

UNDERSTANDING DIASPORA: FROM COLONIAL TO POST-COLONIAL PERIOD

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Received: 06 Jun 2019

Accepted: 11 Jun 2019

Published: 28 Jun 2019

ABSTRACT

This paper has been written to provide a framework to understand the Indian Diaspora in a better way. An attempt has been made to understand all types of Indian diasporic people living abroad. This paper would explain the diversity in the Indian diaspora and trace the patterns of the migration starting from the colonial period till present. It would show how the diaspora have been influenced by the adopted new country. However, an attempt has been made to explain the unity in diversity, although the Indians divide themselves into groups on the different basis such as region, religion, caste, language, etc still they have a common bond that is of Indianness which keeps them tied to each other.

KEYWORDS: *Indian Diaspora, Motivated by the Globalization,*

INTRODUCTION

One of the most famously known community is Diaspora. This community lives in the host land and is deeply connected to the homeland. It is with the emergence of this community that many changes like economical, political, national, international, etc have occurred. Diasporas are motivated by the globalization due to which they decide to move. They have strong feelings of belongingness towards both the countries i.e the host country and the native country. This paper has been written to make an attempt to understand the lives of diaspora and see this community as a set of people with a specific identity. It is a very difficult task to set guidelines to divide the diasporas as per their migration patterns. The different identities present in the foreign land makes it difficult for the policymakers as well as the researchers to look at diaspora as a single identity. This paper would throw light on this aspect that how the feelings of Indianness continues even when the diasporas have their own identities and many differences of religion, culture, language, reasons of migration, place of migration, time of migration, stay at the host country, etc.

The Diaspora

Diaspora is the term which means dispersed. The term Diaspora has etymologically taken from the word diasperien where 'dia' meaning 'away' and 'speirein' meaning 'scatter' or 'sow'. There are various definitions of diaspora given in different aspects. Initially, before World War II, it was applied for Jews outside Israel, the term according to the Oxford Advanced Learner's dictionary states 'the movement of people from any nation or group away from their own country'. It meant dispersal and migration of Jews after the Babylonian exile to either live or work in different parts of the world. It also meant their longing for a homeland which was yet to be acquired.

This word diaspora is oftenly said as a synonym to expatriate, refugee, immigrant, exile community, ethnic community, etc. all types of immigration and all acts of migrated people can be summarized under this category of

diaspora. It is remarkably difficult to set a paradigm for diaspora as every community is completely different from the other. The explanatory confusion has somehow led to the loss of distinctiveness of the diaspora. Therefore this paper will attempt to make a concept and place Indian diaspora under that concept. The main elements for this conceptualization are as follows:

Migration and Settlement After Crossing Borders

It refers to the people who have crossed the boundaries of their state and settled in the new land. This cross-border migration can be willingly or unwillingly. This migration leads to a long term or maybe permanent stay in the host country or the adopted country. Several types of people fall under this category like the ethnic communities of all kinds and also the people of partitioned countries like India and Pakistan fall under this category.

Participation at the Foreign Land

Settling down at the new land is equally important as the participation in various things of the foreign land like the political and economic system of the country. The immigrants always affect the economic, social and political conditions of the foreign country. In order to secure their existence, they always try to compete with the other communities present there. As it is said that the more the person is settled in the new land the more he could participate in the development of the country. Many Indians have already achieved a successful life abroad which sets an example for others.

Homesickness

Homesickness is not only about missing the homeland but also about being conscious about the homeland, it means a feeling to keep in mind the motherland which exists beyond the borders of the country where a person has migrated to. The ways of this consciousness can vary like it can be retained in a person's mind, can be recreated as a version of homeland at the host country or can exist in the form of having some connections to the homeland such as political, social and economical networks. In case a person migrates to the third country then this feeling of homesickness is for the two left countries.

The Construction of Multi-Dimensional Self

It means when a person migrates, his identity is framed with the help of both the countries i.e the homeland and the host land and is definitely not marked by strict boundaries. It is a distinct identity though it keeps on changing with the changing generations. Both the native land and the adopted land plays a crucial role in the formation of the identity. It is clearly visible in the variations of diasporic groups in the same adopted country out of the same homeland. It also happens that due to this change the diaspora community is often remarked as a minority group in the homeland. Instead of rejoining their motherland after coming back to it, the returnees face double-diasporation i.e they start liking the lifestyle of the adopted land equally to that of their motherland.

The Indian diaspora is a huge term which includes a wide variety of people living outside India. It refers to the people of Indian origin who have migrated from the territories that belong to the Indian Republic. They have their own spatiotemporal dimensions just like any other type of diaspora like Irish diaspora, Dutch diaspora, Persian diaspora, etc. Approximately 20 million Indian diasporas have been spread across the globe. The history of Indian diaspora can be traced from the dates back to the Buddhist era or even further back to the time of Indus Valley Civilisation. If we deconstruct the

word- Indian Diaspora, it is very clear that it refers to a set of people who belong to Indian origin, people who are no longer Indian citizens or NRIs(Non-residing Indians).

Classification of the Diversities

The roots of the Indian diaspora lie deep in the diverse socio-cultural background and it also includes the major forms of human migration under it. This diversity shows the diverse Indian social set-up, the patterns of migration as well as the changes occurred due to the host land adoption. Many different experiences have been faced by the set of Indians who plan to migrate to a foreign land. All the good and bad experiences a person faces depends on the host country as well as the migratory that how comfortably he accepts or rejects the situations.

The government of India has already classified the Indian diasporas into three categories i.e NRIs (non-residing Indians), PIOs(persons of Indian origin) and OICs (the overseas Indian citizens). This paper is an attempt to study the major patterns of migration, the identity of Indian immigrants in other diasporas and the way the Indian diaspora participates in various policies of the Indian government.

Initial Wave of Migration

Initially, the people of India began to move out of India as traders, laborers, preachers, gypsies, sailors and many other forms. Doing trade with other civilizations proved to be very beneficial for the Indian traders who were afraid of doing trade in foreign land. Many of the folk songs and folklore have been famous telling about the longing of the homeland of the people living far away from home as well as the adventures related to the migrations. The famous records like of Alexander the great, of Greeks and of Arabs are important historical sources which provide relevant information about the Indian trading activities and settlements throughout central Asia, West Asia, and Africa.

The main regions of trade were Gujarat, Bengal and Tamil Nadu where the merchants were earning very well and many merchants of the eastern part of the world were highly influenced by this. People from different parts of the world starting coming to India for trade though initially, the stay of traders in India was not a permanent one. And many of the Indians also began for the same but the early set of migrations from India could form a Diaspora.

The colonial rule has had a great impact on the migrations the economic patterns and the rapid growth of plantation are the main reasons for this. This slowly and slowly led to permanent settlements of the people where the people were happier in the foreign land and this forms the Old diaspora. Till this time a big group of people was known as Indian diaspora which includes Bangladeshis, Pakistanis as well as Sri Lankans.

Migrations With the Government Help

The government was helping the migrations which included the indentures and similar type of migration. India was the main source to get cheap labor which was very much required for the plantation but slavery was completely abolished by this time due to which the labor has to be paid. It was during the British rule in India that around 1.5 million people were already sent as the laborers to different countries of the world like Trinidad, Mauritius, Tobago, Jamaica, Fiji, New Zealand, Burma, etc. like the indentured laborers, the kangani and maistry system started where a head was appointed on a network of people who supervised the laborers, this was most common in the southern part of India. These types of laborers were not bound by any type of contract but had to work in order to pay a debt which they had taken in advance.

This kangani and maistry system were good in one sense that it recruited families, so the people could move with their families. The discussions on the diaspora of the initial stage that was indentured and similar would be incomplete without discussing three important aspects.

The first is drawing parallelism between indentured laborers and slavery. Though equating these both would not be correct to one extent but there are many similarities between the two. If we talk about the dissimilarities between the two it is mainly the technical issues and nothing else. Slavery was a kind of permanent status which the coming generations also had to follow but the indentured laborers were paid labor who used to work under a temporary contract. In real life, it would be right to say that the indentured and the slaves were treated very much equal in a dehumanizing way. Most of the indentured laborers were Hindus and very few Muslims, so religion became another instrument for exploitation.

The second is the success and many good achievements which the indentured have attained always overshadow the allegations put on them. From the initial settlements of the indentured laborers to the successful life, they spent in the foreign land. Many of these well-settled indentured play a vital role in the socio-economical background of the country.

The third main issue is that of the identity amongst these indentured. These indentured laborers were termed as a coolie in the initial stages which continued for a long time. These laborers carried the feelings of exile with them and a certain loss which always remains in their minds. All this is very much reflected through their writings. The sense of belongingness to India was very strong and so was the feeling of isolation in the foreign land. The associations with the new culture have led to the evolution of new subcultures often known as Little Indias. The people were following the same culture, rituals, and traditions which happened during their migration which is not prevalent these days.

Convict labor or penal settlements was another type of the colonial migration which was started by the Britishers in the late 18th century for the increasing demand in the response to the requirement of labor for doing the developmental works in the colonies. Most of these types of laborers used to live in the colonies. Some of them got to mix with the other Indian migrants and many others used to marry the local women and get settled. Though this system wasn't accepted much and was discontinued in the mid of 20th century.

Apart from this indentured labor, another form of very important government-sponsored migration was of the semi-skilled and skilled labor force, which was recruited directly by the government on different posts. This category included many Sikhs and Pathans who were recruited as security guards. A large number of Indians in British colonies later got into good business and even money-lending. The sex ratio was decreasing at a great speed which was due to the separation of families as mostly the males of the families used to work abroad and the families stayed back in India. The earned money was sent back to the families through a person only.

Free Migration

Free migration is another important type of migration along with the government-sponsored migration. It is also called the free-passage Indians. Most of the people of this community belonged to the traders from all over India, as the Indian traders had successfully established good businesses across the Asian as well as African countries. This community migrates to earn a better livelihood it consists of unskilled or semi-skilled laborers like cobblers, barbers, etc, and the skilled laborers like lawyers, teachers, etc. the rituals and traditions of their homeland were the things which helped them to have a connection with their homeland. Many of the indentured laborers returned back after completing their term but

were unable to settle back in their homeland. And therefore many of them go back to their migrated countries.

Such type of migrations was mostly rotational and the permanent settlements happened only after the second world war. These free migrants were very smaller in number as compared to the indentured laborer. They usually try to maintain distance from the laborers. They have contributed a lot in the economy of the country with active participation in the social as well as the legal activities of the country. They were people of good competition for the people of Europe and were often criticized in India.

Migrations After the Second World War

After the second world war by the mid 20th Century, a new migration took growth where people used to migrate for living a better lifestyle and earning well. Most of them were skilled or highly skilled people. Initially, these migrations were to the United Kingdom but later it began in other parts of the world like United States, Australia, and few other Asia-Pacific countries. This migration was also known as Brain-Drain because this community of diaspora got skilled degrees from India but choose to work abroad. However, the scenario changed after the 1990s as the people started investing in India and change of technology and skills started happening. It was only due to the motherland love of the diaspora that all this started to begin.

Many people are against this to use the money earned abroad in India but everything has its pros and cons so it is a fact that these diasporic people have contributed a lot in the Indian economy. One such example of the IT sector which has been kick-start in Bangalore and Hyderabad mainly followed by the rest of India. This industry like many others was fed by the diaspora with all new ideas. Although the fact is that many of these migrations are not permanent migrations and they are categorized as NRIs in India. There has been a great change in labor with the development of the industrialization. But there is always the division of skilled and unskilled labor who are at a distance from each other.

Secondary Migrations

Secondary migrations are also known as Twice migrants, a term coined by Parminder Bachu (1985). It refers to the set of migrants who have re-settled from their homeland to a foreign country. In most of the cases, the remigration happens due to the government policies or discrimination in the society. Despite being in love with their motherland they share an equally strong bond with their first migrated country where they have lived for long and earned their livelihood. This type of migration often challenges the concept of roots as a person who is attached to the roots would never leave it for another time.

Migration of the Indian Students

India students have been migrating a lot in recent years. It is a kind of trend going on in India. This leads to not only brain-drain but also the capital outflow as the students pay huge fees and the living expenditures also goes to the host country. India is said as the second largest importer of overseas education which costs \$10 billion annually. This set of migrants are known as Cash Cows (Baas 2006), who get skilled up and earn their livelihood in the foreign land. The host countries also provide many sorts of benefits to the students which attracts them and they want to join the universities and later work and settle there. Student migration acts as a gateway for the middle-class people who desire to live abroad as many of them attain permanent residency after completing their studies and with certain formalities.

Only stating this green pasture factor is a one side factor which results in the outflow of the students whereas there are so many other factors in India which are also responsible for this like lack of quality education. Lack of good jobs, good salaries, the gap in supply and demand, availability of education loan, etc. Though many of these problems have been decreased to some extent and the Indian government is continuously working to frame such policies due to which the students could study and work in their own country. So the fact is the student migration lead to either permanent or long term settlement in abroad which forms a type of diaspora.

Migration due to Political influence

Although the migration initially happened due to the economical need of a person there is a political push as well which results in the migration of people. Mostly such migration is an outcome of a conflict. Political diasporas are less willing to compromise with the existing situations which makes them move abroad. Some of the commonly known political diasporas are the Sikhs, the Kashmiris, and the Naxalites. The Sikh diaspora emerged out of the unrest of Punjab and the most important event which took place i.e Blue Star was one of the reason due to which this type of group was formed. Immediately after this, the Sikhs demanded to have a separate state but a considerable number of them were even against this idea of having Khalistan, a separate state.

Position of Women Diasporas

Writing about the women diaspora is not to separate their migration or to discriminate them but to understand the migration of women in a deeper sense with their experiences and understanding. Women have been an equal part of the migrations whereas the migration of women was not talked about much. In fact, the migration of women has always been very difficult and specific to them. As working as indentured laborers they had to handle dual suppression – one from their bosses and other from their own men. As a migrant wife, they always try to recreate the Indian setting in abroad which is many time not accepted by their own family. As skilled or semi-skilled labor, they work hard either to improve the financial conditions of their families or to get settled themselves. And the set of highly skilled women has to balance the family at home along with the work she does. Women largely migrate as a framework of patriarchy and often preserve themselves as the bearers of Indian traditions. Though the women have been given equal rights and play an important role their self is still questionable. No doubt about the fact that the most common problems arise for the women from gender discrimination and patriarchy.

Distribution of the Indian Diaspora in the World

The first database to calculate the Indian diaspora living in different parts of the world was done by the LM Singhvi Committee, the number given by them was 21 million. As per the latest information was given by the ministry of foreign affairs, it has been increased to 2,16,34,119 out of which 1,00,37,761 are the NRIs and 1,18,72,114 are POIs. The Indian diaspora is widespread in 105 countries of the world. The largest number of Indian diaspora i.e 52,62% is settled in Asia.

Unity in Diversity

The already discussed diversities are further differentiated in the terms of caste, religion, region, economic status, and language. The fact is that the Indian migrants instead of calling them as Indians call them as Punjabis, Bengalis, Gujaratis, etc. this divides India into communities as per their religions and regions instead of showing India as one.

Another important division of the diaspora is the old and new diaspora. All these divisions mark a question on the identity of an Indian. The segregation is done so seriously that in many places these communities talk very less or even don't talk at all to each other. The fact lies that in order to make the communities out of India the differences and the discriminations have been done which makes small groups and these groups often don't cooperate with each other. However if a person tries to stress the common identities of the diaspora, he would feel more united and see that the differences are not at all bigger than the similarities. Indian diaspora should understand about the Indians which is common among them. Many of the Indian diasporas are aware of this fact and have even decided to be united but still, there is a good lot of people who are happy living in their small groups and communities.

CONCLUSIONS

An attempt has been made through this paper to provide a systematic representation of the Indian diaspora. It has been tried to explain diaspora in terms of definition, distribution, and composition. The stress has been laid to understand the unity in diversity. It talks about the diversity of the Indian diaspora in terms of migration, the period of migration as well as the reason for the migration. If we look at the Indian diaspora which begun from the colonial period, it can be classified into two categories i.e colonial and post-colonial diaspora. If we talk about the colonial diaspora, there are self-sponsored groups and government-sponsored groups, which further divide into indentured, traders, returnees and short time professionals. The post-colonial diaspora also has the subtypes like the semi-skilled, highly-skilled, unskilled, students and political migrations. All these categories are further divided on the basis of caste, color, region, religion, language, etc. The researchers have to deeply understand the theoretical perspective of diverse India. It leads to the fact that although the Indian diasporas are having the feeling of Indians they have categorized themselves in further categories.

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