

## **From Labor to Longing – Tracing the Journey of Indian Diaspora**

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### **ABSTRACT**

The word ‘Diaspora’ was initially used in connection with the dispersal of Jews when they were enforced into exile to Babylonia. However, today it has come to mean any sizeable community of a particular nation or region living outside its own country and sharing some common ties that give them an ethnic identity and consequent bonding. However, what constitutes ethnic identity is fluid and changes over time. It means different things to different people at different points of time, place, and circumstance. For the first generation, it means strong feelings about a country of their origin. From the second generation onwards ties with homeland get gradually replaced by those with the adopted country because latter does not remain adopted. It becomes their own country, yet not completely, the identity crisis remains. Certain elements constitute markers of identity such as food, clothes, language, religion, music, dance, myths, legends, customs, etc. These markers can be retained, discarded or adopted differently by an expatriate at different times and places, but a feeling of oneness, a tug of the roots persists even after several years. This feeling results in the formation of ‘Diasporic Community’

**Key Words** – Diaspora, Waves of Indian Diaspora, Structure of Indian Diaspora

### **Indian Diaspora**

The human movement has always taken place as nomads, hunters, traders, cultural carriers, exiles, and conquerors. Indians too have migrated since the dawn of history. Recent population studies suggest that the Indian Diaspora of about 25 million people is dispersed in about 110 countries of the world. These migrations can be classified in three waves.

### **The First Wave**

The Indian Diaspora in East and South Africa and East and West Indies and other islands has a history of over 150 years. This first wave of migration has largely been ignored because these migrants were colonial, indentured labours of the 19th century. The colonial government and the ruling elite were simply not interested in the lot of these unfortunate people. However, the descendants of these people have written the history of their people emphasizing their different origins. As suffering and pain is the most prominent element of the indentured labour experience of the *girmittias* as permit, *girmitt* holders went to work in the East and West Indies on the work of sugar plantations as well as sawmills.

### **The Second Wave**

In the second half of the 20th century, Indians migrated as professionals leading to the coming of the term, the 'brain drain.' While India struggled as a resource scarce country after independence, it actually aided developed and rich country like U.K. and the U.S.A. by providing them with some of the best and fully trained skilled human workforce that generated knowledge, wealth and services for them.

### **The Third Wave**

The third wave is the migration from the mid-nineties mainly to the industrialized, developed economy. The situation today largely reflects Success Story of the Indian Diaspora of Silicon Valley and other professional mainly settled in U.K., North America, and Europe. Not only that, there is a steady flow of remittance from the Gulf as the Indian workers adding to the well-being of their families. Much has been written, discussed about the third wave of Diaspora. Bollywood is now making films like 'Namesake' which is based on Lahiri's novel '*The Namesake*'.

The third wave of Diaspora mainly represents the movements of the largely middle class fairly well educated and English speaking population who are professionals in the field of medicine, industry and more particularly in software and Information Technology.

### **Two Fold Structure of Indian Diaspora**

Broadly, there is a twofold structure of India Diaspora. Out of India Diaspora and Into India Diaspora. The history of Into Indian Diaspora dates back to the fourth century B.C. and

second century A.D. to coming of Greeks, Jews, Parsis, Sakas, and Huns up to British. Into India, Diaspora is characterized by the pattern of conquest and settlement with or without assimilation. On the other hand, Out of Indian Diaspora is characterized by uprootedness, identity crisis, acculturation, hybridity and it also reflects attempts to assimilate, to adopt and to adapt.

Indian diaspora can also be classified into two kinds:-

- 1) Forced Migration to Africa, Fiji or the Caribbean due to the reason of slavery or indentured labor in 18th or 19th century.
- 2) Voluntary Migration to U.S.A., U. K. Germany, France or other European countries for professional or academic purposes.

According to Amitav Ghosh, the Indian Diaspora is one of the most important demographic dislocations of Modern Times.

Makarand Paranjape has discussed two phases of Indian Diaspora I) Visitor Diaspora II) Settler Diaspora.

The first Diaspora consisted of disprivileged and subaltern classes forced alienation was a one-way ticket to a distant diasporic settlement. The return to Homeland was highly impossible due to lack of proper means of transportation, economic deficiency, and vast distances so that Homeland became only the 'sacred icon' in their diasporic imagination.

However, the second Diaspora was the result of man's choice and inclination towards material, academic, professional gains and business interests. It is particularly the representation of privilege and access to contemporary advanced technology and communication. Here no dearth of money or means is visible which resulted in multiple visas and frequent flyer utilities.

South Asian Diaspora is the term commonly used to refer to people who emigrated from and belong to one of the ethno- cultural groups originating in the geopolitical region of the world where countries such as India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Nepal and Sri -lanka are located.

Diaspora Studies /Transnational studies has always stressed upon the assumption that identity and belonging are essentially processes of change influenced by issues of ethnicity and gender. So the diaspora theory indicates a discourse about the “other”, about the “difference”. How migration affects, the diaspora subjectivities is a main issue addressed by Diaspora theory. As this effect is based on the relationship of the diaspora space with the host country as well as with the ethnic difference the subject brings with it , there are many as many varieties of diaspora situations as there are kinds of migration under the influence of so many conditioning factors, the obviously, theory resists homogenization of ethnicity.

There are certain issues raised by recent writers that questioned old assumptions of the diaspora discourse. In today’s multicultural and global societies, there are writers like Vassanji, Peter Nazareth, and Shani Mootoo, with multiple homes, involving multiple migrations and for whom, India, the home of their forefathers, is only an abstractions.

There are examples of writers like Naipaul, Rushdie, Pico Iyer, and Vikram Seth, who not only grew up abroad, but also would feel out of place in India. As the “Diaspora” self is changing in character as the boundaries open up in this age of globalization. It becomes more and more ‘transnational’ and ‘global’ self. Marginalization and heterogeneity seem to define the contemporary condition of the Indian diaspora. In fact, the most of Indian diaspora in recent times can no longer be regarded as displaced communities because in most places they are the sizeable community of affluence and influence. In addition to this multimedia, technology enabled them to set up close linkages with people back home turning them into virtual communities.

Besides , the Indian diaspora in the US, England, Canada and Australia—involves diverse communities based on native linguistic, regional and sometimes even caste identities- - such as Punjabis, Sindhis, Bengalis, Tamilians etc.

Today, Indian diaspora spread across the globe is increasingly becoming transnational in character. This is particularly true of the non-immigrant generations raised in countries outside India. Writers like Hari Kunzru, Shanna Singh, Jhumpa Lahiri, and Mera Syal even celebrate their hybridity and ethnicity in the countries of adoption, and some even distance themselves from the India connection.

The formation of the Indian diaspora is one of the most significant demographic dislocations of modern times. Critics like Sudesh Mishra classified it as the 'sugar' and the 'masala' diaspora. The distinction is also made between the old and the new diasporas. On one hand, we have semi-voluntary migration of indentured peasants to the plantation colonies such as Fiji, Trinidad, Mauritius, South Africa, Malaysia, Surinam, and Guyana, roughly between the years 1830 and 1917, and on the other hand, we find postmodern dispersal of new migrants of all classes to thriving metropolitan centers such as Australia, the U. S., Canada and Britain. This same classification is termed by other critics as 'forced diaspora' and 'voluntary' diaspora. Another scholar Viney Kripal calls it as the 'diaspora of labour' verses 'diaspora of longing'.

Indian Diaspora in the last century was mainly a personal choice of individuals, particularly for academic pursuits or economic gains either towards the Middle East or to the western countries, particularly to U.S.A. The native residents in each of these countries responded differently to the waves of immigration but in all most all the cases the expatriate did face a clash of opposing cultures, a sense of alienation which was subsequently followed by the attempts to adjust, to adapt, to accept and finally either form a separate identity as a cultural group to be assimilated and hence acculturated. All this is reflected in the writings, now placed under the umbrella term of Expatriate Writings or Diasporic Literature.

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