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Alain Lefebvre: Kinship, honour and money in Pakistan. Subsistence economy and the effects of international migration. Nordic Institute of Asian Studies Monograph Series, No. 78. Richmond: Curzon 1999. 303 pp. ISBN 0-7007-0984-3.

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Labour migration is an eminent factor of economic and social change in Pakistan. At times the remittances Pakistani workers abroad sent home were the most important source of foreign exchange for the country. The unskilled and semiskilled labourers with a rural background almost exclusively went to the (Persian) Gulf countries without their families, who stayed back, supported by the remittances of the migrant workers. Having the families joining them and leaving Pakistan for good was hardly possible and intended neither by the migrants and their families nor by the labour “importing” countries. Labour migration to the Gulf still is on a rotation basis: the “importing” countries have even started to shift their favour to non-Muslim labour “exporting” countries, mostly for political reasons.

The author’s aim was, as he writes “to analyse the international labour migration from two Punjabi villages in Pakistan with different forms of agriculture, in order, on the one hand, to determine the relations between the levels of their economic development and the necessity to take a job abroad, and, on the other hand to determine the nature of the changes brought about by foreign remittances.” (p. 259). In order to do this, he chose two small villages in the rain fed region of North-Punjab, one in the alluvial plains of the Sialkot District and the other on the Potwar Plateau, an area with loess soils, deeply eroded, where irrigation is hardly possible. The Potwar Plateau had been a favoured recruiting ground for the colonial army and thus has a history in labour migration. Both villages saw forced migration at the time of the partition of India. The introduction of high yielding varieties of the so-called green revolution had less impact in the areas under review than in the “canal colonies” of central Punjab. Holdings are small and fragmented and the traditional system that binds and supports the landless artisans groups (the *kamis*) to the landowners has started to break up since long.

It was, thus, a happy coincidence, that the new government under Zulfikar Ali Bhutto showed a more liberal, and later supportive, attitude towards labour migration at the time when the oil states began to recruit millions of workers, initially preferably from Muslim countries, to build up their infrastructure, after having significantly raised the oil price in 1973. “Dubai chalo”, i.e. let’s go to Dubai, seemed to be the answer for all economic and social ills, on the micro as well as on the macro level. The author conducted his field research in the early 1980s (no year given) and obviously also wrote the manuscript at that time. This is very much reflected by the jargon of his introductory chapter, which now reads like a time warp of the neo-Marxian discourse. He sets out discussing European history of migration that, however, would need a deeper and more careful analysis to work out the parallels (and non-parallels) to that of the third world in general or of Pakistan in particular. The rest of the study, then, is devoted to a detailed description of the economic and social conditions in the two villages, and later – and shorter – the impact of migration, all of them rather unrelated to the initial theoretical underpinnings. He obviously had greatly benefited from the research of his Pakistani co-researcher, Shahida Haque, who as a woman had the access to the women of the villages. The recounts of their experiences in general,

and more in particular during the times when their husbands and protectors were abroad, are among the most interesting parts of the book.

The author obviously had not the opportunity to revisit the villages or follow events later. This would have been most interesting, since much must have happened during the many years thereafter. He tells us – in accordance with other studies — that spending patterns develop over time, starting with repaying the debt incurred for funding the migration, “marrying off” daughters and sisters, building houses and buying land. But the familiar complaint that too much of remittances goes into “honour” (prestige) and consumption might need differentiation. If we use a wider definition of investment and include education (“human capital”), we usually find that child labour disappears, and boys and later also girls go to school etc. What he describes as examples of wasteful consumption, like buying TV sets in households that are not connected to the electricity net, may simply have been done in expectation of such a connection. There are also few alternatives to it, since investing in agricultural implements makes not much sense for villagers with little or any land, who constitute most of the the study’s migrants. There is no mentioning of savings behaviour, which the villagers may also be reluctant to disclose, but the government saw to it that the nationalized banks opened branches all over the rural areas.

The book concludes with a list of consulted organizations, a list of castes in one of the villages in 18760, 1886, 1905 and 19947, a glossary, an extensive bibliography, and an index. Except for a minor flaw (7 *tolas* are not 1.12 kg, p. 184; correct on page XIII), the book makes good reading and will be of interest not only for anthropologists but also for all others who take an interest in the development of rural South Asia.