

India and its Diaspora: A Comparative Perspective

In the 21st century, the revolution in information technology has eliminated the geographical distances. The process of global economic, social and cultural integration has received a stimulus from the presence of trans-national communities. The past decade has witnessed a phenomenal dynamism among the Diaspora communities due to the recent advancement in information technology and communications. The emerging science and technological advancement has reduced the distance, cost and broken the communication barriers. In fact these developments have not only bring the Diaspora communities and their motherland closer but also have facilitated in bringing the members of their community dispersed around the world together. The term Diaspora is thus recognized in most part of the world today. Major countries of the world have recognized their Diaspora and are maintaining close relationship with them. In these circumstances, study of the Diaspora has got momentum.

There are more than 20 million People of Indian Origin (PIO) spread in 136 countries. Majority of them is located in Africa, Caribbean and Oceania. They immigrated into different bursts and different capacities. During ancient times, they went as merchants from Western India to Africa and the Middle East. From eastern part of South India, they emigrated to Burma, Indonesia and other countries of South East Asia. This group derived its livelihood from international trade and still maintained international kinship and economic network. Some south Indian rulers had sent successful expedition in South East Asia. But largely Indians migrated to Far East and South East Asia during this phase to spread Buddhism. The bulk of Indian migration took place during colonial period. The previous small-scale movement of Indian people turned into mass migration. They went broadly under three different capacities - (i) the indentured worker in sugar colonies of Caribbean, Oceania and Africa, (ii) Under *Kangani* / maistry system to Malaysia and Ceylone (iii) and free or passenger Indians primarily in East Africa. The free Indians went in small number to most other places as well except few in Caribbean. In the third phase, during 20th century, Indian immigrated as skilled and semi- skilled worker to (i) the Middle East and (ii) Europe, North America and Oceania. They were not allowed to have citizenship in Gulf countries However, the emergence of PIOs in USA in the top salary bracket and the fact that around 50% total job visa in recent years going to Indian skilled workers in digital technology contributed a great deal in emergence of a confident and powerful Indian Diaspora.

The existing literatures on the Indian Diaspora in different parts of the world inform us about certain aspects of the PIOs. India, in terms of culture, languages, dialects, regions, social mores and religions, is as diverse a country as no other. And this is abundantly clear in that emigration to other countries was as varied as India's regions and people. The historical contexts, causes and consequences of immigration have also been as varied; even social characteristics such as class, caste, place of origin and level of education have been very different. PIOs have wide divergence based on language, religion and geographical regions from which they emigrated. They are not a monolithic lot. There are differences based on the way they migrated to different countries, eg. as indentured worker, free passenger, trader, businessmen or high skilled workers. In a way, they are microcosm of Indian diversity. Though they have multiple diversity but all of them have identity of being ethnic Indians. Moreover, the other sections in the countries of their adoption also treat them only as ethnic Indians and do not give them a choice. Thus, People of Indian origin around the world seem to sense a feeling of one-ness and feel a part of greater Indian society.

PIOs have adopted and integrated themselves into the social and economic fabric of the countries to which they have migrated. At the same time, they have maintained links with their cultural heritage and the mother country. They worked with great perseverance, dedication and commitment in contributing to the cultural enrichment and economic development of their adopted homelands. Many of them endowed with strong entrepreneurship capability have been successful in establishing flourishing business concerns. Many of the Indian migrants have become one of the richest persons in their country of adoption. It is said that the total wealth of the Indian community outside India is more than the Indian government GNP.

Thus, what puts them in single category is their advancement in the economic field. Almost all of them, whether indentured worker, free passenger, semi-skilled or skilled worker or business community all of them have done economically and professionally quite well. In many countries they have also been politically influential. Therefore, PIOs as Diaspora has strength of being prosperous, professionally and intellectually advance and sharing common identity and attachment to the country of origin.

Though PIOs are prosperous and confident of their identity they suffer from their status of being minority except in Mauritius. The prosperous minority faces subtle or obvious hostility of lesser-developed majority community. This problem is compounded when the affluent minority also happens to be an immigrant community and not successfully integrated with the indigenous groups or son of the soil. Indian Diaspora has this problem in most of the countries. If such minority is not networked strongly, as Indian Diaspora is not, its global strength does not help it domestically. Jews realised it at enormous cost and they have made effective correction for that. Beside the above weakness, Indian Diaspora suffers from two additional factors. First, they are not a mobilized Diaspora as compared to the Chinese or Jewish Diaspora. Because of its domestic positioning, lack of net working and absence of strong global organization, the Indian Diaspora has failed to mobilise its resources and strength when it faced crisis as in Uganda or Fiji.

For understanding Indian Diaspora in a comparative international perspective; two aspects needs to be understood - one, the contextualisation and positioning of PIOs in their countries of adoption and second, the international force or support to which they relate themselves for their identity and safety. In absence of an organized and effective force like Global Organization of People of Indian Origin (GOPIO), India despite its weakness and limitation remains the single such source. There is need to understand both the concrete reality of PIOs in a region and imperatives and constraints of Indian policy towards PIOs in order to arrive at generalization on trends and issues of PIOs. This understanding needs to inform by the actual experience in different regions in order to discern major trends, issues and options related to PIOs.

The race for globalization has created an environment to look beyond rigid national boundaries for economic and other aspiration of people. Global networking, interaction and use of complementarily at global level provide emerging opportunities for a Diaspora to network and come together. The past decade has witnessed a phenomenal dynamism among the Diaspora communities due to the recent advancement in information technology and communications. In fact these developments have not only bring the Diaspora communities and their motherland closer but also have facilitated in bringing the members of their community dispersed around the world together. Now Diaspora are being recognized as international force. The global environment is suitable now for a diasporic community to come together for various purposes.

Despite favorable opportunities, Indian Diaspora has its threats as well. PIOs are minority in most of the countries. Any visible attempt to foster external loyalties, however innocuous it may be for domestic system, may invite suspicion and hostility if done without taking the local leaders into confidence. A confident and economically networked PIOs will prove a better asset for the country of their adoption rather than an isolated, sulking and vulnerable PIOs. Another threat for Indian Diaspora could be its reduction as business network only. Businesses network themselves anyway, because they have resources, imperatives and compulsions. However, a Diaspora links people- businessmen, professional, cultural and political leaders and most importantly common people. Business should be a propelling force for people to come together not a sole end in itself. Besides the socio - economic political and international positioning of PIOs one needs to answer research questions like what should be done to enable Indian Diaspora to emerge as international force? What are the roles and tasks of different stakeholders, the government and people of India, the leaders of PIOs, the business community of PIOs, the academicians and the media etc?

Focus and Rationale:

Indian Diaspora has emerged as a major Diaspora of the world. In the post cold war era the acceptance and encouragement of ethnic cultural identity by the world community and emphasis on civilizational dialogue coincided with the emergence of Indian overseas from an Indian settler community to Indian Diaspora. This also coincided with its steady rise in literary and

digital world from a humble position of job seeker and migrant low paid worker. The overseas Indian community established an effective network among themselves as well as with mother country, it developed global organizations and the modern means of communications. This effected their transformation into Indian Diaspora. In globalise world its growing network and its linkages with India has made it an important issues in India's foreign policy. Its spoke and wheel relationship with India has changed into a web relationship. The driving force in the emergence of this Diaspora has been civilizational identity and cultural linkages. This cultural urge was so far operating at local or regional level in different countries of their adoption. The government of India has also recognized their new face and aspirations. It has realized their importance in era of globalisation and civilizational cohabitation. Departing from its previous policies, it has come out with policy framework and structures to incorporate Indian Diaspora. The Indian government earlier policy of 'active dissociation' towards its Diaspora during Nehru era has changed to 'active association' during the 1990s.

Sociologist and anthropologist have for long captured the cultural aspiration, mutation, differentiation and its continuation. These studies have led to picturise and cover the issues like migration, assimilation or marginalisation of Indian settlers in their new society. They basically studied People of Indian Origin as Indian settlers, the Other India, Mini India or Indian Overseas. The new face and features of Indian Diaspora, its importance in India's external relations, its civilizational web and the policy imperatives of Government of India had not been studied and understood in its new international form.

India and its Diaspora needs to be studied in context of comparative study of different component of Indian Diaspora consisting of different region, different phases of migration, different capacity of migrants and in framework of changing India's Diaspora policy. Further Indian Diaspora also needs to be understood in context of its strength, weakness and potentialities in comparison to other important global Diaspora. This seminar will be useful for all the stakeholders including the government of India because it will discuss various policy options concerning Indian diaspora in the changing time. The seminar will focus every aspect of diaspora policy concerning NRI, PIO and a comparison among various global Diaspora.

It is from this perspective that seminar would like to address the issue of India and it's Diaspora covering different dimensions and issues including the following sub- themes:

1. India's Diaspora's policy: Comparing pre globalisation and post globalisation phases.
2. NRI and PIO: Comparing profile and policies of India
3. India and its Diaspora: Comparative regional perspective
4. Structures and agencies of interaction between mother country and Diaspora:
5. A comparative study between different global Diaspora.
6. Gender deficit Indian Diaspora Policy and gender issues in Indian Diaspora