



INDIAN DIASPORA IN AFRICA – AN OVERVIEW

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Abstract

The Indian Diaspora, comprising People of Indian origin and Non-Resident Indians, as India itself, constitutes a heterogeneous and global community, representing diversity of forms, types, geographies and times of formation. Historically, the dispersion of people from India and the formation of Indian Diaspora communities is the result of different waves of migration over hundreds of years driven by a variety of reasons: slavery under mercantilism, indentured labour under colonization, and guest work programmes post colonialism. Indian communities in Africa constitute 9.11% of the total strength of India Diaspora and they reside in 46 countries of Africa inhabiting all linguistic, cultural or geographical regions of the continent. These people faced great difficulties in finding resources, wealth, and place along with challenging climatic and physical conditions of the region. However, their hard work, commitment, courage, given a hand them to conquer the unfavourable conditions and stay alive there, away from their country of origin. Migrations have occurred throughout human history. Human migration generally refers to the movement of people from one place or state in the world to another for taking up permanent or semi-permanent residence, usually across a political boundary. This can occur at a variety of measures, i.e. intercontinental, intracontinental, and interregional. Either migration of people from one place to another can be voluntarily or they may be forced to move. Accompanied with migration are many challenges that migrant's experience; these may be physical, financial, psychological or emotional. Human migration affects population patterns and characteristics, social and cultural arrangements and processes, economies, and the physical environment. As people move, their cultural personalities and ideas diffuse with them, creating and changing traditional landscapes. This paper attempts to present some qualitative and quantitative characteristics of Indian Diaspora with special reference to African countries.

Key Words: *Diaspora, New Diaspora, Africa, Non-Resident Indians.*

Introduction

The term diaspora is used to refer to any people or ethnic population forced or induced to leave their traditional ethnic homelands; being dispersed throughout other parts of the world, and the ensuing developments in their dispersal and culture. In the beginning, the term Diaspora was used by the Ancient Greeks to refer to citizens of a grand city who migrated to a conquered land with the purpose of colonization to assimilate the territory into the empire. The original mean Indian diaspora has a significance presence throughout the globe. India has been the highest receiver of remittances since few years. So, the contribution of the diaspora to our Gross Domestic Production (GDP) is pronominal.

India's booming economy, the appetite of its public and private sector enterprises for investment overseas, and its leadership in science and technology, have together shaped its policy toward Africa. As such, India is focused on intensifying economic and commercial ties whilst contributing to African countries' development through cooperation and technical assistance. A fundamental characteristic of people is their movement from one place to another place; anthropology has noted nomadism as a stage previous human settlement in communities. Even after their evolution as communities, throughout the civilization human beings have been experiencing temporary, seasonal or permanent migration from



their original habitat either voluntarily or forced. Migration is closely related to a variety of demographic, political and socio-economic factors. People who migrate also carry their socio-cultural heritage with them and protect their distinct identities. There is an increasing trend among scholars to study migrant communities, having a sense of their motherland and a differentiated identity.

India-Africa Relationship

India has more than 3000 year's history of cultural and commercial relations with Africa. Commercial relations have a longer history than cultural contacts. Indian sources indicate that there were contacts and trade relations between Dravidians and Babylonians. as early as the 17th century B.C. On their way to Mesopotamia, Indian merchants and sailors would have certainly visited Southern Arabia, which is situated on the maritime route and the Eastern part of Horn of Africa - the Somali peninsula. In modern history major gesticulates of migration are closely related to colonialism. In the days of the British Raj, Indians were taken as indentured labourers to far-flung parts of the Empire in the nineteenth and early twentieth century. It has been estimated that during 1829-1924 about 769,437 Indians migrated to Mauritius, South Africa, Reunion Island, Seychelles and East African region. However, prevailing opportunities in Africa still attract significant number of Indian migrants. Majority of the new immigrants go there on temporary work permit and do not seek permanent citizenship. After working there for some time, they explore opportunity in Western countries, and as soon as they get a chance they emigrate from these countries. In late 1990s, this trend increased many fold and illegal migrants also took advantage of this. The High Level Committee on Indian Diaspora (2001) estimated the total number of Indian Diaspora in Africa 2,063,178 which includes 1,969,708 People of Indian Origins (PIO's), 89,405 Non Resident Indians (NRI's) and 3,500 stateless people. Latest available estimates on overseas Indians indicate that current strength of Indian Diaspora in the African countries is 2811415 out of those 2590448 are PIOs and rest 220967 are NRIs , while total overseas Indians are 30,843,419, 17,835,407 are PIOs and NRIs13,008,012.

Types of Indian Diaspora in Africa

According to the size of its presence, Indian Diaspora in Africa can be divided in four types such as: (1) Marginal Strength (2) Minimal Strength (3) Dominant Strength (4) Substantial Strength.

Marginal Strength

In this type, countries which have a population of Indian Diaspora below 10,000 could be included. By this criteria Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda, Nigeria, Madagascar, Mozambique, Zambia, Botswana and Zimbabwe would fall in this category. In these countries, strength of Indian Diaspora in terms of total population of host country is very small and is scattered in various regions. Therefore, they do not make for an influential political constituency and there is very little chance of them obtaining political offices on the basis of ethnic identity. However, the Indian Diaspora in these countries are economically well off and culturally keen to retain identity. Some of the leading journalists, prominent academicians and lawyers, who shape public opinion in these countries, are from the Indian communities.

Minimal Strength

This category includes countries where the strength of Indian community is less than 10000 people. There are some 32 African countries which fall under this category such as Algeria, Angola, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Cape Verde Islands, Comoros, Democratic Republic of Congo, Djibouti, Egypt, Equatorial Guinea, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Gambia, Republic of Guinea, Guinea Bissau, Ivory Coast,



Kingdom of Lesotho, Liberia, Malawi, Mali, Mauritania, Morocco, Namibia, Niger, Rwanda, Republic of Sao Tome and Principe, Senegal, Seychelles, Sierra Leone, Sudan, Swaziland and Togo. Indian communities in these countries are spread over a wide area and do not make up one constituency. Moreover, in several cases they are temporary residents working in projects and still hold an Indian Passport. Therefore, in political terms their presence is insignificant and in most of the cases they are not able to obtain political offices in their host-land.

Dominant Strength

In this type we can include countries where Indian communities make a majority in terms of total population of the country. Mauritius is the only country not only in Africa but in entire globe which could be included in this category. Recorded by the High Level Committee on Indian Diaspora that Indian Diaspora in Mauritius as unique and distinctive as here Indian Diaspora constitutes an overwhelming majority- nearly 70% of the total population and they were among first permanent settlers in the island. They play a vital role in the political process of the country and hold important elected posts. In the current parliament of Mauritius there are 36 members of Indian origin; although, unlike other parts of the world they are not an economically affluent community. Indians in Mauritius are not a monolithic or homogenous community. There is diversity on the basis of religion, caste, place of origin, language etc. Each of them has beautifully preserved their cultural identity. They have associations and organizations associated to their culture/language.

Substantial Strength

This category consists of countries in which Indian communities have a population of more than 1,000,000. South Africa and Reunion Island can be included in this category. In South Africa, the total strength of Indian Diaspora is 1,56,0000 and they constitute nearly 3% of the total population of South Africa. They are concentrated in the major industrial centres of South Africa and around 75% of the Indian community lives in Kwazulu Natal. Durban, the capital of this province accounts for a considerable part of the largely urbanized Indian population of this country. This concentration makes them politically influential in this area which is incidentally among highly industrialized and prosperous regions of South Africa.

Concept of ‘New Diaspora’

The Indian overseas community includes the foreign citizens of Indian origin who are called People of Indian Origin (PIO) and Indian passport holders based in foreign countries known as Non-Resident Indians (NRI). This community comprises of various ethnic, linguistic and religious groups, which reflect the cultural and regional diversity of India. Migration phases are varied in terms of historical circumstance, causes, and consequences, and Indians have emigrated in different migration surges and occupational capacities.

During ancient times, they went as merchants and explorers. Though in the last three decades of the 20th century, the character of Indian migration increasingly changed in form, and ‘New Diaspora’ began to emerge. Spurred particularly by more flexible United States policies for highly skilled migrants, Indian migration was increasingly dominated by professionals academics, scientists, engineers, doctors, and managers; many of whom showed considerable entrepreneurial flair. The United States was the prime destination for those who become the NRIs, but this new wave also moved to Britain and its dominions where they established themselves as a major players in global ‘big businesses.’



The 20th century also saw the return of the demand for contract labours in the oil rich states of the Gulf, and in the economies of the South East and East Asia. Such labours became important for India because of the substantial remittances made by the workers. These new contingents of labourers suffered many of the oppressive conditions of their 19th.

Century indentured forebears; but unlike them, they were generally not allowed to settle in their host societies. Over the years, the Indian diaspora grew in the host countries, gained importance and emerged as valuable assets for their new home and host countries.

Assimilation of Diaspora

Today, in Africa, where the Indian diaspora migrates for job opportunities they don't face discrimination to the extent that they face in other countries like the US, European nations and Gulf countries. For example, in Mozambique there is no discrimination against any foreigners, including Indians. They own businesses and work in the government as civil servants without any discrimination whatsoever. According to the World Economic Forum, today there are more than three million people of Indian origin in Africa and day by day their numbers are increasing - especially there is a remarkable rise in Keralite migration. Also, India is the seventh largest investor in Africa with a \$17 billion investment in 2015. The India-Africa trade has risen to \$63 billion in 2017-18. In most countries of Africa, the Indian diaspora has excelled in retail and manufacturing sectors. In countries like Tanzania, Madagascar, Mozambique, Kenya, Uganda, etc. Indians play a pivotal role as a bridge between India and Africa in trade and commerce.

Indian Diaspora in Anglophone Region of Africa.

The Anglophone region consists of Britain and her ex-colonies. Of the several Anglophone countries in Africa - Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda and South Africa - are important countries for India. Indians occupied the middle position in the racial structure between British and Africans. In East Africa, most Indians are traders and quite prosperous, which has led to frequent clashes between the native African population and people of Indian descent. At the social level, Indians are largely from a conservative background. They rarely mix with Africans. Indians in the Anglophone region have tried to preserve their identity, especially with regard to their religion, rituals, festivals, customs, and food habits. Economically, they have integrated well in most the countries. Though multiple levels of diversity exist, this is because of the differences in the socio-historical and political conditions they have been situated in. The Indian community in Anglophone region occupies a unique position. Indians are considered to be a disciplined and model community. Their high and commendable levels of educational attainment and their distinct profile, as compared to others, have created a new image of India as a dynamic nation.

Indian Diaspora in Francophone Region of Africa

Francophone as a region consists of French-speaking countries, and there are around 25 countries in Africa which fall under this category. Indians have contributed significantly to the economy, society, politics, and culture of these countries. Indian labour has been the main force for transforming the physical landscape of many Francophone countries like Mauritius, Reunion, Seychelles, Guadeloupe, and Martinique. The Indian diaspora constitutes an important and unique force in these countries with its significant presence in various businesses and high-skill professions. PIOs are extremely successful in knowledge-based sectors, particularly in Information Technology. They also very successfully run small businesses in countries like Madagascar.



Indian Diaspora in Lusophone Region of Africa: Lusophone Sub-Saharan Africa covers four per cent of the African population. Unlike the Francophone and Anglophone where PIOs can be found in large numbers, in Lusophone Africa, however, their numerical strength is much less - except in Mozambique.

Diaspora as an Agent of Development

The diaspora represents a potent source of skilled labour and expertise for their native countries by virtue of return migration (both temporary and virtual). In the present era of globalization, the diaspora also reflects a goldmine of Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) in their home countries, in addition to setting up vital commercial links to opportunities in untapped markets. However, the avenues by which policymakers can engage with diaspora groups are seldom direct. Foremost lies the lack of conceptual clarity about the inclusions and exclusions under the term 'diaspora' – it can encompass individuals from first-generation migrants to people whose relations migrated many generations ago. In the present context, diaspora includes current migrants and people who gave up their citizenship in their 'home' nations but still maintain links and ties with their homeland. This leads to a heterogeneous mix in diaspora groups, and it is vital for the policy makers to identify groups that have a genuine interest in ushering a strong socio-economic progress in their country of origin. Simultaneously, policy makers need to analyse whether the interests of the diaspora are in sync with those of the homeland citizenry. Lastly, policy makers also need to go beyond the obvious and utilise the benefits accruing because of multi-state connections that the diaspora groups can strengthen.

Remittances and Development

Remittances by individuals and families play a major role in diaspora-homeland relations. There are two contradictory views about the desirability of the flows of money; that result from migration and the consequent emergence of Diasporas. The negative view of that phenomenon highlights the following aspects: Continued migration and remittances will increase the homeland's dependence on their diasporas, encourage further chain-migration and consequently brain drain, create instability in homeland economies, stifle economic initiative, feed consumerism, increase inequality, and lead to developmental distortion and economic decline that may even overshadow the advantages for a minority of beneficiaries. The positive view of remittances seeks to turn each of the negative arguments on its head. Thus, as a result of those trends, so it is argued, homeland economies will have to become responsive to market forces, homelands will get resources for development, because those money's will have multiplier effect, and the remittances will improve income distribution and contribute leading to a higher standard of living (encompassing better education, sustenance for elderly people, and adequate housing for families in homelands). However, neither the negative view nor the positive opinion is totally correct. It is hard to argue that income from remittances is responsible for economic crisis or recession in homelands. It is equally difficult to say that remittances have become reliable engines that can sustain economic growth or narrow the social and economic gaps in the home countries.

Investment and Development.

A significant way in which the diaspora is found to be involved in contributing to the development of their home states is through collective investment in community projects via setting up of hometown associations. Hospitals, schools, literacy initiatives, upskilling missions are some examples where this phenomenon can be seen in action. If we look at the Ghanaian hometown associations in the UK, we can notice that these groups are bound together by a burning desire, to play a role in the development of the people back in Ghana. Going beyond the socio-economic aspect, the bilateral and multilateral connections facilitated by the diaspora must be leveraged to encourage a healthy exchange of ideas and



people. This can be seen in multiple countries and India is no exception, We have a programme called 'Know India' which is run by the Ministry of External Affairs and provides a unique avenue for young professional and students to acquaint themselves with contemporary India. Inter-nation linkages can also influence the decision of people to return home - this is a reverse of 'brain-drain' and has positive implications for the development of the home country.

Conclusion: The Indian community residing in Africa is very special as it has contributed its skills to the development of the country of adoption, and is integrated with the indigenous populace. Staying away from their homeland, the diaspora been very successful in Africa. Furthermore, it is seen that the Indian government is no longer ignorant to the success and activities of the PIO's, as they have retained their emotional, cultural and spiritual links with India. The Government has also recognised the success stories of the community. Also, the potential that the Indians offer for the country's development is highly appreciated. Thus, we see how significant the role and contribution of Indian diaspora is, in Africa. Indians have been visiting the African continent since ages. Despite age-old linkages, modern settlement of Indians in Africa is certainly linked with the colonial exploration of the continent. In the colonial period migration occurred in two ways - by force as well as by choice. Further, large scale migration occurred in the post-independence period. As mentioned, today, Indian communities in Africa constitute 9.11% of the total strength of India Diaspora and they reside in 46 countries of Africa inhabiting all linguistic, cultural or geographical regions of the continent. The influence of Indian communities in their country of adoption varies from one country to another which is largely dependent on their size of population. In case of Mauritius, they have been able to dominate in the political and socio-cultural domain. They have also been an important pillar in the political space of South Africa as well as the socio-cultural life of Reunion Island. On the other hand, Indians have made significant contributions in other countries of Africa although their numerical strength is marginal or minimal. The Diaspora is very special to India. Residing in distant lands, its members have succeeded spectacularly in their chosen professions by dint of their single-minded determination and hard work. Moreover, they have retained their emotional, cultural and spiritual links with the country of their origin. The government of India is no longer oblivious of the communities of Indian origin abroad, increasingly celebrating the success stories of these people while also recognizing the potential they offer for the country's development. The government has made proactive efforts to engage these communities, and people of Indian origin abroad have responded to these initiatives, making significant contributions in several tangible and intangible forms (Mishra, 2016). Recently, under the dominate leadership of Ms. Sushma Swaraj, Ministry of External Affairs Government of India has presented some notable success stories in terms of engaging the Indian diaspora and addressing their issues.

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