

Student Article - 01

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Anusha Kiran

RV College of Architecture

## Human Migration

Reverse Migration - Understanding reverse migration through the case study of a family of three. Kumar, a restaurant waiter; his wife Padma, domestic help and their 10-year-old son Chetan. The family had moved to Bangalore three years ago and were slowly building a life there only for the pandemic to strike and render them jobless. The couple have painstakingly come to the decision of moving back to their village in North Karnataka, with hopes to return to the city someday.

The house is overcome with a sense of doom as they pack their meager belongings bought with care and extensive planning. They have already bid adieu to their neighbors and friends and are the first family in their vataara to succumb to the adversities of the pandemic. They have booked tickets in the local bus to Gulbarga, the city closest to their village, Shyamanahalli. They are prepared to wait in the platforms of the Gulbarga Station for a minimum of 8-10 hours with snacks in steel dabbas, bedsheets and makeshift bag-pillows.

A Displaced Home Of the family of three, the only person excited to be going back to the comforts of their village was Chetan. To get him prepared for a lifestyle in the city and with big dreams for their child, Kumar and Padma admitted Chetan to a private school irrespective of its exorbitant fees and unending overhead expenses. Having studied in a Kannada medium school previously, Chetan never got along with his English-speaking friends. All of his friends lived in better neighborhoods and larger houses, got dropped to school in cars and had fancy stationery. Chetan was forced to walk to school and used his cousin's hand-me-downs such as bags and stationery. On occasions such as birthdays, his classmates wore new clothes and bought chocolates for the whole class. On the first year of his birthday in the city, Chetan cried and threw tantrums wanting new clothes and chocolates for all of his friends. A tight slap on the face and several hits on his legs washed away his dreams of being the center of attention for once. On the occasion of his birthday, he quietly walked to school in his uniform, with no chocolates but his favorite food, chicken curry and chapatis freshly and lovingly made by his mother for lunch. The

same routine followed for the next three years and he slowly started to detest chicken curry and refused to eat it over time.

He was mediocre at best with studies and was often scolded by his teachers for showing a lack of interest and refusing to put in efforts to learn to the best of his abilities. His friends made fun of his accent and his lack of English-speaking skills. He developed a fear of public-speaking and would shy away from taking initiative. He sat back and simply watched as his friends pulled his hair, threw his books around and snatched his lunchbox. Pre-teen kids can be merciless and Chetan bore the brunt of it.

In contrast, Chetan had fond memories of his early childhood that he often reminisced about. He had been a kite flying champion amongst his friends and would spend hours making kites in different colors and shapes. Suraj, Deepa and Chetan, all about the same age, were joined at the hip all day long and lived on the same street back in the village. Overtime, the memory of his village, as memories often do, had taken a shape and color of its own. On his worst days, Chetan would retreat to these memories and imagine himself flying high on one his own, brightly colored kites. With the expectations of going back to the village of his musings, Chetan was the first to pack his bags all too ready to leave his English-speaking friends behind.

Within the first couple of days of returning, Chetan knew something was amiss. Deepa had dropped out of school and was busy helping her mother in household chores. Deepa's mother always looked at Chetan suspiciously whenever he went by her house. Suraj's family had moved to Mysore and his house was in shambles from disuse, much similar to Chetan's memories of him. Even after a few weeks, Chetan couldn't shake off the feeling that he'd not truly returned. The memories of comfort his village had provided him with were nowhere to be found and over time Chetan began to miss certain aspects of his life in the city unbeknownst to him like the hustle and bustle of the city, their neighbor Irfaz's loud Punjabi music, the lights and surprisingly, the people.

He did not like the school in his village with its dong bell that the peon would sometimes forget to ring. He smirked at his teachers and friends for their weird accent while speaking English, which was worse than his and hated that not all his classmates wore uniforms. Chetan was forced back and forth from the home that was, the home that was meant to be and the home that is, leaving him with an ever-present displaced sense of home.

The home of Aspiration Kumar had dropped out of school in the 7th grade and used to accompany his father to their fields, ploughing land and preparing crops for harvest. He had had no plans of moving to the city until one day, Shiva, his classmate from school, rolled into the village in his brand-new red colored Maruti car. Shiva had moved to the city a couple of years ago and was in the real estate business. He wore sunglasses, perfume and a shiny gold bracelet and spoke so highly of the city, Kumar decided then and there that ploughing in the fields all day was not the life for him.

By the time Shiva was on his way back, Kumar was convinced he was destined to live in the city. He slowly began to convince Padma and his parents and within two months, the couple with their 6-year-old son moved to the city. As soon as they settled in, Kumar contacted Shiva who answered his call and promptly shut him off after. That did not deter the mile-high dreams of a fancy-car and gold bracelet for Kumar and he found himself a job as a waiter in a restaurant close-by. The pay was less and the hours were long but the glitz and glamor of city life kept him occupied. Padma took up a job as a daily maid in an apartment nearby and they gradually se

Initially the couple somehow managed finances, using the money they had saved up over the years. But with Chetan's mounting school fees, rent and innumerable other overhead expenses, money was always short. Kumar was always left with a sense of despair and foreboding but his bright-red four-wheeled dream pushed him forward, refusing to quit. With growing disdain about the increasing gap between his dreams and reality, Kumar became easily irritable and always went about with a scowl on his face.

As time went by, Kumar could not recognize the person that he was becoming. He was getting worse at his job, was often forgetful and impatient. Having had enough of Kumar's taciturn behavior, the manager of the staff in the hotel dismissed him just as the pandemic struck and the world came to a standstill. Kumar tried his best not to give in to the sink hole that was pulling him down day by day and applied for other jobs over the next couple of weeks but in vain. Their savings quickly dwindled and the dreamy-eyed, city-entranced villager in Kumar fought to come to terms with the reality of going back to his kaccha house and the stench of cow dung.

On the day of leaving, Kumar vowed to himself to come back and refused to bid adieu to his long-held dreams. Back in the village, he begrudgingly settled to help his father in the fields and look after their sizable cattle. The first couple of days were the hardest but he gradually began to accept his fate and toiled on day after day. Once he could see past his city-crazed perception of his village, Kumar realized he had terribly missed the quaint streets and a certain inexplicable togetherness that was exclusive to the rural populace. His breezy and fun countenance slowly resurfaced



Source: Dipon Bose | Shreeja

and Kumar felt truly at home in the confines of his familiar village and its simple life.

One evening, two months after they had returned, sipping tea in the verandah of his house and waving at the passers-by, Kumar couldn't think of a reason good enough for him to return to the city.

### Of Adventures and Identity

Padma's childhood was spent being an inadvertent mother to all her siblings while her mother ploughed fields and reared cattle. She dropped out of school after fourth grade and was completely engulfed into the world of cooking and cleaning and looking after her four younger siblings. Padma was shy by nature and mostly kept to herself. The few friends she'd made at school had moved on with their lives leaving her behind in her own little cocoon. She never realized how the years went by until she was married at the age of 16 to Kumar. Her lifestyle did not take much of a turn post marriage, her responsibilities had just shifted from one house to another. She quietly went about her daily chores and did not have much of a social life. The people of the village saw her as a reserved, well-mannered and obedient girl and she was all too happy to fit into that role, away from gossiping mouths and peering eyes.

When Kumar decided to move to the city, Padma was reluctant and scared about adjusting to life in the city. She had little practice making friends and couldn't imagine leaving the comforts of her village. Upon Kumar's insistence, she hesitantly packed her things and put on a brave face for her husband's sake.

A few weeks of sitting idly at home with no-one to talk to and not much to do, Padma slowly built up the courage to step out of the house. Knowing nothing much beyond housework, Padma asked her neighbor, Geeta if there were some odd jobs for her to do. Geeta worked as a house maid in a fancy high-rise apartment close to their home. She pulled a few strings and got Padma a job in the same apartment that she worked in. Padma, surprising herself, quickly became good friends with Geeta who introduced her to a couple of more friends. This small group of women in the pretext of working would often slip away from home and went about exploring the city that lay before them. They would giggle all the way and buy small plastic packets of popcorn and glass bottles of Coke in the Talkies, eat bhel puri on the street side and gaze at women of the city who so confidently wore jeans and fancy tops.

This one day after watching a block-buster Kannada movie, the group felt especially adventurous and went to a local shop and bought fitted jeans and short, western tops for themselves. They sneaked it into their respective homes and hid it away from their husbands, afraid of their reaction. That was their last outing before the pandemic wreaked havoc in their



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lives and the apartment association forbade maids from entering into the premises. Padma lost her job and eventually moved back to the village.

Padma understood early on that she was no more the shy-and-reserved-Padma the villagers were accustomed to but they would in no way accept the curious-and-fun-Padma. She learned to hide behind her pallu again and go about her everyday chores. She terribly missed Geeta and often reminisced about her rickshaw rides and her packets of popcorn but would sooner or later get pulled back to the tasks at hand. The only thing remaining of city-girl Padma was her single pair of jeans and her shimmery pink top. It was hidden away at the bottom of her trunk, to remain untouched for the months to come.