

# AFRICAN MIGRANTS IN SOUTH ASIA

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The purpose of my research is to develop an ethnographic account of the lives of African national migrants to the global south, particularly in India. In contemporary times, movement of African nationals to the South Asian countries have been substantial due to the migration policies becoming constrained in Western European countries and USA. In India, the African migrants are more “visible” and less “audible” due to their color and language dissimilarities. At times, the “Afro-phobia” manifested through violence and discrimination is further compounded by stereotyping as drug peddlers, sex workers and “Habshi” (an Arabic word for traders and slaves of Ethiopian origin given by the Mughal emperors). This immigrant population has not been thoroughly studied as to the circumstances that lead to their migration, the emotional and personal experiences en route, the everyday living in sometimes hostile surroundings, and the perception of their life in the host country in relation to their homeland.

African immigrants living in New Delhi are from countries like Congo, Ethiopia and Nigeria where many have migrated for higher education, some for cheap and affordable medical care, a few for small businesses. Some are also engaged in illegal activities. The African immigrants in contemporary period are struggling to find a sense of belonging, a sense of home in the host country amidst the precarity of socio-economic political milieu.

The site of ‘residing’ also creates a site of ‘living’ where immigrants develop affinities, negotiate meanings and face resistance from political and social bodies. Ethics of living can be understood not in the context of extreme good or extreme bad situations, but ethics of living is understood as a desire, an urge to make life optimum amidst the vagaries and trying circumstances of life.

Therefore, my research objective is to understand that in a world of global exchange where migration is a normative way of living, how do small ‘marginal’ communities like that of African

migrants in India engage in intersubjective negotiations, meaning making and identity formations in their everyday life. Taking a cue from existing ethnographic literature and works of the anthropologist, Michael Jackson, I wish to formulate my research in developing a possible foray into registering migration as a ‘question of life’ before venturing into a recording of sociological matrices of social identities and locations of the migrants. Migration itself becomes an identity where before having a new and firm social and legal identity that determines their life, they have an ethical identity that determines their will to live where, in hope for a better life, they interact, adapt, reciprocate, create and eliminate in their everyday life. It is in this light of the ethics of everyday and human intersubjectivity that I want to understand the experiences of the alienation and the alliances of the African migrants being produced and reproduced in India, particularly New Delhi.

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