

SESSION 3: MIGRATION AND ADAPTATION OF INDIANS ABROAD: EMIGRATION, VOLUME AND DESTINATION

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▪ **Session 3: Migration and Adaptation of Indians Abroad: Emigration, Volume and Destination**

- Outline
- Introduction
- Emigration: volume and destination
- Colonial background of Indian Emigration
- Five pattern of Indian Emigration
- Conclusion
- Further Reading

Objectives

1. Understand the basic background to migration of Indian abroad
2. Analyse the main socio-economic reason and historical context of migration; and
3. Illustrate the different pattern of migration

▪ **Emigration: Volume and Destination**

- Until the Second World War Indians emigrated mainly as indentured laborers to Guyana, Trinidad, Surinam (then a Dutch colony), South Africa, Fiji and Mauritius and as kangani or maistry laboureres to Burma, Ceylon and Malaysia.
- The migration of traders also took place, especially to Burma, Malaysia, Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania, South Africa and Fiji.
- Such migration, however, was proportionately very small and became of some political significance only in 'passage' emigration—the nomenclature being derived from the fact that the emigrants paid their own passage and were free in all respects.

▪ **Indentured Labour System**

- An indentured labourer is under contract to work (for a specified amount of time) for another person or a company/corporation, often without any **monetary pay, but in exchange for accommodation, food, other essentials**, training, or passage to a new country.
- After working for the term of contract (traditionally for four to seven years), he is allowed to be free.
- During the term of bondage the servant was considered the property of the master.
- An indentured servant was normally not allowed to buy or sell goods although, unlike an African slave, he could own personal property.
- After the servant's terms of bondage were complete he was free and paid 'freedom dues'.
- These payments could take the form of land or sugar, which would give the servant the opportunity to become an independent farmer or a free labourer.

- Noted American sociologist and demographer Kingsley Davis(1968) estimated that between 1834 and 1937, some 30 million Indians migrated to different parts of the world.
- While during the same period about 24 million of them returned home, resulting in the net migration of 6 million.
- Overseas Indian emigration was largely ‘ephemeral’ or transitory in character.
- During the period 1834-1900, the average annual emigration was about 202,000, whereas for the period 1901-1937, it was about 451,000.

- The available data indicates four major periods of fluctuations in the migration patterns.
- The first, from 1834 to 1915, was the period of steady increase in indentured labour emigration.
- In the same period the increased net migration since the early 1890s represents the added migration of kangani/ maistry labour to Burma, Ceylon and Malaysia.
- The second period (1916-20) highlights not only the difficult years of the First World War but also the end of indentured emigration in 1917.
- In the third period (1921-30), emigration again picked up, mainly responding to the demands for labour on tea, rice and rubber plantations in Ceylon, Burma and Malaysia respectively.
- The largest number of Indians returned home between depression particularly during 1931-35.

- The kangani/ maistry form of emigration was stopped by 1938.
- By then not only was sufficient labour available in the colonies, Indian public opinion was also opposed to Indians' emigration and their mistreatment abroad.
- Thereafter only voluntary labour, over whom the government of India had no control, continued to emigrate.
- But such migration was proportionately very small and was confined to Malaysia, and possibly Ceylon.

- Following the Second World War migration to the advanced industrialized countries of Europe and North America had also begun to gain momentum.
- The post-war economic expansion in these countries created heavy demand for skilled labour and professionals.
- Simultaneously, immigration laws were relaxed in Canada and the U.S.A.
- This form of overseas Indian migration of skilled and educated personnel, popularly known as the 'brain drain', thus resulted in the formation of sizeable Indian diasporic communities in Canada, the U.K., and other European countries.
- Since the early 1970s Indians have also been sojourning to the oil-rich West Asian countries.

• **Colonial Background of Indian Emigration**

- The historical background against which the Indian overseas emigration was intensified was the penetration of British mercantile capitalism in Asia.
- In the second half of the 19th century, as a result of the communication revolution and the opening of the Suez Canal, the Asian peripheral economies were fully integrated into the world capitalist system with the result that Britain earned a considerable surplus on her trade with Asia in general, and India in particular.
- "The profits from imperial trade were invested by the British in the mines and plantations, in Asia and Africa, which created a further demand for labour throughout the British Empire.
- While the expanding capitalist economy in the British Empire created a great demand for labour and trading classes, in India, a combination of the several factors created socio-economic conditions that led to the Indian exodus overseas.

▪ **The Distress of the Small Peasantry**

- The impact of British colonialism in India arose from the new land policies attuned to capitalist development by the middle of the 19th century.
- In 1765 the revenue administration of Bengal had passed into the hands of the East India Company (Mukherjee, 1958).
- The Company had fixed the land taxes at 90% of the rental in Bengal and over 80% in North India, rates that were excessively burdensome to the peasantry.
- The distress of the peasantry was further accentuated by the introduction of the zamindari system whereby landlords who were rent-collectors (for ten years on 2.5% commission) were converted into landlords in perpetuity (vide Permanent Land Settlement Act, 1793).

- In the Madras Presidency, the land tenure system of *raiwari* was introduced in which *raits* or individual cultivators were the registered occupants of land and as such were free to mortgage, sell or gift their land subject to registered transaction. In the Madras Presidency the land revenues for the most part of the 19th century were even higher compared to Bengal.
- Under these land tenure schemes, not only land transfer became easier, disputes over land also encouraged litigation, crime and corruption.
- Indebtedness forced many cultivators to sell or mortgage their land to the rich peasants or the money-lenders.
- Consequently, the pauperization of the marginal peasantry increased the number of landless labourers who eventually joined the ranks of overseas migrants.

▪ **Famines**

- Widespread and frequent famines and local scarcities, throughout the 19th century and during 1905-1908 periods, were also a major factor in adding to the misery of rural populations, especially small cultivators, artisans (mainly native weavers), agricultural labourers and other depressed classes.
- The frequency of famines increased considerably after 1860.
- In the last four decades of the 19th century, the government's economic policies led to a decline in food production and a rise in food prices.
- On the other hand, during the same period the export of food-grains increased resulting in further shortages of food-grains (Bhatia, 1967: vi)

▪ **The Decline of the Handicraft Industry**

- In the 17th century, India was a great manufacturing power mainly because of its handicrafts industry which provided employment to million of people.
- The cotton industry was especially thriving, its produce exported to a number of markets in Europe and Asia.
- As the British cotton industry was unable to compete with its Indian counterpart, the British government charged heavy customs duty on Indian imports into England.
- In 1720, Indian goods were prohibited entry into England.
- During the 19th century, India imported an increasing amount of cotton goods from Britain.
- According to one estimate, the value of British exports in cotton goods, just over 100,000 pounds in 1813, rose to 5.2 million pounds in 1850 and 18.5 millions. This had a substantial negative impact on the handicraft industry in India.

▪ **Sluggish and Enclavist Industrialization**

- While the handicrafts industry in 19th century India declined, modern industrial development was late, slow, limited and enclavist.
- Modern industrialization in India which began in the late 19th century was "fundamentally concentrated in three isolated enclaves—Bombay City, Calcutta and the West Bengal/ Bihar coal belt—with strictly limited impact on one another and on other regions" (Charlesworth, 1982, pp. 37-8).
- The Madras Presidency, which in the 19th century had already become an important area of labour exodus, had no industrialization even comparable to the scale of Bombay or Calcutta.
- Moreover, foreign capital which dominated the modern industries was not evenly and broadly invested.

- There was also absence of a coordinated government policy regarding industrial development until 1914.
- Indeed, in the name of laissez faire the colonial government adopted a "passive state policy.....with respect to industrial development“ .
- Perhaps more harmful to industrial development were the effects of the imperial connection which meant that until the First World War, Indian industry was denied any significant tariff protection.
- Thus, the overall progress of industrialization during the British Raj remained very slow.
- As late as 1931, out of a total population of 353 million, only just over 1.5 million workers were employed in modern factories.
- Thus, the manufacturing sector of the colonial economy was not capable of absorbing the surplus labour force created in the rural areas.

▪ **Other Factors**

- Excessive dependence on agriculture, seasonal unemployment, mass illiteracy and a caste-bound occupational structure were additional contributory factors in creating a class of proletarians, a fraction of which was compelled to seek sustenance abroad.
- Under these circumstances, the Indian government was readily persuaded by the imperial and other colonial government to export Indian labourers.
- It must be pointed out here that 99.6% of the labour moved across waterways to the ports in the British Empire.
- A small percentage went to French, Dutch and Danish colonies.
- About 98% of the total Indian migration abroad during the colonial period was of labourers and the rest was of traders and other middle class personnel.

▪ **Five Patterns of Indian Emigration**

- Historically, five distinctive patterns of Indian emigration can be identified:
 - (1) Indentured labour emigration,
 - (2) kangani/majstry labour emigration,
 - (3) "Free" or "Passage" emigration,
 - (4) "Brain-drain", or voluntary emigration to the metropolitan countries of Europe, North America and Oceania, and
 - (5) Labour emigration to West Asia.
- Whereas the first three forms of emigration were colonial phenomena, the last two are the results of the inherent contradictions of the post-colonial socio-economic development of India.

▪ **Indentured Labour Emigration**

- Indenture was a contract by which the migrant was bound to work for a given employer for a three-to-five-year term, performing the task assigned to him for a specified wage (Kondapi, 1951).
- At the end of the contract the labourer was free to re-indenture or to work elsewhere in the colony.
- After ten years he was entitled to a subsidized return passage.
- The migration of Indian indentured labour began in 1834, and was officially ended in 1920. The chief importing countries of Indian labour were the West Indian colonies, Fiji, South Africa, Mauritius, Malaysia and Ceylon.

- In the first phase beginning in 1834, the majority of emigrants were recruited in the 'hill coolie' districts of Chota Nagpur division and Bankura, Birbhum and Burdwan districts of the Bengal Presidency.
- Soon the recruiting areas were pushed westward into the Hindi-speaking zones of Bihar and Eastern U.P. "there remained the leading recruiting areas in Northern India (Tinker, 1974).
- In South India the Tamil-speaking areas of Trichinopoly, Madurai, Ramnad, Salem and Tanjore and the Telugu-speaking areas of Vizagapatnam and Ganjam were the main recruiting districts.
- In Bombay Presidency, Ahmadnagar district was the main area of recruitment.
- Of the three Presidencies, Calcutta stood first in volume of recruitment and embarkation and Madras second.

■ Kanjani/Maistry Labour Emigration

- The kangani system of recruitment was used to supply South Indian labour to Malaysia and Sri Lanka and the maistry system to Burma.
- The word 'kangani' is the anglicized form of the Tamil word kankani meaning overseer or foreman. Under this system, a kangani (himself an Indian immigrant) used to recruit the coolies in India paying them in advance for expenses (Jain, 1970:199).
- The maistry system was more or less characterised by a gradation of middlemen- employers (the labour contractor, the head maistry, the charge maistry, the gang maistry) and the innumerable illegal deductions.
- In contradistinction to indentured labourers, coolies under these systems were legally free. There was no contract and no fixed period of service.

- Kangani system began early in the first quarter of the 19th century and continued until its final abolition in 1938.
- Maistry system began some time in the third quarter of the 19th century.
- How many Indians migrated under these systems is not definitely known.
- In all, probably ten million Indian migrants moved back and forth between India and Burma, Ceylon and Malaysia (Sandhu, 1969).
- The majority of Indian immigrants were Tamil-speaking Hindus, the remainder being Muslims, Christians, and in the case of Malaysia only Sikhs (Arasaratnam, 1970).

▪ **Passage' Emigration**

- "The third form of Indian migration within the British Empire was 'passage' or 'free' emigration or the emigration of trading castes and classes.
- Passage emigration was predominant to South Africa as well as to the East African countries of Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda, where Gujaratis and Panjabis immigrated largely during and after the Second World War (Bharati, 1972; Kuper, 1960; Morris, 1968).
- Indian immigration in East Africa followed the 'opening up' of East Africa by the British and other European powers.

- The completion of the Ugandan railway offered new economic opportunities in the hinterland as well as along the railway route.
- Indians, mainly Gujaratis, soon established themselves as *dukanwals* (shopkeepers). In the towns they monopolized trade and commercial activities.
- Indians were merchants in native produce, carters and teamsters, small contractors, moneylenders, quarry-masters, dealers in lime, sand, stone and domestic firewood, barbers, saddlers, boot-makers, nurserymen, tailors, etc. (Ghai, 1965).
- Some of these businessmen were highly successful and quite a few of them rose to prominence.

- No reliable data are available regarding the total volume of Indian migration to East Africa.
- Different census reports throw some light on the growth of Indian communities in East Africa.
- Accordingly, there were 40,000 Indians in 1901 and 92,000 in 1931.
- During the war their number increased considerably and by 1963 there were about 372,000 Indians in the East African countries.
- Since the mid-sixties, negligible volumes of immigration and growing political uncertainties in East Africa have caused the number of Asian minorities to decline.

- In 1969 censuses of East African nations, there were less than 100,000 Asians left- 139,000 in Kenya, 74,000 in Uganda and 84,000 in Tanzania.
- Expulsion of about 70,000 Asians from Uganda in 1972 was a setback in this regard.
- Today, there are about 105,000 Indians in Kenya, 90,000 in Tanzania and 15,000 in Uganda.
- A large number of Indians from East Africa had migrated to Britain, Canada and U.S.A., aptly described as 'twice migrants', and many of them are now well settled in these countries.
- The remaining Indians in East Africa continue to thrive in business and professions.

■ Brain Drain

- A brain drain or human capital flight is an emigration of trained and talented individuals, due to conflict, lack of opportunity and/or health hazards where they are living.
- Investment in higher education is lost when the trained individual leaves, usually not to return. Also whatever social capital the individual has been a part of is reduced by their departure.
- Spokesmen for the Royal Society of London first coined the expression “brain drain” to describe the outflow of scientists and technologists to the United States and Canada in the early 1950s.

- The large-scale Indian migration to the advanced industrial societies of Europe and North America began in the late sixties, though the history of Indian emigration goes back to the early years of the 20th century in North America and nineteenth century in Britain.
- The characteristic features of this type of migration have been its totally voluntary nature, and the migration of highly educated professionals and skilled or semi-skilled industrial workers.

- Early Indian migrants who went to settle down in Britain and North America were mainly the Sikhs.
- The Sikhs community constitute the single largest ethnic group in Britain, Canada and the US, although now more and more non Sikhs are also migrating.
- Currently, there are about six million people of Indian origin in Europe, North America and Oceania. In the US the majority of Indians are educated professionals—scientists, engineers, doctors, etc.
- In Britain and Canada Indian communities are occupationally more diversified and therefore relatively less well off.

▪ **Labour Emigration to West Asia**

- **The fifth and the final emigration pattern** consists of the Indian migration to West Asia.
- This migration pattern differs from the previous ones in that all the migrants are generally ‘contract’ workers and are not allowed to settle permanently in the countries of their destination.
- India has had trade and cultural relations with the Persian Gulf region since antiquity.
- However, there is evidence of Indian settlements in the region only since the 16th century.
- Small communities of Indian traders called *baniyans* (a distorted form of the term Baniyas) existed in present- day Iraq, Iran, Oman, Yemen and Saudi Arabia in the 17th and 18th centuries.

- When the region came under British influence in the 19th century, Indian merchant communities flourished in a number of towns in the Gulf countries.
- Indians served as bankers, importers and exporters, customs farmers, agents for local merchants, government contractors, pearl-financiers, etc.
- Some of the members of traditional Indian trading communities like the Parsis, Gujarati Hindus and Jains, Thattai Sindhi Bhatias, Kutchi Bhatias, Bohra Muslims, Khojas, etc, were involved in these activities and have been continuing to operate even after the independence of the Gulf countries.

- At the same time, the emergence of the Gulf countries as oil-producing and exporting economies and the consequent demand for labour have further changed the size and complexion of the Indian and other expatriate communities in the region.
- With the increase in oil prices in the mid-seventies, Indians began to migrate in large numbers to the Gulf countries for a variety of jobs, and the upward trend has continued since then.

▪ **Conclusion**

- In sum, this brief survey of overseas Indian migration highlights the socio-economic conditions of colonial India in fostering substantial pressures for Indian emigration abroad. Under British colonialism, Indian agriculture continued to stagnate, the handicrafts industry declined, and an already poor country was subjected to excessive economic drain which retarded indigenous capital formation and thereby the growth of any significant industrialization.
- Against this backdrop a combination of factors like poverty, famines in the second half of the 19th century, unemployment and ignorance of the agrarian masses, and trickery on the part of the recruiting agents played its part in stimulating Indian emigration abroad.

■ Quiz Question

1. The distinctive patterns of Indian emigration are:

- (1) Indentured labour emigration
- (2) kangani/majstry labour emigration
- (3) "Free" or "Passage" emigration
- (4) "Brain-drain", or voluntary emigration to Europe, North America and Oceania
- (5) Labour emigration to West Asia
- (6) None of the above
- (7) All of the above

2. What did indentured labour mean?

- (a) Cheap Labour
- (b) Free Labour
- (c) Bonded Labour
- (d) None of these

3. "Brain drain" migration is thought to be the result of

- (a) social and environmental factors in developing countries
- (b) the problems people face in source countries, and the allure of a better life
- (c) families living in different parts of the world
- (d) workers becoming more ambitious

Readings

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- Jain, Ravindra K. 1993, *Indian Communities Abroad: Themes and Literature*, New Delhi: Manohar.

- With this I come to an end of the session on Migration And Adaptation Of Indians Abroad: Emigration, Volume And Destination and leave you with few questions which you will find easy.

Thanks for watching the video.



Thank you