

**Lund University
Centre for East and South-East Asian Studies
Masters Programme in Asian Studies
The South Asia track
Masters Thesis
Autumn Semester 2008**

Beyond the Root: An endless journey

The life experiences of the immigrant women in domestic, socio-cultural and political spheres: A case study of Bangladeshi diaspora living in Scandinavia

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to investigate different experiences of domestic, socio-cultural and political life of Bangladeshi diaspora women, living in Scandinavia (especially in Sweden and Denmark). This has done by analysing different life experiences of 22 women (11 in Malmö, Sweden and 11 in Copenhagen, Denmark) who have all been living in these western societies as immigrants. The study includes aspects such as the dilemma of being an immigrant diasporic woman in a western cultural context. It also investigate the extent of which immigrant women are living their daily life and trying to mix-up and reshape their own culture, values, and religious identities and practices with new socio-cultural and political spheres of their present residence. The theoretical discussion focuses on the contemporary understanding of the term Diaspora as well as the different aspects of gender discourses (women's roles) among Bangladeshi immigrant women in the western cultural context as compare to South Asian context. The study also demonstrates the different tendencies to uphold religious and cultural practices of Bangladeshi women in the diaspora as they try to maintain their own identities as Bangladeshis or Muslims in the alien societies.

Keywords: Bangladeshi diaspora in Scandinavia, immigrant women, life experiences, domestic-socio-cultural and political role.

Contents

Acknowledgements	4
1.0 Introduction	5
1.1 Purpose and research questions.....	5
2.0 Methodology	7
2.1 Domestic, socio-cultural and political life in the diaspora.....	7
2.2 Methods and respondents.....	8
2.3 Access, gatekeepers and selection of respondents.....	10
2.4 Biasness, validity and ethical considerations.....	11
3.0 Outline of thesis	11
4.0 Background	12
4.1 Previous research on women in the diaspora and immigrants.....	12
4.2 Understanding Diaspora and immigration	15
4.3 Different immigrants and their life in Scandinavia.....	16
5.0 Theoretical key concepts	20
5.1 Gender role of immigrant women.....	20
5.2 Socio-cultural and Political participation	21
5.3 A clash between the traditions of origin and modern western culture.....	22
6.0 Presentation of Domestic, socio-cultural and political life experiences of Bangladeshi women in Scandinavia	23
6.1 Backgrounds of the Respondents.....	23
6.2 Everyday living: women’s domestic role.....	24
6.2.1 <i>Wifehood and motherhood</i>	24
6.3 Socio- cultural constructions.....	27
6.3.1 <i>Socialization and Social communication</i>	27
6.3.2 <i>Public role: Education and employment</i>	28
6.3.3 <i>Religious practices</i>	29
6.4 Political role.....	31
6.4.1 <i>Consciousness and participation</i>	31
6.5 Two case studies	32
7.0 Conclusion	34
7.1 Some key findings and new considerations.....	34
7.2 Concluding remarks.....	37
Bibliography	38
Interview guide	42
Annex A:	
Maps of Sweden and Denmark.....	43
Annex B:	
Some statistical data and charts of migration in Sweden and Denmark.....	44

Acknowledgements

I want to thank all the friendly people who have made this study possible: Catarina Kinnvall by whom I was first inspired to study and research Diaspora women and who patiently guided me through tricky theoretical issues; the library and information centre of Nordic Institute of Asian Studies (NIAS), Copenhagen for the 'Öresund scholarship' that made possible for me to use their library to collect lots of relevant literatures and materials. Rakhi apa (in Malmö) and Arif vai's (in Copenhagen) necessary contacts and helpfulness made it possible for me to go to the field. But above all I want to thank the all Bangladeshi immigrant women in Malmö and Copenhagen who met me with natural hospitality and delight at being a part of my study and who told me frankly about their different life experiences. Finally, I like to thank my husband Jamil for his encouragement and support during the whole journey of literature selections, data collections to difficult writing process along with Eliza, Kristoffer, and Amin who help me to proof read and corrections.

Zayedda Sharmin
Lund, January 2008

1.0 Introduction

In continuous changing world, homogeneous societies are quickly becoming a remnant of the past. Continuing migrations, intercultural communication, international agreements, transnational cooperation and cross-cultural coalitions all testify to the fact that we are going through on an age of diversity. In a multiethnic societal life and work contain ambivalences, conflicts, and contradictions around the experience of national or ethnic identity. People, with their multiple identities are trying to use multiple strategies to achieve their aims. As a result, they have all faced different experiences. Thus, a new challenge has emerged concerning the extent to which it is possible to ensure one's own identity at the same time as one is to adapt one's culture of origin to the new culture of the host society? (In terms of gender, colour, values, and religion)

In this regard, questions of national attachment and detachment and of strategies for empowerment in a new home environment must be the focus of more sensitive consideration. Perhaps, some immigrants are assertive and successful in pursuing their aims, despite racism; while others internalize inferior images of themselves. Then, what about the immigrant diaspora women? They have been facing a number of multidimensional problems. Areas of particular concern include the disadvantages faced by minority women in the labor market, socio-cultural and political environment as well as in daily life. Besides these problems they are facing different race-based violence in some places. Therefore, considering all these realities, the central concern of my thesis is to analyse the daily experiences of domestic, socio-cultural and political life of Bangladeshi immigrant women in diaspora, living in two Scandinavian¹ countries; Sweden and Denmark.

1.1 Purpose and research questions

Recently, the notion of diaspora has been extensively used by a wide range of scholars aiming to contribute to the definition of transnational migrants. The new trends of diaspora studies define diasporas as exemplary communities of transnational moment. People living in the diaspora in

¹ Scandinavia is a region of northern Europe that geographically consists of Sweden and Norway (*two countries that form the Scandinavian Peninsula*) and the country of Denmark. In modern times, Finland, Iceland and the Faroe Islands (*Faeroe*) are also considered a part of this geographical area, especially in terms of cultural and historic relationships. (The New Oxford American Dictionary 2005)

different countries (Europe, USA, Canada, Australia etc.) are always going through different types of socio-political-cultural crises. Mostly they are facing racial discrimination and identity related problems. At the same, it is important to note that racial discrimination and the question of identity do not affect men and women equally and in the same way. Women often experience compounded or intersectional discrimination, in which their experiences of gender discrimination intersect with racism and identity.

If we look at Europe, we can notice that in each European country, racism is unique in its expressions, but the racisms in the various countries are part of the same European pattern. So women belonging to particular racial or ethnic groups may face dual or multiple forms of discrimination based on race, gender, religion, social class, caste, age and/or other status especially the national origin and/or other status as these become “differences that make a difference” (Essed 1996:105). These factors can create problems which are unique to particular groups of women or disproportionately affect some women relative to others.

Women in transnational contexts have some common experiences. The first experience of women of colour is that, they are ‘non-European’ or ‘not-really-European’. This has constructed their identity as “the Other”, at the same time as it has forced them to live different lives in personal and public spheres as they have to cope with double cultural conditions. The second one is racial discrimination and related to intolerance in terms of limited employment opportunities; segregation; endemic poverty, sexual harassment and so on. Thirdly, there exists the possibility of a process of political awareness which may gradually help them to organize themselves in the struggle of women beyond their own borders (within diaspora). Such developments may take place through the inspirations of different writings and political actions of other marginalized people of other countries (i.e., black people of USA, particularly the role of women). At the same time, a strategic relationship may develop through such processes; one is the coalition with women of colour in general and another is the cooperation with other groups of women (for example, activist white women organization or other diaspora women groups who are fighting to establish their own socio-political rights as well as identity) (Essed 1996: 109). Considering this background the intention is to present a sketch of the Bangladeshi diaspora women’s domestic,

socio-cultural and political situations as new residents of western societies (like two Scandinavian countries as Sweden and Denmark) by analyzing their life experiences.

Therefore, I am interested in investigating how immigrant women are living their lives and how they attempt to mix-up and reshape their own culture and values with new socio-cultural and political contexts of their present residences. Based on these considerations the following research questions have been posed:

What is the role of Bangladeshi immigrant women as new residents of western societies?

How do they, in different spheres of life, face and solve different kind of issues (domestic, social-cultural and political)?

In what ways do immigrant women decide and maintain whether to keep all or parts of their cultures, values, religious norms and traditions of their home society in their new contexts?

All questions are interrelated, as the everyday life of the Bangladeshi immigrant women in the domestic, socio-cultural and political arena in the diaspora is directly influenced by their traditional culture as well as the new culture of their country of residence.

2.0 Methodology

2.1 Domestic, socio-cultural and Political life in the diaspora

In order to investigate the above-mentioned questions I have used qualitative method to gain in-depth knowledge about the subject. In this study I have followed a case study method, which Yin defined as “the case study method allows investigators to retain the holistic and meaningful characteristics of real life events- such as individual life cycles” (Yin 2003: 2). Analyzing Bangladeshi immigrant women’s life experiences in the diaspora I have taken my point of departure in the formation of life phases by using the ‘life-story approach’² to structure my interview guidelines. Bertaux and Kohli defined this approach as a method of collecting data that refers to “the totality of a person’s experience which give the researcher access to the actor’s perspective: his or her values, definitions of situations, and knowledge of social processes and

² The life story approach should be based on narratives about one's life or relevant parts thereof. Because the life story refers implicitly to the totality of a person's experience, because there are many ways to elicit a life story and more than a single way to talk about one's past, life stories (as oral, autobiographical narratives generated through interaction) potentially lend themselves to a multiplicity of uses. (Bertaux & Kohli 1984: 217)

rules that he or she has acquired through experience” (Bertaux & Kohli 1984: 216-217). This approach can be completed in several ways³ ; however I have chosen to study the “perceptions, values, definitions of situations, personal goals and the like” of the respondents (ibid: 219). In this particular context I have chosen to focus on the part of the women’s life experiences and goals to live a better life while maintaining their own identity in new residence. The empirical part of the thesis has structured according to this approach in order to identify the crisis of a dual cultural condition of women’s life in the diaspora as well as the ways in which to manage it.

Therefore, I have chosen to examine the life (i.e., family life, education, career, social contacts, religious identity, political consciousness and so on.) of the Bangladeshi women who are living in Malmö and Copenhagen (CPH).⁴ Accordingly, I have collected data of the Bangladeshi immigrant women’s domestic and socio-cultural life experiences in Sweden (Malmö) and Denmark (CPH)⁵ during my field work. Bangladeshi immigrant women’s life experiences in these two Scandinavian countries can be perceived as being connected to their different roles that mainly come down within different spheres, namely domestic, socio-cultural and political roles. I have chosen to explain the domestic role through two very important parts of their life: wifehood and motherhood; socio-cultural role through socialization and social interaction; public role through obtaining education and employment as well as through religious practices and the political role throughout consciousness and participation in the political system of their host country.

2.2 Methods and respondents

The primary data of this thesis is based on the qualitative fieldwork that had conducted from October to November 2007 in Malmö and CPH and consists of 22 interviews with Bangladeshi women, 11 in Malmö and 11 in CPH. I did a semi-structured interview with questionnaires for

³ It is appropriate to use this approach in those cases where the field itself determines the key features of action. This seems to occur at one of two extremes: on the one hand, fleeting interactions (encounters) where there is no deeper personal involvement; on the other hand, situations with very strong structural configurations (e.g. total institutions or highly relevant stigmatizations) that level out any individual orientations or channel them into a small number of basic orientations. In both of these cases, it may be sufficient to treat the actor as having a simple instrumental or strategic orientation. But in the wide domains of actively structured everyday life, a biographical frame of reference is more productive (Bertaux & Kohli 1984:116).

⁴ Later in the whole thesis CPH will be considered as Copenhagen.

⁵ See the maps of Malmö and Copenhagen in Annex A.

some general information like education, occupation and so forth as well as some focused area such as the environment of their workplace, interaction with their children's school authority or any other public places like their education institutes, market, bank and so on. In this link I aim to inform that by a semi-structured interview is like a conversation which made possible to include the view of the respondent and additional questions which might lead to some new or unexpected information. As a result a large and very important part of my data collection was participant observations as unstructured conversations, discussions and 'heart to heart' talks with respondents as well as their husbands, children, other family members (i.e., mother-in-law) and community people in different settings such as their home, at any socio-cultural or religious gathering like birthday parties, Picnic, Iftar parties (during the month of Ramadan or fasting), Eid (one of the main religious festival of Muslim community) and so on. In this context, I also did 4 interviews with Bangladeshi men, (husbands of some respondents), 4 with their children (who are 2nd generation immigrant as well as born and raised here), 1 with a family member (mother in-law of one respondent). Besides these, I got the opportunity of discussion with some other Bangladeshi people living abroad. These interviews were mostly short and rather informal conversations.⁶

However, I have collected data from two cities in two countries (which may not be able to present the whole situation of the Bangladeshi women's life in diaspora in Scandinavia but may point to some common trends of their life), not to make a comparative study between the two communities. As an alternative, I tried to study the experiences of some of the members of the communities to be able to understand what they seemingly have in common, what differences there are between their lives, and what factors may work behind these similarities and differences.

Apart from the mentioned sources, I have also attempted to get a concrete theoretical base by using libraries in Lund University and especially the library and information centre of Nordic Institute of Asian Studies (NIAS), CPH. Secondary data of the research is mainly based on the

⁶ From two considerations, I didn't record any interviews. Firstly, I felt that it would disturb the respondent's flow of talking as they have not any previous experiences like this interview. Secondly, in some cases the circumstances of the interviews were such that I was hardly ever alone with the respondent as I talked with them in a social gatherings or family parties (especially in CPH). As a result, other women of the Bangladeshi community in those places also wanted to share their views with me. So, it was difficult to record all the conversations.

qualitative studies of other scholars on South Asian women in the diaspora and their life (especially personal, social-cultural and political aspects) abroad as well as gender, immigration, ethnicity and identity politics literature. Most of these literatures are written within a feminist discourse.

2.3 Access, gatekeepers and selection of respondents

As my goal is to portray a scenario of the Bangladeshi women's life in the diaspora on the context of a new society and culture as well as to identify how they manage their culture of origin and the new one. Therefore, the sample was made up of women who have come here (in Malmö and CPH) from Bangladesh after marriage as spouse.⁷ I also talked with some of the Bangladeshi immigrant men (husbands of the respondents) and children (who are born and raised abroad) for realizing the position and role of the women in diaspora in a new society more intensively. The sampling method used was the snowball sample.

However I had no pre concerned plan on how many interviews to be conducted, when I had an opportunity to contact some of the Bangladeshi community in Malmö through one of my previously known acquaintance who mainly played a role as my gatekeeper,⁸ it was really difficult to decide on how many interviews would be enough to answer my research questions. In Malmö, after contacting the community I had tried to keep regular contact with 8 to 10 women (who are mainly friends of or in touch with my gatekeeper in Malmö) and their families regularly by visiting different socio-cultural and religious occasions in their houses or over telephone. As a result, I got the longer time to conduct interviews in Malmö than CPH. During the whole October, 2007 mostly I did my field works in Malmö and only one week in CPH.

In CPH, first I was introduced with the Bangladeshi community by a Bangladeshi man, who worked as gatekeeper. I met and introduced with him in a pizza restaurant during the time I was working with NIAS library, CPH (July'2007) afterwards he helped me to contact Bangladeshi

⁷ I selected them as because these women are socialized with Bangladeshi culture and values very strongly and after coming here they should have to face the new culture of their new resident as well as bring up their children in a new cultural environment. In this connection they should need to decide/maintain whether to keep all or part of their culture, values, religious norms and traditions of domestic interaction in a new society.

⁸ A gatekeeper is a person who gives the researcher access to the field. Usually in an unknown field a gatekeeper plays a vital role. Mostly the notion is frequently used in the studies of Anthropology.

women and the community. In CPH, I did not have the opportunity to maintain the contact with the women as Malmö. As a result, on those cases, I did not have enough opportunity to know their personal life so deeply. But to know the detail of their life experiences, I followed Kvale's 'quality Criteria' (Kvale 1996:145) and asked them that type of shorter questions which they should answer longer (such as what about your language classes? what type of family support do you have received? Or who actually help you in your household duties? and so forth). Besides this, I also asked some follow-up questions which worked as a pause to respondents to go on with their life stories in more detail.

2.4 Biases, validity and ethical considerations

The process of selection affected the outcome of the interviews in regard to bias and validity. Among 22 respondents, 21 were from the Muslim community; I had only done one interview with a woman from the Hindu community. At the same, I got more accesses to the respondents in Malmö rather than CPH in terms of every kind of contacts. These biases might have affected the validity of the study. On the other hand, the respondents had different backgrounds in terms of their age, educational background and different occupation. However, consider the validity question, my advantage was that I know the same language (Bengali) as the respondents and at the same time, I had access to their houses and family environment frequently. That is why I had got the opportunity to crosscheck the collected information according to my necessity.

For ethical perspective, I have chosen to secure the anonymity of the respondents by not using their names anywhere in this thesis. In the two mentioned cases in the thesis, I have not used the respondents' real name. Even though they may not feel that they have told me anything that was controversial, I located that some of the information regarding marriage, divorce, sexual life as well as religious feelings are sensible which justifies this consideration.

3.0 Outline of thesis

The next part of the thesis is separated into four sections. In the first section a short background will be provided on previous research on women in diaspora and immigration, which will take us through different segments experienced by different actors included in diaspora and identity theory, which may be helpful to conceptualize diaspora more clearly. The second section will

provide some brief but necessary discussion on some theoretical concepts related to the research topic by which the collected data will be explained. The third chapter will be considered as the empirical section of the thesis which will present the domestic, socio-cultural and political life experiences of the respondents. Finally, the thesis will close up by drawing some conclusive findings and remarks, which have discovered from the research.

4.0 Background

4.1 Previous research on women in the diaspora and immigrant

In this section I am going to discuss the existing literature and studies based on diaspora, gender, identity and politics of integration and so forth, which have induced me to select this area of study. Essed in his book, *Diversity: Gender, Color & Culture* (1996) has argued about the diaspora of women of colour (the immigrant women) in the wider European context, where tendencies toward narrow nationalism compete with a desire for a transnational Europe. He especially focused on the women of colour, who are located in different nation-states, at times frustrated cross-European categorizes because of national variations with respect to immigration and integration policies. At the same he emphasized how the women of colour and female immigrants are lagging behind the emancipation of white women in terms of different socio-political experiences. Yet, through media, literature and other channels of communication, women of colour recognize common experiences that transcend national borders (Essed 1996:111).

We know that culture, politics, subjectivities and identity are highly contested in the contemporary scholar debate. Brah, by her writings, tries to highlight on these debates by exploring the intersections of race, gender, class, sexuality, ethnicity, generation, and nationalism in different discourses, practices and political contexts (Brah 1996:17). She has approached questions of ‘difference’ and ‘diversity’ by analyzing changes in gendered and racialised discourses and state practices over the last fifty years. She uses both theoretical and empirical research to document the cultural and political responses (especially about the ‘Asian’ construction in Europe). Her works also contextualized some of the major post-war debates within feminism, anti-racism, and post-structuralism. She also initiated some critical questions

about the ways in which identities are constituted and contested in the aspect of power relation. She mentioned as

“..... ‘regimes of power’ articulate with those of gender, class, or other modalities’ differentiation as they are played out in economic, political, cultural, and psychic spheres.” (Brah 1996:158)

Rayaprol, in her book *Negotiating identities: women in the Indian Diaspora* (1997) has tried to examine the various ways in which south Indian Hindu immigrant women in Pittsburgh (USA) adhere to the values of their native country and also adapt to some of the universal values of the host country. She focused on how immigrant women’s lives are influenced by religion and religious practices. Through feminist perspectives, she has attempted to show how women took the lead in reproduction and recreation of the culture of their community and at the same time, performed balanced, bureaucratic functions at the public and personal sphere (Rayaprol 1997:31). Considering the diasporic background, Gupta in her collection, named *Emerging Voices: South Asian American Women redefine self, Family and Community* (1999), similarly has focused on the experiences of South Asian immigrant women living in North America. All the essays are concerned with issues of identity, family and culture that shape the lives of women as members of this community spread across the USA. The authors range from feminist scholars who have conducted studies on groups of South Asian women to young graduate students who have presented first person accounts of their own complex experiences as women of ‘colour’ coming to terms with living on the margins of a dominant culture, and who in their personal lives live with the constant pressure to ‘conform to two sets of relational ideals’ (Gupta in Singh 2000:142).

In the same way, Naidoo’s research themes are emerging from a comprehensive review of empirical studies of South Asian immigrant women in Canada. These reflect on the dynamics of the women's cultural adaptation and evaluation of self-image, placed within the perspective of Canada's historic attitudes toward South Asian immigration and recent demographics. The four sources of change in the women's self-image include their new dualistic world-view, involving both traditional values in family life and western values of personal development. The study suggests drawing on indigenous concepts in studying South Asian cultures. It asserts that Canada's historic accommodation of diversity assures a promising future for South Asian Canadian women (Naidoo 2003: 52).

Another interesting and extensive research on Muslim diaspora women (2001) has done by Ahmed, who has focused on the British South Asian Muslim women in higher education and employment in UK (Ahmed in Puwar and Raghuram (ed.) 2003: 50). She has recognized that there are many more Muslim women entering Higher Education (in UK), which is itself a strong challenge to stereotypes about Muslim women being restricted to the domestic sphere, trapped within arranged or forced marriages and dominated by the patriarchal attitudes of parents. In this connection she comments:

‘...Historical and contemporary encounters continue to embody South Asian Muslim women through cultural and religious frameworks as essentialized oppressed figures of victimhood and despair, but also as sexualized and fetishized ‘Others’. Neither representation offers the possibility of empowerment through social and political agencies.’ (Ahmed in Puwar and Raghuram (ed.) 2003:43)

Perhaps, her works clearly identified that South Asian Muslim immigrant women in UK are bearing a ‘stereotypical identity’ in general which creates a barrier to build up their own identity in their country of residence.

Besides these, Hole’s study on South Asian Gujarati Hindu women in the diaspora living in Sweden and UK is mainly induced me to shape my study. Her research works have provided me with much inspiration and many ideas including finding out some similarities between Indian and Bangladeshi women’s life in diaspora. She has tried to focus on the aspects of identity that are found in gender discourse (mainly Women’s different roles) and the diaspora discourse among Gujarati Hindu women. This has done in relation to cosmology addressed to a gender discourse on how gender roles are changing in diaspora when confronted with modern world. She has shown how some of these Gujarati women in the diaspora deal with everyday dilemmas of their lives through some of the domestic, communal, public and rituals roles as bearers of the Hindu tradition. She concluded that:

“Being part of a very small diaspora community might mean heaving to, as in Brown and Foot’s words; decide on what to keep in as much as well aspects of the Gujarati ways cannot be upheld the maintained by a limited number of members. On the other hand, when living in a small community, deciding what should be kept and what can be released is not an easy task.” (Hole 2005: 307)

Hole’s realization is also true for my research, as the Bangladeshi community which is also a small one in the Scandinavian countries. As a result they should also face the same realities as the Gujarati Hindu women in the diaspora in Sweden and UK.

In point of fact, through all of these literatures I am inspired to conduct a study, which will examine the Bangladeshi immigrant women in the diaspora in relation to the participation and activities in their domestic life and in the public arena as well as their self construction (identity) and perceptions as diaspora women in their host countries.

4.2 Understanding Diaspora and immigration

In the beginning of the 1990s the attempt to establish a working definition of diaspora became a concern for the social sciences. In 1991, Tölölyan, editor of the journal *Diaspora*, suggested the use of a wide definition of diaspora in the editorial preface to the journal:

“The term once described Jewish, Greek and American dispersion now shares meanings with a larger semantic domain that includes words like immigrant, expatriate, refugee, guest-worker, exile community, overseas community, ethnic community.” (Tölölyan in Hole 2005:3)

Tölölyan believed that by widening the scope of its application, the notion of diaspora would make sense for contemporary concerns, as well as satisfy the understanding of its different historical usages.

Kaye, opposing to Tölölyan, wants to limit the use of the term diaspora and defines it within four different approaches to the contemporary notion of diaspora, as put forward by contemporary scholars. He mentioned:

- The first standpoint regards diaspora as a social form (Boyarin and Boyarin 1993; Cohen 1997; Safran 1991; Van Hear 1998; Wahlbeck 1999). Diaspora as a social form refers to transnational communities whose social, economic and political networks across the borders of nation-states.
- The second approach conceives diaspora as a type of consciousness, which emerges by means of transnational networks (Clifford 1992, 1994; Cohen 1997; Gilroy 1987, 1993; Hall 1991; Kaya 2001; Vertovec 1997). This approach springs from W.E.B. Du Bois' notion of 'double consciousnesses, and refers to individuals' awareness of being simultaneously 'home away from home' or 'here and there'.
- The third approach is the understanding which regards diaspora as a mode of cultural construction and expression (Gilroy 1987, 1993, 1994). This approach emphasizes the flow of constructed styles and identities among diasporic people.
- A fourth approach emphasizes the political dimension of contemporary diasporas (Sheffer 1986, 1995). This approach particularly addresses the importance of political relations between diaspora, homeland and country of settlement. (Kaya:2001)

Appiah and Gates has emphasized in their books about identities how ethnic and national identities operate in the lives of individuals by connecting with some people, dividing them from others; defining “I” by placing it against a background “we” (Appiah and Gates 1995:3). Instead of ‘individual identity’, Werbner has argued for a need to analyze the ‘organizational and moral’,

as well as the 'aesthetic dimensions' of diasporas in order to understand the political and mobilizing power of the diasporic people. Organizationally, diasporas are characterized by a chaordic structure and by a shared sense of moral co-responsibility, embodied in material gestures and extended through and across space. Ultimately, there is no guiding hand, no command structure, organising the politics, the protests, the philanthropic drives, the commemoration ceremonies or the aesthetics of diasporas (Werbner 2002: 119).

Neither individual nor organizational identity, Vertovec has considered diaspora by focusing on three different modes of production namely, diaspora as social form, diaspora as type of consciousness, and diaspora as mode of cultural production (Vertovec and Cohen in Hole 2005:37). By emphasizing on modes of production it becomes possible in so far another way to establish boundaries without having to hold every group of people who lives outside the homeland. As a result this approach would easily keep out voyagers of other intention, for example businessmen or foreign students.

Considering all the above discussion it is clear that diaspora identity is relate with the word migration which means the resettlement of people within countries or between countries and the term thus encompasses both their life and situation in their new residence. Actually, these also refer to their cultural complexity and identity crisis.

4.3 Different immigrants and their life in Scandinavia

The first wave of immigrants into Scandinavia came for economic reasons, and a better standard of living. For example, tens of thousands of workers came from Third World countries to Sweden and later to Norway, as a result of the emergence of oil and gas production (Johan and Pentikainen: 1998). The second wave was refugees and asylum seekers coming from Central America, Asia, Africa and Eastern Europe. These immigration movements have changed the whole population structure of Scandinavian countries in every way. This means that Scandinavian countries are gradually moving toward multiculturalism, and so on. (www.religiousfreedom.com)

Especially in Denmark, Norway and Sweden in relation to South Asia points, their coming period was to the years 1968–71. The first immigrants were mostly young men in age group 20–30 years who came without families and supported the further migration of their relatives and friends. Thus, the pattern of chain migration started for most South Asians (Ostergaard in Singla 2005: 216). The transplanted communities, which provided security and comfort to their sponsors, were also the targets of marginalisation and isolation from the receiving societies. Paradoxically the law about the “Migration Stop” in 1972 led to the beginning of family reunifications with spouses. Most youth were born here, while some came with their mothers under family reunification. This migration history underlines that South Asians are a heterogeneous group. There are, indeed, differences in the mainstream Scandinavian perceptions of Indians, Sri Lankans versus Pakistanis and Bangladeshi (in regards their religious identity) given the current climate of “Islamophobia” in Europe (Malik in Singla 2005: 216). Even though there are some similarities relate to their migration history, broad family and marriage patterns, cultural consumption patterns (for example, Indian films, music, cricket), and languages.

Table 1

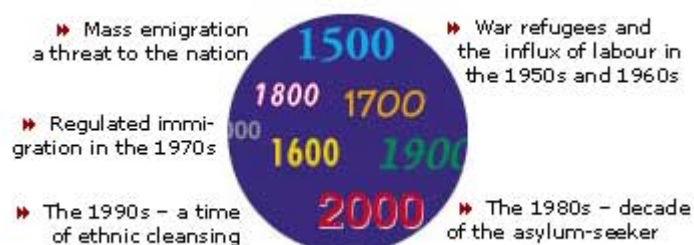
South Asians in Scandinavia: Total Number of population and the Number of Citizens

	<i>India</i>		<i>Pakistan</i>		<i>Sri Lanka</i>		<i>Bangladesh</i>	
Sweden (9 million)	12464	9652	3779	2416	6118	5109	3421	2240
		Swedish citizen		Swedish citizen		Swedish citizen		Swedish citizen
Denmark (5.3 million)	4085	2231	19301	8052	10291	6569	No available information	
		Danish citizen		Danish citizen		Danish citizen		
Norway (5 million)	7154	4,722	27676	15482	12560	8104	556	385
		Norwegian citizen		Norwegian citizen		Norwegian citizen		Norwegian citizen

Source: Statistical Yearbook of Sweden, 2005, Danish Statistical overview, 2006; Statistics, Norway, electronic edition 2006.

According to the Swedish Migration Board, a total of 50,779 persons were granted citizenship in Sweden in 2006 and 23,317 are Asian origin (including Indian, Pakistani and Bangladeshi and other South Asian). At the same time, a total of 86,436 persons were also granted residence permits in Sweden in various grounds as refugees, other protective grounds and humanitarian

reasons, family ties, visiting students and adoption. The net migration rate in 2006 in Sweden was 1.66 migrant(s)/1,000 populations. (See the Annex B, Table 1 and chart 1) (for more details please visit: www.migrationsverket.se). The following picture may present the feature of Swedish migration:



Source: Migrationsverket, Sweden 2006. (www.migrationsverket.se)

In the case of Denmark, according to the Danish Immigration Service the total number of immigrants and descendants in Denmark is 452,095, which is equivalent to 8.4% of the Danish population of 5.4 million (See the Annex B, table 2 and chart 2). In total, work, study and EU/EEA grants made up approx. 90 % of all permits etc. and the number of permits granted for family reunification was 3.582 permits in 2006 (Statistical overview; Migration and Asylum 2006).

Through different sources especially from the Bangladeshi immigrants in Malmö and CPH it is possible to say that, most of Bangladeshi currently living in Scandinavia came as asylum seekers during mid eighty's to ninety's (in between 1984 to 1990) in the period of military regime in Bangladesh and a few number also came as labour force. After having settled in these countries they had brought their spouses in family category. As a result, in these countries Bangladeshi immigrants are mainly lived as a first generation and their youth children are representing the second generation of Bangladeshi diaspora.

Considering the immigration situation, it may be comment that, nowadays, the Nordic countries are different than before as many foreigners living in this region. The countries of Sweden, Norway, Denmark, Finland, and Iceland all have different policies toward foreigners, but Sweden is in its own class (Juha and Pentikainen: 1998). It has had a very liberal and tolerant policy. Many came from distant countries with different languages, cultures, and religions. At

present, there are more than 200 national and ethnic groups in Sweden. The same development has taken place in Denmark too.

Now the question is how immigrants are adapting to life in the Scandinavian countries especially in Sweden and Denmark? From the migration histories of Scandinavia, some few years ago the Third World immigrants were perceived as an economic element, but now they have become an ethnic element. Structurally, the Scandinavian States define the migrant community as an ethnic minority, their culture as a minority culture and their language as a minority language. They have created various institutions exclusively concerned with migrants, such as housing institutions, separate employment offices and separate youth clubs, as well as subsidized migrants' own organizations as well as mother-tongue and two-culture classes in schools, and so on. Under this policy of cultural pluralism, as it has come to be called, ethnic differentiation has not only been endorsed, but also encouraged (Swetland: 1985).

During the discussion it may be defined that cultural pluralism has differentiation as its starting point and defines the migrant on an ethnic-minority basis. Usually the host country defines what a minority culture is and how an immigrant has been ethnically labelled. At the same two things have happened; an individual, is part of a minority group in a particular host country is one thing and for him/her to be treated as a member of a minority is another. As well as some time the religious identity of the immigrant can also be isolated or imaged him/her differently (as example, after 9/11 the Muslim identity).⁹ As a result a migrant, as opposed to a man/woman who has never moved, is a highly adapted and adaptable person. He/she has to be. In order to survive he/she has to learn the ins and outs of other nations' cultures, languages, income tax and social security systems. The problem of adapting does not rest, and never has rested with the migrant. In this purpose we can also remember what Mahatma Gandhi urged the Indian diaspora in Mauritius in 1901 to do:

“Educate your children and participate in the public life of your country of adoption” (Gayan in Singla, 2005: 232).

⁹ Some time some identities are constructed by others. As example, the terrorist attacks on the USA in 9/11/2001 placed Islam and Muslims of every hue in the media and political spotlight. Since 11th September the huge media interest in British Muslim community and their responses to the atrocities against the USA have spawned a number of experts, analysts and surveys to comment on the Muslim world. While some have genuinely sought to understand Muslim discontent and educate against irrational prejudices and stereotypes, others have focused instead on playing upon fears of 'Islamic terrorism', 'fundamentalism', the 'enemy within' and the 'clash of civilizations' (Ahmad in Puwar and Raghuram 2003:47).

5.0 Theoretical key concepts

5.1 Gender role of immigrant women

Gender is a key factor in defining social roles, responsibilities, and power relationships within the family and outside. Payne in her book *Different but equal: communication between sexes* (2001) argued that Biological, psychological/sociological, cultural, and religious influences on gender identity usually help to define gender roles (Payne 2001:19). In fact gender roles are "socially and culturally defined prescriptions and beliefs about the behaviour and emotions of men and women" (Anselmi and Law 1998: 195). To identify the roles and their meaning played in a specific culture, different schools of thought have argued different theories (Hole 2005:119). For example, postmodernists share the feminist doubt of universality with regard to aspects such as "existence, nature and powers of reason, progress, science, language, and the "subject/self" (Flax 1986:3). On the other hand, Feminists generally have a problem with the postmodernist standpoint due to the loss of gender centrality that the postmodern approach creates by "posturing endless difference" (Rayaprol 1997:37). In this regard Moore suggested that the scope of feminist scholarship included the analysis of 'what is to be women, how cultural understandings of the category "women" vary through space and time, and how those understandings relate to the position of women in different societies' (Moore in MacDowell 1999:7). She also suggested development of this understanding required the concept of gender and gender relations: that is the different ways in which women and man, and the accepted attributes of femininity and masculinity, are defined across space and time (ibid:8).

Thus, within a socio-cultural framework, gender, being a very significant dimension of ethnic identity, plays a very important role in the complex choices of individuals living in most socio-cultural settings. Especially in a migratory environment, it seems that older immigrants' attachment to cultural practices and beliefs of the origin can increase the generation gap between parents and child, through an emphasis of the cultural difference between them. This difference is usually even more pronounced in the case of the female members of the family (Ganga 2007:42). In fact by tradition, women are considered as the custodians of culturally specific ethnic values and family customs (Baldassar 1999; Pedraza 1991). Due to this, within some migrant communities, young women could be at the receiving end of a double standard upbringing, which privileges the independence of the male counterpart within the family and

outside world. The double standards affecting the female offspring of people of immigrant origin as members of their own family and mainstream society are often perceived as unjust and can be difficult to reconcile (Ganga 2007:43). My observations in the field and the analysis of interviews showed that same type of situation is also true for the Bangladeshi immigrant women living in Malmö and CPH. Most of them have managed to transfer certain ideas on roles and duties from their places of origin to the new country and applied those to their families. Especially they had been tried to carry on the cultural (like dress code, food habits, behaviour patterns, sexuality etc.) and religious duties and believes as well as to teach those to their children.

5.2 Socio-cultural and Political participation

The socio-cultural and political environments are important spheres where immigrant minorities are struggling for a place in an alien society, so considering what/who represents the community and its culture becomes important. In point of fact, the proper socio-cultural and political participation can represent the immigrant community in the diaspora in a significant way. The community identity with their socio-cultural and political participation are played out among individual immigrants and groups within their own community and with outsiders; through community organizations, specifically in women's and youth associations, and community media on the one hand, and through multicultural organizations and daily encounters with other community of the host society on the other hand. As in diaspora and migration studies, culture and country, society and space, people and places, tribes and territory are closely related. Hence people who move from one place to another are often seen as "torn loose from their culture" and "uprooted" (Toren 1999:88). Traditionally, the prescribed remedy for cultural uprootedness and territorial displacement was the assimilation of newcomers into the host culture and society. This meant first and foremost learning the local language, becoming aware of and familiar with taken-for-granted norms and shared meanings, and behaving according to the sometimes tacit ground rules (ibid:88).

Above all, in these cases, immigrant women have to play the key roles in preserving various aspects of the so-called community culture. Immigrant women should maintain rituals and food preparation, and organizing and staffing most of the social programmes of their own

community¹⁰ (Bauer 2000:183). They do much of the work that keeps community networks alive and provide general assistance to new comers from their country of origin, such as locating new housing for others in the community and bringing individuals together to share housing, helping to find employment, arranging dinners and socio-culture gatherings (around birthdays, marriages, death, different religious base occasions, and so on), doing childcare, obtaining educational loans or direct assistance from government agencies, working in minimal salary jobs to supplement the family's income. At the same time, they should maintain other public contacts for their own and children educational or work purposes with the other people of the host society. From my fieldwork I have also identified the same role of the Bangladeshi women living in Scandinavian countries, which will be discussed in more detail in the following section.

5.3 A clash between the traditions of origin and modern western culture

Behavioural science demands that behaviour of human beings is very flexible and will adapt itself to the cultural environment. This may have different meanings for each individual. Some argued that human behaviour is uniform in some admiration in all societies. Others argument is that while visible human behaviour is point to change, the latent behaviour of human beings are identical. All these arguments are inclined to dwell in imagination of anybody examining the life and condition of immigrant group in diaspora and living outside their own lands and cultures. Here the concerning question is how does a diasporic community negotiate diverse socio-cultural contexts? They may follow several alternatives; the diasporic community may continue to maintain its native culture even in an alien land and also perpetuate it for the benefit of future generations. However at times they may internalise the culture of the alien land and people, becoming acculturated in the process. Otherwise, they may fit into that category, wherein they have imbibed elements of both the cultures- native as well as alien (Rao 2003:366). To do this they may face different experiences and situations. Moreover, the immigrant diaspora women may face the troubles most intensively due to their gender role, they are considered within community to preserve its 'traditional values' expressed through cultural symbols and family structures. Since the burden of preserving these cultural symbols and structures fall on the

¹⁰ Bauer discussed in his work that some of the Iranian refugee and immigrant women in Canada and Germany had more support (specially from state assistance) to study, work and raise their families independently if they wished, they were not always able to easily to take advantages of new opportunities, as both their roles and behaviours were submitted to community debate and discussion in organizational meetings, in the Iranian media, on radio shows, and over tea and coffee. Men often suffered depressing loss their political and social status vis-s-vis their host communities. (Bauer 2000:183-184)

immigrant women, where the main question raised to probe the way in which the women in diaspora are compelled to conform to traditional values in their personal lives, which usually clash with their efforts to integrate with the dominant culture of their new country in which they study, work and live (Sing 2000:143).

As a result, immigrant women should face a clear conflicting situation in between their personal and public life ¹¹sphere. For example, some time may their specific religion identities (like Muslim, Hindu or Sikh) also make them different with some stereotype ideas. Such as, Muslim immigrant women are normally considered in terms of visual marks and mobility, both of which are the focus of the practice of *purdha*¹²; as a sign of Islamic culture (Mohammad 1999:226). In fact, two relational fields in particular are shaped by the ethnic dimensions of Islamic culture: family relations and public life. This is where, Islam as a religion and Islam as an ethnicity interacts, which can be confusing for political agencies attempting to protect rights and fight discrimination. For instance, arranged or forced marriages, and even excision are cultural practices often legitimized by certain Muslims in religious terms. In such areas, the distinction between religious rights and cultural practices may be hard to differentiate and confusion may arise regarding Muslims' rights (Casari 2006). In these situations a clash between the traditional norms and values of the homeland society and the modern western cultures of the host societies may occur. From my research I have also found out the same experiences shared by Bangladeshi diaspora women which will be discussed in data analysis section.

6.0 Presentation of domestic, socio-cultural and political life experiences of Bangladeshi women in Scandinavia

6.1.1 Backgrounds of the Respondents

All of the respondents in Malmö came from Bangladesh as spouses and have been living here from 7 to 15 years. They are all in the age group of 25 to 45 years and most of them are working

¹¹ All people have lived two lives, one private, the other is public. The private life is lived with loved ones, dear friends, and perhaps one's spiritual guide and confessor. The public life has experienced beyond the home and confessional; it occurred where one is not generally well known save perhaps in a single role, such as teacher, plumber or attorney. Private life is often composed, frequently genial, consisting as it did of persons bound by blood, love, long periods of shared experience, or an intimate access to one's God. Public life was not so composed, as it consisted of many different kinds of persons seeking some sort of cooperative existence without benefit of the binding forces of family, love, or religious spirit. (Gary:1997)

¹² *Purdah* or *Parda* in Hindi ("screen," or "veil") practice that was inaugurated by Muslims and later adopted by various Hindus, especially in India, and that involves the seclusion of women from public observation by means of concealing clothing (including the veil) and by the use of high-walled enclosures, screens, and curtains within the home. (www.britannica.com)

women. Within 11 respondents, 8 are doing different kind of jobs (almost 73%); 6 of them are working as nurses in different hospitals and “old age homes” and 1 is working part time in a pizza restaurant which is her family business. 1 respondent is working as BMA (Bio-medicine analyser), 2 are studying (18%), and 1 is a housewife (9%). All of them informed me that initially they had faced problems because of lacking to knowledge about the Swedish language but now they are almost able to read, write and speak the language. As a result now they do not have any problems to interact with the new society as immigrant women. At the same they informed that they are trying to contrast the different values, norms and culture of the host country with their own. In other hand, most of the respondents in CPH are also in the same age group and 5 of them are working in different occupations (near to 46%), 2 are studying (18%) and 4 are housewives (36%). Although the respondents’ experiences in personal and socio-cultural and political life are almost the same in both places, I noticed that they all are conscious about maintaining their cultural and religious identity. Thus they are trying to teach their children the Bangladeshi culture and values as well as rituals.

6.2 Everyday living: women’s domestic role

6.2.1 Wifhood and motherhood

Wifhood plays and bears a very important role in the socio-cultural setting of South Asians which is also true for the lives of diasporic women. The women’s roles as controllers of the kitchen and household domain emphasize their importance for the “physical and social well being of household members” (Mearns in Hole 2005:146). Food preparation and cooking for husband and children seemed to be very important tasks to all of my respondents in both places. Most of them told me that they have to manage their cooking besides their jobs and other works as because they are conscious about their family member’s health. At the same time they used to arrange lots of parties frequently, where different type of Bangladeshi food considered the main attraction. In this connection, I also asked the women who should take care of the household and family (especially their youngest children) when they go for work or busy with other domestic responsibilities. Most of them got help from husbands, elder children, and other Bangladeshi neighbours. However, a small number of women told me that whenever they go to work they use to get up even earlier in the morning to finish the household work. Even 4 respondents informed me that when they have work at night shifts, they would prepare the food in advance and put it in

the fridge even though some of their husbands are able to cook. But all of them would like to thank their husbands because they are allowed to study and work outside. As a result, they could dream to do something for themselves which might be not possible if they were in Bangladesh. Most of the respondents informed me that they didn't finish their study and didn't work while living in Bangladesh. But since they are here, they could start their studies and carrier newly with their husbands' inspiration and help. In Bangladesh, sometime in some cases, women are not allowed to do jobs as it is not appreciated after marriage by the husband's family. In this regard one of my respondent's statements is:

“My husband always helps me in every way and we are trying to fix our working duties in a way which can't cause problem to take care of our children. I think, may be it would not be possible to get this type of help on regarding my job from my 'same husband' if we lived in Bangladesh, since male are sometime criticized from their own family (especially from the older members) or society if they did household works or helped their wives. ” (Malmö, 2nd Octobar'07)

The observation is that, abroad living is high and expensive (compare to Bangladesh); the Bangladeshi male immigrants have allowed their wives to work. At the same time, the study loan or grant system as well as the welfare system of both Swedish and Danish governments help Bangladeshi immigrant women to complete their study and promote them to get the suitable job.

Beside the wifhood, duties and responsibilities for the upbringing of the children lie within the spheres of domestic and communal roles. The duties of motherhood have changed for most of the women in comparison to the lives they or their families lived before migration. Almost all of my respondents (20 respondents, 91%) have children (with age varying between 2 to 20 years old) and their children are going to different educational institutes. (Most of the children are in school, 4 in college and 3 are in the University). Among the respondents in both places, the number of children born to the women interviewed varied from one to four. I asked them, if they had or have any communication problem/gap (due to their two cultural practises, one in house and another in outside. i.e. school) with their children. In reply most of them informed that they did not feel uncomfortable nor had trouble dealing with their children till now, but they have to modify their own culture and interpret the culture of the new residence. I also wanted to know their future plan or dream about their children. In answer, all of them told me that they have lots of plans and dreams to their children's future that go beyond their own life and career. They hope, if they do not able to successful in their career; then may be their children will get the proper opportunity to build their future and will be able to integrate themselves with the society

of their residence and make sure to have a bright and stable life within their own identity. One respondent in CPH told:

“I expect from my heart that my children will continue their study and able to make their own career as their wish. I hope they will be integrated totally and become a respected citizen in this country. At the same, I want to them to love their Bangladeshi cultures and uphold it.” (CPH, 20th October’07)

The Most important observation is that they are very anxious about their children life. Especially, they are worried about their children’s future such as their education, career, cultural and religious life as well as personal life. Though most of children of Bangladeshi immigrants are born and raised up abroad, they are facing two different types of socio-cultural values and norms. One they should learn from their family and another from their society of residence. As a result, in some circumstances they have to live a *dual life*, one within family and another in outside. In some cases these double standard of life make them confused. For example, the concept of sex, marriage or family is very much different in western societies (which are mostly identified as ‘western culture’) compare to Bangladesh. As a result, these women always try to teach the Bangladeshi norms, values and culture to their children. Even though, they controlled to select their children’s friends. In this situation, I have noticed some *discriminative attitudes* in between boys and girls (especially from the mothers). It seems to me that, the respondents’ family control over daughters is stronger in comparison to the sons. For example, the respondents are also concerned about the dress-up of their daughters. Usually they did not allow their daughter to wear ‘too open cut western dresses’ especially in any community programme. One day in a family programme of one of my respondent’s house, a 14 years old Bangladeshi girl, daughter of another respondent wore an ‘open chest’ dress, which resulted in the girl’s mother being criticized by her other Bangladeshi friends openly. They argued that, if one girl starts wearing this type of dress then others will do the same. Therefore, they thought that the mother should select their daughters dress, especially the adolescents. In this regards one respondent in Malmö expressed:

“I always choose and buy dresses of my daughter. I had tried to bring dresses from Bangladesh in the eve of any special celebration. As I like to wear *sari* and *shalwar qumiz*¹³ in any occasion specially any domestic, socio-cultural or religious program. So I am also influencing my daughter to wear the same. I think it is my duty to grow interest of my daughter to wear the Bangladeshi traditional dresses and adornments.” (Malmö, 22nd October’07)

¹³ Both are Bangladeshi traditional outfit. Sari is a long piece of cloth which one covers the whole body. Shalwar- qamiz usually made up of three garments; trousers, tunic and a shawl.

From these cases it may comment that the immigrant women have been trying to keep and practice their cultural norms, rituals according to Bangladeshi values as women are considered responsible for the keeping of the tradition and culture of their own society. Even they are very much choosy and concern to select the *Bangladeshi origin* life partner especially for their daughters rather than sons. In fact, all these attitudes of my respondents remembered me the same gender realities in Bangladesh and abroad.

6.3 Socio- cultural constructions

6.3.1 Socialization and Social communication

Mazumdar and Mazumdar suggested that patterns of socialization and social interaction clearly lie within the area of women's communal role. (Mazumdar and Mazumdar in Hole 2005: 127). The global migration pattern have involved people to maintain a combined relationship with people who came from the same country or region (i.e., Bangladeshi and South Asian) as well as the same religious group (i.e. Muslim or Hindu). These relationships sometimes might be widening support and friendship across family borders, where women also played a vital role in making a communicative relationship and building up a small community in an alien place. Dasgupta's research (1989) among the Indian women in USA found out why immigrant women were interest in maintaining these social communications in the new residence. Dasgupta has established that many of the immigrant women felt isolated and lonely in comparison to their earlier lives, and that they felt they no longer belonged to any social network (Dasgupta in Hole 2005:132).

Throughout all of the interviews it seemed that Bangladeshi women in diaspora in Scandinavia are also very much interrelated with a *community binding* with other Bangladeshi people who live in these countries. Although till now the Bangladeshi immigrant community in Scandinavia is not so big (most of people are the first generation), thus they are able to maintain an intensive relationship with community peoples in both places (Malmö and CPH). One of the respondents in Malmö is divorced and living single with her two daughters and she is working in an "old age home". She informed that when she goes for night shift duty, usually she requires help from her Bangladeshi friends who are looking after her children very willingly.

I also wanted to know from the respondents, beside the relationship within their own community, how do they maintained the daily life social interaction with other people (i.e. Swedish or Danish or any other national) in different spaces, like workplace, market or their children's school. Most of them informed me that, as they know the language (Swedish and Danish) of their residence country little bit well¹⁴, so they feel very *confident* in communicating with other members of their new society. As a result they can manage to maintain their daily socio-cultural communications (for examples, deal with their children's school/college or any other organizations, i.e., tennis school, music or dance school or football club, and so on) as well as in shopping, banking and so forth. These kinds of communication make them to break their previous *unconfident image*¹⁵ that usually common for the women in Bangladesh. Thus, the expertise on language of the new residence is considered as an important tool for the immigrant women to keep their social communication in public spaces.

6.3.2 Public role: Education and employment

Here I have considered women's involvement with different educational institutions or any kind of employment as their public role because in these spaces they interact with other peoples beyond their family and community boundaries. To know, how they managed these kinds of interactions and how they emphasized the necessity of study and work in their new residence, I asked them a few questions. In these regards the observation is, Bangladeshi women have played a good public role by achieving the educational success and getting different types of jobs in both places. Most of the respondents informed that they have completed successfully the basic language courses within a very short time in both countries (As language courses are compulsory for immigrants). At the same time some of them have finished school and college level studies and some are still continuing their studies. Few women also completed their studies and now working in different suitable jobs. In this aspect their common realization is:

“We feel very proud and comfortable as we are able to communicate with other people (especially with Swedish and Danish nationals) very frequently and courageously as we had participated in the language courses as well as in different integration programs. In fact by participating in school and classes we also became confident.” (Malmö and CPH)

¹⁴ The respondents have used the couple of words 'little bit good'. I think by this they want to mean the fluency of the languages, not really the skill of writings.

¹⁵ In Bangladesh, like other society women are portrait with some stereotype ideas, like they are inactive and passive to make communication with other, which also make them unconfident in every aspect.

So, it showed that education reward at the host society can play a vital role in the integration process of the immigrant especially the women. As these type of participation can make them more confident to endorse their public role boldly. In this regards, different Swedish and Danish Governmental policies for immigrant are also played vital roles. For example, Denmark was the first country in the world to introduce an Integration Act in 1999, which is intended to ensure that newly-arrived refugees and immigrants can make the most of their capacities on an equal footing with other citizens of Denmark. All refugees and immigrants are therefore offered free teaching of Danish for three years. (www.nyidanmark.dk)

Among my respondents both in Sweden and Denmark, a significant number of Bangladeshi women are employed. In Sweden, Bangladeshi immigrant women are working in different sectors but a major number of them are working as nurses. Though nursing is considered as a 'good job'¹⁶ to Bangladeshi community. On the other hand, in CPH most of the women are working in different types of jobs, which are mostly provided by the commune¹⁷ and the respondents informed that, most of their jobs are periodical, not permanent. As a result, most of them are not so happy with their work, even if the salary is better in comparison to Sweden. Analyzing the data about the immigrant women's employment situation, my observation is that the Swedish government is more successful in ensuring steadier jobs for the immigrants in comparison to Danish government, though in some cases their payments are higher than Sweden.

6.3.3 Religious practices

Another noticeable findings of this research is that the women in both places are very much concerned about their *religious identity* (I noticed in some cases they are more conscious rather than in Bangladesh). Though Bangladesh is a Muslim majority country, maximum Bangladeshi

¹⁶ For them a good job meant roughly the same work as one held previously. Actually a good number of the South Asian (especially Indian) and some Muslim immigrant women (such Iranian and Afghan) in Sweden work as nurses so for Bangladeshi 'nursing' is considered a 'good job'. At the same this type of job has decent payment, is protected by trade unions, and high education does not required (especially to be a junior nurse one should completed only 1 year diploma training). (Hole 2005:181)

¹⁷ Denmark is divided into five regions and 98 municipalities (Danish, *kommuner*). This was established per an administrative reform, effective January 1, 2007 which replaced the 13 counties (*amter*) with 5 regions (*regioner*). The 270 municipalities were consolidated into 98 larger units, most of which have at least 20,000 inhabitants. The reason was to give the new municipalities' greater financial and professional sustainability. (<http://www.denmark.dk/en>) In Sweden, actually the Municipalities (*kommun*) are the local government entities. On 1 January 2006 there were 290 municipalities and 20 county councils in Sweden. The current 290 municipalities form sub-divisions to the 21 Counties of Sweden . All municipalities are of a uniform type, and there are no local statutes or privileges of any kind. (www.sweden.gov.se)

immigrant women of these places are also Muslim. As a result, with the exception of 1 (one Hindu respondent was in CPH), all of the respondents are Muslim. Actually, Today Sweden might have one of the most heterogeneous Muslim populations of all countries in Western Europe. They have different cultural, ethnic, political, economic, religious, linguistic, educational, etc. back grounds. They come from over forty different countries in “Arabic” and “Black” Africa; in “Persian”, “Ottoman” and “Arabic” Asia and in Europe. They have migrated or fled, and related different reasons. They have very different opinions in political matters as well as many different attitudes and ways of relating to Islam as cultural, social, political and religious system. This will most likely put the total number of Muslims in Sweden from the groups mentioned above somewhere in between 350,000 – 40,000. (Anwar, M., Blaschke, J., and Sander, Å 2004: 10). At the same, a large number of Muslim immigrants have in Denmark though there is no register information on the number of Muslims in Denmark. Statistics Denmark estimated that there were approximately 120,000 Muslims in Denmark as of 1 January 1999, but has carried out no calculations since that time. Researchers estimate that there are currently some 250,000 Muslims in Denmark. (www.nyidanmark.dk)

In Bangladesh the practices of Islam in Muslim community are not so strict and there have not so called bindings and obligations of Islamic laws in general. For example, the use of *Hijab* and *Borqa*¹⁸ is not so popular to women in Bangladesh. But in these western societies, from different conversations with the women, it is noticed that they are more interested in wearing *Hijab* and bearing other identities of being Muslim. Some of them already have used *Hijab* and feel proud of it (more in CPH than Malmö). In this aspect I like to inform that, there have a kind of coexistence of religion and culture in Bangladesh. But in these countries, a kind of worry has been noticed among the women as regards of the religious identity. Most of them are worried that their children might not keep properly their ‘Islam base culture’ so long in future. As a result, they are trying to practice the Islamic rituals very consciously in family as well as community. At the same time, they also teach their children all the rituals and beliefs of Islam (i.e., Namaz, Roza, Lesson to Quran as well as all principals of family life, sexual life according to Islam and so on). Actually they informed that, there have some “stereotype sketches of

¹⁸ Hajib: chamberlain, chief of palace administration and sometimes head of government, Borqa: a plain tentlike garment worn by women, usually of white cotton which covers completely. (www-personal.une.edu.au)

Muslim” (especially women) in the other people (Swedish or Danish or other national), so they always treated them accordingly that, which in some extent created an “inferior feelings” in their new residence. So, they try to keep up their religious identity as a tool of their resistance. In these situations a clash occurred between the traditional norms, values, and rituals of homeland and the modern western cultures of the host societies.

6.4 Political role

6.4.1 Consciousness and participation

I also asked the respondents some questions related on the political system and different governmental initiatives in both countries (Sweden and Denmark) to observe their minimum consciousness level about the political system as well as political participation¹⁹ in their host country. Though the questions were not so serious to present a full picture of the political consciousness and participation of the whole Bangladeshi immigrant women as a community, from the conversations it had noticed that some of the women in both places are more or less conscious (in terms of knowing different information) about the political system of their host country but are not actively participating such voting or any other political activities. Especially they are concerned about the different immigration and integration policies of their Governments. For example, they were asked to comment on Swedish/Danish government or any policy, the answer was similar as they want more intensive policies about immigrants (especially in terms of different social facilities). One respondent told:

“I think the government should take a better integration policy for the immigrants and be more careful about the proper implementation of the policy otherwise they may face problem with their immigrants in near future (Especially in the case of Arab and some east European immigrants).” (Malmö, 9th Octobar’07)

At the same time, they told that some of them are voters and also participated vote in different elections (not regularly and usually in local level), even though the number are not highly significant, it should be a positive sign to achieve political right in their present country. In this

¹⁹ A few decades back ‘political participation’ was frequently associated with individual convictions and motivations. Sidney Verba stresses the fact that ‘individual motivation’ to political participation does not involve preferences for politics beneficial to some group of which one is a member.’ Whereas politics within the EU and the western community at present increasingly is being influenced by pressure groups, lobbies, ethnic minorities, gender and other forms of ‘issue politics’, (Sidny and Verba 1978:11) political participation were not long ago, seen as ‘issueneutral’, in other words stemming out of ‘civic attitudes’, or a ‘sense of Civic obligation,’ including the duty to vote. Hence, one may address the intricate relation between ‘individual motivation,’ ‘group-based motivation’ and ‘civic obligation’. Whereas the former and the latter are connected by an individuals ‘issue-neutral’ sense of duty to vote, group-based motivation allows for an out-spoken issue-politics (such as ‘ethnic policy’), questioning the idealistic (and republican) notion of ‘civic duties’ and, some say, widens the scope for political action.(Phillips in Adamson 2006:11)

connection it may be remarked that, the consciousness and participation level of Bangladeshi immigrant women in Scandinavia is still *parochial*²⁰.

6.5 Two case studies

The following case studies should help to understand a number of feelings of the respondents regarding their own life and children future which may help to understand the key findings of the study.

Case: One

Marium,²¹ is 31 years old and working as a junior nurse in an “old home”. She informed me that her working environment is really very good. In response to the question about discrimination as immigrant woman she told, these never happened really but she felt little bit discriminative attitudes in some extent. She comments, “One of my senior colleagues sometimes not really neutral with me on the base of other Swedish colleagues to distribute duties or so on”. But at the same time her realization is, it may not be conscious and general. She also think that not as Muslim but some time her appearance and skin colour makes her different in some places. She also said that she is not really conscious about her Muslim identity so she is not interested to teach her daughters the Islamic values so importantly. She believes when they will be grown-up they will chose their own identity (can be the Bangladeshi or the Muslim or Swedish so on.) In regard of the question on family support she told that she is divorced and living alone with her 2 daughters, one is 14 years old and another is 4 years so sometime she has been facing some difficulties as she use to do evening or night shift duties. In those cases she put her children in special “dagis” (where children can stay till evening) or any other Bangladeshi’s house. So she is really thankful to some of her Bangladeshi friends who really consider her problem by heart and

²⁰ Almond and Verba claim to have identified three broad types of political culture in aspect of their five-nation study of mass attitudes and values; 1) *parochial*, in which no clear differentiation of specific political roles and expectations exists among actors, i.e. “political specialization is minimal” 2) *subject*, in which institutional and role differentiation exists in political life, but towards which the citizen stands in largely passive relations; and 3) *participant*, in which the relationships between specialized institutions and citizen opinion and activity is interactive. They summarize this general schema as follows:

“A participant is assumed to be aware of and informed about the political system in both its governmental and political aspects. A subject tends to be cognitively oriented primarily to the output side of government: the executive, bureaucracy, and judiciary. The parochial tends to be unaware, or only dimly aware, of the political system in all its aspects” (Almond and Verba 1963: 79)

²¹ The names of the women in both cases are pseudonyms.

take care of her daughters as their own family members. On the discussion on political participation she said that she is voter and also gave vote to social democrats in last election. She also comments that the government should be careful to select the immigrants (especially their educational background and occupational specialization).

In regards of the question about facing any communication problem in the school of the children she told that she never experienced this and the teachers are really helpful and caring to her children. She has access to consult about her children with them and she never got any kind of discriminative attitudes towards them as immigrant's children. On the question regarding the integration of the children with Swedish society and culture her comment was:

“My daughters have lots of Swedish and different ethnic classmates and friends. But my observation is, after a certain time their friend circle become closer with most of the immigrants' child (The ratio of the Swedish friends are became shorter). Though I am not sure what is the exact cause but sometimes it has happened. At last, my expectation is that, my children will continue their study and able to make their own career as their wish. I hope they will be integrated themselves 100% and become a respected citizen.” (Malmö, 9th Octobar'07)

Case: Two

Amina is 42 years old Bangladeshi immigrant woman who lives in CPH with her husband and 3 children. She has been living in CPH from 1985. She came here as a spouse. After coming here she had completed the Danish language courses and started work in a canteen of the commune. But, now she does not do any job as she needs to look after her children. To discuss about her Muslim identity, she told that she never faced any problematic situations/attitudes or did not felt insecure in anywhere (i.e., in market, in bus or train or any other public place); but in the time of 'Mohammad debate',²² they heard that in some places Muslims from different countries were facing some problem. So, in that time they all were in tension and scared. In this connection she comments that she is proud to be a Muslim and also be aware that her children will bear their Muslim identity and should learn the values and norms of Islam. So, she had arranged to teach the 'Holly Quran' to her children and her elder daughter (19 years old) has completed to recite the Quran. She told that, though her children are born and raised up abroad, they always trying to adopt with the culture of their host society, but they should have to obey and maintain their own

²²Muhammad cartoons controversy began after twelve editorial cartoons depicting the Islamic prophet Muhammad were published in the Danish newspaper *Jyllands-Posten* on September 30, 2005. Danish Muslim organizations organised protests. As the controversy has grown, some or all of the cartoons have been reprinted in newspapers in more than 30 other countries, which eventually led to significant unrest around the world, particularly in Islamic countries where the cartoons were seen as culturally insensitive. (www.reuters.com)

culture (Bangladeshi) in house and community (Bangladeshi). She is also very much strict in the question of children's life-partner selection (her elder daughter is 19 years old, son is 17 years and 3rd daughter is 14 years old). In this regards her opinion was:

“They are not allowed to choose or marry any boy or girl from any other religious or nationality. As a mother my expectation is that, their life partners should be Muslim and Bangladeshi. But you know, I am always more anxious about my two daughters. I always want that they follow their own culture as Bangladeshi as well as Muslim (but at the same time I know very well that it is not enough easy to maintain in the western society). Actually I will be very happy if they will choose any Bangladeshi guy as their life partner. My son is now 17 and in his case I also informed him that he should marry a Bangladeshi origin girl.” (CPH, 20th October, 2007)

To understand her political consciousness, I also asked about her political interest and participation as a Danish national. She told that she is a voter but did not give vote regularly as she is not interested in Politics. But she is very anxious about the recent immigration policy of present Danish Government especially regarding on spouse visa and so on. Lastly I wanted to know about her future plan. She answered that now her dreams are more relate with her children futures. So she always hopes that they will enjoy their own life in their residence and should be consider as a Danish citizen.

7.0 Conclusion

7.1 Some key findings and new considerations

The personal life experiences of Bangladeshi immigrant women in Scandinavia in relation to their own family structure, type of socio-cultural and political involvement vary from woman to woman. The number of aspects that affect how people in minority diaspora communities experience their lives is probably impossible to measure. Actually there are many different factors that determine why they have different experiences in same path. Hole in her research showed that this multi-dimensional surface of the life experience of these women resembles a magnetic field, which holds different strengths to different people. The power field may vary from 0% to 100% depending on the person in question (Hole 2005:295). However, in spite of the variations, some common findings have identified from the study in these two cities. The findings are the following:

Double standard of life: experiences of second generation

Most of the children of the respondents are in the range of age group of 2 to 15 years and a few are in the age group of 18 to 25 years. By talking with 4 second generation children (2 girls and 2

boys from age group 18-25) and observing other children's lives and attitudes it is clear that the children of the Bangladeshi immigrants have found themselves confronted with a *double standard* of growing up and following rules which are fundamentally different and more meticulous than those of their peers. These narratives are similar to those found in Singla's studies on South Asian Youth in Scandinavia (2004), which showed that youth actually find new ways of identifying themselves which basically transcend, develop and expand the existing binary opposition between the culture of the sending country and the culture of the receiving society (Singla 2005: 223). Specifically the parental social control over them sometimes caused confusion and frustration during adolescence when individuals struggle to adjust their own personalities to the external world. In particular the adolescent girl child appeared to be more affected by the parents' views than the boys, who instead were granted more freedom. Among some Bangladeshi families, it was clear that while teenage boys were generally free to go out, with the only condition that they should come back home by 10 to 11 pm. at night (during the summer) or not to be drunk but the daughters were not allowed to do so. In most cases problems are mainly related to cultural and different social values regarding dress-up, love, marriage, sex, religion and so forth because women are considered as cultural reproducers (Davis 1997:117). From the discussion with 2 second generation girls (1 in Malmö and 1 in CPH), it seems that similar behavioural rules affected them regarding dress-up and other societal and cultural values of their country of residence and country of origin (where they went for short visit only). In their opinion girls, especially teenagers in Bangladeshi community often have conflict over dress. One of them stated:

"I like the Bangladeshi traditional wears like saree and salwar-qumiz but I didn't feel comfortable with these. I think these are only fine for special community occasions (once or twice a year)" (CPH, 22th October'07).

At the same time, mothers tried to teach their children about love, marriage and sex according to their own culture of origin, as they think the western views regarding these are not suitable or proper for their lives. The mothers' insisted that they should; firstly, marry according to their choice and secondly that they should be allowed to choose their own life partner on the condition that they were of Bangladeshi origins as well as Muslims. While parents have tried to maintain these behavioural rules, children who have grown up in western societies and experience both family values and values of the outer society. Hence they attempt and manage to lead a dual life which sometime creates barrier to their personalities to flourish in a proper way. As a result, as

shown in Singla's studies a 'conflict situation' has occurred. This is indirectly to parental expectations and the young person's transgressions as well as these conflicts, including processes of secrecy and deception. The result has often been various intrapsychical reactions in second generation youth which has, at times, lead to self-destructive and aggressive behaviour (Singla 2005: 227). This partial continuity of dual values demonstrated in these empirical studies suggests that every immigrant parent should be careful and find out the right way to reduce the cultural clash between their culture of origin and western culture in order to achieve a better life of their children.

The changing gender role: challenges and progresses

Another area of concern is '*the role of working women*'; the women who are trying to balance demanding careers with family responsibilities and who find their situation to be more challenging than that of career women living in Bangladesh who have easier access to hired help or extended family networks. As a large number of the respondents were employed in both Malmö and CPH, the findings show that the position of the employed women is largely dependent on how the work is shared. The time spent on housework is an indication of the power relationship between men and women. The *double burden*²³ of women is a bigger problem among South Asians as well as Bangladeshis (when males in the family exhibit traditional behavior patterns) than in many other groups. It may be the cause of extreme stress, conflict and sometimes even break-ups (Ghosh 1981). Although the study has found that in many families the husbands have provided different kinds of supports to their wives that have helped them to continue their job smoothly. At the same, in some cases immigrant women's mother-in-laws (a little number lived in Malmö and CPH) have also looked after their infants while the women have been at work. The husbands of some respondents and the mother-in-law of one respondent whom I talked to, had highly appreciated the both roles of the women (as wives and mother and as the working women) and commented that they had to pass hard lives abroad in comparison to Bangladesh (without the help of extended family members or maidservant, they are maintaining domestic and public life). From their recognitions, it is clear that they have started to realize and also honour the changing gender role of the women in the changing social context of gender equality.

²³ Household gadgets enable more work to be done in less time, but women work more, not less. (Ghosh 1994:60)

Another very important finding of this study is Bangladeshi immigrant women's *changing outlook about unhappy family relation and divorce*, which is really impressive. In Malmö and CPH, I had met some women who decided to divorce to get out of their unhappy family relationships and are courageously 'rebuilding and maintaining their lives'. Two of my respondents were divorced and informed me that they had got lot of support (mental and societal) from their other Bangladeshi friends and community members (both men and women) when they decided to live single lives with their children. At the same time they also believed that if they had been living in Bangladesh they would have been pressured by family and social taboos to stay within abusive relationships and not been able to divorce. In this regard, some of them (4 respondents) treated their divorce as a 'shameful secret' for the Bangladeshi community. Yet the rest of all 16 respondents also supported the bold decision of divorce and stated that although the decision about divorce may be painful or disturbing for any woman and her children, it is really much better to live single rather than an unhappy/unsuccessful married life. Here I do agree with Gupta's opinion that what distinguished their (the immigrant women) experiences, obviously, were their particular location (Gupta 1999:213). Living away from the extended families in Bangladesh, these women enjoyed a certain degree of anonymity as immigrant women abroad. Thus, they were free from the strain of constant disapproval, and could pursue careers as well as their divorce proceedings without any social pressure (Singh 2000:144). In this connection, the understanding is that, these Bangladeshi women in two Scandinavian countries are more successfully and actively rejecting traditional patriarchal gender roles, throughout the process of divorce, whereas a large number of divorced women in Bangladesh are facing and fighting a more difficult situation as they attempt to rebuild their lives, is to some extent challenging. So, their changing point of view regarding divorce should be considered as evidence of the changing gender role of the immigrant women in diaspora.

7.2 Concluding remarks

The study opens to me 'a tale of real life experiences' of the Bangladeshi diaspora women in Scandinavia. From learning about their experiences, more detail and authentic information have been collected about gender roles, cultural and religious identity crisis and so forth, which really helped to consider and rethink many known aspects in new dimension. In concluding remarks it should be mentioned that although the Bangladeshi immigrant community in Scandinavia is not

so big and is represented only by the first and second generations, their problems are still important and illustrative. Bangladeshi immigrant women in the diaspora are also going through on limited and obvious crisis, which they have also tried to face courageously and confidently. In fact, they are still on a journey which they had started by leaving their homeland to settle down in their new residence, beyond the roots.

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Interview guide

- How long have you been living abroad?
- In which source have you been come abroad?
- Are you a passport holder/permanent citizen of your new residence country?
- Do you have any occupation?
- How is the environment of your education institute or working place?
- Do you feel any problem or discriminative attitudes (from administration or colleagues) in your work place as an immigrant woman?
- Do you face any problematic situation/attitudes or feel insecure in any where as being a Muslim?
- What are your main responsibilities in the household?
- As a working woman what type of support have you received from your husband and other family members?
- What do your family and other members of Bangladeshi community think of your occupation and household role? (Your husband, in-laws, children etc)
- What is the future plan about your career?
- Are you voter in your new residence? Do you have any experience to give vote?
- Do you have any comments about the political system/Government of your present residence?
- Do you think you can enjoy the same social facilities as like the other citizen of your host country?
- Are you a member of any socio-culture base organization (organized by the Bangladesh immigrants or any other?)
- Do you feel any problem to communicate with the authority/teachers of your children's school?
- Do you think your children are able to integrate themselves with their friends as well as the culture of their resident?
- What is the future plan about your child? (In a sense of your education, career, socio-culture life, and so on)
- How do you maintain your religious rituals?
- How do you like to introduce yourself in your present residence? (for example, immigrant Swedish/Danish or Bangladeshi or Muslim/Hindu)
- How do you decide/maintain whether to keep all or parts of your cultures, values, religious norms and traditions of your home society in the western society?
- Background information: age, education, number and age of children, number of family members, religious identity.

Annex A



Source: www.goeurope.com

Annex B

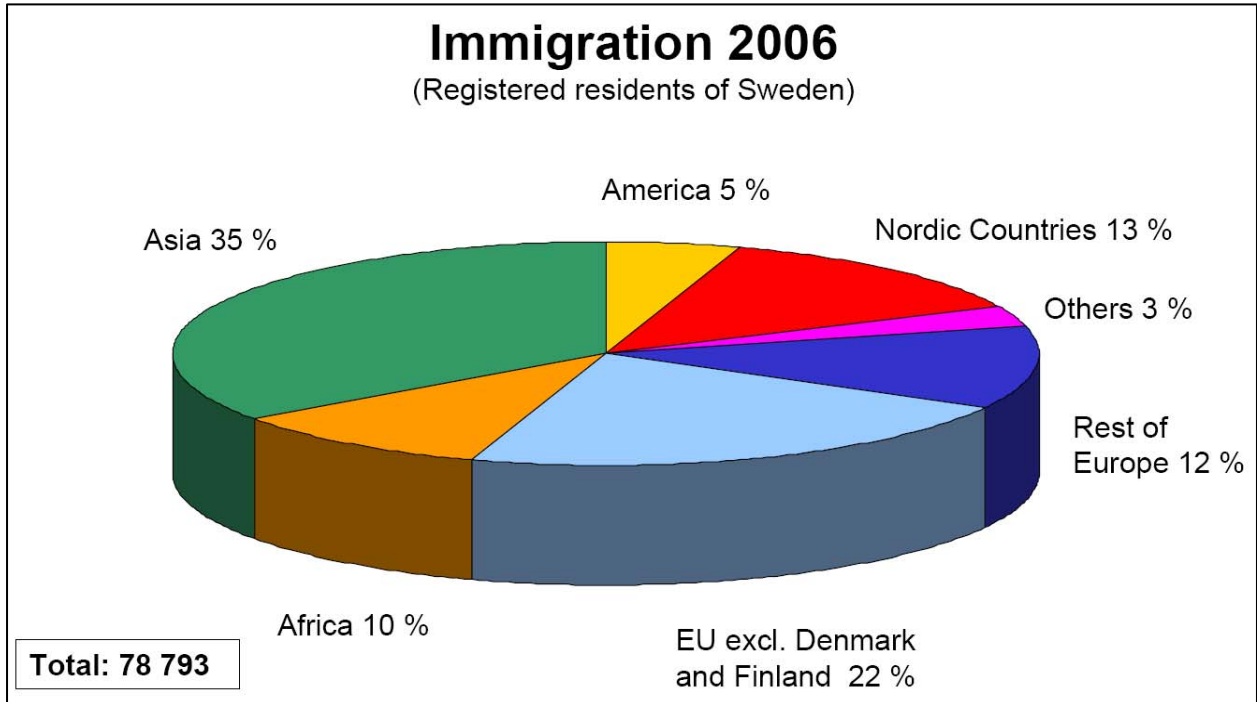
Table: 1

Citizenship in Sweden

	2004	2005	2006
Nordic Countries	3 681	3 518	3 958
Rest of Europe	7 093	11 390	15 105
Africa	2 284	2 508	3 744
America	1 062	2 009	2 767
Asia	10 784	18 938	23 317
Others	3 989	1 210	1 888
Totalt	28 893	39 573	50 779

Source: 'Facts and Figure 2006'. Swedish Migration Board, Norrköping, March, 2007.

Chart: 1



Source: 'Facts and Figure 2006', Swedish Migration Board, Norrköping, March, 2007.

Table: 2 Overview of all residence permits granted in Denmark 2001 - 2006

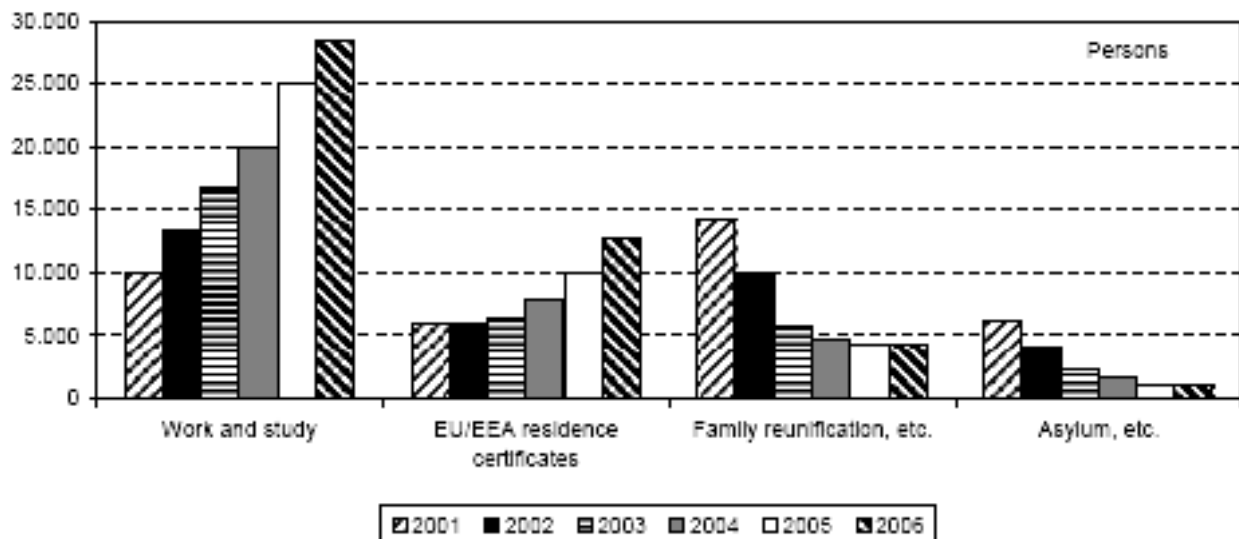
Category	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	% in 2006
Work and study (A)	10.001	13.310	16.778	19.887	24.988	28.448	61%
- of which wage-earner and self-employed	908	1.166	1.663	1.469	1.513	1.849	4%
- of which work permits to persons from new EU Member States				2.097	4.923	10.353	22%
- of which Job Card Scheme and specialists, etc.	953	805	661	734	941	1.350	3%
- of which education	3.724	5.317	6.122	6.221	6.854	5.043	11%
- of which interns	1.650	1.837	1.417	1.537	1.916	2.620	6%
- of which au pair	1.018	1.156	1.233	1.500	1.471	1.793	4%
EU/EEA residence certificates (B)	5.950	6.041	6.475	7.904	9.916	12.802	28%
- of which wage-earner	2.309	2.056	2.129	2.147	2.516	3.684	8%
- of which education	2.012	2.306	2.550	3.815	4.593	5.753	12%
- of which family members	919	868	867	924	1.642	1.941	4%
Family reunification, etc. (C)	14.140	9.943	5.733	4.718	4.341	4.198	9%
Family reunification	10.950	8.151	4.791	3.832	3.522	3.582	8%
- of which spouses and cohabitants	6.499	4.880	2.538	2.344	2.498	2.787	6%
Other residence cases	3.190	1.792	942	886	819	616	1%
Asylum, etc. (D)	6.263	4.069	2.447	1.592	1.147	1.095	2%
Refugee status	5.742	3.489	1.852	1.045	853	838	2%
- of which Geneva Convention	2.020	1.267	724	278	167	201	<1%
- of which B-Status/De Facto Status	3.116	1.689	602	229	202	107	<1%
- of which quota refugees	531	490	509	498	483	530	1%
Other status	521	580	595	547	294	257	1%
- of which humanitarian residence permits	83	45	203	351	186	216	<1%
Total (A+B+C+D)	36.354	33.363	31.433	34.101	40.392	46.543	100%

Note: Includes all instances and refers to positive decisions regarding first time applications.

Source: 'Statistical Overview: Migration and Asylum 2006', The Ministry of Refugee, Immigration and Integration Affairs, Copenhagen, 2007.

Chart: 2

Overview of all residence permits granted in Denmark 2001 - 2006



Source: 'Statistical Overview: Migration and Asylum 2006', The Ministry of Refugee, Immigration and Integration Affairs, Copenhagen, 2007.