

# SESSION 1: MIGRATION AND DIASPORA: CONCEPTS AND THEORIES

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**INDIAN INSTITUTE OF PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION, NEW DELHI**

# **Session 1: Migration and Diaspora: Concepts and Theories**

## **Outline**

- Migration and Diaspora
- Transnationalism, Globalisation and Diaspora
- Perspectives on Studying Indian Diaspora
- Longing and belonging: the in-between State of Indian diaspora
- Conclusions
- Further Reading

# **Session 1: Migration and Diaspora: Concepts and Theories**

## **Objectives**

1. To understand the concepts in the study of dynamics of Indian diaspora
2. To analyse the various sociological perspectives on diaspora
3. To relate the diasporic situation of Indians to these concepts and analysis.

## ▪ Migration

- Migration does not mean the mere physical movement of people.
- Migrants carry with them a socio-cultural baggage which among other things consist of:
  - (a) a predefined social identity,
  - (b) a set of religious beliefs and practices,
  - (c) a framework of norms and values governing family and kinship organization, and food habits
  - (d) language.
  - (e) Myth of return: Migrants are not completely cut off from their land of origin, they may retain physical and/or mental contact with their homeland.

## ▪ **The Concept of Diaspora**

- Origin Greek, from '*diaspeirein*' meaning 'disperse', from *dia* 'across'+ *speirein* 'disperse'.

Thus, the term 'diaspora' means the dispersion or spread of any people from their original homeland (Ox. En. Dict).

- Reference to the dispersion of the Jews beyond Israel.
- The diaspora of boat people from Asia
- Now the term 'diaspora' is universally used to dispersions of various groups of people across the globe such as - African Diaspora, Chinese Diaspora or Indian Diaspora.

▪ **William Safran**(1991) set out six rules to distinguish diasporas from migrant communities.

i. Dispersal from original homeland

ii. Retention of collective memory;

iii. Vision or myth of the original homeland;

iv. Partial(never complete) assimilation in host society;

v. Idealised wish to return to original homeland;

vi. Desirable commitment to restoration of homeland and continuous renewal of linkages with homeland

## ▪ **Transnationalism, Globalisation and Diaspora**

- Transnational migration is described as “a pattern of migration in which persons, although they move across international borders and settle and establish social relations in a new state, but maintain social connections with the polity from which they originated. They live across international borders in transnational social fields.”(Glick Schiller, 1999).
- The transnational characteristics of the diaspora is an outcome of the globalization process.
- The process of globalisation is driven by three major imperatives: the market, the new technology, and transnational networks that are themselves interconnected.

## ▪ Perspectives on Studying Indian Diaspora

### *a. The Retentionist Perspective*

The retentionist view of Indian culture in overseas shows the ability of the Indians to retain, reconstitute and revitalize many aspects of their culture in an overseas setting.

- The common bond of race, language and fellowship coupled with racial prejudice segregated the Indians first where they were lodged as indentured labourers and since the 19<sup>th</sup> century in villages they settled.
- The best example of this perspective is Morton Klass's study of East Indians in Trinidad(1961).



- **Klass** provides an extensive account of the social organization of the villages of Indians in Amity and reports that they were faithfully modeled after a kind of generalized north Indian culture.
- Villagers had rebuilt a community resembling the socio-cultural system of village India.
- East Indians in Trinidad have successfully transplanted the institution of family in its basic form which they have brought from their homeland.
- The East Indians in Trinidad is still characterized by the unequal status of women, parental selection of mates, rarity of divorce, sharing of property and inter-relationships within the caste system.

### *b. The Adaptationist Perspective:*

- It is mainly concerned with the question of the adaptation of the social group or an immigrant society in the social environment of the host society.
- **R.K. Jain's**(1970) work on South Indian migrants, in a typical Malaysian setting, is a study of the process of adaptation of PIOs to conditions of life and work in a particular Malaysian environment, namely rubber plantations.
- The study highlights the interaction between norms of a traditional rural people from south India and the ideology and procedures of an industrial bureaucracy.

- **Burton Benedict**(1961) also subscribes to the adaptationist perspective in his study of the Indians settled in Mauritius.
- While providing an account of the Mauritius situation, he described the physical, demographic, economic and political setting in which the Indians live.
- Further, he examined the situation of Indian in Mauritius, and highlights on the households, land tenure, domestic economy, kinship and marriage, Indian religious beliefs and the village political structure.
- Benedict tries to show that there is communication and mobility between sections of Mauritius society, tending to unify it and where there are bars to communication, tending to drive the sections apart.

- **Adriyan Mayar's**(1973) study of the rural Indian society in Fiji is another example of the adaptationist model.
- He reports on the Indian pattern of settlement, their ritual activities, caste, culture and kinship keeping in view the aspect of adaptation.

### c. Plural Society Perspective

- It is advocated by Furnivall(1948) in the context of colonial society of South East Asia.
- Acc. to him, this kind of society possessed 3 characteristics- cultural, economic and political.
- Culturally, a plural society consists of incongruous and incompatible cultural sections between which communication is hampered.
- Economically, the relationships between the cultural sections are those of the market place.
- Politically, this kind of plural society is held together only by the fact of being dominated by an external colonial power.

- R.K. Jain(1986) argued that the concept of plural society in the sense used by Furnival is applicable only to settlement societies and not to civilizations.
- M.G. Smith(1965, 1969), who developed this theory in its application to the Caribbean society, restricted it to modern colonial situations and to the era of European industrial expansion and laissez-faire capitalism.
- Further, it was confined to the study of multi-racial communities.
- Pluralism was defined in terms of both structure and culture, as connotating simultaneously “a social structure characterized by fundamental discontinuities and cleavages and a cultural complex based on systematic institutional diversity”(Smith, 1969:27).

## **d. The Ethnicity Approach**

- Jayawardena(1980) has tackled the question of diverse forms of culture in Guyana and Fiji through the parameters of ‘ethnicity’.
- This approach accords explanatory primacy to relations of class, status and power and ethnicity is emerging from these factors.
- In Guyana the Indian population had lost or abandoned all but the basic principles of traditional Indian culture and were forced to fabricate a mythical identity.
- The Indo-Guyanese thus possessed both an ethnic identity and ethnicity.
- However, the Indian population in Fiji possessed an ethnic identity but not an ethnicity because its members maintained regular contact with their homeland and regarded their Indian identity as a routine feature of their lives.
- Ethnicity had manifested itself in Guyana and not Fiji because of historically determined and crucial differences in the fields of class, status and power.

## e. The Political Economy Perspective

- Sociologist John Rex(1982) who suggests that there is a continuity between the 19<sup>th</sup> century emigration of Indians and th 20<sup>th</sup> century migrations to the industrially developed countries.
- Barriers of a racist kind control the movements of labour from underdeveloped countries to metropolitan countries at the present time.
- Migrants from underdeveloped countries are not given the same status-though they belong to the same economic class-as the labour force belonging to a different race into the metropolitan countries themselves.
- This is a process dictated by the worldwide phenomena of imperialism and colonialism going to the 17<sup>th</sup> century, of which the repercussions are felt even today.



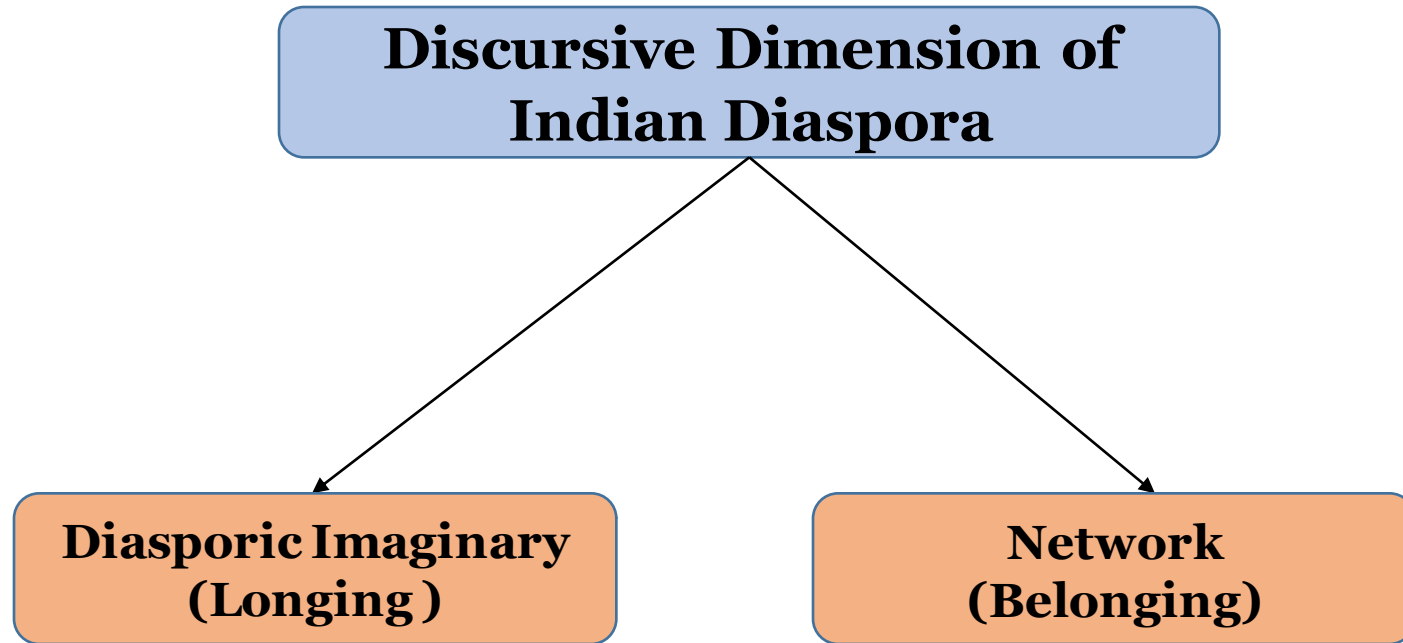
- Theorists of the development of underdevelopment thesis take a global view of the phenomena of the migration, settlement, and formation of Indian communities abroad.
- Theorist Beckford(1984) pointed out the determining influence of the economic structure of the plantations in the colonial territories of tropical areas in Asia and Latin America.
- Beckford's thesis of "persistent poverty" in the plantation areas of the world applies with special force to the Indian diaspora of the 19<sup>th</sup> century when indentured labourers were initially recruited to man the labour force on plantations.
- Hence there is a continuity of socio-economic and cultural systems in plantations and other areas of Indian immigration in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

- On a wider scale and arguing in global terms are the theorists of Gunder Frank(1967), Wallerstein(1974) and Amin(1976) who argued in terms of a core-periphery model of the global development of capitalism.
- In these terms, it seem that certain geo-political constraints of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century and even earlier have shaped the unequal regional economic development all over the globe.
- In this perspective, the Indian diaspora would seem to belong to an especially underdeveloped and deprived section of global population.

- **Longing and Belonging**

- Globalisation and transnationalism alerts us to the issues of deterritorialisation and reterritorialisation which is related to international migration.
- The discursive dimension of Indian Diaspora has two aspects:
  - (I) Diasporic Imaginary (Longing)
  - (II) Networks (Belonging)
- The distinction was first explicitly stated by Vijay Mishra (1995) and implicit in Mckeown (1999)
- It has been elaborated upon in relation to African, Chinese, Indian & Jewish diaspora (Jain 2003).

# Longing and Belonging



- With this I come to an end of the session on Migration and Diaspora: Concepts and Theories and leave you with few questions which you will find easy.
- Thanks for watching the video.

## ■ Quiz Question

### **1. “Diaspora” means:**

- a. Palestine
- b. The spread of Greek culture
- c. Dispersion
- d. Law

### **2. Who among the following set out six rules to distinguish diasporas from migrant communities.**

- a. Roger Rouse
- b. William Safran
- c. Sheffer Gabriel
- d. Anthony S. Mith

### **3. Which of the following study reflects on the best example of retentionist perspective in the study of Indian diaspora?**

- a. Morton Klass’s(1991) study of East Indians in Trinidad.
- b. R.K. Jain’s(1970) work on South Indian migrants in Malayasia
- c. Burton Benedict(1961) study of the Indians settled in Mauritius.
- d. Adriyan Mayar’s(1973) study of the rural Indian society in Fiji

## ■ Reference

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**Thank you**