

TWINNING TRANSNATIONALISMS AND INDIC IDENTITY IN THE MODERN WORLD: INDIAN DIASPORA ENGAGEMENTS AND IDENTITY IN THE EUROPEAN UNION

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The uniqueness of the presence of Indian diaspora in Europe lies in the fact that it is primarily a post World War II phenomenon; also, it is essentially a skill-based emigration. Though this is similar to the emigration of Indians to the other parts of the developed world, yet, history of the Indians diaspora in Europe is different due to colonial experiences of the same nations in the past. Indian population in Europe amounts to about 5-8 % of the total population of Europe. Indian emigration to the European Union countries took place in response to demand for labour and skilled professionals for the economic reconstruction of Europe. These Indian diasporas who have been settled in the European nations have contributed immensely to their host nations and showcase a distinct identity building process.

Transnationalisms within the Indian diasporic communities also impacted their presence within the European Union since the 1970s. The recent most Indian skilled labour migration as contracted with the large multinational and transnational corporations add another layer to the Indian engagements with their settler countries.

This paper engages with the contributions, the identity formation processes and resultant Indic identity of the people who have migrated to the European Union at different time periods and under differential circumstances. The paper argues that there is a change in the nature of the identity formation amongst the Indian diasporic community in Europe and how today Indian diasporas identify themselves while their immense contributions to European nations remain a constant factor.

Introduction

Indian diaspora in Western European nations is a construct of the modern world in the post World War II era and is composed of skilled labour in the form of doctors, engineers, entrepreneurs and academicians to mention a few professions. Added to these migrations were the exodus of Indian diasporas from the African nations in the decades between 1960 and 1990 where they had been citizens not of India but the respective African nations. The majority of these Indian diasporas from the African shores

had maintained their links with India but chose to settle in Europe. They then became the first transnational migrants way back when this term had not feature in common parlance when speaking of migrations. Work and skill have emerged to be the determining factors in creating the transnational cross border relations. This was in response to the forces of globalisation that connected the various systems across the world. Therefore skilled labour migration of PIOs and NRIs within and to Europe become important. Highly skilled migrants usually work in

globally competitive sectors like high technology, information technology (IT), engineering, biotechnology, education and health care

The rise of the Indian diaspora across the world has been studied intensively in the past decade as a success story of migration and assimilation with the host nations, making it an important soft power for the Indian state. Widespread globalization processes have demanded migration of larger numbers of skilled labour in the world. Located in this matrix is the new Indian diaspora in Europe. The older diaspora in Western Europe constitute of those who had migrated in the 1950s onwards both as skilled and unskilled labour. The Indian diaspora today is a mixture of the old and the new migrants in Western Europe.

Section I: Transnationalism amongst the Indian diaspora in Europe

The rise of the Indian diaspora across the world has been studied intensively in the past decade as a success story of migration and assimilation with the host nations, making it an important soft power for the Indian state. This is especially true of the Indian diaspora in the European continent and especially in the western European nations. Indian population in Europe amounts to about 5-8 % of the total population of Europe. Indian Diaspora in Europe is a complex and multifaceted phenomena in the entire spread across the world as it encompasses two to three generations of migrants, a colonial heritage of exchange linkages that had created particular patterns. There had been small Indian diasporic communities in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries in

Europe. The post World War II era witnessed huge changes where Indian emigration to the West European countries took place in response to demand for labour and skilled professionals for the economic reconstruction of Europe, the modern immigration policies of the different nations governed the entry of the Indian nationals to these nations.

Even today, the ascendancy of the Indian diaspora in this region is evident in the changes in the immigration policies of some of the nations. The old Indian diaspora and the new the Indian Diaspora is Europe today coexist along with NRI populations in this region. The important change that has been noted in this century is the enhanced presence of the Indian diasporic communities in the hitherto unexplored nations of Eastern Europe. This has been facilitated by the emergence of the Indian diasporic community as a major investment and innovative power both in the Western European nations and the rise of India on the global economic scale. Widespread globalization processes have demanded migration of larger numbers of skilled labour in the world. Located in this matrix is the new Indian diaspora in Europe. The Indian diaspora today is a mixture of the old and the new migrants in Western Europe.

It is well acknowledged that amongst the older Indian diaspora in the Europe not all migrants could be classified as skilled labour. They are also distinguished by the fact that their mobility was restricted and they only had access to two locations: their place of origin and the place of their destination. They are essentially citizens of the host country to which they have

migrated though the linkages that they have maintained over the years with their homelands and host nations are multilayered and numerous.

The new Indian diaspora in Europe is not restricted to the two aforementioned locations. This may be due to the fact that most comprise a highly skilled labour segment that may or may not have citizenship of any of the host nations'. They are transnational in character as they are situated across different locations, even while maintaining the earlier multilayered and multiple linkages with all their locations. This is a situation where the boundaries and importance of ideas like the nation state get blurred. This then becomes a contested site of locations and dislocations.

The terminologies of diaspora and transnationalism are often used as similar notions which is always not accurate. Both concepts denote migrations specifically emigrations of populations from one country to another country for whatever may be the reason. Indian diasporic movements to various nations has been a reality from ancient times and have gathered particular stimulus under colonial regimes. Transnationalism is a response to the needs of globalisation process. The difference also lies in the fact that the diasporas often acquires the nationality of the host nations were as all people citizens of whichever nation they may be can have a transnational character. Thus the Indian diasporic community in the Western European nations will be participating in the transnational movements as much as the citizens of the original homeland India. The ties of emotion, remittances and

actual legal identities with Indian citizenship will be therefore different from their diasporic counterparts.

It is significant to note that the Indian diaspora in Western European nations is also a construct of the modern world in the post World War II era and did compose some skilled labour in the form of doctors, engineers, entrepreneurs and academicians to mention a few professions. Added to these migrations were the exodus of Indian diasporas from the African nations in the decades between 1960 and 1990 where they had been citizens not of India but the respective African nations. The majority of these Indian diasporas from the African shores had maintained their links with India but chose to settle in Europe. They then became the first transnational migrants way back when this term had not feature in common parlance when speaking of migrations.

Section II: Emergent Relationships of the Transnational Indian Diaspora in Europe

Work and skill have emerged to be the determining factors in creating the transnational cross border relations. The analysis of the new Indian diaspora in Europe as a dynamic part of such transnationalisms is the focus of this study. Therefore skilled labour migration of PIOs and NRIs within and to Europe needs to be studied in all its aspects: social, political cultural economic and religious.

Gaining employment suited to the skill levels possessed and working well in the said job is only one aspect of the employment achievement. There are other facets to employment held in different

social and cultural milieu. Often, the processes of working within the same organisation in different locales are different. This initiates a complexity in the identities which assume work in such conditions. The tensions within the workplace that arise through diverse work environments create opinions within the self regarding the local people. The Indian diaspora in Europe that is transnational in nature though seemingly well adjusted to local conditions may also be adrift when it comes to building relations in the locales as there is often a language and cultural barrier. A majority of them are in the IT industry working in various time slots of the day and night. These barriers ensure the feeling of isolation and result in clinging more intensely to their known friends and family circle, often over the internet communication. The isolation also makes them more vulnerable on different scales from the work arena to the social arena. Often, these transnational Indian diaspora do not form any bonds with the local Indian diaspora who are citizens of that particular country. As workers from abroad they often face hostility from local workers who view them not as necessary skill imparter but as interlopers. Thus ‘... the emergence of transnational social spaces has complex and contradictory outcomes’ (Lakha 2005 , p. 354). So the transnational Indian diasporas maintain close links with India and other transnational work locations that are perceived to be more hospitable and profitable.

The exception to this scenario in Europe is the United Kingdom. Due to the longer presence and familiarity with the systems and language Indian diasporic

transnationalism have different contours of relations here. Globalization has brought a change to demand driven skilled migrants who are knowledge workers having knowledge and training in the globally competitive sectors. Highly skilled migrants usually work in globally competitive sectors like high technology, information technology (IT), engineering, biotechnology, education and health care in the United Kingdom. In most cases the transnational Indian diaspora in UK does not have many links with the Indian diasporic community settled in the UK. They have their own distinct spheres of interaction and rarely do these spheres intersect. Thus social isolation is a factor here too. In the UK as language is not a significant barrier in the local transactions there is greater intermixing with the local people. From there arises conditions of racial discriminations that is much more difficult for the transnational Indian diaspora to deal with. This causes psychological inflections on their self identity as their skilled work contribution in the specialized sectors is almost obliterated and their self worth is questioned. Racial discrimination is prevalent and faced by transnational Indian diaspora in almost all of Europe and not just limited to UK.

In the work arena there is also a difference in the pay packages allocated to different workers. Skilled workers who are citizens of that country in the same work are generally paid more than the transnational workers. The transnational Indian diaspora who are working in the different European countries may be more in number than their national counterparts in the same organisation but the pay inequity is a fact

that they have to accept. The pay of the transnational skilled Indian diasporic worker is generally more than what the pay would be in their country of origin but less than what is paid to the same level of skilled worker in the host nation. This gives rise to the conflicts and contestations in the workplace. The duration of stay in each transnational location is also varied, depending upon the life cycle of project for which the transnational worker has been recruited lasting from a few days to a few months and sometimes to years at the same location. The location may be changed within the same host country, as in where they are transferred around from Berlin to Bonn in Germany.

There is another Indian diasporic transnational community in Europe that is of the international students who are found at almost every leading educational centre of Europe. They not only form the diasporas but also of future transnational migrants of Indian origin. Often they are recruited by global companies to work in the newer global locations that they have not yet traversed. The students have different ways of life from the employed workers in the multinational companies. In these spaces newer forms of social, political and cultural changes are being shaped that affect everyday lives in different parts of the globe. These Indian and Indian origin student diasporas in Europe develop their own "networks, activities, patterns of living, and ideology that span their home and the host society" (Basch et al. 1994, p.54.) that is distinct in nature. These are then carried by them when they enter the transnational and multinational corporations for work and modulate their interactions. They then

have different imprint on the society and economy in which they work later on. Indian origin academic diasporic movement may be invisible in economic terms but they are very much present in the inter university and research centre mobility. DeChabert (2004) argues that through educational migration, there evolves something new, "a different way of life that is hybrid and fluctuating" (p. 282).

Global knowledge diasporas are a "form of transnational human capital in the new millennium" (Yang and Welch 2010 , p. 594). Knowledge diasporas are not bounded by the territory of the nation states. The diffusion and spread of Indian knowledge diasporas gives rise to new transnational networks that promote scientific, social and economic development, which is different from hitherto established ideas of brain drain and brain gain. Newer forms of identity and relations are thus emerging in the Indian diasporic transnational community in Europe.

The complexity is most felt in the Indian diasporic transnational community in Europe when it comes to gender relations and alternative sexuality. The gender norms are being disturbed as more women are entering the transnational work arena as highly skilled labour and not as wives or female relations of the male workers. This also questions norms of male domination of transnational spaces of migration within the Indian diaspora. The break from traditional cultural norms is made easier in the transnational spaces to a certain extent as equally as it may cause problems making it a difficult terrain to be

traversed. Amongst the alternative sexual identities, at times they become more open but the repression may also be true as then the pressure is overwhelming to conform to the traditional sexual mores. All these are the different locations within the Indian diasporic transnationalism networks in Europe.

The Indian diaspora in Europe is also unique as it is present in all regions and locales of Europe, especially in Eastern Europe where it has engendered industrial and service sector development. They have contributed to the ideas and ideologies and enormous labour and capital to the countries they have settled in. Indian diaspora has played important role in social and political dialogue, advocacy and awareness. As the Indian diasporas in Europe have gained more voice and recognition they get more opportunities of participation in the host and home country's political processes. It also makes them an indispensable human agency for channelling wealth, information, innovative ideas, intellectual capacities and skills and creative business practices to Europe. The Indian diaspora in Europe may be considered as a soft power, a heritage and strategic resource.

Section III: Indic Identity Amongst the Indian Diaspora in the European Union

The Indian diasporic community's essential character remains undeniably Indian, as is witnessed in the grocery stores that abound across the European continent, the enormous growth in the population going to the theatres and cinemas screening Bollywood films and the increasing number of the various types of places of worship, be it gurudwaras,

temples or mosques, The Indian diaspora as a group clings on to its identity as INDIANS. "If we listen to the steady but vigorous dialogue within its confines, best embodied in the views of young writers and publications within the community, these concerns are about being an Indian. It is about maintaining one's own culture, traditions and values, starting from family values and celebrating all things Indian"¹.

Herein, the manner in which a diaspora is defined is of utmost importance, since this also has an impact on how the diasporic community perceives and later on strengthens its identity. Cohen (1997)² argues that a diaspora can emerge from a growing sense of group ethnic consciousness in different countries, - a consciousness that is sustained by, amongst other things, a sense of distinctiveness, common history and a belief in common fate. This view is not exactly corroborated in the case of the Indian diaspora since it is not a one cohesive or ethnic identity, delineated sharply in religion, language, caste, locality and territorial bias. Many such as Parekh (1993)³ and Vertovec (2000)⁴, Ballard, (2004)⁵ consider religion to be the one of the primary elements that defines/classifies the Indian diasporic

¹ Deshpande, Shekhar, (2004): Whose Identity is it anyway? in Seminar, June, Vol. 10, No. 2.

² Cohen, R (1997): Global Diaspora, An Introduction, UCL Press, London.

³ Parekh, Bhikhu (1993): Some Reflections on the Indian Diaspora in Journal of Contemporary Thought, No. 3.

⁴ Vertovec, S (2000): The Hindu Diaspora: Comparative Patterns, Routledge, London.

⁵ Ballard, Roger (2003): The South Asian Presence in Britain and its Transnational Connections in Parekh, Bhikhu, Gurharpal Singh and Steven Vertovec (ed): Culture and Economy in the Indian Diaspora, Routledge, London.

community, the one thread that provides the commonality, distinctiveness and shared history. This is not an all-inclusive religious or cultural category as it excludes some of the minority faiths that have substantial followers within the diasporic community. The Indian diasporic community in Europe is divided on terms of religion, as faiths other than Hinduism such as Islam, Zoroastrian, Sikhism and Jainism also have their own gatherings, yet, ultimately they also brand themselves as Indians and thus emerges the sub group of Indian Muslims to cite an example.

Indian society is particularly characterised by the presence of caste groups; this is second category that is used as a symbol of identity that is used within the Indian diaspora in Europe and denotes diversity, locality and difference. Though in some cases caste has as a factor in identity construction has become weakened, in Europe, amongst the older generation settlers this was a major point of self-identification. Tied to this are the stocks of social and the cultural capital that were shared amongst the various communities that helped them gain prosperity and reach the present levels of development.

Thirdly, language or region of origin is used as a marker of identity amongst the Indian diaspora in Europe as the regional identities became more powerful where common language formed an important link. The importance of the intertwine of language and region is seen in the various cultural communities of Tamil, Telugu, Malayalam, Bengali and Gujarati associations, where communities comprise of different religions and caste but speaking the same language and form the

same region. This is more clearly brought out in the networks that exist within the community and encompasses people from various segments in its fold. Moreover, this is the site of passing on the oral traditions that are inculcated on an individual family basis. So linguistic affiliation brings into its fold the manifolds of culture which plays an important role. Taking all the above factors and processes into consideration, perhaps the core feature that defines the Indian diaspora in Europe is its collective imagining of India – of emotions, links, traditions, feelings and attachments that together continue to nourish a psychological and sociological appeal among the successive generations of emigrants for the mother country⁶.

The older generation cherished all of these and also thought of returning, though that day was far off even in their imaginings. They maintained extensive links with their original homelands and contributed to their growth and prosperity. The idea of the homecoming is one that distinguishes this generation.

To comprehend this reality in the changing nature of the identity formation amongst the Indian diasporic community in Europe, one has to look into the elements that will focus on the contradictions, the processes of exclusion, the fissures in the memories of successes and selective silences on the happenings that no one wants to acknowledge. The problems at first exist on the generational levels. The translation is quite easy and natural; the cultural set up in which the children of the original immigrants grow up is not one that their parents cherish for them, the tension lies in

⁶ Ibid.

the different perception of the values between the two generations. Thus, the cultural values that the parents want to incorporate into their children, are often conflicting with the ones that exist in the public life of the child, who also do not understand the requirement to adhere to standards and modes of value that to him may be obsolete or of no use. Thus they do not identify themselves with the same value concepts as their parents; the void thus created often is not bridged; and if bridged, then something quite different takes its place. Thus we see that the caste relationships and linkages declining amongst the new generation of the Indian diasporic community in Europe.

‘The second and third generational issues are of main concern to the internal mechanics of how the Indian community functions and how it treads the waters of an aggressively and rapidly changing culture’ and these concerns surface as a major issue of representation in cultural gatherings, writings and even films and television shows⁷ in the European Union. The tendency to define themselves as Indians is predisposed by the wish to ascertain themselves as non resident Indians. The inherent dualism is what creates the question mark; a wish to cling on to the mythical homeland that exists on only in their memories. As the new generation does not possess any such memory, therefore, their identifications with this becomes problematic. Their conception of themselves is not one of a life in exile,⁸ forced by the extenuating

circumstances but that of a natural acceptance of the place where they grow up as their homeland. They do not require the anchor of the homeland so as to construct their own identity. The older generation who have though adjusted to the new configuration of their hostlands would yet like to adhere to the India that lives on in their memories and at times who refuse to face up to the reality of today’s India. So they are enthralled by the constructed identities set in their own frames of reference. What happens is that they then begin to believe the surreal image as projected by the filmmakers and this carries forward the culture of the homeland. The nostalgia embedded in the older generation’s memories that they present to their children makes it difficult for the present generation to compute with the present day India⁹.

Moreover, the new generation also has a problem with the ‘Indian’ identity with that of the primarily linguistic or community based identity that is built by the older generation. The adoption of the multiple identities as Tamils¹⁰ or Gujaratis first and then Indians also confuses them. They also find it difficult to differentiate between the two afore mentioned identities. The adoption of multiple identities and the ease with which the Indians slip in and out of and into the other

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Duncan, James, Nuala. C. Johnson and Richard H. Schein (2004): *Diaspora in A Companion to Cultural Geography*, Blackwell Publishing, Oxford.

⁹ Narayan, Kirin (2004): *Haunting Stories: Narrative Transmissions of South Asian Identities in the Diaspora*, in Jacobsen, Knut. A and P. Pratap Kumar (ed): *South Asians in the Diaspora, Histories and Religious Traditions*, Brill Publishers, Leiden.

¹⁰ Luchesi, Brigitte (2004): *Tamil Hindu Places of Worship in Germany*, in Knut. A Jacobsen, and P. Pratap Kumar (ed): *South Asians in the Diaspora, Histories and Religious Traditions*, Brill Publishers, Leiden, pp. 116-133.

is also bewildering, and then comes the posit: which one is better and which one to adopt? Added to this is their own identity as British Indians or French Indians/Asians etc. The small segments based on regional and linguistic delineation also creates a locale where the value judgment is made as to what should be passed on to new generation and what should not be, leaving the younger generation with the biases that linger on amongst the older generation.

The rise of an underclass among immigrant Indians has grown sizeably over the past two decades. Yet their concerns, struggles and issues have not yet registered with conscience in the media or the public life of Indians¹¹. Mostly survival is the only thought in their minds and they identify with the poor, identification processes then become even more difficult as they have to deal with dual resistance from the immigrant well settled population and the native populations. The new generation also faces a problem in that though they adhere to the imagined India of their parents' memories, they do not have any desire to come back to India as very simply they do not fit in. They have thus sought different methods to assert their identities¹². Whereas the earlier generation was content to remain as passive actors in the international arena, now they choose to assert themselves. The interest groups of the Indian diaspora in Europe now has a visibility that was lacking before. Here the point to

mentioned is that 'identity does not always determine interests, ... some times identity is the interest.'¹³ Since identities and interests are determined by social interaction, there is space here for domestic actor participation. This domestic actor has now gained enough credibility on the world stage to stake its own claim on its diaspora as has been case with India. Now is the time when the Indian diaspora wants to know India and India also wants to know them. The result is the policy initiative in the form of dual citizenship.

Consequently the process of identity construction becomes purely political and pits conflicting actors against each other ... it is a conflict over power to determine national identity'¹⁴. Thus the diasporas become dynamic. In the context of the Indian diasporas in the European Union this dynamism is further accelerated by the infusion of young blood in the form of the new recruited members of the software and information technology who then become an intrinsic part of the per-existing diasporic community. They project their identity as a pan Indian identity, undoing the shackles of the earlier forces of language, region, religion etc. This is the identity that then is put in front of the new generation of the diasporic community, who are in turn baffled by its complexity

Identity formation at any time is the positioning of several actors, and intrinsically has an 'us' and 'they' context. The projection of the 'self' is always in response to the 'other' and as these

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Valley, Anne (2004): *The Jain Plate: Semiotics of the Diaspora Diet*, in Knut. A Jacobsen, and P. Pratap Kumar (ed): *South Asians in the Diaspora, Histories and Religious Traditions*, Brill Publishers, Leiden.

¹³ Shain, obsid.

¹⁴ Katzenstein, Peter. J. (1996): *Culture of National Security: Norms and Identity in World Politics*, ColumbiaUniversity Press, New York.

change, the projection of the self's identity also changes. This is what is happening within the Indian diasporic community of the European Union. The identity formation processes if counted as an end product becomes difficult to compute as they are in a fluid state of changing identities and moving on to multiple identities that a person can project at the same time. Moreover, 'it cannot be one homogenous model of identity that equally serves all members of a group ... we must be ready to ask for different and shifting levels of identity as for conflicting and contesting designs. (Avtar Brah quoted in Tololyan, speech made at the conference on 'Locality, Identity, Diaspora' in Hamburg, Germany 2004)¹⁵. Such imaginations and the de facto culture clash lead to a contentious role for Indian migrants in their host society. Many migrants 'live their lives simultaneously across different nation-states, being both "here" and "there", crossing geographical and political boundaries' (Riccio 2001, 583). Both economic resources and symbolic resources (such as goods or food from 'home') play an important part in establishing the migrants 'transnational livelihood' (Salih 2001).

Conclusion

Transnationalism and Indian diaspora relations in Europe are multilayered and multifaceted. It is located in a complex network and at times the pathways of movement are often blurred. What remains real is the movement itself. Thus, the contributions and interactions are negotiated and shifting. Transnationalism in the Indian diaspora in Europe is still

evolving and the outlines of the communications are being opened up. Transnationalism transcends the level of the nation-state (Bailey 2001), whereby transmigrants 'develop and maintain multiple relations - familial, economic, social, organisational, religious, and political that span borders' (Glick Schiller et al. 1992, cited in Buirkner 2000, 106). This also leads to their ascribing to multiple identities simultaneously. Identity formation in the Indian diasporic community in the European Union today foregrounds the complexity of lived experience that is typified by unstable, dynamic, and power-ridden intersections of gender, age, ethnicity, race, work-skills and (trans)nationality.

¹⁵ Tololyan et al, Obsid.

