural Mirpur, where it is still considered unseemly for women to be seen in the open spaces of the *bazaar*. It is in this context that Plazas come into their own, always provided that one has access to a car, as most returnees do. In these circumstances female returnees can circumvent local conventions by finding a male kinsman to drive them to the sheltered entrance which is a salient component of each Plaza, from where they can step straight inside an enclosed arena in which shopping can be conducted whilst sheltered from the public gaze, before being whisked back to the respectable seclusion of the domestic household.

However limited, ironic and indeed humiliating such 'freedom' may seem to young women who have been brought up in Britain, these practices must nevertheless be regarded as a significant departure from local norms. Where families lack routine access to a car, women still have to rely on their husbands to make all decisions with respect to purchases in the *bazaar*, so the female pedlars who bring round baskets of goods for sale from courtyard to courtyard continue to do very good business. Although in Britain Mirpuri women of all ages make regular shopping trips into the town centre, as yet female visitors from Britain have only managed to dent the edges of local custom and practice back in Mirpur.

Rural developments

By contrast with the slow pace of change in gender relations, the remittances to which transnational connections have given rise have had a much more dramatic—although no less paradoxical—impact on agriculture, which still remains the nominal bedrock of the local economy. Given a location unsuited to extensive irrigation—at least when using

more traditional technologies—Mirpur has never been particularly agriculturally prosperous. However, since the rainfall in this area is generally reliable, small-scale subsistence farming has long been the order of the day. But whilst the area was always self-sufficient in food grain, there was rarely much of a surplus, so the principal reason why young men from this area have a long history of taking temporary employment elsewhere—whether as boatmen, stokers, or textile workers—was to add cash to their families' basic income from subsistence farming. But despite the District's long history of such external entrepreneurial engagements, it was not until the 1970s that these activities began to have a really significant effect on the local economy.

As we have seen, as the volume of remittances arriving from Britain grew, a boom in house construction began to occur. Local wage rates began to rise sharply in response to the ever-growing demand for labour, which in turn led to an increasing number of migrant workers being drawn in from other less favoured parts of Pakistan. Some were employed as labourers in the brickyards which sprang up throughout the District, whilst those with higher levels of skills took jobs as bricklayers, masons and carpenters. The building boom also generated all sorts of new commercial opportunities, with the result that the *bazaars* expanded rapidly to meet the escalating demand for cloth, shoes, and domestic hardware. In a further contingency, refugees from Afghanistan began to fill many of these new opportunities in the marketplace, a niche which they and their descendants still virtually monopolise to this day.

Yet even though remittances provided a very sharp boost to Mirpur's local economy, relatively few members of the local population took much advantage of these new opportunities, especially if—as was very soon almost universally the case—they belonged to a *biraderi* whose members had managed to establish a bridgehead overseas. In those circumstances most young men much preferred to wait for a call inviting them to join their kinsfolk abroad. Hence rather than regarding the remittance income that came their way as a source of capital around which to build a better future for themselves in Mirpur, the majority saw them as an opportunity to finance a more leisurely lifestyle. Hence, for example, motorcycles were very much more frequently purchased than tractors or irrigation pumps.

As a result the massive inflow of remittances did next to nothing to stimulate the productive base of Mirpur's local economy. Whilst agriculture continues to be practised, only older men show much interest in doing so on a regular basis. Much of the more marginal land in the District

can now be better described as having been abandoned rather than fallow, and the yield obtained from the land which remains under cultivation is steadily falling, rather than rising. Most strikingly of all, especially in the light of the cash-rich state of the local economy, there has been no significant investment in agricultural machinery, in the installation of pump-driven irrigation systems, or in the development of new and more profitable crops such as fruits and vegetables—for which there is a ready market in nearby Islamabad. Agriculture is, therefore, very firmly in decline, even though the District's agricultural potential is undoubtedly very substantial.

Nor has there been any significant degree of industrial development. Whilst the Government of Pakistan has offered all sorts of tax breaks and low-cost loans to budding entrepreneurs prepared to set up industrial projects in the 'frontier zone' of Azad Kashmir, virtually all of those who took advantage of these schemes have turned out to be fraudsters. The outskirts of Mirpur town are littered with the shells of the factory buildings constructed to house these proposed enterprises, but the capital on which such businesses were initially established—most of which was borrowed from one or the other of the nationalised banks—has in most cases long since disappeared.⁴ Hence, whilst Mirpur's prosperity is real enough in financial terms, in practice its effects have been little more than skin deep. Visitors may indeed be impressed by the presence of a superficial gloss which is entirely absent from those parts of rural Pakistan whose inhabitants do not enjoy the benefits of transnational connections, but the lack of productive investment has been so serious that the non-remittance dependent sectors of Mirpur's local economy have now gone into service decline. If the remittances were ever to dry up again, the local consequences would be extremely serious.

Remittances, dependency and Pakistan's wider economy

Just why has this occurred? An important part of the explanation, as I argued in considerable detail some years ago (Ballard 1988, 1989), is that, the inhabitants of Mirpur have found themselves locked into Pakistan's wider political economy in a particularly unfortunate way. Besides

⁴ It is worth noting that only a very small minority of the beneficiaries of these scams were local Mirpuris. The majority were sophisticated operators based in Lahore and Karachi with extensive political connections, who were therefore able to exploit the gaps in Pakistan's notoriously leaky banking system (whose resources have of course been significantly boosted by the saved remittances of the country's migrants).

lying in the disputed territory of Azad Mashmir, they have found themselves pushed to the very periphery of Pakistan's highly inegalitarian socio-economic order. Hence whilst the authorities in nearby Islamabad have been only too happy to absorb the benefits of the Mangla hydro-electric project as well as the migrants' contribution to the nation's foreign exchange reserves, they have done little or nothing to repair the further damage done to the District's civil infrastructure—which was ill-developed in any event—by the construction of the Mangla Dam. Nor has any international aid come the District's way. Britain's Department for International Development refuses even to consider putting this area on its agenda, informing me, for example, that Mirpuris are 'not poor'.

The result of all this is now plain to see. Given the District's profound infrastructural weaknesses, which local entrepreneurs are clearly not in a position to remedy on their own account, the only real moneymaking enterprises in Mirpur are those which feed off the continuing inflow of remittances. As a result the local economy has become locked into an ever more tightly constrained condition of dependency. Since virtually all local economic activity is still remittance-driven, it is hardly surprising that most young Mirpuris now take the view that the only meaningful route to prosperity is joining their kinsfolk overseas. Nor is that dream unrealistic: virtually all now await the receipt of an invitation to marry a British-based cousin. As one sagacious farmer told me: 'We Mirpuris don't cultivate crops any more, we just cultivate visas.'

Social contradictions

Clearly, viewed from within, the Mirpuris' apparent prosperity is far more rent by contradictions that most outsiders have yet begun to recognise. In addition to the usual disjunctions of gender, age and social class, two additional sets of contradictions have become salient: first, between those who have and those who have not successfully established themselves in the metropolitan world; and second, between the Anglo-Mirpuris who were born and brought up in British cities such as Birmingham and Bradford, and those Mirpuris who were born and brought up in Mirpur itself. Whilst all such persons may be embedded within transnationally organised *biraderis*, and hence feel strongly bound by their mutual obligations of kinship, the outlook and expectations as well as the interests and concerns of members of each of the many categories precipitated by their cross-cutting contradictions frequently turn out to differ dramatically once they return to Mirpur.

Whether they are emigrants or British-born, all returnees from the UK find that they occupy a position of very considerable privilege on their return to Pakistan. They soon find that their money goes a very long way: a single hour's work in Britain's generates at least as much purchasing power as does a full week's hard labour—always assuming that work is available—in Pakistan. Moreover, whilst invariably pleased to find themselves back in their ancestral home, most returnees take it for granted that they have reached a much higher level of social and cultural sophistication than their 'inexperienced' kinsfolk. But however much they may enjoy the adulation which they believe is no more than their due, they are invariably equally disconcerted by the keenness with which everyone seems to be hell-bent on exploiting their beneficence.

From the stay-at-home's point of view, such expectations of generosity are of course entirely legitimate. After all, they reason, it was they who sacrificed their own futures by staying back to hold the fort whilst their kinsfolk went off to enrich themselves overseas. Hence it seems quite reasonable that these well-dressed returnees with their cash-filled wallets should share some of their good fortune. And if returnees fail to live up to these expectations, only one conclusion is possible. They have been so 'spoiled' by their contact with Western materialism that they have forgotten the moral imperatives of kinship.

These simmering contradictions become most acute with aspect to the returnees' ability to access the highly desirable Entry Certificates which give their holders almost immediate access to the metropolitan world. The route to this is quite straightforward. Since cousin marriage has long been the preferred form of union in Mirpur (just as it is in much of the rest of northern Pakistan), and since the British passport holding offspring of Mirpuri settlers have the right to call their spouses to join them, returnees find themselves under intense pressure to enable another member of their *biraderi* to join them in the metropolis.

In the face of such requests, the instinctive reaction of most returnees who were born and brought up in Mirpur is to make a positive response. Having been socialised in an arena within which it was taken for granted that to assist one's kinsfolk was one's most sacred duty, it follows that marrying one's British-born offspring to a favoured niece or nephew not only fulfils that duty, but generates a substantial debt of gratitude amongst their remaining Mirpur-based kinsfolk. Hence when parents of a British passport holding young person are emigrants in this sense, whether this favour should be granted to a member of the husband's as opposed to

the wife's kindred is often in dispute. By contrast the hopes and expectations of the young people whose fate is thereby being determined are very different. Whilst those who have grown up in Mirpur invariably await the arrival of such offers with keen anticipation, those returning from Britain frequently view their parents' manoeuvres with much trepidation, since little or no attention is normally paid to their own personal interests and concerns.⁵

So it is that whilst most young visitors from Britain welcome the prospect of regaining first-hand contact with the people and places which continue to figure so hugely in their parents' memories and conversation, there are marked gender differentials in the precise character of their experience. In my experience, young men can afford to be more relaxed about any negotiations in which their parents engage, secure in the knowledge that even if a marriage should ensue, there should be no great difficulty in sloughing off their obligations after their return to Britain. By contrast their sisters are acutely aware that fulfilment of their elders' expectations can all too easily leave them entrapped in what amounts to a life sentence.

Nor it is just with respect to marriage that such differences emerge. Whilst local customs and conventions accord men the right to roam freely and do whatever they choose whenever they like, women's spatial mobility is much more tightly constricted. Indeed there are only two legitimate reasons for women to move about: either to visit relatives, or to make a pilgrimage to visit the shrine of a *Pir*. Hardly surprisingly, young women visitors from Britain often find these restrictions extremely irksome. This brings us to a complaint articulated by almost all young returnees from the UK: boredom. Having excitedly explored the nooks and crannies of their new environment during the first few days of their holiday, the novelty very soon wears off. But then what is there to do? Just how much can one bear of granny's tall tales and loving affection? Of endless visits from aunts, uncles and cousins, all of whom expect gifts as well as a visit in return? To be sure TV might offer an alternative to the blur of sameness, but even so familiar programmes often turn out to be missing, the video to have broken down, and the electricity supply to be so intermittent as to be virtually useless. In these circumstances it

⁵ Nevertheless it would be erroneous to conclude that such marriages are 'forced'. Even where young people are aware that a union which satisfies their parents' interests and concerns may well be a positive blight on their own, such is the strength of the processes of socialisation as well as the tightness of the networks of reciprocity within which they are enclosed, that they may capitulate, albeit with reservations.

is easy to start chafing at the bit, most especially as it turns out to be much more difficult to slip quietly beyond the elders' gaze. All the classic excuses that one has to go off to college to complete a project or do some revision in the library no longer work.

In these circumstances young men are much better off than their sisters. It is easy enough for them to borrow a motorcycle, or better still a car, in which to speed around impressively; likewise they can roam the *bazaar*, visit friends and relatives, or take a stroll around the Mangla Lake. When that palls they can still go and sit grandly in a restaurant or hotel, ordering endless rounds of tea, Coca-Cola and snacks. And when their patience finally runs out they can go and pester the travel agent, and tell him to find a seat on the next flight back home. Ricky spoke for many when he told me

It was laught at first. Get up when you like and do what you like—no hassle. But once you've seen it all—and that doesn't take every long—the prats start getting up your nose. They won't leave you alone, they're always pestering me for something or other. All I want to do now it to get back home, and get in a few bevies with me mates. It's dead boring here. I dunno how they put up with it. They're all just a load of wankers.

By no means are all returnees' reactions so negative, of course. However, as far as I have been able to determine, virtually everyone who did not spend a substantial part of their childhood in rural Mirpur—such that they return to a way of life with which they had some previous familiarity—reacts in a similar way. Boredom very soon sets in, since they find little to meaningfully occupy their time and attention. If this is so for free-roaming young men, then the much more serious constraints facing young women returnees leave most of them feeling even more seriously bored, trapped and unhappy—and hence more desperate still to get away.

IV *Conclusion*

What lessons can be learned from this complex pattern of developments? Whilst all manner of highly specific contingencies have powerfully conditioned both the processes and the outcomes outlined above, the individual and collective experiences of the inhabitants of Mirpur District are far from unique. Never in human history has such a high proportion of the

world's population been on the move over such long distances than is the case today, and virtually all such movements are driven by just the same imperatives as those described here: a search for a better deal by those otherwise driven to the periphery of an ever more globalised, and ever more unequal, socio-economic order. Whilst the greater part of the current literature on transnational migration focuses on the impact of these flows on receiving societies, where the exponential growth in the size of the non-European presence is currently the cause of much alarm, the impact of these flows on the political economy of sending societies has as yet received much less scholarly attention, though its effects are no less far-reaching.

From that perspective, migratory outflows certainly have their downside. The annual departure of many thousands of the brightest and best of South Asia's newly-qualified scientists, doctors and software engineers to North America is an immense drain on the region's intellectual capital. But such movements also have their upside. To the extent that almost all such migrants remain bound up in trans-local kinship networks, they also generate a substantial capital inflow straight into the pockets of their capital-starved kinsfolk back home. But once the much larger component of the total outflow which is composed of emigrants of peasant origins is factored in, the equation changes: in that case the downside costs are minimal and the potential upside benefits are immense—always supposing that potential can be unlocked. How, then, has Mirpur found itself locked into such a severe—and ultimately unsustainable—condition of dependency, and are there circumstances in which that outcome could have been avoided?

The first lesson to be learned from Mirpur is that a situation which pumps large amounts of capital straight into the pockets of peasant-farmers does not necessarily produce economic development. This is not because 'these illiterate peasants don't know what to do with their money', as helpful bureaucrats in Islamabad repeatedly tell fly-by-night advisors from DfID and the World Bank. The central problem for peasant farmers is that the infrastructural resources which would enable them to invest their capital to radically increase the productivity of their land—such as ready and reliable access to electric power, to turbine driven deep tubewells and the wherewithal to operate them, to road connections to give speedy access to hungry markets in nearby Islamabad, and to a commercial infrastructure to delivery high-value agricultural produce such as fruit and vegetables from farm to marketplace—simply does not exist. In no way is the construction and delivery of such infrastructural

prerequisites something which individual peasant-farmers can hope to provide: only the state can do that. But in the absence of such investment agriculture will continue to yield negative returns. Why though, should Mirpuris prefer to build skyscrapers instead? Outsiders may view the prestige these constructions bring as wholly ephemeral, but something is clearly better than nothing. If agricultural investment in Mirpur is invariably loss-making, as those who have tried it can testify, why fritter away one's savings on profitless projects in what one might idly assume was the real economy?

Could the outcome be otherwise? The answer is clearly in the affirmative. Much of the land in the area is deep loess, and extremely fertile with appropriate irrigation. Water is readily available, but needs to be pumped to the appropriate locations; a large market lies close by; and there is no shortage of capital in the hands of small farmers. However, the only way in which this potential is ever likely to be released is if the underlying infrastructural problems are resolved. Why, then, have these issues not been addressed?

In the space available it is only possible to highlight a few of the more important answers. First there has been a gross failure by the Pakistani state to invest in the necessary infrastructural resources in rural areas in general (Zaidi 2000), and in Azad Kashmir in particular. Despite the hugely beneficial impact of remittances on Pakistan's balance of payments, Pakistan's urban élite have managed successfully to divert these benefits in their own direction. Likewise, whilst the Mangla hydroelectric project has brought immense benefits to Pakistan proper, the downside costs have overwhelmingly been borne by the inhabitants of Mirpur District (Ballard 1991).

This is not to suggest that Mirpuris are incapable of helping themselves: their very success in breaking through the barriers of fortress Europe makes that absolutely clear. But in unequal and increasingly Hobbesian transnational arenas, those seeking to look after themselves have little alternative but to develop wholly opportunistic entrepreneurial strategies. So, however much affection migrants may have for their Kashmiri homeland—and those skyscrapers and the *kabiristans* beside them clearly underline the depth of that affection—they can hardly be blamed for using all their available resources to manoeuvre their way forward to their own best advantage. Pakistan may eventually come to regret the de-development of high-emigration areas such as Mirpur, just as British politicians wring their hands at the apparent unstoppable inflow from Mirpur. However no one can blame the Mirpuris for pursuing what they

perceive to be their own best interests. They are hardly alone in doing so.

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