
Summary of Articles

The Construction of Community by Newcomer Indian Residents in Tokyo: Examining the Practices of the Intimate Sphere through the ‘Cohabitation’ Perspective

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This paper uses the perspective of ‘cohabitation’ to examine how newcomer Indian residents in Tokyo have secured their own space of habitation and constructed an Indian community. As argued by Judith Butler, the ‘cohabitation’ perspective provides insight into preferable ways of sharing space for habitation with others. Tokyo’s population of newcomers from the South Indian states, where IT industries are highly developed, has been increasing rapidly since the beginning of the twenty-first century. Focusing on activities within the intimate sphere, I analyze the formation of family, school education, and cultural activities. I also investigate community construction and suggest possibilities for ideal modes of cohabitation in Japan and the strategies for realizing them.

Most newcomer Indians, who are IT engineers, and their family members share the sojourners’ mentality, which is characterized by two different attributes: maintaining spatial, cultural, and emotional attachment to their homeland, and developing a cosmopolitan self-consciousness as English-speaking global citizens. As the young, bachelor IT engineers stay longer in Japan, they usually search for marriage partners through internet matrimony services for Indians, go back to India and get married, then come back to Japan again with their new family. They have constructed an Indian town called Little India around Nishikasai, Edogawa Ward. Typical South Indian families there usually live in the apartment complex provided by the semi-governmental Urban Renaissance Agency and send their children to newly established Indian international schools that adopt both Indian and International education systems. They also strengthen their own linguistic and cultural identities by participating in cultural events held every year by associations organized by linguistic affiliation. Consequently, Little India has become their own space of habitation with various functions for maintaining Indian lifestyle, custom, culture, and tradition.

The most important issue for newcomer Indians in Tokyo is not how they can develop their ability to adapt to the norms of Japanese society but rather how they can construct their own space of habitation where they can maintain attachment to their homeland while also responding flexibly to transnational communication as global citizens. Achieving cohabitation with them would require us to recognize that “others’ habitations” exist within the particular spaces we regard as ‘our own habitation,’ and by so doing, to allow others to continue to occupy these spaces. Furthermore, we should listen carefully to the voices of these other groups, give new consideration to their significance, and try to work out strategies to reflect these voices, as well as others’, in government policies.