

## **Understanding Homeland/s and Identities: A Study of Barkas in Hyderabad**

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This paper is an attempt to understand the construction of homeland/s and identities in Barkas, an Arabian colony in Hyderabad.

Barkas, a neighbourhood in Hyderabad, is inhabited mainly by the Chaush community who were descendants of the Hadrami Arab military men and bodyguards hailing from the Hadramaut region of Yemen. It is also inhabited by some former employees of the Nizam of Hyderabad who are not from Hadramaut. This area used to serve as the Military Barracks of the Nizam of Hyderabad. The word is believed to have been derived from the English word Barracks.

Data collected by Greater Hyderabad Municipal Corporation in 2001 showed that the total population of Barkas was 34,288 among which 17,808 males and 16,480 females. The neighbourhood is surrounded by Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) camp, quarters of CRPF and Kendriya Vidyalaya School now. Here, every household has at least one member from each generation either returned or working in the gulf. Today the local market has products from Saudi Arabia brought by migrants and their families. Influence of gulf was seen in the names of the shops such as Hadrami Harees, a café, Musqati Dairy, Dubai Shopping, Al-Ain Tailors, Dubai Footwear, Dubai Burqa shop, Oman general Stores, Hadrami shoes, New Saudi Arabian Shawarma Restaurant and Yemeni video library.

In this paper, I have looked at, as majority of the residents of Barkas identify themselves as Hadramis from Yemen, even today, therefore, does migration to the Gulf have any

relationship with the concept of homeland? Given this, the main question is how and why do different residents of Barkas construct homeland? I have looked at the multiple perceptions of people constructing homeland differently and attempted to explore the relationship between construction of homeland, hostland and multiple identities.

In order to understand the construction of homeland/s and multiple identities, I have based my analysis on the concepts of Benedict Anderson's (1983) 'imagined community', Stuart Hall's cultural identity and Homi Bhabha's concept of cultural hybridity. Benedict Anderson's (1983) concept of imagined community is significant.

### **Construction of multiple homelands**

Multiple homelands are created and recreated by the migrants of Barkas based on their collective identity, shared beliefs, social networks and experiences in the Gulf countries. Presently, residents of Barkas migrate voluntarily and are settling into their new homes and finding various ways to assimilate in the new society. Many migrants have stressed that home is in two places i.e. where your home is and where your family is. The home is where your background is and where your ancestors are from.

### ***Construction of Multiple Homelands in Barkas***

Transnational existence and life in exile, for example the Jewish diaspora, pave the way for possibly different and inventive conceptualisation of home. Migrants from Barkas are expatriates as they migrate for a fixed period of time to the Gulf as naturalisation of citizenship is not possible in the Gulf countries. It is a popular belief that migration to the Gulf happens mainly due to economic reasons. In this paper it is seen that migrants from Barkas, especially the Hadramis have a different notion of migration to the Gulf other than purely economic reasons. As citizenship is not given to any migrant in the Gulf, hence it is not always true that migrants live secluded lives by ignoring the culture of the Gulf.

However, in contrast to the first and/or second generation, who cannot go back to Yemen, it is only through the migration that they are trying to recreate a homeland in Barkas. To create a home even when one is far away from it is primarily about finding security and safety and just coping with life. Generally, migrants from Barkas are spread in Bahrain, United Arab Emirates (UAE), Saudi Arabia, Oman and Qatar, as well as USA, UK and Australia. There is no one country that they prefer to migrate to and the experiences are quite different in different countries. For many migrants, the differences between homeland and hostland are collapsing and those rigid binaries are no longer present. These migrants are moving beyond the concept of communities. It is now only about the movement of an individual, and ways in which his or her socio-economic background influences their relationship to place. There are different responses to the meaning and construction of homeland post migration to the Gulf such as Hadramaut as the original home, Gulf as the second home and Hyderabad as home or migrating to the Gulf means reaching near Yemen.

### ***Hadramaut as the Original Home***

First, there are those families who believe that Hadramaut is their original home. These families have a collective memory of their homeland and their descendants have a collective myth and their ancestors had a myth of return unlike the next generations. Gillis (1994) has argued that identities and memories get transformed over time and as a result they tend to be 'subjective constructions of reality rather than objectively fixed phenomenon'. Geertz (1986) has pointed out that, 'like nostalgia, diversity is not what it used to be'. In other words, the past is reconstructed and presented in a hybrid manner which includes multiple cultures and identities. Rayaprol (1997) has also mentioned that the homeland that people construct is part real and part imagined. In this paper, the homeland that Hadramis of Barkas has created is partly imaginative because many of them have never visited Hadramaut in their lifetime. Hadramis of the first generation came from Yemen. Even the second generation has not

visited Yemen in their lifetime except for a few. The second and mostly the third generations do not feel the need to visit Yemen as they have no attachment with the place as they were born and raised in Hyderabad. Their parents could not keep in touch with the families who were left behind in Yemen as communication across nations was not easy in those days. With the generations changing, the concept of Yemen homeland is disappearing. The issue of citizenship is also important reason as to why first generation did not go back to Yemen. By the time, Hadramis have lost their occupations, they became Indian citizens. Moreover, the economic and political reasons did not give the Hadramis of Barkas enough of an opportunity to go back to Yemen, rather they migrated to the Gulf countries for occupational purposes using various types of social networks.

Language as a marker of identity is important in this neighbourhood as Hadramis of the first generation spoke in Arabic. The second, third and fourth or the present generations have started learning Arabic due to the influence of the Gulf. In the Gulf countries, migrants first have to learn Arabic and the residents prefer speaking in Arabic today than Urdu which was used until about 1956 and the formation of the state of Andhra Pradesh.

Children who are raised in the Gulf, have English medium education, and like other children in the English dominated world, they have started speaking English even at home. For the Hadrami parents and grandparents, it is important that the child should learn Arabic. Children born in Hadrami families are forgetting Arabic if they are studying in Hyderabad. It is mixed with Deccani Hindi or Urdu. Families are sending small children to Mosques to learn Arabic. Girls also attend Arabic classes till the age of twelve years. Therefore, parents in both places are trying to make their children learn Arabic through both formal and informal means.

## **Intergenerational Perceptions**

In Barkas, Hadrami migrants and their families at some point still consider Hadramaut as their original homeland. There is both a desperate and a hopeful clinging to the past and homeland. However, it differs within each family and between generations but there are families where people across generations have mentioned that Hadramaut is their original home. Older generations have drawn this belief and constructed their homeland on the basis of sharing common ancestry and history of their migration to India. In other words, more specifically, for the older Hadrami members of the neighbourhood, the only home in Hadramaut is because they share a common history.

There are many families where children are socialised to maintain the culture of Yemen, in Barkas, even today. However, much of the storytelling has changed over time as the older members have only a vague memory of their past. The history of Hadramaut is created and recreated with time and young generations mostly do not hold any memory related to the homeland as there is a nostalgia of the past. They do not know if the past was real or imagined. It is always a story narrated by the older generations. People construct the past and present in their own ways and that becomes hybrid in the present times. This is not unproblematic any longer. Aidan Arrowsmith (2006) has pointed out that nostalgia is experienced through photographs and memories attached to it. Moreover, with modern technological inventions, people who have been dispersed from their homelands, view the geographical landscape through internet and films as seen in the work of Ranjan Bandopadhyay (2008). Residents of Barkas, watch Yemeni movies and those who went to Yemen for short term visits, have brought back pictures of the city of Sana'a.

Restoring homeland does not mean moving there physically, but it has to do with reclaiming one's past and providing individuals with roots. Families still try to maintain ties with Yemen

through various ways. Moreover, it is also interesting that they do not want to go back to Yemen even if they say that it is their home mainly due to political and economic reasons. The meaning of diaspora is quite different from the old meaning where people were dispersed and can only be secured in relation to a particular homeland where they must return. Here, the meaning of diaspora is defined not by purity but by heterogeneity and diversity and by a conception of identity which is lived throughout with hybridity. Therefore there is a difference, a diversity and hybridity that makes the people of Barkas, a diaspora.

### ***Gulf as the Present Home or Second Home***

Many families of both Hadramis and Hyderabadis believe that the Gulf is their present home and sometimes second home although they are aware that they will not be able to live in the Gulf permanently. Therefore, Gulf is a temporary home for many. For the Hyderabadis of Barkas, there is a constant desire to attach themselves with the local Arabs as many believe that the Gulf is their second home after Barkas. There are reasons as to why many immigrants from Barkas felt Gulf as their second home. Young population i.e. children of the migrants mentioned that as many of them were born in the Gulf so they call themselves as Arabs. This is because they were raised in the Gulf culture where they interact with the local culture on a daily basis.

### ***Home is in Two Lands for Many***

Many migrants have stressed that home is in two places i.e. where your home is and where your family is. The home is where your background is and where your ancestors are from. This is also contested because of the complex identities of the residents. Gulf is home for many till the time they are working whereas Hyderabad is also home because it is where their ancestors were born and lived and has memories.

Many also believe that home is where family is. For many, home is where the family currently resides as well as where family members had originated from. Many a times, these two places are not the same due to continuous migration to the Gulf countries. For the residents of Barkas, family plays a prominent role for migration as many want their families to migrate with them. Migrants have also pointed out that living with the family in the Gulf is more peaceful than living in Hyderabad. For the children it is alright if they are half-half. They are content with the fact that they have two homes and they can travel from one country to another. Here, the main argument is that migrants felt closer to locals because of language and superior Arab culture.

***Gulf Migration means reaching near to the Home (Yemen)***

However, there is another trend also where few Hadrami families have stressed that as their ancestors have migrated from Yemen and made Hyderabad their home, now migrating to the Gulf for work and/or for marriage, believe that migrating to the Gulf means reaching near Yemen as both have Arabian culture although it varied with different socio-economic class, families, and between generations. One commonality is visible and that is the presence of shared history and identity. Even if the Hadramis have varied responses yet there is one point where they collectively said that going to the Gulf means reaching near Yemen or mention that Hadramaut is their home even if they have not seen it. Also the migrants construct home in different countries in the Gulf. For some Hadrami families, Dubai or Riyadh is their second home after Yemen whereas for many, Yemen is still their homeland. When migrant families mention that Riyadh or Dubai as their homeland it means that there is an influence of these countries in the lives of the migrants and their families.

### ***Hyderabad/Barkas as Home***

Earlier generations may still consider Yemen and Gulf to be their home or second home, whereas for the present generation are born in Barkas, and consider it to be their home. For the Hadrami fourth generation, Hadramaut is only a place in Yemen. They have no intention of constructing Hadramaut as their original home. Many young generation Hyderabadis have also stressed that Hyderabad is their home as there is always a fear of sudden expulsion from the Gulf. Migrants who believe that Barkas as their home and have migrated with families have close and continuing engagement with their homeland, Barkas. Therefore, there are different ways in which a migrant and his family constructs homeland for variety of reasons.

Being a Hadrami for the young generation is ambiguous which however does not say anything about the authenticity of their representations. It is different for the Hyderabadis in Barkas as the construction of homeland differs according to their experiences abroad. Home is constructed not as something removed or far away or confined to a particular place but as something which you can carry within you. Therefore, it is about the movement and is malleable.

### **Construction of Identities and Imaginary Homelands**

Self proclaimed Hadramis have an emotional memory of their homeland, Yemen but at the same time, they are comfortable with the present situation in Hyderabad and migration to the Gulf. It is not a forced migration rather a voluntary one. Benedict Anderson's concept of "imagined community" is significant as communities are to be distinguished by their falsity/genuineness but by the way they are imagined. Here, the idea of imagined homeland emerges differently for different residents of Barkas depending on age, gender and

movements around the world<sup>1</sup>. Creation of a collective memory and cultural identity was therefore very much a family business which belongs to the future as well as to the past.

Moreover, shifting identities happens from sometimes being from Barkas or from Hyderabad or from India. Stuart Hall (1996: 21) explains the multiple complexities of culture among the diaspora communities abroad. As Hall quotes in his essay that identity is not a complete phenomenon and it keeps changing with variety of circumstances. Question of cultural identity also depends on the time period from where one is locating oneself. Therefore, construction of cultural identity will be different for families who have experienced migration in different time periods. Drawing from Hall (1996) there is a shared culture which is collective, based on shared history and common ancestry.

### **Imagining Homeland/s and being a Hadrami-Hyderabadi**

There are no pure Hadramis or Hyderabadis in Barkas. Identifying respondents as a Hadrami or a Hyderabadis is done through how each one of them have identified themselves. Hadramis were present when they migrated to India but with mixed marriages with the Hyderabadis there is no pure Hadrami. It is hybrid and perhaps hyphenated. However, the culture of the neighbourhood is typically known as Hadrami culture, as families and individuals have identified themselves in different ways and therefore I have termed them as Hadrami-Hyderabadis, a hyphenated identity.

There are multiple ways in which homeland/s are created and recreated in Barkas among the residents. The Hadrami identity that is perceived by them is very important. As it is becoming more symbolic and distant, the context of being without a homeland that Hadrami-ness is created. In Barkas, a hybrid Yemeni culture prevailed even among the Hyderabadis living

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<sup>1</sup> Hyderabadis and Hadrami identities are used on the basis of how an individual has identified himself/herself in the field.

where the presence of Hadramaut is strong even if the person is from a different ethnic background. It is only as Edward Said (1979: 4) has said, 'imaginative geography and history, which helps the mind to intensify its own sense of itself by dramatising the difference between what is close to it and what is far away. It has acquired an imaginative or figurative value we can name and feel.' In Barkas, Hadramis constantly produce and reproduce the images of a Hadrami identity associated with their imagined homeland, Yemen. Self identified Hyderabadis in Barkas have clearly mentioned that either the Gulf is their second home or Hyderabad is their original home. The question of imagined homeland emerges when a Hadrami mentions about Yemen and his/her aspirations of reaching Yemen even if it is for a temporary visit.

### **Construction of Multiple Cultural Identities**

Much of the recent work on identity suggests that identity is 'in a constant state of flux and can never, nor will ever, be static' (Kerchen 1998: 2). Transnational lives and attachment to new places also affect processes of identification. Meenakshi Thapan (2005) has argued that the ways in which global and local identities are negotiated depends on the class and the location of the migrants. Here it based on the geographical location of the migrants where there is a shared past and the collective identity among the residents of Barkas. As many migrants have mentioned, Arab culture is superior and they bring back that culture to Hyderabad through food, dressing and language mainly. Ties with the Gulf are also strong through social media. Residents, who have never visited Gulf, know everything about the social life of Gulf through Television and internet. There has been a constant debate as how residents of Barkas identify themselves within and outside their locality. There is ambivalence in categorising them as forming one kind of identity. People negotiate different sides of their identities. For the Hadramis, the Hadrami identity neither yielded nor conserved fully rather it is complemented with new experiences, meetings and activities. For many

Hadramis, an Arab identity is so important especially post migration that they would identify them as Arabs in Hyderabad.

### **Conclusion**

Even in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, Hadramis of Barkas are trying to maintain the culture of Hadramaut to their full potential. Hadramis believe that they belong to multiple places. Construction of multiple homeland/s and cultural identities varies intergenerationally. Perceptions are dependent upon the connections that they experience in the Gulf and the social circle in both the countries that a migrant interacts with. It keeps changing before and after Gulf migration. Different positions that occur in an individual's life have different meanings and also have narratives of the past. Cultural identity has become vague for the younger generation who had never known about the homeland, Yemen. This new generation is without memories of the homeland, Yemen and the struggle of their ancestors. Hyderabad migrants mentioned that with a good life, good income and good friends, they have started feeling Gulf as their home. On the other hand, there are many who believe that Hyderabad is their only home as they were born in Hyderabad. Therefore the paper concludes that meaning of home kept changing post migration to the Gulf and also across generations. It is contextual in nature. The meaning of home kept changing also because of the blurred of fuzzy identities that occurs in an individual's life with the constant movement from one country to the other and back to his/her own country.

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