

LANGUAGE IN INDIA

Strength for Today and Bright Hope for Tomorrow

Volume 12 : 3 March 2012

ISSN 1930-2940

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Indian Diasporic Population in Canada

N. Kavitha, M.A., M.Phil., Ph.D. Scholar P. Selvam, Ph.D.

INTRODUCTION

Migration and dispersion are natural phenomenon. Human beings are no exception to this. They have been experiencing temporary, seasonal and permanent migration from their original habitation. The growing Indian diasporic community is evolved in this manner. When we pronounce the word “Diaspora” we feel a sense of affection and affinity. This is also the case for Indian diaspora. The word diaspora itself is associated with many interesting questions: whom do we call Indian Diaspora? What are their problems? What is their role in the regional and international politics and economy? Today, they are over 20 million people of Indian origin who can be labeled Indian diaspora (Report of the High Level Committee on the Indian Diaspora (New Delhi: ICWA, 2001) P.V .

Etymologically the term *diaspora* is derived from the Greek ‘dia (thro’) and speiro (to scatter) literally meaning scattering or dispersion ([www. uohyd.ernet.in/njword/html](http://www.uohyd.ernet.in/njword/html)).

According to the *Encyclopedia of Social Science*, “Diaspora is a Greek term, which refers nation or a part of a nation, separated from its own state or territory and dispersed among another nation, but preserving its own national culture” (*Encyclopedia of Social Sciences*, Vol.5 (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1935)p.126)

The term “diaspora” is generally used to refer to those Jewish people who reside outside the Palastine/Israel. The connections that the diaspora maintain are symbolic. For the scholars, the

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term “diaspora” combines various categories such as immigrants, guest workers, ethnic and racial minorities, refugees, expatriates and travelers, and knowledge-based workers. Diaspora may be created as a community, as a result of voluntary or forced migration, mass exile and by emigration of economically depressed groups to other countries.

Focus of This Paper

This paper presents an overview of Indian diaspora by identifying its population structure, settlement pattern and political and economic profile. The spread of the Indian diasporic population is linked with the nineteenth century migration during the colonial period. This was largely based on the forced recruitment to the various plantation jobs almost all over the globe. Geographically speaking Indian diaspora has its roots in about 138 countries. They have their locations in various processes of migration involved in the emergence and spread of Indian diaspora. This process is part of the colonial and the post-colonial period.

THE POST-COLONIAL MIGRATION IN THE 20TH CENTURY

The Second World War wiped out much of the British Empire’s manpower base. As a result, there began the post-colonial phase, which are only a few decades old. This period witnessed the large-scale emigration of white-collar professionals from India to the developed western world particularly to the countries such as the USA, Canada, U.K., Australia and the European Countries in the late 1960’s. Students, Professionals, Skilled, Knowledge based workers, Scientists, Businessmen, IT experts and educated elite class have formed this migratory process.

Renewed Importance

The concept of “diaspora” has acquired a renewed importance in the modern era of globalization. V. S. Seth defines the term ‘diaspora as “Scattering of people with a common origin, background and beliefs”. In order to define the concept of “Indian diaspora” we have to analyze the concept such as overseas Indians, NRI and Persons of Indian Origin (PIO).

The category of “Overseas Indian” comprises of the Indian Nationals Overseas (INO) and the PIO. There is a marked difference between these two categories of migrants. This is due to the political status, which they receive in their country of adoption and also their intention behind their stay and the length of their stay in the respective country of adoption (As quoted by P. Sahadevan in India and Overseas Indians: The case of Sri Lanka (Delhi: Kalinga Publication: 1995) P.I. . The concept of overseas Indian is the residue and left over of the British colonial legacy.

INDIAN NATIONALS OVERSEAS

In India the term INO is referred to the NRI. The NRIs are said to have emigrated from India since 1947 to various countries. According to Foreign Exchange Management Act 1999, which came into effect from June 1st 2000, NRI is a person who is resident outside India but keeps his Indian Passport. India or settled down abroad for any other purpose indicating his intention to

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stay outside India for an uncertain period. The Indian Citizen working in abroad with the government agencies or international or regional organizations like the United Nations, Organizations, those who are working in the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (IBRD) or World Bank, the officers of both the central and state government and also public sector enterprises posted abroad on deputation are said to NRI's under this category, those Indian Citizen who have taken up jobs on completion of their higher studies abroad are also included (RBI Exchange control facilities for investment by NRI's (New Delhi: RBI, 1988) P.I.

“The spouse of a Citizen of India is also deemed to be of Indian origin”.

Thus the Pre-requisite condition for calling a person an NRI is his purpose and also his duration of stay abroad. This definition is evidently linked to holding of Indian citizenship.

PERSONS OF INDIAN ORIGIN (PIOS)

PIOs are another category of the overseas Indians who are chiefly the descendants of the Indian emigrants of indenture labour (especially on plantations) sent by the British in the Nineteenth and the early part of the twentieth centuries. According to the Foreign Exchange Management Act, ‘a PIO is a person who is deemed to be of Indian origin if he or she held an Indian passport or he/she or either of his/her parents or any of his/her grandparents were citizens of India by virtue of the Constitution of India or the citizenship Act, 1955. At present, there are about 7 lakhs and 1 thousand PIOs in Canada The Foreign Exchange Management Act (FEMA) 2000 see (Investment in Firm or proprietary concern in India) Regulations, 2000 P.174

The term PIO is applied for a foreign citizen of Indian descent. PIOs tend to become stateless within the legal framework of the country of their domicile. These include children whose names were entered in migrant parent's passports which were later destroyed or lost and in many other cases, where there is no documentary proof to substantiate their Indian origin. The stateless person are those who have neither taken Indian citizenship nor been granted the citizenship of their respective countries of residence. Stateless persons are those who are neither said to be citizen of the country of their origin. In Canada, there are about 1000 persons who are said to be stateless.

OVERSEAS INDIANS

Overseas Indians comprise of NRIs and PIOs. But there exists a huge variation between these two. It is the term of the period of their migration. The PIOs migrated in the colonial period, whereas the migration of NRIs is a recent phenomenon. Overseas Indians include these people who migrated from India in the 19th century and they are the PIOs. There are about more than one lakh NRIs in Canada.

THE INDIAN DIASPORA IN CANADA

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In Canada, India diasporic population includes Tamilians, Malayalis, Punjabis, Gujaratis, Maratis and Bengalis. Indians are settled in Toronto, Van Coyer, Montreal, Calgary and Edmonton. They are mainly from the states of Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Punjab, Gujarat, Maharashtra and West Bengal. The Indians in Canada are mainly from Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Punjab, Gujarat, Maharashtra and West Bengal. The Indians can be classified on the basis of their economic activities and occupation into four groups they are:

- a. Professionals
- b. Agricultural Labourers
- c. Unskilled and Semi-skilled workers
- d. Traders, Merchants and Business communities

In Canada it is estimated that 30% of the Indians are occupying professional and managerial positions both within the government and the private sector. The average annual income of the immigrants from India is nearly 20% higher than the national average. Most of the Indian diasporic community are well-educated professionals. A majority of them are in the full or associate professor category. The prominent professors from the Indian diasporic population are Uma Parameshwaran and Sunitha N. Joshi. Some of the Indian students are studying in various Canadian Universities.

Some of them are involved in politics. Though they are a microscopic minority, their presence is vital in countries like Canada. In Canada, the Indian diasporic population is felt in the mainstream Canadian politics. For instance, Herb Dhaliwal became minister in the Canadian cabinet. The percentage of the Indian diasporic population in the total population of Canada is about 2.8%.

OBSTACLES

After September 11, 2001 incident, Muslims from Asia and Africa have been subjected to several prejudicial acts among the people in USA and Canada and in Europe. In this process, non-Muslim Asians and Africans also suffered. In USA and Canada, their shops were looted and some of them were killed. This widened the racial divide.

CONCLUSION

From the above discussion it is clear that the Indian diasporic population has achieved progress in their chosen fields. Through their entrepreneurship, they have now started providing employment to others. In Canada, their income has surpassed the per capita income of other Canadian communities. The Indian diaspora is culturally, emotionally and sentimentally interconnected with India. The Indian diasporic population function not only as cultural ambassadors of India but also they represent all four corners of India.

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