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# Sikh Immigrants' Views and Strategies of Integration into Swedish Society

A Qualitative Study of First Generation Sikhs in Skåne

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# Abstract

The aim of this essay is to acquire enhanced knowledge about the views and the strategies that Sikh immigrants of the first generation, who reside in the province of Skåne in Sweden, are using for becoming integrated into the Swedish society. From my own participation in some of the activities that have been organized by the Sikh community in Malmö I became interested in issues regarding integration, and especially how Sikh immigrants perceive and use various strategies for becoming (or not) integrated into the Swedish society and culture. This study is based on fieldwork in Skåne and qualitative interviews with first generation Sikh immigrants. In order to examine if there are differences in the views and strategies for integration among Sikh immigrants who have migrated for various reasons, the informants selected for interviews are both male and female migrants with different migration histories. The study analytically distinguishes between various types of integration – cultural, social, economic and political – and investigates how Sikh migrants perceive their own integration within these fields and in what ways and to what extent they are using similar or different strategies to becoming integrated in the Swedish society.

*Keywords:* Integration; Migration; Sikh; Malmö; Gurdwara; Immigrant; First Generation; Turban

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# Acronyms

BA	Bachelor of Arts
BSc	Bachelor of Science
MA	Master of Arts
MIPEX	Migrant Integration Policy Index
OECD	Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development
UN	United Nations
SFI	Svenskundervisning för Invandrare (Swedish Tuition for Immigrants)
EU	European Union
US	United States
UK	United Kingdom
DO	Diskrimineringsombudsmannen (Equality Ombudsman)
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization

# 1 Introduction

In recent years, the integration of immigrants has become a key issue on the political agenda of the European Union and its member states. EU institutions and national actors have realized that the integration of immigrants plays a crucial role in accruing the maximum benefits of immigration in terms of social, cultural and economic progress. Sweden and most of the EU member states have become increasingly active in developing new integration strategies and searching for solutions to the pressing challenge of immigrants' integration. At the EU level, the Hague and the Stockholm programs identified the integration of immigrants as a major policy priority. Moreover, in 2004, the Justice and Home Affairs Council adopted a set of "Common Basic Principles on Integration".<sup>1</sup>

This study focuses on the first generation Sikh immigrants and their experiences of and attitudes towards integration into the Swedish society. In general, previous studies have indicated that Indian and Sikh males and females have succeeded fairly well with their economic and cultural integration in Sweden, while their social and political integration has been more restricted. Their educational pursuits and their success on the labor market have been major indicators of their successful integration. Based on fieldwork and qualitative interviews with 7 first-generation Sikh migrants in the province of Skåne, this study investigates which strategies Sikh migrants themselves have been using to facilitate their own integration into the Swedish society and whether they perceive themselves as integrated or not. To approach this vast field and use measurable indicators of their integration, the study starts from a theoretical distinction between cultural, social, economic and political integration and analyzes how the respondents have explained their strategies and perceptions of integration in these fields.

The results of the study indicate that first-generation Sikh migrants, who have lived in Sweden since the 1970s and the 1980s, have made severe attempts to become integrated and adapted themselves to the society in economic, cultural and social respects. However, their success with these efforts also varies, partly because they have diverse migration histories and constitute a group of people with different economic, social, and cultural backgrounds. There are, for instance, many differences between men's and women's experiences of immigration, which affect their views of integration into the majority society and thereby their power resources. The

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<sup>1</sup> Wiesbrock A, 'The Integration of Immigrants in Sweden: A Model for the European Union?', *International Migration*, vol. 49, no. 4, 2011, pp. 48-66.

informants' statements can give a deeper understanding of how the first-generation Sikhs experience their arrival to Sweden, how they remember and reconstruct their own migration and integration histories, as well as illustrate individual experiences of power structures between the majority and the minority culture.

## 1.1 Research questions

The two major research questions of this study are the following:

- What strategies are male and female first-generation Sikh migrants using to becoming integrated into the Swedish society?
- How do male and female first-generation Sikh migrants perceive their own integration into the Swedish society?

In order to address these questions, the first two sections of the study (part 2 and 3) firstly provides an introduction to the Sikh migration and population in Sweden and offers a brief overview of the Swedish integration policy which functions as the legal framework, in the background of individual narratives about integration strategies. The two last sections of the study (part 4 and 5) presents and analyzes the results from the empirical study in which 7 first-generation Sikh migrants were interviewed about their experiences, strategies and perceptions of their own integration into the Swedish society.

## 1.2 Method

Qualitative research makes the appropriate methodological base for this study because it helps to uncover meanings and contents of migrants' experiences on a grassroots level. Ethnographic fieldwork is considered a vital method as it can provide contextual richness of individual experiences, interpretations and perspectives in real-life situations.<sup>2</sup> The fieldwork conducted for this study has included qualitative in-depth conversations and semi-structured interviews, thematically guided, with 4 male and 3 female Sikh migrants who reside in Malmö and Lund. The fieldwork has also included participant observation of practices in their public place of worship, the gurdwara in Malmö, as well as in their homes. The subjects chosen for the study are all first-generation Sikh migrants who migrated from India to Sweden in the 1970s and the 1980s and are now in the age between 51 and 65 years (the females between 51 and 54 years old and the males between 60 to 65 years old). Although the informants have different background and life-stories,

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<sup>2</sup> Widerberg Karin, *Kvalitativ forskning i praktiken*, Studentlitteratur, Lund, 2002, pp. 16-17.

all except for one originate from the state of Punjab, the “homeland” of the Sikhs, and all have a family with two to three children.

The semi-structured interviews were carried out between June 20 and July 6, 2012, in the homes of the respondents and one at a café. All the interviews were digitally recorded with the permission of the informants. As both I and they have Punjabi as mother tongue, the interviews were conducted in the Punjab language and later transcribed and translated into English. Each interview situation began with a cup of tea and sometimes a meal with whole family, and as we talked more informally I explained the purpose of the study. Considering that some questions could be perceived as being sensitive, I felt it was important to create an atmosphere and situation in which the respondents could feel safe and provide as open and honest answers as possible. The interview guide that was used for the semi-structured interviews (see appendix 1) followed a chronological pattern of their experiences before, during and after migration and included several questions about their experiences and strategies of integration, structured by cultural, social, economic and political integration. In accordance with the ethical demands for research studies in humanities and social sciences, the respondents were informed about the aims of the project and their rights to withdraw from the study, and all confirmed their consent to participate in the interviews. All respondents have been given pseudonyms in this study to protect their personal identities.

The field work and the collection of data turned out to be more challenging than I at first anticipated. Even if I am familiar with the Sikh community in Lund and Malmö, due to my own background, it was still difficult to find Sikhs who were willing to participate in interviews about their migration and integration, perhaps because the topic of the study involves many sensitive and emotional issues. Several of them were doubtful about omitting data about themselves and their families, while others indicated that they did not have much time. Quite a few persons I contacted and asked if they were interested in participating in the study regretfully declined the invitation. Another issue that came forward during the fieldwork was the hesitation towards the interview situation by some of the female informants. In the beginning I planned to interview four male and four female Sikh migrants, but eventually one female respondent dropped out in the last minute. The respondents with rural and agricultural background seemed to be more supportive of traditional gender roles, even to such an extent that some of the women I interviewed could not meet me (as a man) without the presence of their husbands. According to the patriarchal norms and values in India and Punjab, men and women have clearly different roles with the women being subordinate. The father or the husband often has undisputed

authority and it the one who takes responsibility for all of the important decisions and supervises the other family member's activities. Even if it has been difficult to capture data I planned from the beginning which also has affected the methods and the results of this study, I still believe that the qualitative semi-structured interviews that were conducted have provided interesting and valuable insights into the lives and perspectives of some Sikh migrants in the Swedish society.

### 1.3 Theory

The academic research on immigration and integration is today a vast and continuously expanding field which cannot be rightfully addressed and presented in a more limited study such as this. The analytical and theoretical framework, on which this essay is based, circulates around a number of conceptual categories and core concepts, such as identity and integration. In order to limit this essay, I have primarily used available research studies on the Sikhs in Sweden to discuss the concepts of integration and identity within the specific context of the Sikhs. As the essay is based on field work and uses an inductive methodological approach, starting from the empirical data and based on that make analytical and theoretical conclusions, the academic literature on migration and integration theories have been more selectively chosen.

For instance, one social theorist I have found interesting and relevant to this study is Putnam who argues that a community's lack of assimilation or integration into the majority society, and the resulting inequalities, deprivation, unemployment and other experiences and outcomes they may counter, reflects their lack of "social capital". His use of the concept "social capital" attempts to measure the connectedness of individuals to their local communities by dividing social capital into two mechanisms of bridging and bonding. "Bridging social capital" consists of formal and informal networks that link members of a given community or ethnic group with the wider society, while "bonding social capital" connects members of a community or group with each other.<sup>3</sup> In the following the concept of the bridging and bonding social capital will be used especially in the analysis of Sikh immigrant's economic integration into Swedish society.

The field study with interviews indicated that Sikh respondents are less active in their political participation. To understand and explain this tendency I especially found Hans Löden's ideas about the *superordinate national identity*, as a means for immigrant's integration into democratic politics, useful. Löden suggests that a superordinate national identity, perceived as inclusive by immigrants and by the native population, would be beneficial to such integration. In this context

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<sup>3</sup> Putnam R D; *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*, Simon Schuster, New York, 2000, pp. 23-24.

he argues that command of the dominant language of society is seen as most important of the inclusive criteria. Other such criteria are respect of the country's political institutions and feelings of belonging to the country in which you live. Some of his argument turned out to be useful for my own data when Sikh respondents expressed views that were in favor of similar inclusive criteria for a "Swedishness". According to Löden there are two important criteria for a superordinate national identity: A widespread and fairly equally distributed (socially and ethnically) command of the dominant language is crucial for the democratic state. Secondly, a national identity is founded on fairness, that is, an identity oriented towards civic values, such as freedom, democracy and equal rights, inviting anyone who wants to associate with that identity. Citizens must be able to communicate on an equal basis, with each other and with the society at large, which also allows the citizens to participate in all basic social, economic and political activities.<sup>4</sup>

Another important aspect of integration processes into a host society is the immigrants' perceptions of their identity. In this context I found the arguments of Nader Ahmadi useful and especially his discussion on the importance of immigrants' understanding themselves in new diaspora situation. He suggests that, in order to integrate, the migrants must firstly create an understanding of the context in which integration should take place. Images of the self and perceptions of a personal identity is a necessary requisite for integration.<sup>5</sup> Moving from one country to another does not simply imply a geographically move, but also a social transfer in time and space, during which many are experiencing great difficulties such as rootlessness and alienation. The process of integration, after immigration, requires a great deal of mental and psychological work. Psychologists, like Elsie C. Franzén, has also paid attention to that the transnational move of migrants often means losing a part of what was previously perceived as their identities<sup>6</sup>. Psychological research has further shown that immigrants who identify both with their culture of origin and the host culture are the ones who do best in terms of integration and have the highest confidence.<sup>7</sup>

Hans Löden in this context argues that national identity on the other hand views might be constructed out of experiences of, e.g., the importance of language, religion or ethnicity from

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<sup>4</sup> Löden H, 'Swedish: being or becoming? Immigration, national identity and the democratic state', *International Journal of Social Sciences*, vol. 3, no. 4, 2008, pp. 257-264.

<sup>5</sup> Ahmadi Nader, 'Kulturell identitet i gungning' in Allwood, Carl Martin & Franzén Elsie C, (eds.), *Tvärkulturella möten: Grundbok för psykologer och socialarbetare*, Natur och Kultur, Stockholm, 2000, pp. 155-179.

<sup>6</sup> Franzén Elsie, *Att bryta upp och byta land*, Natur och Kultur, Stockholm, 2001, p. 77.

<sup>7</sup> Nekby Lena & Rödin Magnus, 'Kulturell identitet och arbetsmarknaden', *Rapport till Integrationsverket*, no. 7, 2007, pp. 1-55.

countries of emigration and immigration. He suggests that creation of a superordinate identity with national identity there incorporating two or more subgroups, is a way of decreasing intergroup conflict. He claims that people who share a superordinate identity tend to be more concerned with procedural justice than with distributive outcomes. If the process is fair for all superordinate group members, then members do not focus on subgroup identity. 'Fairness' seems to be a crucial aspect of the superordinate identity if it should work as a uniting point for different subgroups.<sup>8</sup> He writes in his original text like that:

The successful development of a superordinate identity, i.e. an identity accepted by both in-group and out-group, seems to be largely dependent upon representations of prototypicality in the superordinate category. If the in-group's prototypical representations are prominent in the superordinate category it will make the out-group less interested in being an integral part of that category. But, if the superordinate category is characterized by complex prototypicality, i.e. a decrease in relative in-group prototypicality, out-group interest to join will increase. Skin color, birthplace and religious faith are such prototypicalities. The extent a superordinate identity is characterized by criteria possible for anyone to appreciate (e.g. fairness) and meet (e.g. language) it ought to attract the interest of the potentially excluded.<sup>9</sup>

As the analysis of experiences and strategies of the Sikh respondents in this study illustrates, their prototypicality (i.e. skin color, external symbols and background) sometimes become a hinder to join the in-group or the majority society in social contexts. On the other hand, the "fairness" of institutions and in the society at large with regard to work opportunities, the health care system and maintaining their cultural identity in Swedish society, were appreciated by all informants.

## 1.4 Definitions and limitations

In the academic literature there are several definitions of the word 'integration', partly because there are various immigration policies across countries and the concept has been used differently depending upon the historical and current situation. According the definition given by Tuomas Martikainen, integration is "the processes by which individual and groups of immigrants are incorporated into various social arenas and segments of the new host society." Martikainen also pays attention to the dialogic relationship and transnational aspects implied in the concept:

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<sup>8</sup> Löden, op.cit., pp. 259-260.

<sup>9</sup> *ibid.*

“Integration is a two way process whereby both the immigrants and the host society adapt new features as a result of their interaction. Integration may also have transnational dimensions.”<sup>10</sup> In attempt to measure the various dimensions and aspects of immigrants’ integrations, scholars have further divided the conception of integration into different types. With regard to immigrants social and socio-economic integration, Brian Ray, for instance, used the categories “labour market integration”, “linguistic integration” and “civic and political integration” as concepts and tools to gather data and create a more nuanced approach.<sup>11</sup>

For this study I have found the divisions and categories used in the recently started EU-funded and policy-oriented project “Developing a knowledge base for policymaking on India-EU migration” at the European University Institute. The contributions that have this far been published within the framework of this project deals with different aspect of migration on four levels: economic, political, social and cultural to measure and evaluate Indians integration into the EU states (see Figure 1 on the next page). Although it is far beyond scope and the time at disposal of this study to examine how Sikh migrants in Skåne have integrated in relation to all these levels, I have used the basic typology of this project to focus on a few selected indicators of integration.

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<sup>10</sup> Martikainen Tuomas, ‘Religion, Immigrants and Integration’, *AMID Working Paper Series*, no. 43, 2005, pp. 1-14.

<sup>11</sup> Ray Brian, ‘Immigrant Integration: Building to Opportunity’, *Migration Policy Institute*, 2002, retrieved 18 July 2012, <http://www.migrationinformation.org/feature/display.cfm?ID=57>.

**Figure 1**

<b>Economic integration</b>	<b>Political Integration</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Employment/unemployment rates</li> <li>•Occupation and level of household income</li> <li>•Self-employment /migrants who have opened their own businesses</li> <li>•Percentage of immigrants enrolled in vocational training</li> <li>•Proportion claiming some form of social security benefit (ex: maternity, child benefit, housing benefit, unemployment insurance)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Immigrant voting rights and participation in local/national elections</li> <li>•Membership in political parties</li> <li>•Number of candidates elected at the local/national level</li> <li>•Involvement in international associations aimed at defending specifically migrants interests</li> </ul>
<b>Social integration</b>	<b>Cultural integration</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Social networks and interaction with society</li> <li>•Competence in the national language</li> <li>•Quality and type of housing, home ownership versus rented accommodation</li> <li>•Educational level, professional training and higher education</li> <li>•Participation in adult language training.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Creation and establishment of religious and cultural associations</li> <li>•Maintenance and transmission of native language</li> <li>•Mixed marriages and involvement in community life</li> <li>•Immigrant involvement in associations trade unions, and other community group</li> <li>Etc.</li> </ul>

Source: <http://www.india-eu-migration.eu/>

There are many limitations regarding to my this study among first generation Sikh immigrants first of all there is a lack of research and literature on Sikh immigrant in Sweden which make difficult to assess effectively the Sikh integration progress and experiences of integration into Swedish society. Another major issue is which I am aware that there are also disadvantages to my qualitative research method. The choice of informants is limited and small; the data may be less representative and therefore cannot draw any general conclusions. I am aware that my choice of literature, informants and my processing and interpretation of the material may have affected study results. Furthermore, the number of people interviewed small and limited, and I'm not familiar interviewer or interpreter, so I should be very careful in my study that not to generalize or draw further conclusions.

## 2 Integration policies and legal framework

Sweden was one of the first countries to recognize the importance of the immigrants' integration and enacted measures for integration more than 30 years before the country officially proclaimed a shift from immigration to integration policies.<sup>12</sup> In the 1960s Sweden was still a rather ethnically homogenous country but adopted a positive stance towards work migration because of the labor demands.<sup>13</sup> The Swedish Integration Board was established in 1969 when Sweden introduced the legal framework for coordinating between the integration policies and asylum seekers. There was however no clear political objective as to how immigrants and refugees should be integrated until the middle of the 1970s. According to Pieter Bevelander, the main goal of the policy during the early years was to assimilate the immigrants as quickly as possible and to authorize residence permits, often permanent, because of the existing labor demands.<sup>14</sup> The new immigration came to influence the labor market and change the socio-cultural characteristics of the population.

A major shift in Swedish immigration and integration policies occurred in the 1970s when Sweden changed to a country of immigration and the earlier assimilationist focus shifted to a more 'multicultural' approach' with focus on integration.<sup>15</sup> The principal objectives of the new integration policy were (1) equal rights, responsibilities and opportunities for all, regardless of ethnic or cultural background; (2) a community based on diversity; and (3) a society characterized by mutual respect and tolerance, in which everyone can take an active and responsible part, irrespective of background.<sup>16</sup> In practice, however, the implementation of the new policies became largely limited to home language education for immigrants and support of cultural associations of immigrants. When the number of immigrants increased in the 1980s and many migrants and refugees with different cultural backgrounds made Sweden new home, the political and public resistance towards immigration became stronger.<sup>17</sup>

In the early 1990s, integration became the key word in the debates and Swedish immigration policies were renamed into integration policies. To protect immigrants from discrimination in

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<sup>12</sup> Wiesbrock, op.cit., p. 50.

<sup>13</sup> Löden, op.cit., p. 257.

<sup>14</sup> Bevelander Pieter, 'Immigration Patterns, Economic Integration and Residential Segregation: Sweden in the Late 20th Century', *Current themes in IMER research*, no. 2, 2004, pp. 1-35.

<sup>15</sup> Hellgren Z & Hobson B, 'Cultural Dialogues in the Good Society: The Case of Honour Killings in Sweden', *Ethnicities*, vol. 8, no. 3, 2008, pp. 385-404.

<sup>16</sup> Wiesbrock, op.cit., p. 50; Bevelander, p. 12.

<sup>17</sup> Hellgren Z & Hobson B, p. 390.

working life The Office of the Ombudsman against Ethnic Discrimination (DO) was established in 1986 and a law against ethnic discrimination in working life was passed in 1999.<sup>18</sup> In 1997 the Swedish Parliament agreed on an integration policy that aims to give the same opportunities to everyone in the society. However, there has been no straightforward way of measuring the degree of immigrants' integration into the host society and many assessments of integration policies are often normative in nature. The Migration Policy Group has made attempt by establishing the so-called Migrant Integration Policy Index (MIPEX) for which a number of indicators are used to measure and evaluate migration policies.<sup>19</sup> In the overall ranking by the Migration Policy Group of 2006, which measured policies in 28 countries, Sweden scored the top mark of 88 out of 100 points. On a scale from "unfavorable" policies to "best practice", Sweden also had the best practice on every indicator with regard to integration on the labor market, including labor market access, security of employment, labor market integration measures and rights associated with employment. The result of this measurement suggests that Swedish integration strategy differ from policies applied in many other EU countries, such as Denmark and France in which the conditions for integration have become increasingly restrictive in recent years.<sup>20</sup>

With regard to the Sikhs, they have attracted considerable attention in Swedish society over the years due to the wearing of turban and carrying ceremonial dagger (*kirpan*) among those who are following normative rules of the religion. Following a British model, National Road Safety Office made already in 1987 an exemption for the Sikhs who were not obliged to wear helmet if they wore a turban because of religious reason.<sup>21</sup> Furthermore, in 2006 the National Police Board decided that Swedish policemen could wear turban because of religious reasons, given that the look of the turban was adjusted to the uniform. Similarly the Sikh dagger has been not subjected to the national knife law as it is not considered to be a religious symbol and not an object to be used in acts of violence. The Sikhs have often figured in public discourses as an example of the new multi-cultural and multi-ethnic Swedish society.<sup>22</sup> What local Sikhs in Sweden have experienced in the daily life, however, is another thing and will be discussed more in the following analysis.

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<sup>18</sup> Myrvold Kristina, 'The Swedish Sikhs: Community Building, Representation, and Generational Change', in Jacobsen, Knut A. & Myrvold Kristina (eds.), *Sikhs in Europe: Migration, Identities and Representation*, Ashgate, Farnham, 2011, pp. 63-94.

<sup>19</sup> Wiesbrock, op.cit., p. 57.

<sup>20</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>21</sup> Trafiksäkerhetsverket, 'Trafiksäkerhetsverkets föreskrifter om skyddshjäl', TSVFS 1987:10, 16 juli 1987.

<sup>22</sup> Myrvold Kristina, 'Swedish Case Study: Indian Migration and Population in Sweden', in CARIM-India-Developing a Knowledge Base for Policymaking on India-EU Migration, *CARIM-India Research Report*, no. 2012:06, 2012, pp. 1-41.

### 3 An overview of Sikh migration to Sweden

Sweden has not been a traditional host country for Sikh migrants, in comparison to, for example, the US, the UK, Canada and Australia. During the past forty years, however, the ethnic composition of the Swedish society has changed radically and the Sikhs have come to constitute one visible ethnic and religious group in the country. A more noticeable Sikh migration to Sweden began in the 1970s when mostly men arrived to the country either directly from India or through neighboring countries (such as Finland, Denmark, Norway, Poland, and Germany). The officially stated reasons for immigration among these migrants were of different types, but the majority appears to have entered because of studies, work, and marriage with Scandinavian spouses. Sweden was perhaps not the first choice for many, but a residence permit in the country provided an opportunity to legally stay and work in Europe.<sup>23</sup>

Kristina Myrvold pays attention to methodological problem of quantifying the Sikh population since official statistics has not registered the population by ethnicity or religion since the 1930s and the criteria for defining a Sikh involve complex matters. For this reason it is difficult to estimate Sikh population in Sweden at the present. The Sikhs in Sweden have used their Sikh religion and Indian and Punjabi culture as key elements for organizing activities and representation and visibility in society. According to Myrvold, estimations by academics and the Sikhs themselves point to between 3000 and 4000 individuals and of these about 35 to 40 Sikh families live in the province of Skåne.<sup>24</sup>

The early Sikh migration appears to have followed a traditional model in terms of gender as the first migrants were young and middle-aged males who migrated because of studies and work. After having secured their legal statuses in the country they initiated a second migration phase by marrying women from India.<sup>25</sup> During the 1980s and 1990s many Sikhs migrants also came as asylum seekers from the Punjab after having escaped the political turmoil in Punjab and the anti-Sikh riots that followed the assassination of Indira Gandhi.<sup>26</sup> The Sikhs in Sweden have a history of belonging to various categories of migrants – labour migrants, student migrants, marriage

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<sup>23</sup> Myrvold Kristina, 'Swedish Case Study: Indian Migration and Population in Sweden', in CARIM-India-Developing a Knowledge Base for Policymaking on India-EU Migration, *CARIM-India Research Report*, no. 2012:06, 2012, p. 2; Myrvold, *The Swedish Sikhs: Community Building, Representation, and Generational Change*, p. 67.

<sup>24</sup> Myrvold, *The Swedish Sikhs*, p. 65.

<sup>25</sup> *ibid.*, p. 67; This result supported by my study which shows higher proportion of young males in the period 1975 to 1976 and female in the 1980s( see appendix 2).

<sup>26</sup> *ibid.*

migrants, refugees and asylum seekers – and have had different motivations and reasons for entered the country. A vast majority of them have settled in the larger cities of Stockholm, Gothenburg and Malmö.

### 3.1 Individual backgrounds and reasons for migration

Most of the first-generation Sikhs who participated in this study came in the 1970s for the various reasons, such as studies, family reunification or as asylum seekers in the 1980s. All of them are highly educated and come from middle class families, and about half of them also perceived themselves as being secularized. Their educational and economic backgrounds have given them greater capacity to meet and adjust to the new society, and their social positions have also been improved after their immigration. For this reason many have expressed positive attitudes towards the Swedish society and its welfare model and cultural norms, especially the women who experienced that their rights and opportunities changed radically after migration. The case of one upper middle class woman also illustrated how traumatic experiences in the home country may create a strong wish for migrating:

...during the Sikh riots in 84 we were very much affected...Before that I never thought of going abroad, but after the Sikh riots I felt I didn't want to stay anymore in India...when I got a marriage proposal I accepted it...so in view of this I can't say I moved voluntarily...even if I am not a political asylum seeker, I think I was forced to take a decision as I did not want to live in India anymore. That's because of the riots...the riots happened on 31 October 1984, and on April 1985 I got married and then came to Sweden. So it was a quick decision...I think I don't want of be second class citizen but...that is the destiny.... (Interview, June 23, 2012, respondent 2)

Her explanation clearly illustrates how a quick arrangement of her marriage became a means for fleeing India during the 1980s when Sikhs were exposed to violence and discrimination. Other Sikh women in this study have also stated that they were accepting marriages with men living abroad in attempts to escape strong patriarchal values and practices and the social pressure from their families. Other informants have, on the other hand, felt that the migration process implies a sudden lower status in the new society. Their educational base from the homeland as well as the studies they pursued after migration, however, provided them good opportunities of establishing a career and supporting themselves. Two women in age 54 and 51, who had lived in Sweden for 26 and 18 years respectively, explained how they invested in their career with support of their

husbands:

In India I was a white-collar worker, but here I was unemployed in the beginning. I had ambitions and strength to invest in the future. I was very resolute and wanted to learn the language as quickly as possible and develop my studies...I never look back, what is gone that is gone...I thinking in the now and here...I mean I never felt that I had a good job in India and I left it and I had to start over again and worked hard to established myself...I thought I should study medicine and I have do something... (Interview, June 23, 2012, respondent 2)

In Sweden my husband helped me and guided me a lot. He first advised me to learn the language and become a teacher...I went to Komvux for SFI, basic level Swedish and also study on college level...I worked and struggle a lot for work...in beginning I worked as a teacher, because I had already worked as a teacher in India...so through the employment exchange office I worked in children's day care for one year...after one year I didn't get admission to the teacher training education...then the employment exchange office sent me to the elder care service for work...there I was trainee...but when I saw and worked there then I made up my mind, I have to work with this, not with anything else...because when I saw these old ones then I remember and thought that I was unable to take care of my own parents and parents in-law...so this work was kind of helping other old people...after that decision I went for assistant nurse studies...today I have worked nine years as a nurse...I am satisfied with my occupation and I never regret my decision... (Interview, 26 June, 2012, respondent 4)

The diverse migration histories of the first generation Sikhs illustrate, as other studies on the Sikhs have shown,<sup>27</sup> that the Sikh migrants do not constitute a homogenous community but consist of individuals with different social identities and cultural backgrounds. Their migration processes and living in Sweden have in many cases dramatically restructured their relations to family members, including the gender relations between husband and wife clear that the social backgrounds of both women and men, such as their class affiliation, social statuses and educational levels, were important factors affecting their immigration experiences, and the

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<sup>27</sup> Myrvold Kristina, 'Swedish Case Study: Indian Migration and Population in Sweden', in CARIM-India-Developing a Knowledge Base for Policymaking on India-EU Migration, *CARIM-India Research Report*, no. 2012:06, 2012, pp. 1-41; Myrvold, *The Swedish Sikhs: Community Building, Representation, and Generational Change*, pp. 63-94.

adjustment to a new social environment was not without obstacles.<sup>28</sup> The data in this study also indicate that the migration experiences can be of a quite different nature between men and women. Many of the migrating men experiences something similar to an “immigration crisis”, which according to Mehrdad is “a stressful situation in which his or her previous socialization, experiences, cultural background, and norms are challenged by the new life situation.”<sup>29</sup> It is most likely that the Sikh men in this study perceived their migration experiences somewhat differently since their migration histories include more challenging and hazardous journeys through different countries before they reached Sweden, while the women were at least formally marriage migrants who arrived and settled under the protection of their spouses.

In either case, the migration process involves a dialogic interaction between oneself and the majority society which individuals do experience differently, depending on several social, economic, and cultural factors, such a class, caste, rural or urban background, living condition, and the composition (joint or nuclear) and character of the household in the homeland.<sup>30</sup> The settlement in the new country is also experienced differently due to a set of factors and variables. For instance, when the Sikh women arrived in Sweden, later than their husbands, they lacked knowledge in the Swedish language and culture, and became severely dependent on their husbands. Some of them, however, became strongly influenced by Swedish notions of equality and family patterns and gradually increased their demands for equality and equal rights in the marriage, demanding their husbands to work at home. Other examples of how they integrate and adapt to the Swedish society will be elaborated in the following sections.

## 3.2 Collective place-making

Despite the various social backgrounds and reasons for migration, the Sikhs have managed to established collective places of worship in Sweden and have today established four gurdwaras (literally “the house of the guru”) and different religious and cultural associations in the cities of Stockholm, Gothenburg and Malmö.<sup>31</sup> As Myrvold mentions, this process of collective “place-making” has been important for the public visibility of the Sikhs in Swedish society and has followed a typical three ladder pattern: In the beginning the first migrants congregated in private

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<sup>28</sup> Darvishpour, Mehrdad, ‘Immigrant Women Challenge the Role of Men: How the Changing Power Relationship within Iranian Families in Sweden Intensifies Family Conflicts After Immigration’, *Journal of Comparative Family Studies*, vol. 33, no. 2, 2002, pp. 271-296.

<sup>29</sup> *ibid.*, p. 288.

<sup>30</sup> *ibid.*, p. 289.

<sup>31</sup> Myrvold, *The Swedish Sikhs: Community Building, Representation, and Generational Change*, p. 63 & 72.

homes to conduct recitations (*path*) and other religious ceremonies. When a group of co-devotees within a geographical area became large enough and collected funding they searched for premises to rent and transform into a place of worship which they can attend on a more regular basis. Through donations they finally bought a house and created a permanent gurdwara with weekly or monthly meetings and distribution of food from the communal kitchen (*langar*).<sup>32</sup> With regard to the establishment of the gurdwara in Malmö, one female respondent explained this process in the following wordings:

...in that time [1980s] there was no gurdwara in the beginnings when we wanted to do *path* [recitations] on *Sangrand* [the first day of the month according to the Sikh calendar] then we did it in different homes with small *gutkas* [a small breviary with hymns from the Sikh scripture]...after that we got a copy of *Guru Granth Sahib* [of the Sikh scripture]...first we did *paths* in homes and then we started to rent halls...we rented places in Lund because there we were getting a cheaper price...but when they raised the price then we stopped it and started to hire a place in Malmö...and slowly that also became expensive...so after a long time, in 2006, we bought a place in Malmö”... (Interview, 20 June, 2012, respondent 1)

The opening of a gurdwaras in public places has served a central function in creating representation of Sikhism in Swedish society. In the past years, the gurdwara has received several visitors and representatives of the majority society, schools, and other religious organizations, and some of the key persons in the gurdwara have repeatedly participated in various forums on religious pluralism.<sup>33</sup> As Myrvold also observes, religion has become important in the collective representations of the Sikhs in Sweden, even if a Sikh identity in Punjab rest on many different social variables, such as caste, clan, class, regional belonging, etc. As she writes:

When the Sikhs immigrants themselves and the majority society have translated the Sikh tradition and culture into public discourse they have done so exclusively in religious terms. The Sikh migration experience seems to have promoted images of a homogenous religious community with more clear-cut boundaries and norms. Studies of other migrant groups suggest that this development occurs when national politics of recognition and struggles over representation in pluralistic societies privilege religion and require migrants to actively reflect upon what their religion is. What was taken for granted in the homeland has to be articulated and explained to

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<sup>32</sup> Myrvold, *The Swedish Sikhs: Community Building, Representation, and Generational Change*, p. 72.

<sup>33</sup> *ibid.*, p. 73.

oneself and to others by adapting to Western and sometimes Christian terminologies and ideologies of what a “real” religion is or should be.<sup>34</sup>

The Sikhs have made severe efforts to recreate their religious and cultural traditions in Sweden and during this process their representations of the collective selves have emphasized religion and interpretations of religion adapted to a Swedish and Christian framework.

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<sup>34</sup> Myrvold, *The Swedish Sikhs: Community Building, Representation, and Generational Change*, p. 80.

## 4 An analysis of the field study

After a brief introduction to Swedish integration policies and an overview of the Sikh migration to Sweden, this part of the study describes and analyzes the results of my field study among Sikh migrants in Skåne. The analysis has been divided into four sections which subsequently describes the respondents (1) cultural integration after migration, (2) their strategies for social integration, (3) economic integration, and finally (4) their political integration and (5) own perceptions about integration. A table and a brief overview of the respondent's personal backgrounds and reasons for migration are given in Appendix 2 and 3.

### 4.1 Cultural integration

After the respondents in this study had migrated to Sweden they were facing several questions and challenges regarding the similarities and differences between the culture in their home land and the new culture they experienced in Sweden. Some expressed that the new cultural codes they experienced contributed to a certain amount uncertainty when they first arrived in Sweden. Others experienced large cultural differences between the Indians and the Swedes such as different attitudes to hospitality and social openness, but also emphasized that these are cultural codes you learn gradually over time. Especially the men who have been wearing turban paid special attention to how they have met with different reactions and attitudes in the majority society:

A main thing is related to our external symbols (turban, cloths and so on)...is when you able to explain to majority society the reason of wearing of this...this is another issue whether they like it or not...at least you give them knowledge...these are the daily questions I expose to regarding this... (Interview, 24 June, 2012, respondent 3)

...looking special, people are staring at me...Once I went for repairing my care at a garage...they asked me why I have a turban...then I explained them who I am... why I have long hair and purposes of wearing turban and so on...than they become happy...(Interview, 28 June, 2012, respondent 5)

The strategy among these and other informants in this study have in general been to actively

communicate information and knowledge about their symbols and religion, in attempts to create understanding and broadening the perspectives of the people with whom they have interacted.

The Swedish integration policy emphasis that immigrant should be encouraged to preserve and develop their cultural heritage and community life. In the Malmö Sikh immigrants initially celebrated festivals together with the Hindus but in the 1980s created a separate organization, *Sikh Cultural Association Lund and Malmö*, for preserving and representing the religious and cultural values of the Sikhs in dialogue with the majority society. One male and one female respondent, who have been very active in the community, explained how they kept their traditions of the homeland alive together with other Sikhs and Indians:

First of all I kept my turban...after that, all festivals like *Diwali*, *Vaisakhi* and *26 January* we celebrated in Malmö together with all of Indian origin, not only Punjabis ...when we are about 40 people we created the Indian association...to show the majority society what we are doing...this was in 1979-80...and the gurdwara was opened in 1984 (Interview, 28 June, 2012, respondent 5)

When we the women were new here we were getting together and celebrated festivals like *Lobri*, *Diwali* and *Vaisakhi*...because here is not very much Indian atmosphere...but we tried to maintain what we could...there was programs by Indian association, in that we participated and some celebrations through the gurdwara...in beginning we wished to teach our children so they learn how their parents doing...and children also followed with us (Interview, 20 June, 2012, respondent 1)

When the Sikh migrants explained their reasons for establishing the cultural association and later the gurdwara, it was firstly to serve purposes within the community, such as transmitting their religion, language, and culture to the children, celebrating different festivals, and creating temporary spaces in which they could experience the “atmosphere” of the home country. Through these activities, however, it became almost equally important to create associations and more formally organize the activities in order to represent and communicate with the majority society. The voices of the respondents seem to indicate that the Sikhs have been culturally integrated into the Swedish without obstacles, but their stories also contain elements of difficulties and verbal and physical forms of discrimination because of their foreign background. Two respondents explained how they themselves or their relatives had been exposed to acts of

discrimination:

I remember one incident...one man gave me a comment on my clothes, on my Indian dress. This comment was not positive...But if I have to go out with Indian dress, I am not looking around and I am not bothering...if someone gives me negative comments or not...it is the same thing if I am not wearing Indian dress... you are "svartskalle", that kind of negative comments one gets a lot...that can happen even if you are not wearing Indian dress but have western clothes... (Interview, 23 June, 2012, respondent 2)

...once my father in-law went to the market at Möllevångstorget for buying some vegetables, there someone touched his turban or someone touched his turban so that it fell to the ground...something like that happened...my husband was not with them, only my in-laws were at the market. Only that time something like this happened with my father in laws because my husband parents can't speak Swedish but otherwise nothing like that happened to us... (Interview, 20 June, 2012, respondent 1)

Many of the respondents felt that they have had some kind of privileged position in their homeland regarding their external wearing of religious and cultural symbols. A feeling of not being culturally or religiously accepted in the Swedish society, even discriminated against, was apparent in several narratives of the respondents. Some expressed that in Sweden foreigners were too often perceived to be the cause for problems and should therefore be content with a secondary position or status in the society. This feeling of cultural alienation is perhaps not typical of the Sikhs, but migrants in general.

According to Carolina Bjurling, stereotypes about people from other parts in the world can have severe negative impact on the people coming from these places, to such an extent that stereotypes are projected upon individuals.<sup>35</sup> The difficulties that educated immigrants may face can further be of two various kinds: First, the practical obstacles related to the required adjustment to a new and sometimes unfamiliar lifestyle, and secondly the mental barriers prompted by this need for adaptation.<sup>36</sup> For immigrants the practical obstacles, such as meetings with authorities can become more dramatic in their experience than it would for native citizen,

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<sup>35</sup> Bjurling Carolina, 'Komma till sin rätt: Om invandrade akademikers väg till kvalificerade arbeten: hinder och öppningar', *Högskoleverkets rapportserie*, no. 2004:37R, 2004, pp. 1-116.

<sup>36</sup> *ibid.*, p.44.

since the migrants often lack knowledge of society's different cultures (e.g. in contacts with governmental bodies) and orient themselves in new environments.<sup>37</sup> The mental barriers relate to the demands for change and adaptation that immigrants may experience in the early phase of their settlement. Many of the participants in this study had to leave or chose to leave their middle-class lives and move to a country and culture they knew little, if anything, about.

Ulrika Schmauch also pays attention to that discrimination against various ethnic groups in everyday life exists at different levels and can involve a wide range of acts, sometime trivial things, that make people from other cultures experience inequality and violations in relation to the ordinary Swedes.<sup>38</sup> As the examples above illustrate, Sikh migrants have experienced direct or indirect discrimination based on their appearances and wearing of cultural clothes and religious symbols. To handle these prejudices Schmauch discusses different strategies which adult immigrants often use in attempts to handle the everyday racism. In the Sikh case, my informants used primarily two strategies, mentioned by Schmauch, to avoid this discrimination: denial of racism or keeping racism at a distance by ignoring it. According to the first strategy, immigrants tend to look away from events or acts that are cause by cultural difference and can be perceived as discriminating or racist, but rather interpret them as "negative thoughts" or blame themselves while explaining that the host society does not have sufficient knowledge.<sup>39</sup> Two informants clearly expressed this strategy in their answers:

The Swedish people who travelled aboard they see the differences...they accept you as the way you are and the people who not even went to Copenhagen...they don't know anything...from them the Sikhs only hear "jävla utlänning"...on the other hand you should not get irritated with what they are saying...because they don't have knowledge and don't know the difference...the thing is that you are the one who should play the positive part...you are one who should tell them and explain them...(Interview, 24 June, 2012, respondent 3).

I did not get any negative remarks about my appearance...there are not many Sikhs here...here people have never seen a Sikh before, so people have a fascination about the turban and they want to talk with you and ask who are you and where do you come from...when I explain to them we are Sikhs, no one knows about it [the

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<sup>37</sup> Bjurling, op.cit., p. 45.

<sup>38</sup> Schmauch Ulrika, *Den osynliga vardagsrasismens realitet*, Print & Media, Umeå universitet, 2006, p. 119.

<sup>39</sup> *ibid.*, p. 182.

religion and culture]...they asked if we are Hindus...then we always explain the differences between the Hindus and the Sikhs... (Interview, 5 July, 2012, respondent 6)

All Sikh informants seem to have become accustomed with questions about their religious belonging and cultural background, posed in the daily life by native Swedes, while they have gradually adapted to Swedish standard in order to avoid being exposed to acts of discrimination. The second strategy which some of informers were using is to keep racism at a distance by intentional ignorance in order to not be affected by acts of cultural discrimination in the daily life.<sup>40</sup>One man expressed his thoughts somewhat in line with this.

sometimes my colleague asked me why I have this turban...I explained that it is not only a religious symbol, this is of course in my religion, but in my case it is also a part of my identity...I am living a life as good as my Swedish neighbor...but I will never become a Swede whatever happens...I will never be accepted as a native person, as a swede who was born here...because my appearance is different...if I take away turban, still I am a different and I will never be seen as Swede...so why should I take away my own identity...(Interview, 6 July, 2012, respondent 7)

Although this man had a clear perception of this cultural and religious identity, the situation can be more complex for others. The concepts of adaptation and integration focus on dialogic cultural processes during which different groups are expected to learn how to live together. A basic assumption is that immigrant groups over time will become more integrated into the new society by for example establishing more contacts with the “Swedes”. For some, however, this process can to more feelings of cultural and social exclusion and even a personal identity conflict. One female respondent explained who she was always reminded of her cultural background by her colleagues and was treated differently than native Swedes:

...once I was standing at the cash desk in the supermarket with one Swede in front of me...the cashier took money from that person and said thanks, your welcome and so on...repeated several times...but when I came to cash desk the cashier did not say anything like that...A second experience of feeling like an outsider as when I travelled for my work and represented Sweden...I know I am not Swedish...I am a Swedish citizen and I know that my origin is Indian...but when I said I'm representing Sweden and sometimes, by chance, that I'm Swedish....then my

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<sup>40</sup> Schmauch, op.cit., p. 184.

colleagues look at me strangely...like are you Swedish?...they are not telling you anything...they shows with their eyes and expressions...that have made me think and believe that I'm not Swedish and that has also created a conflict of identity...I can't decide whether I am Indian or Swedish...Who am I? Am I Swedish or Indian...? (Interview, 23 June, 2012, respondent 2)

Even if governmental efforts have contributed to a gradually changing cultural climate in society at large, many Swedish Sikhs experience a more subtle discrimination in the everyday life. In recent year the idea of integration has also been increasingly criticized for building upon and strengthening hierarchical divisions between “we” (Swedes) and the “others” (Immigrants), presuming that the two are more or less homogenous groups, even opposites.<sup>41</sup> Still, the general picture that emerges from the interviews in study indicates that the Swedish Sikhs have less exposed to cultural discrimination, in comparison to many other countries, and have in general gradually pursued a dual cultural competence that have made them feel at home in the new country.

## 4.2 Social integration

It seems to be common for the male and female Sikhs in this study that they interact frequently with both Swedes and other foreign-born. Some of the men said they get along very well with their Swedish colleagues at work, but that they prefer to socialize with fellow countrymen on their free time. In their views, their countrymen see them more as individuals and do not judged them by their cultural belonging, and share many experiences, background and interests. The women expressed that it was much easier to become socially integrated into the society once they got a job. Several narratives also illustrate how the educational and social backgrounds of the respondents in India have strongly encouraged them to pursue a working career and interact with native Swedes. Two informants, for instance, said they used to have a fairly good standard of living in the home country, and after having migrated the search for similar living conditions motivated them to reach out and gain new friends in Sweden. A woman explained that she had obtained stable friendships with Swedes because of her working life:

...according to me, I have less contact with Indians and more with Swedish...if we talk about my own contacts in society then I have a good circle at my work we do

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<sup>41</sup> Schmauch, op.cit., p. 117.

girl-dinners [tjejmiddag] together, we do lots of other activities like that outside work...(Interview, 26 June, 2012, respondent 4)

The majority of respondents emphasized the importance of contacts and a social network with both native Swedes and immigrants. All of them thought it was important to adapt to the surrounding society as much as possible, trying to understand the society of which they were part. A male informant explained that he, in addition to contacts through his work, would take part in community life and try to understand what is typically Swedish, by watching the Swedish television and read Swedish newspapers. Many Sikh immigrants generally speak English and several other languages, this have helped them especially during their first period of time in Sweden. One woman mentioned that her language skills had helped her considerably as she had early been able to ask Swedish friends for advice and received help when feeling insecure. In this study it also seemed that the women were more likely to find Swedish friends outside their work and felt that Indian and Swedish women have more things that unite than divide them. But there were also some individuals who did not spend much time with native Swedes. Two informants explained their lack of social networks with native Swedes by essentializing a typical character of the Swedes, as being more “reserved” and not so “open-minded” in comparison to Indians:

...we have not integrated that much in Swedish society and with Swedish people as it should be...I mean if we know 10 Indian families than at least we must know 3 Swedish family which we don't...this is because the Swedish are very reserved people...so if I don't meet them often they don't open up...right...so in that way we are not meeting Swedish...or it might be other reasons...I don't know if its depends upon my appearance or that I haven't got time for that...(Interview, 28 June, 2012, respondent 5)

...I don't know, maybe it's social attitude...I have very less social integration with Swedish...I have good relation with my Swedish neighbor and surrounding where I live, they are very helpful...but it would never happen that my neighbor invited me for a glass of wine...on the other hand when I am grilling sometimes and my neighbor comes out and says it's smelling good...I invite them always...but the similar way when he is doing that, he never invites me...I think this is their nature...The reason of this attitude...I get to know through one of my colleague...he said “we Swedish are like this...it is not like we don't want to invite

you or others”...he said he lives in Hörby on the same street as his father-in-law...he is just meeting them, not any neighbors or others on the same street...and they don't know him either...I don't think its racism...I think they just don't mix with others...At first I thought people are always hesitant towards newcomers, how they are or so on...I don't say this is racism, it's just in their attitude...they only meet with people they know...they are not open-minded like us, if we meet anyone like us [Indian] we talk and sometimes invite them for a cup of tea...(Interview, 6 July, 2012, respondent 7)

Behind these narratives is a perceived or experienced difficulty in establishing closer social relations to people outside their own ethnic and cultural group. According to Åke Daun, it is difficult for many immigrants to gain Swedish friends, as friendship often has a history (sharing memories of same old nursery, school or university) which the newcomers lack. For most immigrants the working place provides the only contact with native Swedes, partly because of the general practice of drawing a clear line between work and private life.<sup>42</sup> It is possible to work together for years without meeting on free time or knowing much about each other.<sup>43</sup> However, these examples also illustrate that narratives can sometimes generate more stereotypical images of the “other” as a means to find reasons and explain why or why not the social integration has been successful. Despite these narratives, it was still interesting to see that most respondents in this study had chosen to live in residential areas with a high proportion of native Swedes as their neighbours. Only two of them said they had moved to Malmö from villages in Skåne for the purpose of meeting other Indian families more frequently.

### 4.3 Economic integration

Some of the perhaps most common indicators to measure the integration of immigrants are their success in gaining jobs and their level of income in the new country of settlement. The respondents in this study arrived during the 1970s and 1980s- the males between 1975 and 1985 and the females between 1984 and 1994, when unemployment rates was quite low in Sweden, compared to most other OECD countries.<sup>44</sup> Since they arrived at different for various reasons they have also had different pre-conditions for their economic integration. Many studies dealing

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<sup>42</sup> Daun, Åke, 'Svenskhet som hinder i kulturmötet', in Daun, Å. & Ehn, B., (eds.), *Blandsverige: kulturskillnader och kulturmöten*, Carlsson Bokförlag, Stockholm, 1988, p. 324.

<sup>43</sup> Daun, Åke, *Svensk mentalitet, Ett jämförande perspektiv*, Rabén Prisma, Malmö, 1994, p. 90.

<sup>44</sup> Bevelander, op.cit., p. 15.

with the economic integration of immigrants use human capital theory in their approach, according to which different demographic and human capital characteristics are expected to explain the labor market integration of immigrants. Within this framework, education is seen as an investment that individual make in order to increase their productivity, and later improve their labor market careers.<sup>45</sup> Differences in the level of education can from this perspective explain variations in the employment integration of immigrants.

The Sikh immigrants in this study had a high educational level before migrating to Sweden and this certainly assisted them when searching for jobs. Based on a quantitative survey conducted among close to 200 Sikhs in Sweden, Myrvold concludes that their economic integration seems to have been successful:

What appears to set the Swedish Sikhs apart from many other migrant groups in the country is their successful economic integration...including first and second generation Sikhs in all age groups...had pursued college or university studies...The reasons behind this successful economic integration of people with quite different social identities seem to be a combination of their own efforts to adapt and changing policies in Swedish society.<sup>46</sup>

Differences in educational level could be one explanatory variable for the differences in the labor market integration among immigrants groups. Several studies seem to indicate that between 1970 and 1990 a higher educational level among immigrants increased the possibilities to obtain employment for both immigrants and natives Swedes.<sup>47</sup> In my study the informants have apparently used different strategies to obtain jobs with their educational background from the homeland as the base. The strategies have, however, been somewhat different depending on their individual conditions. Three informants, who would have been categorized as unskilled when they arrived in Sweden, worked their way up to more qualified jobs, for which their education from the homeland also became useful. Another strategy, for one respondent, was to complete and advance a degree from the homeland by attending additional courses at a Swedish university, after the credits of Indian degree were translated into the Swedish educational system. Two informants decided to pursue studies in a completely different subject than their Indian degree in order to open up for new job opportunities and enable a career change. For many were these strategies not planned in advance and could only be realized after having lived in the country for

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<sup>45</sup> Bevelander, op.cit., p. 19.

<sup>46</sup> Myrvold, *The Swedish Sikhs: Community Building, Representation, and Generational Change*, p. 70.

<sup>47</sup> Bevelander, loc.cit.

some time. Many did in fact start their working life in Sweden by accepting different kinds of unskilled jobs in order to make a living. Only two, however, decided to remain in same occupational sector without ambitions to improving their career opportunities.

#### **4.3.1 Challenges with access to labor market**

The interviews also reflect that the processes of finding have not been without challenges. The perhaps most difficult challenge for the Sikhs and many other migrants from outside Scandinavia is learning the Swedish language. Most immigrants have to undergo an initial period of language training period and this delays their entry into the labor market. More unfavorable performances on labor market can be related to the lack of country-specific human capital, such as knowledge of the language, working practices, norms and behaviors. It appears difficult for immigrants to obtain the similar outcomes on the labor market as native born citizens, even when they lived in the host country for a considerable period of time.

Putnam argues that a community's lack of integration, which can result in inequalities and unemployment, reflects a lack of "social capital". He further divides social capital into the two mechanisms of "bridging social capital", which signifies formal and informal networks with the majority society, and "bonding social capital" which refers to intra-groups connections. The data in this study indicate that both types of social capital have played a vital role when the informants were recruited for jobs after migration. For three respondents, other migrants already settled in Sweden helped them to get in touch with employers. As two of them explained:

I delivered newspapers for a 1 year and 6 months and worked half time at a company...after that, one of my friends, working in Malmö, called me and told that he is leaving his work and I could get his job...so that was in 1981...and I'm still working there... (Interview, 24 June, 2012, respondent 3)

...it was like that my friends close friends working there...where I am working now for 25 years...so when he leaving from this workplace he introduced me to this employer and employer appointed me...so I never required any support or help from any authority in this matter... (Interview, 6 July, 2012, respondent 7)

Others would also tell that they got work through informal contacts and employment agencies. One woman told how she got work in early 80 by informal contacts:

...there was not any help from the society [other Sikhs] but the employment agency

was helping. First I worked for the local authorities, I got my own contacts, and when I started working in the factory then our old friend's wife asked for me in a company. In that time they required a lot of people, even if I could not speak Swedish well. My employer asked me when I can start working; I said I can start from tomorrow... (Interview, 20 June, 2012, respondent 1)

Bram Lancee suggests that minority groups can gain more for their bonding social capital if they constitute a larger population, or have higher concentration in the host country, and the government policy is targeted towards ethnic groups. As he argues, in Germany the bridging social capital to mainstream society develop more among migrants as the government did not approach them as "immigrants". In the Netherlands, on the other hand, minority groups developed more bonding social capital as the government instead emphasized their cultural difference.<sup>48</sup> In the Swedish context, partly due to the Swedish integration policy based on the welfare model, the Sikh immigrants seem to have developed both bridging and bonding social which have helped them to integrate economically.

#### **4.3.2 Direct or indirect discrimination at work place**

Despite the success of finding a job, many of the respondents had been experienced direct or indirect work discrimination, with regard to access to work, the level of salaries, possibilities for promotion, and working conditions. A male respondent explained how his colleagues were mistrusting him in the beginning because of his cultural background and appearance at work:

...where I am working now, there were doubts about me in beginning, what kind of work I can perform...because of my appearance [wearing turban]...later on, when they saw that I can work well then things became different. Like before my colleagues would not even say hello to me...because I think the reason was not only my appearance, but also that they doubted my working capacity...so they thought this immigrant may not perform as well as we do...I am talking about my Swedish colleagues...but when they got to see my work they start saying hello and so on... (Interview, 28 June, 2012, respondent 5)

Reports on ethnic discrimination suggest that employers are often reluctant to hire persons with immigrant background and prefer native Swedes. Moreover, immigrants are more often facing

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<sup>48</sup> Lancee Bram, *Immigrant Performance in the Labour Market*, Amsterdam University Press, Amsterdam, 2012, p. 54.

discrimination in relation to working conditions and promotion decisions.<sup>49</sup> In the Sikh case, it is perhaps the turban wearing men who have faced most difficulties in the Swedish society, especially those who arrived in the 1970s and 1980s before Sweden had implemented regulations against discriminations in working life. The anecdotes told by two men can illustrate how their wearing of external symbols has affected their work opportunities and the humiliation they have experienced:

In beginning I applied for a job as bus driver...there they asked me if I am working with my turban. I said it is a part of my [personal/religious] uniform. Then they just said “ok”, “then we know”...later they sent me a letter with the remark that right now all the vacancies are occupied...but at the same time I saw in the newspaper that they advertised 9 more open posts for bus drivers...this was happen in 1979... (Interview, 28 June, 2012, respondent 5)

When I completed my education in Sweden and searched for jobs...in all interview situations I was asked if I intend to work with this turban...they didn't know or understand that a Sikh cannot take off the turban like that...they thought maybe I will come without turban when I start working...I said I will work with my turban...in that time I thought I can get a job in my areas quickly after education...if I don't keep the turban...sometimes you have to pay the cost...as long as I kept the turban I did not get a job...then I decided to not wear turban...in my profession you meet a lot of people and represent your organization...and I think my employers believed that this person is not fit for that work...because you are different from others...in that sense, the turban affected my work opportunities...this types of problems the first generation faced...(Interview, 5 July, 2012, respondent 6)

### **4.3.3 Economic living conditions**

Most of the respondents in this study were of the opinion that their financial standard, living conditions, and possibilities to educate themselves had improved after immigration. Especially the women, with higher education than the men from the homeland, thought their work opportunities had increased and thereby also their economic dependency on their husbands. Coming from a culture in which the women traditionally did not work outside of the household,

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<sup>49</sup> Integrationsverket, 'Upplevelser av etnisk diskriminering hos utrikes födda personer i Sverige', *Integrationsverket delrapporten*, 2006, pp. 14-15, retrieved 15 July 2012, <http://www.mkc.botkyrka.se/biblioteket/Publikationer/stencilserie/Upplevelser.pdf>

the women felt that the Swedish model with dual breadwinners had given them increased self-confidence and power resources to challenge traditional gender roles. Both the men and women in this study got appropriate employments after immigration, but the women seemed to have succeeded even better in this regard. Although it is quite usual for immigrant women to accept unqualified jobs to enter the labor market quickly, most of the women in this study had gained better jobs and positions than their husbands.

When identifying the factors behind their economic success the informants mentioned their own attitudes and adaptability<sup>50</sup>, the guidance and assistance they had received from others, their social contacts, and also a certain amount of good luck. Some emphasized that they had adapted to a Swedish style of being in order to avoid conflicts, show willingness to compromise, and so on. Some said that it was important to gain understanding of oneself and what the society demands. Two respondents said their success was because they have dared taking risks and they had been quite assertive when they wanting a job. Two other informants, on the other hand, said they had accepted the first jobs they were offered, just to not feel dependent on anyone. The ability to quickly learn the Swedish language seems to have been a fundamental strategy and reason for their success. The stories of all the seven respondents revealed a few common themes: all have had a strong will and a strong interest in work and had been open to change and adaptation to the prevailing conditions. All had a strong belief in their own abilities and worked hard to realize their success. None of them presented themselves as being passive, but rather explained their active approach as the strategy and reason of their economic success.

#### 4.4 Political integration

Foreign born citizens in Sweden are to lesser degree members of political parties (4, 8 per cent as compared to 6, 4 per cent for the total population).<sup>51</sup> A plausible explanation to the immigrants' low political participation can be, at least according to Hans Löden, the importance of "fairness" and individuals' sense of political trust. Experiences falling short of fairness expectations can have negative effects on the political trust.<sup>52</sup> The extent to which individuals display political interest and readiness for membership in political organizations is also indicating a general interest for the society at large and its future development. One can easily expect that immigrants who maintain and nurture the "myth" of returning home are perhaps more interested in the

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<sup>50</sup> When the informants talk about adaptation, I interpret them however as they often primarily concerned with the successful interaction with employers and colleagues.

<sup>51</sup> Löden, op.cit., p. 258.

<sup>52</sup> Löden, op.cit., p. 261.

politics and developments of the home country rather than investing valuable time and resources in political engagements. All respondents in this study displayed little interest in political activity and participation. All were using their voting rights, but only one had actively become a member of a political party. However, one informant expressed the importance of actively being part in democratic processes that can create changes in society:

I think since the day I came to Sweden, I never ever missed any voting opportunity...it doesn't matter if it is for the parliament or the municipality...or the referendum for Euro or the European Union, I always voted...my firm belief is that a person's aim is not to complain, but they should actively take part in decision...  
(Interview, 6 July, 2012, respondent 7)

It still remains that these and other immigrants do not have a strong presence or voices in Swedish politics which consequently do not reflect the cultural and ethnic diversity of the society. Research studies show that ethnic discrimination sometimes prevents politically active immigrants from reaching higher positions within the parties, and dampens their participation in 'Swedish' organizations.<sup>53</sup> It is yet noteworthy that all of the female respondents were supporting different NGOs and humanitarian help organization, such the Red Cross and the Swedish Cancer Society, while only one man was giving donations to Doctors without Borders. On the other hand, all of them were generously supporting, with finances and human resources, their own community and gurdwara.

## 4.5 Self-perceptions of integration

In this final section of the essay I will present some of the ideas and views the respondents expressed when being asked who they personally perceived their integration into the Swedish society. Subjective perspectives can be, in wordings of Jose Alberto Diaz, described as "the immigrants' perspective" and is, or at least should be, one aspect to be mentioned in studies on the integration process. Even if there are several methodological means to measure immigrants' integration, it is equally important to collect and voice their perspectives, including their perceptions of their own integration, identity, and solidarity with the new society as well as how they perceive barriers and obstacles for integration.<sup>54</sup> According to Ahmadi, integration processes

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<sup>53</sup> Hellgren Z & Hobson B., op.cit., p. 388.

<sup>54</sup> Diaz, José Alberto, 'Integration och indikatorer: Några teoretiska och metodologiska utgångspunkter för användandet av indikatorer', *Integrationsverkets rapportserie*, no. 03, 2004, p. 85, retrieved 12 July 2012, <http://www.mkc.botkyrka.se/biblioteket/Publikationer/Indikatorrapport.pdf>.

work from a “feeling, a subjective state, a condition related to the individual’s subjective experience of belonging to.”<sup>55</sup>

In this study all the respondents were asked to describe their personal perceptions about their own integration into Swedish society, and also how looked upon the future and especially the integration process and possibilities of their children. The answers were very different with regard to how they perceive their integration. As some emphasized, integration requires dual efforts and grades of feeling integrated in different spaces of society, and especially between the more public working life and the private life.

I don’t know about my own integration, but I have adjusted myself. I think integration means [an effort] from both sides. I want be a Swede, but no one is acknowledging me in that way, meaning I only have a wish to be so...in this manner I think I am well-adjusted to society and I did lots of adjustments...but if I have to measure [my integration] on a 1 to 10 scale, my score would end up somewhere between 7 and 8 on that scale... (Interview, 23 June, 2012, respondent 2)

I am integrated in this society as much as is required, not too much and not too little... (Interview, 24 June, 2012, respondent 3)

...well balanced...I think we are sufficient integrated in this society...when being at work than for 8 hours I consider myself to be fully integrated into the society...you are a part of the system and you can react as integral part of it...but in the private, at home, we are 80% [Indian] 20% [swedes] in proportion... (Interview, 5 July, 2012, respondent 6)

Although these descriptions expressed both a will and a feeling of being integrated, at least in the space of working life, others communicated more negative feelings of being socially segregated:

...in Indian you are a first class citizen, here in Sweden a second class citizen...it doesn’t matter what you are, there is no relevance that how much you feel integrated or what kind of job you have or whatever...I myself feel like a second class citizen. Swedes who are living here, they make me feel in that way, they make me feel like that very frequently actually, just by not saying thanks or just by not behaving like

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<sup>55</sup> Ahmadi, op.cit., p. 175.

they behave to other Swedes...I have mostly contributed to this society. I just want something back and with back I mean recognition...what I want is just recognition in society as an equal citizen...they [the Swede] are not saying you are second class citizens, it is just their way and attitude that make me feel like that...(Interview, 23 June, 2012, respondent 2)

Some of my informants said they felt well integrated, while others did not, and reasons behind the variations were of different kinds. The experiences that make them evaluated their own integration occur at various levels in their everyday life, at work, in conversations with neighbours, in the cue at the supermarket, and in many other social context. Key factors that stand out when measuring one's own integration is the feeling of having the same human value as others in society, being treated with the same respects as others, having and equal possibilities to improve the living and work conditions. The other factors presented were related to their own approach and social skills, and the guidance and assistance they have received from others. All have emphasized the importance of being active and have courage in order to take the chances that are presented. All were also very positive towards the guidance they had received from different Swedish governmental bodies and authorities, sometimes highlighting that this guidance had been a decisive factor for their success and integration. In terms of gender, some of women felt that their integration process had been easier as their husbands migrated earlier and had already established social networks when they arrived.

#### **4.5.1 Second generation integration**

While the first generation Sikh have experiences several difficulties when adapting to the new culture, their children who are born and brought up in the country face quite different situations and challenges. In general, the respondents were very optimistic about their children's future and explained that the primary reason for this was the children's dual competence in two cultures, their feeling of belonging to the country, and their pursuit of good education. In these views their children were already integrated into society and were considered to be resources to teach and help the parents:

...because children's born and brought up here...they speak the [Swedish] language perfect and get their whole education from here...so they are more a part of society than we are...and through them you learn a lot...their integration is from another class compared to us...what they learn, tell, and discuss with us, that you can never learn by yourself...their integration will be much better...but still Swedish parent's

children's level is different...like if I say I am integrated into Swedish society 50 percent then the children's integration would be 90 or 98 percent...but still there will be differences for the reason that they are a mixed product of two cultures...Indian culture and Swedish culture, but they have more influences from the Swedish culture...they have more advantages than disadvantages by being part of two cultures... (Interview, 5 July, 2012, respondent 6)

...they have much better opportunities here...because they don't have the feeling that they come from another country, they are born and raised here...I think they will be very well integrated... (Interview, 6 July, 2012, respondent 7)

...in my view their integration will be better than mine because I will never reach in that level which they will be reaching with their education... (Interview, 26 June, 2012, respondent 4)

One woman also expressed worries for the future, their loss of their Indian identity and belonging, at the same time as she anticipated continued experiences of discrimination just because of the children's Indian background:

...the next generation children have nothing to do with India. They hardly understand Punjabi...What will happen to them; I am worried about that...what kind of identity do they have...? I know my identity or maybe I don't know? What about them, when do become a Swede? Just by being born in Sweden you become Swedish or you have to have white colour to become Swedish, when are you Swedish? (Interview, 23 June, 2012, respondent 2)

This and others examples in this study seem to illustrate the continued challenge and dilemma for the first generation Sikhs. On the one hand they actively teach their children in efforts to transmit and maintain their religious, cultural and linguistic traditions of the homeland. On a daily basis the first generation Sikhs are following news and take part in events in the homeland, which some of them left more than thirty years ago. On the other hand they are proud of the children for being well-integrated into Swedish society and having pursued a dual competence in both the Swedish and Indian culture, even if this is at the cost of some parts of their Sikh and Indian identity.

## 5 Conclusion

This study started out with general questions about the strategies which first-generation Sikh migrants are using to become integrating into the Swedish society and how they perceive their own integration. The learning process during this work has illustrated the difficulty in making general conclusions about a group by using different tools for measuring integration, since the group consists of individuals who may have quite different experiences, perceptions and interpretations of their own status, position and success in society. Integration is not always measureable and precise as it deals with people's subjective sense of belonging. What this study has illustrated is perhaps, or hopefully, the complexities involved when integration processes are discussed. Integration, and especially the feeling of being integrated and making a part of a society, cannot merely be the result of national policies that are implemented in a country, but involve several actors on different levels of society. Perhaps this became most evident when the respondents in this study communicated their experiences of discrimination in Swedish society. The troubling experiences did not involve outspoken racism or hate crimes and neither were they caused by the lack of governmental regulations. Instead it was the more subtle or hidden form of discrimination in daily life or a silent ignorance that generated feelings of not being given the same value or respect as others. Many of the first migrants still feel that they are not accepted by many people in the majority society and are being treated differently than native Swedes because of cultural difference.

Despite these experiences, all the respondents had managed fairly well in their new country and succeeded with their economic and cultural integration, in relation to the main objectives of the Swedish integration policy. They have been able to create and develop religious and cultural associations that have proved to be important institutions for representing themselves and creating various kinds of dialogues with the surrounding society. In view of the emphasis on equal opportunities for all in the Swedish integration policy, the first-generation Sikh immigrants have certainly faced challenges in working life because of the external symbols, but in general they have been able to obtain qualified jobs based on their educational background and active efforts on the labor market, and many have also pursued new education and training to improve their career opportunities. Their social integration in terms of their interaction with other people in society seems to be a more complex matter that depends on different social variables, such as class, gender, and economic status, and the situational contexts and spaces. In this study the

women seem to succeed better by establishing wider social networks than men, who tended to interact primarily with people of their own ethnicity and religion. On the other hand, most of the respondents felt more socially integrated in their working life, while they experienced a higher degree of social exclusion by the surrounding society in their private lives. One strategy to handle this feeling of being social excluded was to refer to differences between the Indian and the Swedish cultures and the reluctant attitude among the Swedes.

Although all informants have used their democratic rights and voted in elections, they displayed little interest in Swedish politics and the future development of the country. Possible explanations for this could be that it is still difficult for people with immigrant background to become active in Swedish politics and focus of many Sikhs in the first generation is rather the developments in their home country. Their perceptions of their own integration also reflect that feelings of belonging to the society and identification with a “Swedishness” have been and still is negotiated depending upon the situation and with whom they interact. Their responses illustrate that integration involves dialogic processes that often occur on the grassroots level and requires that several actors adapt themselves while interacting.

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## **Appendix 1: Interview guide (translated from Punjabi)**

### **Background information**

- Name:
- Age:
- Origin in India (from town or village):
- Year of arrival in Sweden:
- Reason(s) for migration:

### **Cultural Integration**

- Have you been able to maintain your cultural traditions from the homeland in Sweden?
- How have you been able to established collective organizations and associations for maintaining the cultural of your homeland (like Gurdwara)?
- Have you faced any problems and challenges you faced during this process?
- Have you exposed any kind of attitude towards your external symbol (Turban, Punjabi suit)? Both positive and negative
- How does your external symbol affected or not in your work opportunities?
- What similarities and differences do you see between your homeland culture and the Swedish culture?

### **Social integration**

- How have you built up your social network in Sweden?
- How do you spend your free time and with whom? Who are your close friends?
- How do you perceive your contacts with other people in the Swedish society?
- How much you think you integrated with Swedish peoples?
- What is your education from India and in Sweden?
- What is your conception/perception about your status in society? Before and after came to Sweden is it increase or decreases?
- What kind help have you gained from the Swedish society? Positive or negative

### **Economical integration**

- Work opportunity you got in society at large)?

- What kind of work you get from you came in Sweden till now?
- What kinds of challenges and difficulties have you faced when searching or getting work?
- What kind of help you get from society and government (commune)?
- What kind of strategies have you used to get a job in Sweden?
- Has your life situation in Sweden raised your economic living conditions?

### **Political integration**

- Have you participate in any organization or in politics actively or doing any action to change society you living?
  - Do you use vote in the elections? Are you a member of any political party?
  - Have you been politically active at some point during your time in Sweden?
  - Human rights and democratic rights. Are you supporting in other country? (like humanitarian help, Red Cross)
  - What kinds of (political) news and events do you take part of?
- 
- Have some of your perceptions (about what?) changed in Sweden since you arrive?
  - Have your children changed or not your perception?
  - What you think about children's possibility of integration in society compare to yours?

**Appendix 2: Informants information table:**

<b>Informant gender and age</b>	<b>Origin in India</b>	<b>Year of arrival in Sweden</b>	<b>Reason for migration</b>	<b>Education in India</b>	<b>Education in Sweden</b>
I1-(Female) age 54	Village	1984	Marriage	M.A Punjabi	Restaurant education
I2-(Female) age 54	City	1985	Marriage	B.SC, MA in Economics	Medical education
I3-(Male) age 63	City	1976	Student	Technical education	Technical education
I4-(Female) age 51	City	1994	Marriage	B.A/teacher	Nurse education
I5-(Male) age 63.5	Village	1975	Student	B.A	Driver/own business
I6-(Male) age 60	Village	1975	Student/settlement	Unspecified university degree	University degree
I7-(Male) age 65	Village	1985	Student	B.A	Studied course at University

### **Appendix 3: Presentation of the informants**

- **Informant 1**

I1 is a 54 year old female. She grew up in a village in Punjab. Her mother tongue is Punjabi. She has lived in Sweden for 28 years. She came to Sweden on the basis of marriage. In Punjab, she studied at a university and pursued a MA degree in Punjabi. In Sweden she studied the restaurants education. At the time of the interview, she was unemployed.

- **Informant 2**

I2 is a 54 years old female. She grew up in two states in India and her mother tongue is Punjabi. She has been living in Sweden for 27 years. She came to Sweden because of marriage and for other reasons. She is has pursued university education and has a BSc and MA degree in economics from India. She also worked in India before migration. In Sweden, she has both studied and worked. At the time of the interview, she worked in the medical sector

- **Informant 3**

I3 is a 63-year-old male. He came to Sweden as a student. He grew up in a two states in India and speaks many Indian languages. He has lived in Sweden for 36 years. He is educated in college and pursued technical education in India and in Sweden. At the time of the interview, he worked within the industry.

- **Informant 4**

I4 is a 51 year-old female. She came to Sweden on marriage basis. She grew up in two states in India and her mother tongue is Hindi and Punjabi. She has lived in Sweden for 18 years. She is college educated (BA) and was engaged in voluntarily work in India. In Sweden, she has both studied and worked. At the time of the interview, she worked in the health care sector.

- **Informant 5**

I5 is a 63 year-old man who came to Sweden as a student. He grew up in a village in Punjab and his mother tongue is Punjabi. He had lived in Sweden for 37 years. In India he pursued college education and has a BA degree from Punjab. In Sweden he studied during his first year at university and worked and established his own business. At the time of the interview, he worked within the transport sector

- **Informant 6**

I6 is a 60 year-old man. He grew up in a village in Punjab and came to Sweden as a student and for settlement. His mother tongue is Punjabi. He has lived in Sweden for 37 years. In Punjab, he studied at university and during his first years in Sweden he also pursued studies at university. At

the time of the interview, he worked with the public sector

- **Informant 7**

I7 is a 65-year-old man who came as student in Sweden. He grew up in a village in Punjab. His mother tongue is Punjabi. He pursued college education and has a BA degree from Punjab. In Sweden he studied during his first year at university and also worked. He has lived in Sweden for 27 years. At the time of the interview he worked within the industry.