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# Transnational Migrations

## The Indian Diaspora

Editors

William Safran, Ajaya Kumar Sahoo  
and Brij V. Lal

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# Indian Diaspora in Transnational Contexts — Introduction

William Safran, Ajaya Kumar Sahoo and  
Brij V. Lal

The Indian diaspora has grown apace in the past three decades to comprise more than 20 million people spread over all continents. Although that figure is small compared to the more than a billion inhabitants in the homeland, it has reached a critical mass in various host countries. It has developed institutions, orientations, and patterns of living specific to the institutional structures and socio-political contexts of different hostlands. These patterns have been marked not only by the influences of the hostland culture but by relations with the homeland. All the papers in this volume show two things: that the consciousness of homeland is never completely missing, and that the transnational context is part and parcel of diaspora and is, indeed, implicit in its very definition.<sup>1</sup> In other words, those who argue, like Paul Gilroy, that diaspora is merely “where it’s at”, are wrong; but so are those, like Nina Glick-Schiller, who substitute diaspora with transnational relations or transnationalism. This introduction is divided into three parts. The first part will discuss briefly the importance of diaspora and transnational studies in the contemporary context; the second part will provide a brief overview of Indian diaspora from historical to contemporary period; and the third part will introduce the chapters in the volume.

## I

### **Diaspora Studies**

Since the Second World War, the world has experienced an unprecedented increase in international migration. In 1990, the International

Organization for Migration estimated that over 80 million migrants had moved out of the country of their origin. Among them, 30 million were said to be irregular migrants and another 15 million were refugees or asylum seekers. By 1992, the number of migrants had increased to 100 million, of which 20 million were refugees and asylum seekers (Castles and Miller, 1993). The United Nations Population Division in July 2002 estimated that there were 185 million people living for 12 months or more outside their country of birth or citizenship (<http://www.un.org/esa/population/unpop.htm>). A majority of them are international migrants who are potential immigrants in countries of their destination and who often converge into diasporic communities.

The field of diaspora studies has undergone a fascinatingly complex evolution in the last two decades. It has received considerable attention by academicians, administrators, policy makers, social workers and the media, and there has been a paradigm shift in the analysis of immigrant ethnic minority communities to diaspora discourse. The launch of the journal *Diaspora: A Journal of Transnational Studies* in 1991 has not only shown how the field has grown over the years but also has brought into academic debate how the different immigrant and ethnic communities can be categorised under the rubric of 'diasporic communities'.

Historically, the term 'diaspora' referred mainly to the dispersion of Jews from their original homeland; it also referred to other two classical or traditional diasporas such as Armenians and Greeks. William Safran (2005: 36) pointed out that "diaspora referred to a very specific case — that of the exile of the Jews from the Holy Land and their dispersal throughout several parts of the globe". Referring to the classical and traditional diasporas, Khachig Tölölyan (2007: 648) writes, "a diaspora was understood as a social formation engendered by catastrophic violence or, at the very least, by coerced expulsion from a homeland, followed by settlement in other countries and among alien host societies, and, crucially, capped by generations of survival as a distinct community that worked hard to maintain its old identity or to create new ones that sustained its difference from the host society". However, today "the term refers not only to such classic groups as Jews, Greeks and Armenians, but to much wider categories which reflect processes of politically motivated

uprooting and moving of populations, voluntary migration, global communications and transport.... The term has acquired a broad semantic domain and now encompasses a motley array of groups such as political refugees, alien residents, guest workers, immigrants, expellees, ethnic and racial minorities, overseas communities" (Shuval, 2000: 41–42). As Rogers Brubaker (2005: 1) has rightly pointed out, as the term has proliferated over the years, "its meaning has been stretched to accommodate the various intellectual, cultural and political agendas in the service of which it has been enlisted". According to Tölölyan (1991: 4), the term today "shares meanings with a larger semantic domain that includes words like immigrant, expatriate, refugee, guest-worker, exile community, overseas community, ethnic community".

Diasporas are undoubtedly a kind of ethnic group, and ethnic groups often find their origin in migration flows. But not every ethnic group forms a diaspora, nor do all immigrations lead to the formation of ethnic groups (Sheffer, 2003, cited in Amersfoort, 2004: 362). Safran (1991: 83–84) analyses a variety of collective experiences in terms of their similarity and difference from a defining model. He defines diasporas as follows:

- They, or their ancestors, have been dispersed from a specific original "center" to two or more peripheral, or foreign, regions.
- They retain a collective memory, vision, or myth about their original homeland — its physical location, history, achievements, and, often enough, sufferings.
- Their relationship with the dominant element of society in the hostland is complicated and often uneasy. They believe that they are not, and perhaps cannot be, fully accepted by their host society and therefore feel partly alienated and insulated from it.
- They regard their ancestral homeland as their true, ideal home and as the place to which they or their descendants would (or should) eventually return — if and when conditions are appropriate.
- They continue to relate, personally or vicariously, to that homeland in one way or another, and their ethnocommunal

consciousness and solidarity, which reach across political boundaries, are importantly defined in terms of the existence of such a relationship. That relationship may include a collective commitment to the maintenance or restoration of their original homeland and to its independence, safety, and prosperity. The absence of such a relationship makes it difficult to speak of transnationalism.

- They wish to survive as a distinct community — in most instances as a minority — by maintaining and transmitting a cultural and/or religious heritage derived from their ancestral home and the symbols based on it. In so doing, they adapt to hostland conditions and experiences to become themselves centers of cultural creation and elaboration.
- Their cultural, religious, economic, and/or political relationships with the homeland are reflected in a significant way in their communal institutions.

While the concept of diaspora has been subject to various interpretations, its geographical and territorial dimensions are clear. According to Steven Vertovec (1997: 277) the term diaspora is often applied to “describe practically any population that is considered ‘deterritorialized’ or ‘transnational’ — that is, which has originated in land other than that in which it currently resides, and whose social, economic, and political networks cross the borders of nation states or, indeed, span the globe”. Diasporas, although by definition scattered apart geographically, are held together by factors such as a common ethnic identity and a collective relation toward the original homeland. Diaspora discourse is here to stay, thanks to the recent advances in the fields of transportation and communications technology that has brought diaspora communities globally dispersed closer to each other besides to their places of origin, the ancestral land or motherland. The advent of the Internet has contributed immensely to the growth of transnational networks, diasporic imaginary, and virtual communities. There is revival of the “local” in the global context, with the shrinking of space and time. The processes of globalisation have been undergoing change over time for centuries from silent trade and barter exchange, through international trade and multinational corporations, to a free flow of

capital and culture beyond the boundaries of nation-states spanning the globe. The last two decades of the twentieth century have particularly ushered in a new paradigm of globalisation, miniaturising space and time at the dawn of the twenty-first century. The far-reaching changes in technologies of transport and communications, that followed the micro-electronic revolution, have already impacted immensely on the way people think, work, and view the world.

### Transnationalism

The relationship of any diaspora with the homeland/motherland falls under the broader domain of international relations as it involves at least two countries that formally permit their subjects to interact with each other. Even in the absence of such formal understanding and other constraints, relations of an imaginary kind could exist through building structures and institutions that recreate the places of origin by diaspora communities. Today, diasporic communities go beyond the host nation-state and motherland to network with their communities dispersed around the globe. The emergence of such networking, cutting across several countries, is most appropriately described by the term “transnationalism”.

“Transnationalism” generally implies migration of people across the borders of one or more nations. It also refers to the deterritorialisation of population along with their material and non-material cultural commodities. As Portes *et al.* (1999: 220) argue, “...in other areas of human activity, transnationalism involves individuals, their networks of social relations, their communities, and broader institutionalized structures such as local and national governments”. The term “transnationalism came into prominent use for the first time in the study of international relations in the context of international organisations, relations between non-governmental bodies in particular” (Albrow, 1998, cited in Vertovec and Cohen, 1999: xx). In the field of international migration, the term developed rapidly during the late 1990s. In fact, the terms such as “transnational networks”, “transnational communities”, and “diasporas” are often used interchangeably in many contemporary studies. For instance, Caroline Knowles (2003: 155) argues that the concepts of diasporas and transnationals are “not distinct but blend into each other in describing

similar sets of people, circumstances and social processes” Transnational networks form a precondition to the emergence of transnational communities and the process of this transformation is generally designated by “transnationalism”.

An excellent analysis of this process is promoted by Portes (1997) in his paper “Globalisation from Below: The Rise of Transnational Communities”. He states, quoting Basch *et al.* (1994: 4), that transnationalism is “a process by which immigrants forge and sustain multi-stranded social relations that link together their societies of origin and settlement. We call these processes ‘transnationalism’ (*especially*) to emphasise that many immigrants today build social fields that cross geographic, cultural and political borders.” They actively engage in multiple spheres of life in host countries as well as in the countries of their origin. Such involvement is further extended to include other countries too, where members of their community are dispersed (see also Portes *et al.*, 1999).

Peggy Levitt (1999: 4) has examined the significance of several factors that have led to the emergence of transnational networks. These include: a) easy travel and communication; b) the increasing role immigrants play in the countries of their origin to legitimise themselves by providing service to migrants and their children; c) the increased importance of the receiving country states in the economic and political futures of sending countries; d) the society and political marginalisation of migrants in their host countries; and e) migration within an ideological climate that favours pluralism over the melting pot.

Besides the forces of globalisation, advancement in the technologies of travel, transport, and communications too play a key role in the emergence of transnational networks. Aeroplanes, telephones, television, electronic mail, and the most versatile Internet with online interaction, compress ‘time and space’ (Harvey, 1990) in a magnitude never ever anticipated, have brought a sense of *sustained connectedness* among the diasporic communities.

Diaspora communities like the Chinese in Chinatowns or Indians in their ethnic enclaves of ‘Little India’ the world over have built *homes away from home*, but the transnational networks of the contemporary era have facilitated members of these communities to be *here and there*. The above-mentioned processes of globalisation

and technological advancement have given rise to networking among the diaspora communities dispersed across the world. Hence, there is an urgent need to re-examine and capture the emerging phenomenon in transnational social spaces.

Transnational social spaces (see Basch *et al.*, 1994; Faist, 2000) or social fields (see Levitt and Schiller, 2004) are constructed from the transnational networks, which in turn are built upon transnational family networks (interactions between members of a family living in different countries) as well as upon the networking of community organisations (caste associations, religious institutions, for instance). These networks enable immigrants to maintain simultaneous connections with two or more nation-states. Further, these networks are intensified as a result of globalisation, deterritorialisation, continuous circulation of people (such as labour), capital (especially the role of the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, and the World Trade Organization), and information (through the Internet and other means of rapid communication) across countries. Such intensified transnational networks constitute a single community with global spread. As Kivisto (2001: 568) has mentioned, “transnational immigrant social spaces require the creation of a new form of ethnic community. What makes a diaspora different from the more familiar form that typified immigrant enclaves in industrializing nations a century ago is that it is located in a space that encompasses two or more nation-states, a situation made possible by time-space compression.” According to Thomas Faist (2000: 189), “whether we talk of transnational social spaces, transnational social fields, transnationalism or transnational social formations in international migration systems, we usually refer to sustained ties of persons, networks and organizations across the borders across multiple nation-states, ranging from little to highly institutionalized forms”. He further distinguishes between three types of transnational social spaces: transnational kinship groups, transnational circuits, and transnational communities. And “diasporas”, according to him, tend to constitute a specific type of transnational community.

According to Vertovec (2001: 575), “transnational connections have considerable economic, socio-cultural and political impacts on migrants, their families and collective groups, and the dual (or more!) localities in which they variably dwell”. The economic impacts of transnational migrant communities are extensive. The remittances

and investments that flow between transnational migrants to their families back home as well as the socio-cultural networks with the motherland, as in the case of the Jewish, Chinese, and Indian diasporas, are also interesting examples of transnational networks. This sustained transnationalisation of migrant ties is currently on a steep increase. Further, the global economy, along with international business operations and the acceptance of dual nationality by hostland governments, offers opportunities for promotion of transnational interactions. The modern modes of transportation and communication, in combination with new international institutions of economic activity following globalisation, have accelerated the immigrants' involvement in the economic transactions that cross borders of the countries of their origin and those of their settlement. Like the economic impacts of transnational migrations, the social, cultural and political impacts too are considerable. As Vertovec (2001: 575) pointed out, "many migrant communities maintain intense linkages and exchanges between sending and receiving contexts including marriage alliances, religious activity, media and commodity consumption... The political impact of transnational phenomena takes many forms especially with regard to 'questions of citizenship' and 'homeland politics'."

As mentioned earlier, revolutionary developments in the spheres of transport and communications during the past decade have introduced far-reaching changes in all societies, including the diasporic communities dispersed in different countries away from their countries of origin. Insofar as the diasporic communities are concerned, not only are the ties with the motherland reinforced and intensified but they are extended to reach the members of their community settled in many other parts of the world. These networks are transnational in nature as they cut across not just the motherland and the country of immigration but cover several nation-states where members of the same diasporic community are dispersed. Unlike the earlier motherland centred dyadic diasporic relations, diaspora communities today have multiple centres of interaction.

A note of caution is in order. Not all migrations have produced diasporas, nor are all transnational groups necessarily diasporas. For instance, the term cannot be applied to corporate personnel or members of military units whose presence in a foreign country is temporary and whose institutions are makeshift.

## II

## The Indian Diaspora

Perhaps no other diaspora in the world is characterised by such diversity in its population as the Indian diaspora in terms of culture, including languages, regions, religions and other forms of social stratification. Emigration from India too has been widely varied in terms of the historical context, causes, and consequences of migration from India as much as the social characteristics such as level of education, caste, gender, class, place of origin, and religious and linguistic affiliation of these immigrants.<sup>2</sup> A brief history of Indian emigration to other parts of the world show how the Indian diaspora formed under different socio-economic and political contexts over a period of time. Landy *et al.* (2004: 203–4) have categorised the Indian emigration, from the historical to the contemporary period, into six broad phases:

- a) merchants who went to East Africa or Southeast Asia before the 16th century; b) migration of various groups (traders, farmers) to neighbouring countries (Sri Lanka, Nepal); c) indentured labourers to colonial empires like the Caribbean, Fiji, Mauritius or Natal; as well as migration through middlemen (*kangani*, *maistry*) to Southeast Asia; d) migration of skilled workers after the Second World War towards the developed countries (UK); e) migration of contract workers to the Gulf countries; and f) recent migration of knowledge workers to developed countries (USA).

Based on the above six categories of the history of Indian emigration, we briefly explain those under four broad patterns of emigration:

- Pre-colonial emigration;
- Colonial emigration that began in the 1830s to the British, French, and Dutch colonies;
- Post-colonial emigration to the industrially developed countries; and
- Recent emigration to West Asia.

This introductory chapter will not discuss in detail the history of the Indian diaspora, since there is already a large corpus of literature

available on the topic. The main focus of this volume is on the transnational aspects of Indian diaspora. As such, its aim is to present a snapshot of Indian emigration to different parts of the world and to provide background knowledge for students and scholars working in the field of Indian diaspora. In the last section, we will introduce the chapters in the volume.

### *Pre-colonial Emigration*

In the Indian context, emigration has been a continuous process since pre-colonial times when its purposes were for trade and the propagation of religion. Historical and archival data suggest that Indian emigration goes back to the first century AD when Indian princes, priests, poets, and artisans migrated to Southeast Asian countries (Suryanarayan, 2003). The early emigration from India owed its origins to the Buddhist missionaries, when the Hindu kingdoms of medieval Southeast Asia attracted labour and craftsmen from India during the sixteenth century. According to Vinay Lal (n.d.), "long before the Mediterranean trading routes were established in the early modern period, the Indian Ocean trading system facilitated the migration of Indians to the east coast of Africa, Southeast Asia, and the area that is now encompassed under the term Middle East".

These trade contacts slowly developed, and thereby small colonies established themselves in East Africa and Southeast Asia. Also during this period, merchants from Gujarat, Bengal, and Tamil Nadu settled in the great port cities of Southeast Asia, such as Malacca, Aceh, Ternate, and Tidor. They gradually assimilated with the local population (Suryanarayan, 2003; see also Rai, 2008). Claude Markovits (2000) provides an excellent analysis of diasporic trading networks of Hindu merchants from the towns of Shikarpur and Hyderabad in the province of Sind, describing how they came to control the trading networks throughout the world. In reference to the case of Gujarati merchants and their trading networks, for instance, Jha (2008: 38) pointed out that "the commercial activities of Gujarati merchants developed much on overseas trade and 'international' contacts during the pre-modern period. The oceanic networks in the Indian Ocean were old and well established, and for centuries Gujarati merchants operated on these networks." However,

large-scale migration of people from the Indian subcontinent into Southeast Asia began with the expansion of western colonialism and capitalism during the last two centuries (Sandhu and Mani, 1993: xix; see also Kaur, 2008).

### *Colonial Emigration*

It was only in the mid-nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, in the wake of European imperialist expansion, that further conditions for the emigration of large numbers of Indians to different parts of the world were created. New plantations and industrial and commercial ventures in European colonies created the need for large supplies of labour; and with the abolition of slavery in the British, French, and Dutch colonies, respectively, in 1834, 1846, and 1873, there were severe shortages of labourers to work in the sugar, tea, coffee, cocoa, and rubber plantations in the colonies. Looking for alternative sources of labour, aside from the African ex-slaves and European immigrants, the colonial government imported Indians under the designation of "indentured labour". The indenture labour system "took a variety of forms, typically articulating with indigenous social relations, but generally was a contractual arrangement with penal sanctions whereby workers agreed to passage to and employment in a foreign country under specified terms, usually for five to ten years" (Goss and Lindquist, 2000: 389). The emigration of indentured labour started during the late eighteenth century and continued up to the early twentieth century. Thousands of Indians emigrated to East and South Africa (see Morris, 1956; Jayawardena, 1968), Mauritius (see Carter, 1994), Fiji (see Gillion, 1956; Lal, 2008; Srebrnik, 2008), and the Caribbean (see Clarke, 1986; Lai, 1993) under this system. A brief overview of this colonial emigration is given below.

The Indian presence in East Africa dates back to the first century AD when merchants from India had trade connection with East Africa. As Jones (2007: 17) writes, "the beginning of the Asian diaspora in East Africa may be imagined as a shrewd and self-serving businessman traversing the Indian Ocean in both directions, looking out to sea rather than in to land — a dynamic and cosmopolitan figure that is not entirely displaced by the experiences of Indian



indentured labourers". They were mostly from the Gujarati-speaking areas of Kathiawad and Cutch on the north-western coast of India (Morris, 1956: 194), and played a significant role in the economic development of that region both before and during European colonial rule (Mehta, 2001). By the middle of the twentieth century, the Indian community started to increase in large numbers as a result of several developments under British rule. For instance, the large-scale "influx of Indians began with the building of the Uganda Railway which was started in 1896. They were recruited as labourers for the construction of railways because of the absence of local labour, and after the work had been completed they were permitted to remain" (Martin, 1953: 233). Referring to the socio-cultural life of Indians in East Africa, Stephen Morris writes, "the Indians who came to Africa were in a sense a selected group. They were selected by geographical proximity to convenient ports in India and their position in their society at home. Representatives of various Muslim sects and Hindu sects came to East Africa, and in coming they had necessarily to alter many of the distinguishing marks and much of the behaviours which had characterized them as castes and sects at home" (1956: 197).

The history of Indian presence in South Africa goes back to the seventeenth century; however, it was only during the mid-nineteenth century that large-scale emigration took place under the indentured system, which was first used in Mauritius in 1834, then in the West Indies, followed by Natal in 1860. "A tripartite agreement between the governments of India, Natal and Great Britain facilitated the arrival of Indian agricultural labourers for an initial period of five years.... The late 1870s saw the arrival of a new class of Indians — the so-called 'passenger' Indians, who were mainly traders, mostly Muslims, and were often referred to incorrectly as Arabs. They traded in Indian goods and found a ready market in the indentured migrants" (Landy *et al.*, 2004: 205). Among these indentured emigrants, two-thirds were Tamil and Telugu-speaking Hindus from the then Madras Presidency as well as from Mysore and surrounding areas, and the rest of the migrants from eastern Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, and West Bengal. Most of these emigrants were illiterate, but they carried with them the memories of their rich traditions, customs, and rituals which they preserved even during the difficult periods of indentured

life in plantations (MEA, 2001: 76). According to the 1996 census, there were almost 1.1 million South African "Indians". They make up less than 3 percent of the total South African population (Landy *et al.*, 2004: 205).

Indian indentured labour went to the British West Indies immediately after the abolition of slavery in 1838. By 1917, when the indentured labour system was abolished, 241,000 and 145,000 labourers had arrived in British Guiana and Trinidad, respectively (Mohapatra, 1995). According to Peter Manuel, most of the immigrants who came to the Caribbean "were lower-caste peasants from the Bhojpuri-speaking region of what is now Bihar and eastern Uttar Pradesh. Although many of them returned to India, the majority remained in the Caribbean, and their descendants now constitute the largest ethnic groups in Trinidad, Guyana, and Suriname, outnumbering their Afro-Caribbean compatriots, and accounting for about twenty percent of the English-speaking West Indian population as a whole" (Manuel, 1997/1998: 18). Despite harsh working conditions in the plantations, Indians successfully transplanted their cultural traditions in the Caribbean and brought a "completely new culture where religion, language and social customs marked their unique identity" (Naidu, 2007). Today the descendants of the indentured workers are spread over the whole Caribbean space, forming a majority in Guyana and substantial minorities in Trinidad and Tobago as well as Suriname (Basdeo and Samaroo, 2008: 98).

In sum, the colonial emigration of Indians to the different countries of Africa and the Caribbean had similar features of Indian indentured labourers. During the colonial period, Calcutta and Madras were the chief points of embarkation, and the major districts for recruiting labour included Tamil and Telugu populations and the districts of Bhojpuri region of eastern Uttar Pradesh and northern Bihar (Daniels, 1989; Mayer, 1973; Laxmi Narayan, 2005). Approximately 1.5 million Indians crossed the Indian Ocean under contracts of indenture, including 61,000 to Fiji from 1879 to 1916 (Tinker, 1974). Various factors pushed Indian migrants into seeking employment under indenture. The first was the destruction of the Indian village and cottage industry, which resulted in unemployment and extreme poverty. The West, on the other hand, was becoming affluent because of industrial development. Second, all colonial masters found Indians

skilful, hardworking, and useful, so that the British, the French, the Dutch, and the Portuguese all took Indian skilled labour for the development of plantations and the agricultural economies of their territories. Upon their arrival in the colonies, the immigrants were assigned to plantations to which they were "bound" for five or more years. They lived there in isolated and insulated conditions. Although they were promised fair wages and a return voyage to India in exchange for a predetermined number of years spent working in the colonies, poverty and the desire to build a new life ensured that very few of these indentured labourers ever returned to India.

The migration of Indians to Sri Lanka, Burma, and Malaya during the British period was different from earlier migrations. It also presents a marked difference in contrast to the African and Caribbean countries (Jayawardena, 1968). All the emigrants to Sri Lanka and Malaya were from the southern parts of India and were recruited by a headman known as *kangani*. "Each *kangani* recruited a score or more of men belonging mainly to his own caste and kin group... Often the *kangani* was a man with some capital who lent his followers the expense of travelling to, and settling down on, a plantation" (Jayawardena, 1968: 433). The demand for south Indian labourers was based on the fact that they were more docile and reliable. The Indians under this system worked on the tea, coffee, and rubber plantations. "The peak of *kangani*-assisted recruitment occurred in the 1910s, when about 50,000 to 80,000 Indian workers arrived per annum" (Kaur, 2008: 80). Jain (1970) has estimated that, during the period 1852 and 1937, approximately 1.5 million Indians went to Ceylon, 2 million to Malaya, and 2.5 million to Burma. They "formed an important minority in Burma and Malaya where they filled a critical need in the urban manufacturing sector (Burma) and the plantation sector (Malaya)" (Kaur, 2006: 425). After 1920s, the *kangani* emigration (totalling around 6 million) gradually gave way to individual or unrecruited, free migration due to the fall in demand for Indian labour.

#### *Post-colonial Emigration*

The post-World War II scenario has changed the whole international migration process by affecting every migrant country, and India was

not far behind. During this period migration was directed towards developed countries, and the migrants were, for the most part, talented professionals, skilled labourers, and entrepreneurs from the peripheral colonial and underdeveloped countries besides Anglo-Indians. This post-war migration was totally different from the earlier migration of indentured, *kangani*, and other forms of labour migration. During this period, large-scale migration of Indians took place to the developed countries such as the United States (US), United Kingdom (UK), Canada, Australia, and New Zealand. Indians from other parts of the world, especially from the former colonies, also started entering these countries. They were labelled as "twice migrants" (see Bhachu, 1985).

The first phase of Indian settlement in the US began in the nineteenth century, but as a result of tightened immigration legislation, displacements, and voluntary return movements to India, the community almost ceased to exist after the Second World War. Only since the reformation of the immigration laws of the US in 1965 have people from South Asia in general, and India in particular, gone to the US in greater numbers (Gottschlich, 2008: 156). The new immigrants who have migrated to the US since 1965 were different in many respects from the nineteenth century old immigrants with whom Americans were most familiar (Lessinger, 1995: 5). They included members of the educated and professional elite such as engineers, scientists, and doctors as well as accountants and businessmen. This pattern of emigration of Indian professionals was triggered by the availability of jobs for trained engineers, physicians, and scientists, by the promise of a materially superior lifestyle, and also by a shortage of medical personnel and engineers in the US until the mid-1970s (Chacko, 2007: 133). There are also immigrants who were admitted under family reunification categories. These new immigrants have challenged the "established American conceptions of race and ethnicity since many of them hail from areas of the world where groups are categorized on the basis of very different criteria" (Kurien, 2005: 436).

The Indian presence is particularly important in the UK. The Indian population has been a part of Britain for almost three centuries (Laxmi Narayan, 2005). For instance, the Parsi community of Gujarat and the Bengali community arrived in Britain in the eighteenth

and nineteenth centuries as qualified lawyers, doctors, and professionals to settle down in the UK (MEA, 2001: 122). However, since the Second World War, Indian emigration to the UK started in large numbers (Desai, 1963; Robinson, 2005). Large numbers of Indians, especially from Punjab, went to the UK in the aftermath of the post-World War II reconstruction efforts in the industrial sectors. Another large group of Indians from former colonies in East Africa came to the UK in the wake of ethnic violence in those countries. These "twice migrants" had considerable expertise in trade and business. The most recent migration of Indians to the UK mainly consists of highly skilled workers such as IT experts, doctors, nurses, teachers, and engineers. According to the 2001 census, the Indian population is the largest single ethnic minority group in Britain, making up almost one quarter of the total minority ethnic population (Robinson, 2005: 184). They are considered hard-working and successful, and in spite of racial discrimination and disadvantage, the Indian community is found to be progressively better off than other groups in British society (Barn, 2008: 194).

In the case of Canada, the first decade of the twentieth century saw a steady growth of Indian immigration (Petros, 1993: 475). But after the Second World War, the Canadian immigration restrictions were gradually loosened and legislation in 1962 and 1967 substantially liberalised immigration. Prior to 1962, most of the immigrants were from the Punjab region and settled in the province in British Columbia. But thereafter the influx was more balanced, made up of people from every regional, linguistic, and occupational group represented in India. Besides Sikhs from Punjab, Hindus from Gujarat, Bombay, and Delhi, Christians from Kerala and Parsis from Bombay too immigrated to Canada during this period. In the multicultural society of Canada, Indians today constitute a significant proportion of the total immigrants and emerged to be one of the most prosperous and educated 'visible minority' that enjoyed much higher level of acceptance than the other immigrants in Canada. The impact of globalisation and transnationalism on the Indian communities in Canada has also become evident through the development of hybrid forms of cultural forms, blending elements from Indian and Indian diasporic communities.

Migration of Indians to Australia can be categorised under three broad waves. The first wave of migration began during the early part of the twentieth century, when both Australia and India were under British colonial rule, and most of them belonged to the Sikh community. The Sikhs mainly moved to Australia to work on the banana plantations in Southern Queensland (MEA, 2001). The second wave started after 1947 when India achieved independence, and a large number of British and Anglo-Indians joined in this migratory flow. The relaxation of the restrictive immigration policy by the Australian authorities in 1966 led to a marked rise in migration to Australia. The third wave of Indian emigration to Australia occurred about 25 years ago, after Australia abandoned its "Whites Only" policy. When the policy was abolished, many white-collar workers and professionals, most of them originating from Punjab and Gujarat, came to settle in Australia (Helweg, 1992). The big influx of Indians began with the revolution in communication technology (IT boom), when a large number of computer software professionals started migrating to Australia from 1976 onwards. The current waves of Indian immigration consist largely of engineers, toolmakers, doctors, and students. It may be mentioned here that Gujarati business families from Africa, Indo-Fijians from Fiji, and the second-generation relatives of Indians are also in this flow (see Voigt-Graf, 2005).

The Indian emigration to New Zealand has a long history, way back to the nineteenth century. And since their arrival, "they have established an 'Indian' identity based on occupational activities which they typically undertook and on the regions of India from which they originated" (Friesen, 2008: 45). The first Indian to enter into New Zealand was a Goan, Edward Peters. "His gold prospecting facilitated a mid-nineteenth century gold-rush upon which Otago's early economic wealth was built. Peters has received little mention by historians and instead the accolades have gone to a European, Gabriel Read" (Leckie, 1998: 163). However, it was only "after the implementation of a new immigration policy in 1987 which emphasized education, skills and investment capital in the selection of migrants" (Friesen, 2008: 48) that this immigrant community's numbers increased considerably (Johnson, 2007) and became the second largest ethnicity within the Asian community after the Chinese, and the country's third largest minority

(Johnson and Figgins, 2005). Indians who migrated to New Zealand before 1987 had their ancestral roots either in Gujarat or Punjab. But after 1987, Indo-Fijians, another branch of the Indian diaspora, began to enter into New Zealand, in the wake of two military coups in Fiji (Leckie, 1998: 163). Although their number rapidly declined after 1988, there was a steady flow from Fiji through the 1990s, and this, once again, accelerated after another attempted nationalist coup in 2000 (Friesen, 2008: 48).

In contrast to the ex-indentured populations, Indian immigrants in the industrially developed countries today have been able to maintain extensive ties with India because of their comparative affluence. Marriage arrangements, kinship networks, religious affiliations keep many immigrants well linked to their places of origin, since a large number of Indians are still first-generation migrants. Another factor that has enabled overseas Indians to maintain ties with their homeland is the flow of their remittances and investments.

#### *Recent Emigration to West Asia*

The recent migration of Indians to West Asian countries is basically oriented to labour and servicing occupations on a contract basis. The year 1973 marked the beginning of the rapidly increasing demand for expatriate labour in oil-exporting countries of the Gulf and North Africa — Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, Qatar, and Libya. These countries adopted a development strategy revolving around the building up of infrastructure and, in turn, created a demand for unskilled manual labour, especially in the construction sector. At the termination of the first phase of infrastructural projects and with the new emphasis on industrialisation in the Middle East, there was a significant change in the nature of labour demand. Between 1975 and 1980, 1 million skilled workers had been imported to manage and operate this new infrastructure.

#### **Indian Diaspora in Transnational Contexts**

Indians have migrated to different parts of the world at different periods of time. They migrated to British, French, and Dutch colonies during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries as *indentured*

and *kangani* labourers, and today they constitute the *Old Diaspora* (Bhat, 2003). They also migrated to industrially developed countries of Europe and North America during the post-colonial era as skilled workers and professionals and thus constitute the *New Diaspora*. The latter continues to have close contact with the families and relatives back home. Indians today have been successful in forming their local, international, formal, and informal networks by contacting with their kin around the globe. Their networks are channelled through various mechanisms, such as regular communications over telephone, visits and correspondence, remittances, the Internet, and sending and receiving videos on family events and other celebrations. While the New Diaspora has retained a vibrant relationship with family and community in India, the majority of the Old Diaspora has lost contact with the motherland. In the course of their long journey by ship to distant destinations, the unknown co-passengers became “jahaji bhai” [literally meaning “ship brother[s]”, a brotherly affinity owing to travelling together. As Landy *et al.* (2004: 207) write:

During the journey migrants became jahaji-bhai (ship mates), which created a new ‘kinship’ based on the memory of the journey on the same ship, without any attention to caste or religion. The bonds were so strong that marriage between children of jahaji was likened to incest. Alongside the referent of the village and the region had arisen a new referent without any specific location (a ship). This was the first mutation in the geographical identity, the first identity marker not connected to the origin in India. However, the memory of the journey faded away for succeeding generations.

Under a new system of slavery called “indenture labour” invented by the British colonialists, the Indian diaspora communities formed during the colonial era were totally denied access even to their own folk attached to different plantations, let alone any access to the then existing means of transportation and communication to engage with the motherland. The post-colonial emigrants, in contrast, not only enjoyed the advantage of being professionally trained, middle class, Anglophone Indians, but also earned an adequate income that could facilitate visits and frequent communication with their place of origin. The recent advancement in technologies of travel, transport, communication, information, and Internet has contributed immensely to the growth of transnational networks and virtual

communities. With the shrinking of space and time, there is revival of the local in a global context. At the same time, the transnational migration “triggers a range of feelings, including fear, nostalgia, anguish, exile, trauma, and sense of loss longing for the homeland, on the one hand, and the need to adjust, assimilate or integrate and to connect globally, on the other. This has an impact on successive generations due to narratives told by individuals and parents in the family and in communities. It influences the way children are brought up as ethnic communities are forged in the post-migration country” (Gopalkrishnan and Babacan, 2007: 508).

### III

#### Introducing the Chapters

This edited collection studies the Indian diaspora from the ground up. Several of the papers are based on personal interviews in selected American cities. They explore problems encountered in attempts at negotiating an identity that is a balance of “Americanness” and “Indianness”. In so doing, the chapters address questions frequently posed in connection with diasporas worldwide: How are diasporas formed? How do their members relate to their hostland, and how do they resolve the tension between the need to adjust to their new surroundings and to preserve their cultural identities? What roles do religion, language, class, and race play in this process? And what is the impact of diasporas on their anterior homeland?

The study by Smitha Radhakrishnan on the “Global Indian Middle Class”, which focuses on the Indian diaspora in the United States, suggests two important aspects of diaspora: its upward mobility in a pluralistic hostland, and the transformative function of a high-technology culture. There has developed “global Indianness” marked by a growing transnational interaction, in particular between the United States and India (and more specifically between the Silicon Valley and Bangalore). One manifestation of this is the value attached by graduates of Indian schools of technology to spending some time studying in North America or Western Europe. This interchange has led to a reversal of the brain drain and contributed to changes in the structure of the homeland society toward a progressive embourgeoisement and to the growth of a consumer culture.

The embourgeoisement of the Indian diaspora has altered the status of women as they benefit from gender equality while they try, at the same time, to maintain as much of the homeland culture is possible in foreign surroundings. It is noted, interestingly, that while Indian women in the diaspora have been taking full advantage of the gender revolution, they remain conservative in matters of religion and family. Finally, there has been a homogenisation of sub-national identities in the diaspora in favour of a pan-Indian identity (which suggests an interesting parallel with other diasporas, such as those of the Armenians, Hispanics, and Jews, whose internal differences often become less relevant in a hostland context), and a “long-distance” nationalism that may be associated with the support of the Hindu nationalist movement.

Sunil Bhatia’s study, “9/11 and the Indian Diaspora: Narratives of Race, Place, and Immigrant Identity”, is narrowly focused on second-generation Indians in the metropolitan area of Greater New York. It has two major themes: a) the rejection of a universally valid model of acculturation (if there is such a thing); and b) the importance of critical events in shaping collective identities. The author cites a number of factors that are conducive to the creation and maintenance of diaspora identities and that impede assimilation into the host society: increasing globalisation, massive migration flows, frequent border crossings, and the creation of multinational economic units. In addition, there is a demographic element of particular relevance to the Indian diaspora: the growth of the Indian population in the United States has reached a density that has changed the character of diaspora leadership and changed the nature of the Indian diaspora from pariah to a self-respecting bourgeoisie including high-tech professionals who are aware of their relatively privileged economic status.

All this would have made acculturation easier, except for a crucial event, the bombing of the World Trade Center towers in New York in 2001. Before that event, Indianness was not regarded as “foreign” by many Americans; indeed, some Indians considered themselves “white Americans”. Thereafter, Indians became increasingly the objects of stereotyping, suspicion, and racism. Indians are no longer as comfortable with non-Indians as they were before, and they have developed a defensive posture. In view of the fact that “there is a conflation of South Asian Muslims and Arabs with terrorism and

Islamic fundamentalism” and that, as a consequence, all South Asians are regarded with suspicion, Indians have been attempting to show that they are not Arabs (or Muslims). Sikhs are especially subject to discrimination and hate crimes because of their turbans and beards. To counteract this, Sikh leaders are emphasising “that Sikhism is a peaceful religion founded in opposition to Islam”.

Pawan Dhingra’s paper entitled “Committed to Ethnicity, Committed to America” calls attention to the problem of defining ethnic boundaries for those born in the diaspora but unwilling, or unable, to relinquish their “primordial” identities. Based on interviews with second-generation Indian youth as well as Indian ethnic leaders, the paper makes an important point in distinguishing between adaptation and integration, and between the political and the socio-cultural community. Dhingra focuses specifically on the attempt of diaspora Indians to integrate into the hostland socially, economically, and politically without abandoning Indian identity — in short, to integrate into the *state* (i.e., to the political system) but not into the *nation* (viewed in ethnic terms). This is the sort of position that a French citizen of Jacobin conviction would find untenable, if not unintelligible, but that would accord comfortably with the pluralist ideal of a democratic society in America as expressed three generations ago by Randolph Bourne and Horace Kallen. The tolerant attitudes prevailing in the United States, a settler nation, make such a distinction possible; yet, as this paper points out, “few feel completely at home in the United States” in a racial, ethnic, and religious sense, a situation that explains why ethnic ties are maintained both locally (infranationally) and with the homeland (supranationally). The cultivation of family ties and the association with Indian religious and cultural organisations and, in addition, interaction with other Asians, have provided Indian Americans with a “safe space” from racism and given them a degree of autonomy.

Dhingra refers to two expressions of identification with the homeland on the part of the Indian diaspora in the United States. On the one hand, American democracy and pluralism have led to a “progressive critique” of the homeland by second-generation diaspora; on the other hand, racial discrimination, negative stereotyping, and racial profiling have prevented full assimilation into the hostland, strengthened endogamy, and led to a “conservative defense” of the homeland. Moreover, the growing commitment to “multiculturalism”

in the United States, which brings with it the expectation that groups know a great deal about their homelands, contributes to the need for an “authentic ethnicity”. Of equal importance is a continuing belief in the importance of primordial ties. By asserting ties of ethnicity, religion, custom, and kinship, Indians also assert pan-ethnic commitments with other Asians, and thus become more “American”.

The paper by Gauri Bhattacharya, “The Indian Diaspora in New York City: Cultural Identities and Transnational Relations”, points to the complexity of Indian diaspora identities: some regard themselves primarily as Indians, while others identify as members of the Indian diaspora, and still others, as Indian-born Americans. In addition, there are class identities. There has been a continuing attempt to reconstruct India’s hierarchical class system in the New York City diaspora. This attempt does not always succeed, for it is counterbalanced by an important reality in Western hostlands: the predominance of the merit-based *Gesellschaft* model of social relations over the ascriptively based *Gemeinschaft*. Many members of the Indian diaspora have adopted, and successfully adapted to, the American upward-mobility model; they have achieved professional and economical success, which has enabled them to get integrated into American society and take advantage of the ease of travel to go back and forth to India to reconnect with their roots.

The attitudes of the Indians in New York toward their homeland and the diaspora are affected by their members’ personal histories, including their origins in a particular Indian subcommunity. As has been pointed out in this as well as in several of the other articles, there is a “fusion” of ethnic subcommunities in the diaspora that does not obtain in the homeland. At the same time, there are cultural variations within the diaspora that reflect different origins, like Indian or Caribbean. These differences are often reflected in the existence of separate neighbourhoods in New York (a situation that is comparable to that of other diasporas: distinct neighbourhoods of East European and German Jews; and of Puerto Ricans, Cubans, and Haitians). The Indian government is interested in maintaining ties with all the components of the Indian diaspora, which explains why, in 2006, it initiated a program of providing overseas citizenship for people of Indian origin (similar rights have been provided by the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG), Israel, Croatia, and Armenia to their diasporas).

Carmen Voigt-Graf's paper, "Transnationalism and the Indo-Fijian Diaspora", distinguishes between two Indian diaspora communities: immigrants who have settled in Fiji of their own free will, and the descendants of those who have been brought to the islands as indentured servants. India has tended to maintain a greater interest in fostering relations with members of the former group, who are relatively well-to-do and who have maintained active links with their homeland. In contrast, the relationship of members of the latter group with India has been relatively distant; and it is even more distant for those who have left Fiji for Australia and have constructed a Pacific identity. For many of them, Fiji, not India, is the homeland. This study provides an example of what the author calls "twice migrants" — of communities that have moved from a primary to a secondary diaspora — a phenomenon that confuses the distinction between homeland and diaspora and introduces complexities with regard to collective identity. The differential identification with the homeland based on the status in the homeland and conditions of entry into the hostland can be observed in the case of other diasporas as well: e.g., West Indian Africans and European Jews in the United States, and East African Sikhs in the United Kingdom.

One interesting finding is that Indians in Fiji are not quite the same as those in the homeland. This applies especially to social relations: the differences in caste, language, and religion that mark relations in India are not replicated in Fiji, where intercommunal relations are more amicable. It applies also to culture. Until two or three generations ago, Indian culture and language in Fiji were replenished with the arrival of immigrants from the homeland, but with the decline of immigrants the language spoken in Fiji has increasingly diverged from Hindi. Nevertheless, India continues to provide a cultural infusion in the form of religion, films, music, and fashion. While there is a strong interest in India in the maintenance of democracy in Fiji, the Indian government has been reluctant to interfere in its internal political affairs.

Pablo Bose's paper entitled "Home and Away" looks at India in connection with a more general theme — that of the place of diaspora in global development. Although diaspora remittances to the homeland are substantial, the impact of the former goes far beyond them. Among the many other contributions to the homeland are development

aid, the spread of Western-influenced condominium projects, and land speculation (which often enough results in the displacement of the poor). There are also cultural influences, marked, for example, by the growing importance of "non-resident" Indians in Bollywood films, both as subjects and as audience. The internal social structure of diasporas, their positioning within a hostland, and their linkages to homelands in the context of a globalising world raise questions about the evolving meanings of community, identity, citizenship, and, indeed, the nation-state.

All the contributions in this collection, while analysing the peculiarities of the Indian diaspora, also show what that diaspora has in common with others: the existence of continuing economic, cultural, and familial connections between diaspora and homeland; a tension between the desire to adapt to the hostland's political, economic, and social norms and the desire to maintain a distinct collective identity; and the development of diaspora institutions that seek to perpetuate aspects of homeland culture and society, moderated by the fashioning of forms of culture and social patterns that depart in one way or another from those of the homeland.

### Notes

- [1] The six chapters in this volume were first published as a special issue in the *Journal of Intercultural Studies* (Volume 29, Issue 1, 2008).
- [2] See *The Encyclopedia of Indian Diaspora* (Lal et al. 2006) for an overall discussion on Indian diaspora.

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