



Vivekananda International Foundation

An Overview of Indian Diaspora in Africa: Implications for India

Dr Neha Sinha



VIF Paper | March 2019



© Vivekananda International Foundation, 2019

Vivekananda International Foundation

3, San Martin Marg, Chanakyapuri, New Delhi - 110021

Tel: 011-24121764, Fax: 011-43115450

E-mail: info@vifindia.org, Website: www.vifindia.org

All Rights Reserved.

No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form, or by any means electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise without the prior permission of the publisher.

Published by Vivekananda International Foundation.

About the Author



Dr Neha Sinha is working as an Associate Fellow in VIF. She did her Graduation and Masters in Political Science from Delhi University. She has a specialisation in the African region and has completed her MPhil. and PhD from the Center for African Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi India.

An Overview of Indian Diaspora in Africa: Implications for India

The 21st century is seen as an era, when issues relating to global economic, social and cultural unification has encountered a boost from the existing international institutions. Thus under these circumstances, the study of diaspora acquires importance and becomes significant. In terms of language, identity and status, any diaspora is very diversified, and its socio-economic and political role along with the level of integration and assimilation becomes crucial, as through these that culture and traditions that form connection between two countries are preserved and protected. But today we see that despite playing an important role in every corner of the world, diasporic members are viewed with lot of speculation and reservation. In the African continent, there are around three million people of Indian origin. A large number of Indians have settled in Africa after migrating in phases. Considering diaspora as an important attribute to the connection between domestic and international politics, this has added new dimensions to the India–Africa relationship.

Defining Diaspora

The word ‘diaspora’ is derived from the Greek word *dia* (through or over) and *sperio* (dispersal or to sow). Diaspora literally means ‘scattering’ or ‘dispersion’. In the case of the Indian diaspora, India is that common ancestral homeland from which people, for various reasons, voluntarily or involuntarily, moved to various parts of the world. The diaspora was thus formed due to such kind of migration (Lal 2007: 14-18).

The term ‘diaspora,’ according to V.S Sheth, denotes, “scattering of people with a common origin, background, and beliefs” (Sheth 2003: 105). With the enhanced inter-dependence between states, trans-national relationships and contacts have become significant. According to the *Encyclopaedia of Social Sciences*, “Diaspora is a Greek term for a nation or a part of the nation separated from its own state or territory and dispersed among other nation but preserving its national culture (*The Encyclopaedia of Social Science* 1935: 126)”.

The term, ‘diaspora’ is generally used to refer to Jewish people who reside outside Palestine. The connections that diaspora maintain are symbolic. For scholars, the term ‘diaspora’ combines various categories such as immigrants, guest workers, ethnic and racial minorities, refugees, expatriates, and travellers. Diaspora may be created as a community as a result of voluntary or forced migration, mass exile and by the emigration of economically depressed groups to other countries. The recent changes in the world political and economic order have caused large scale movements of people in almost every region. Given the

relationship between the diasporic community and the motherland, there exists a possibility of their return from the country of their adoption. Thus, diaspora has originated from migration.

It is also quite clear that the diaspora are ethnic minority groups that reside in host countries, but maintain strong emotional, sentimental and material links with their respective countries of origin (Sheffer 1986: 3). The concept has now been generalised to refer to any population which has migrated from its country of origin and settled in a foreign land. They selectively incorporate and synthesise themselves with their roots of origin and sense of their past.

The assessment of the diaspora thus goes beyond historical and cultural ties and extends to wider economic role. In a globalising world, migration is a significant force of historical change when a diasporic community assimilates, acculturates into its host society and tends to lose its affinity and linkages with its land of origin (Gupta 2003: 2). Thus, the role of diaspora becomes significant in the formation of ethnic identity, shaping ethnic relations and in reconstructing societies. They provide a broad way for understanding the dynamics of culture and are thus gaining significance in contemporary history.

Concept of ‘New Diaspora’

The Indian overseas community includes the foreign citizens of Indian origin who are called People of Indian Origin (PIO) and Indian passport holders based in foreign countries known as Non-Resident Indians (NRI). This community comprises of various ethnic, linguistic and religious groups, which reflect the cultural and regional diversity of India. Migration phases are varied in terms of historical circumstance, causes, and consequences, and Indians have emigrated in different migration surges and occupational capacities.

During ancient times, they went as merchants and explorers. Though in the last three decades of the 20th century, the character of Indian migration increasingly changed in form, and a ‘New Diaspora’ began to emerge. Spurred particularly by more flexible United States policies for highly skilled migrants, Indian migration was increasingly dominated by professionals - academics, scientists, engineers, doctors, and managers; many of whom showed considerable entrepreneurial flair. The United States was the prime destination for those who become the NRIs, but this new wave also moved to Britain and its dominions where they established themselves as a major players in global ‘big businesses.’

The 20th century also saw the return of the demand for contract labours in the oil rich states of the Gulf, and in the economies of the South East and East Asia. Such labours became important for India because of the substantial remittances made by the workers. These new contingents of labourers suffered many of the oppressive conditions of their 19th century indentured forebears; but unlike them, they were generally not allowed to settle in

their host societies. Over the years, the Indian diaspora grew in the host countries, gained importance and emerged as valuable assets for their new home and host countries.

Migration of Indian Diaspora in Africa

The Indian diaspora today, constitutes a vital and unique force in the world economy. PIOs have been hugely successful in their host countries. Today, PIOs live in almost every country across the globe, and they have made their mark in virtually all professions and occupations. They constitute more than 40 per cent of the population in Fiji, Guyana, Mauritius, and Surinam where the Indian community has been politically dominant. Globally, the Indian diaspora is no longer seen as humble migrants, but as a community excelling in every field, holding high posts in politics, universities, and industries. Members of the Indian diaspora have made their mark as leaders, politicians, eminent professors, and other high-ranking professionals. People of the Indian subcontinent have been known to migrate to different countries for various reasons during multiple periods of history. The Indian immigrants comprise a considerable chunk among the numerous nationalities.

If we look at the demographic map of the world today, there is hardly any country in the world where there are no people of Indian origin. They are living in different parts of the world, specifically in the West, the Middle East, Africa, the West Indies, South and South East Asia, Australasia and Oceania. From the dawn of recorded history, Indians have been migrating and settling abroad. During the colonial era, a large number of Indians migrated as indentured labourers to far-off countries like Mauritius, South Africa, Trinidad, Guyana, Fiji, etc. They went in search of work and laboured in sugar plantations under highly exploitative conditions. With the passage of time, they became part and parcel of the country of their adoption. In the post-independence period, migrants from India consisted mainly of people of technical competence and skilled workers who went voluntarily in search of better economic prospects. (Mathew's, K. 2001. Vol.22, No.3, p.5).

Presently, PIOs are in majority in Mauritius (almost 70 percent) and Guyana (51 percent) and the single largest ethnic group in Fiji (less than 50 percent) and Surinam (37 percent). Indians form the second largest group in Trinidad and Tobago - about 40 percent of the population. In several other countries, the Indians position is third or fourth in the population ranking - Malaysia (9 percent), Singapore (6.4 percent), Sri Lanka (5.5 percent) (Sahadevan, 1995, p.16).

Out of the 30 million people of Indian origin across the globe, there are around three million residing in the African continent. They are present in all regions of Africa. They migrated to Africa for various reasons such as slavery, trade, as indentured workers, as construction workers, and businessmen. The waves of the Indian Ocean have brought together India and Africa, since the time when 'dhows' were used by sailors and traders to sail to each other's shores. With the emergence of the colonial era and improvements in

shipping technology, contacts between the two continents were enhanced multi-fold. The remnants of large numbers of trading outposts and settlements along the East African coast, along with the discovery of Indian coins, bear testimony to the strong bilateral trade ties.

The first wave of Indians was brought to Africa as slaves. However, the first regular migration to Africa started with indentured labourers being hired as agricultural hands. Subsequently, economic prospects lured migrants to Africa, and they went as traders, clerks, business people, artisans, lawyers. There are more than three million PIO across the African Union countries - large numbers are found in Anglophone Africa, while smaller and a more recent population are found in Arab Africa, the Francophone and the Lusophone areas. As highlighted earlier, the initial wave of migration of Indians was concentrated along the eastern coast of Africa, and the subsequent waves spread all along the Indian Ocean coastal region in addition to the western Indian Ocean island nations. Indians can now be found across all the countries of the vast continent. If we observe carefully, we can conclude that the first regular migration of Indians to Africa was confined to Mauritius in the first half of the 19th century. They were taken to sugarcane plantations as indentured workers.

The second wave migrated to South Africa where the Indian workers were taken to Natal under indentured contracts in the late 19th century. Once the time of the indentured contracts came to an end, Indians stayed back in the colonies where labour was still required and in demand. They built railroads connecting East Africa and were accompanied by others who were carpenters, small traders, cooks, cleaners, washermen etc. A significant portion of the railroad workers returned home to India after finishing their work, but some people chose to stay back in Africa. When East Africa was connected with the rail network, Indians were hired to run the rail operations. With the expansion of economic activity, a new generation of skilled people - doctors, lawyers, business people, came calling, and the activities of the Indian diaspora, which might appear insignificant, left a deep impression on African commerce. For example, the early Indian petty traders travelled to remote and interior areas of Africa and traded on miniscule profit margins to bring the rural agricultural goods to the cities/towns. To this day, the term 'duka' (from the Hindi word 'dukan' meaning shop) can be heard in the African continent.

Later on, the Indian diaspora in Africa came to represent a mix of people, with some of them tracing their roots in Africa to the early Indian settlers - whereas the recent migration represents groups of expatriates. In the case of Kenya, most of the Indian diaspora are the third or fourth generation descendants of the early Indian migrants. The recent arrivals into Kenya boasts of investors in the country's vital sectors viz., textiles, floriculture, tele-communications, petro-chemicals, etc. After being displaced from neighbouring Uganda (during the Idi Amin regime in the 1970s), they were invited back into the nation by the Ugandan government when peace was restored in the nation. As a result, more than 30,000 Indians, including both new investors and returnees, are currently living in Uganda. Tanzania is one of India's largest trading partners and hosts a population

of 40,000 Indian residents. In the case of Zimbabwe, approximately 10,000 Indians - mostly small business people and traders - reside in the country. Resource-rich Burundi also plays host to a group of Indians who have moved in from Uganda. Post the civil war, Rwanda played host to more than a couple of thousand Indians, and they have set themselves up for success with the steady growth of the Rwandan economy.

Indian link with Mozambique is both significant and historic. Down the line, when the Portuguese captured Goa, regular commerce and trade between the two countries was established. Trade was mainly carried in wood, tea, coffee, and spices. Goan traders began making voyages to Mozambique to sign up as soldiers and administrators. The pioneering Indians from Goa have assimilated so marvellously into the Mozambican society that they cannot be distinguished as Goans anymore. Ethiopia, another African nation, also has close ties with India, and this relationship has been strengthened by the Indian teachers in the primary as well as secondary schools during the 1970s. In Nigeria, there are about 25,000 Indians, 8,000 of whom have taken up Nigerian citizenship. Nearly 6000 Indians live in Botswana, while Eritrea hosts 500 Indians. The Liberian civil war took a toll on the Indian population, and most of them moved out of the country. Currently, there are approximately 3500 Indians in Liberia. This small group won international acclaim for running war shelters in Monrovia, which faced the brunt of the civil war.

From the official statistics of the government of India, we can clearly see a healthy surge in the numbers of the Indian diaspora in the African continent. The Indian community is spread across 46 countries of the African continent, and they constitute around 12 per cent of the total diaspora in Africa (Upendra Tripathi, 2017). When we talk about the diaspora in Africa, it is also important to note that there were many problems that the Indian diaspora faced in integrating with indigenous societies of Africa. They also faced various socio-economic and political problems such as economic hardship, denial of equal political rights, social segregation, and, issues relating to loyalty. Also, at times, the diaspora found itself in a minority situation.

To analyse the current population of the Indian diaspora in Africa, we can classify them into four categories:

- i) **Dominant Strength in Africa.** Mauritius has the distinction of being included in this category. The High Level Committee on Indian diaspora mentioned that more than 70 per cent of the total population of the nation is composed of the Indian diaspora. The Indian diaspora was among the initial permanent settlers on the island. The members of this group wield influence in the political sphere of the nation - although they are not the economically advanced community. The Indian group in Mauritius is not described as a monolithic, homogenous community. Divisions exist on the lines of caste, place of origin, religion, language, etc. The community has been successful in

preserving its cultural identity. A recurrent theme in each Mauritian town is the presence of places of worship belonging to different religions. The famous 'Ganga Talab' is considered auspicious as it is believed to be purified by the holy Ganga River and is demarcated as a site of pilgrimage for Hindus in Mauritius. Due to the cultural resemblance, Mauritius is often regarded as a little India, away from geographical territory of India (Gupta R.K.: 2013, 136-146).

- ii) **Substantial Strength in Africa.** South Africa and Reunion Island belong to this category. The Indian diaspora in South Africa constitutes three percent of the total population of the nation and is concentrated in the KwaZulu-Natal area (about 75 per cent of the Indian community). Durban is considered to have a huge urbanised Indian population (*Report of High Level Committee on Indian Diaspora: 2001*, 84). The concentration of the Indian diaspora has given the Indians a political clout in this prosperous and industrialised region of South Africa. In the case of Reunion Island, the total strength of the Indian diaspora is 30 per cent of the entire population of the nation (Gupta R.K.: 2013, 136-146).
- iii) **Marginal Strength in Africa.** Countries like Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania, Nigeria, Madagascar, Zimbabwe, Zambia, Botswana, and Mozambique fall in this category because the population in these countries is between 10,000 to 100,000. The relative percentage of the Indian diaspora in these countries is small and scattered. Hence, they are not able to exert political influence nor do they find a strong chance of obtaining political offices on the basis of their ethnic identity. The notable feature is that the Indian diaspora in these countries is keen to retain their identity and financially sound. They play a vital role in shaping the public opinion as they are employed in the roles of journalists, academicians, lawyers, etc. (Gupta R.K.: 2013, 136-146).
- iv) **Minimal Strength in Africa.** Under this category, we see that there are thirty three African countries with less than 10,000 individuals of the Indian Origin. The binding feature of these individuals is that they are spread across different geographical locations of their host-countries and retain their Indian passports. This makes them find insignificance in the political realm of the host-nation. In this category, Malawi is the only exception where the Indian diaspora is represented in the parliament and the government (Gupta R.K.: 2013, 136-146).

Table 1: Indian Diaspora in Africa Region: Country-wise Strength

Sl. No.	Country	Non-Resident Indians (NRIs) 2016	Persons of Indian Origin (PIOs) 2016	Overseas Indians 2016
1	Algeria	3770	17	3787
2	Angola	1500	2500	4000
3	Botswana	9000	3000	12000
4	Burkina Faso	200	5	205
5	Burundi	465	35	500
6	Cape Verde Islands	20	0	20
7	Comoros	30	200	230
8	Congo	9000	25	9025
9	Djibouti	350	0	350
10	Egypt	3500	265	3765
11	Equatorial Guinea	250	0	250
12	Eritrea	1000	3	1003
13	Ethiopia	5250	23	5273
14	Gambia	600	15	615
15	Ghana	10000	0	10000
16	Guinea	700	0	700
17	Guinea Bissau	100	3	103
18	Ivory Coast	1500	0	1500
19	Kenya	20000	60000	80000
20	Lesotho)	500	1000	1500
21	Liberia	3000	0	3000
22	Libya	1500	2	1502
23	Madagascar	2500	15000	17500

Sl. No.	Country	Non-Resident Indians (NRIs) 2016	Persons of Indian Origin (PIOs) 2016	Overseas Indians 2016
24	Malawi	2500	8000	10500
25	Mali	212	0	212
26	Mauritania	200	0	200
27	Mauritius	10500	884000	894500
28	Morocco	300	20	320
29	Mozambique	1500	20000	21500
30	Namibia	200	59	259
31	Niger	150	0	150
32	Nigeria	40000	35	40035
33	France	19000	90000	109000
34	Rwanda	2940	60	3000
35	Sao Tome & Principe	50	0	50
36	Senegal	380	31	411
37	Seychelles	4000	6000	10000
38	Sierra Leone	900	50	950
39	South Africa	60000	1500000	1560000
40	Sudan	3400	100	3500
41	Swaziland	500	500	1000
42	Tanzania	10000	50000	60000
43	Togo	500	10	510
44	Uganda	23500	6500	30000
45	Zambia	5000	18000	23000
46	Zimbabwe	500	9000	9500
Total		220967	2590448	2811415

Source: Ministry of Overseas Indian Affairs, Government of India (2016)

Diaspora's Contribution and Role in Africa

The role of diaspora can be attributed to several development strategies that has been continually acknowledged in the past decade. Their contribution are in the form of economic growth of the host country - which has attracted significant policy interest in recent years - in poverty alleviation; remittances which is an important contribution by the diaspora to their families in India, and helps in the development of emerging economies and for investing in community projects in their country of origin.

South Africa. In South Africa (S.A.), the Indian diaspora played a pivotal role in the fight against apartheid. Even Nelson Mandela pointed out while referring to Mahatma Gandhi that he was an integral part of South Africa's history and his contribution from liberating people from apartheid. In a letter Mandela wrote, "*... in 21 years of his stay in South Africa we were to witness the birth of ideas and methods of struggle that have exerted an incalculable influence on the history of the peoples of India and South Africa.*" (E.S. Reddy, The Wire 2016). Just like Gandhi, the other people of Indian Origin also made efforts and found several ways to fight against the prejudiced regime that existed in S.A. Over the years, the political landscape has changed in S.A. with the emergence of many local parties and with identity becoming a political issue. An Indian political party was also established in due process which was later criticised for only talking about Indian issues in S.A., particularly those in Durban and about the top business people like the Guptas who have influenced the African National Congress (ANC) leader Jacob Zuma, presently charged with corruption. This has led to the targeting of the general Indian populace. Post-apartheid, the Indian diaspora is playing an important role in the economy and politics of the country. Currently, three percent of the Indian population are very well established businessman. Also, the number of ministers present under ANC currently shows their active participation in the political realm too.

Uganda. Four decades ago, in 1972, Ugandan Asians faced mass expulsions on the orders of the former military ruler Idi Amin. About 50,000 Asians (read Indians) were forced to leave the country as they were accused of "milking Uganda's money". At the time, they owned 90 per cent of the country's businesses and accounted for 90 per cent of Ugandan tax revenues. Thousands of Ugandan Asians fled to the United Kingdom after Idi Amin ordered their expulsion and forced them to leave Uganda. Thus, the large, prosperous community of Ugandan Asians found themselves scattered across the globe, many having left and lost the businesses they had set up with great efforts. In the years which followed, Uganda's economy slumped. But, when President Yoweri Museveni, who recently won a fifth term in office, seized power in 1986, he encouraged the exiles to return. With the return of the Indian diaspora in the country in 1980s and 1990s, Asians from the Indian subcontinent once again become a pillar of the Ugandan economy. Since then, right from running banks to farms to supermarkets to shopping malls, the Indian diaspora have regained their significant role in the country's economy. Now, despite making up less than a

per cent of the population, they are estimated to contribute up to 65 per cent of Uganda's tax revenues. So the conclusion is that Indians should be involved in both the economy as well as politics in order to have a clout in the country. The economy will help them to cement their base in the growth of the nation whereas the politics will make them powerful in terms of legality. Confining just to economy might again lead to expulsion if and when the same situation arise.

Mauritius. In Mauritius, we see that the Girmitiyas did not have the right to vote till 1948. There was a law made by the Britishers, that people of Indian origin should have their representative in the assembly of eleven ruling members, and the criteria was that the person should be a learned voter holding good post, financially sound and owner of land. A movement was followed by Prof. Basesio Beesoondiyal where Hindus, Muslims, Telugu, Marathi, etc. started learning to write in order to achieve the given criteria. Soon, the election results were reversed in which nine turned out to be of the Indian diaspora. Since then, all the general elections are won by the Hindus with a comfortable majority and they hold good position in almost all the arena.

Assimilation of Diaspora. Today, in Africa, where the Indian diaspora migrates for job opportunities they don't face discrimination to the extent that they face in other countries like the US, European nations and Gulf countries. For example, in Mozambique there is no discrimination against any foreigners, including Indians. They own businesses and work in the government as civil servants without any discrimination whatsoever. According to the World Economic Forum, today there are more than three million people of Indian origin in Africa and day by day their numbers are increasing - especially there is a remarkable rise in Keralite migration. Also, India is the seventh largest investor in Africa with a \$17 billion investment in 2015. The India-Africa trade has risen to \$63 billion in 2017-18. In most countries of Africa, the Indian diaspora has excelled in retail and manufacturing sectors. In countries like Tanzania, Madagascar, Mozambique, Kenya, Uganda, etc. Indians play a pivotal role as a bridge between India and Africa in trade and commerce.

Diaspora as an Agent of Development. The diaspora represents a potent source of skilled labour and expertise for their native countries by virtue of return migration (both temporary and virtual). In the present era of globalization, the diaspora also reflects a goldmine of Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) in their home countries, in addition to setting up vital commercial links to opportunities in untapped markets. However, the avenues by which policymakers can engage with diaspora groups are seldom direct. Foremost lies the lack of conceptual clarity about the inclusions and exclusions under the term 'diaspora' - it can encompass individuals from first-generation migrants to people whose relations migrated many generations ago. In the present context, diaspora includes current migrants and people who gave up their citizenship in their 'home' nations but still maintain links and ties with their homeland. This leads to a heterogeneous mix in diaspora groups, and it is

vital for the policy makers to identify groups that have a genuine interest in ushering a strong socio-economic progress in their country of origin. Simultaneously, policy makers need to analyse whether the interests of the diaspora are in sync with those of the homeland citizenry. Lastly, policy makers also need to go beyond the obvious and utilise the benefits accruing because of multi-state connections that the diaspora groups can strengthen.

Remittances and Development. Remittances by individuals and families play a major role in diaspora-homeland relations. There are two contradictory views about the desirability of the flows of money; that result from migration and the consequent emergence of diasporas. The negative view of that phenomenon highlights the following aspects: Continued migration and remittances will increase the homeland's dependence on their diasporas, encourage further chain-migration and consequently brain drain, create instability in homeland economies, stifle economic initiative, feed consumerism, increase inequality, and lead to developmental distortion and economic decline that may even overshadow the advantages for a minority of beneficiaries. The positive view of remittances seeks to turn each of the negative arguments on its head. Thus, as a result of those trends, so it is argued, homeland economies will have to become responsive to market forces, homelands will get resources for development, because those money's will have multiplier effect, and the remittances will improve income distribution and contribute leading to a higher standard of living (encompassing better education, sustenance for elderly people, and adequate housing for families in homelands). However, neither the negative view nor the positive opinion is totally correct. It is hard to argue that income from remittances is responsible for economic crisis or recession in homelands. It is equally difficult to say that remittances have become reliable engines that can sustain economic growth or narrow the social and economic gaps in the home countries.

Investment and Development. A significant way in which the diaspora is found to be involved in contributing to the development of their home states is through collective investment in community projects via setting up of hometown associations. Hospitals, schools, literacy initiatives, upskilling missions are some examples where this phenomenon can be seen in action. If we look at the Ghanaian hometown associations in the UK, we can notice that these groups are bound together by a burning desire, to play a role in the development of the people back in Ghana. Going beyond the socio-economic aspect, the bilateral and multilateral connections facilitated by the diaspora must be leveraged to encourage a healthy exchange of ideas and people. This can be seen in multiple countries and India is no exception, We have a programme called 'Know India' which is run by the Ministry of External Affairs and provides a unique avenue for young professional and students to acquaint themselves with contemporary India. Inter-nation linkages can also influence the decision of people to return home - this is a reverse of 'brain-drain' and has positive implications for the development of the home country.

Indian Diaspora in Anglophone Region of Africa. The Anglophone region consists of Britain and her ex-colonies. Of the several Anglophone countries in Africa - Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda and South Africa - are important countries for India. Indians occupied the middle position in the racial structure between British and Africans. In East Africa, most Indians are traders and quite prosperous, which has led to frequent clashes between the native African population and people of Indian descent. At the social level, Indians are largely from a conservative background. They rarely mix with Africans. Indians in the Anglophone region have tried to preserve their identity, especially with regard to their religion, rituals, festivals, customs, and food habits. Economically, they have integrated well in most the countries. Though multiple levels of diversity exist, this is because of the differences in the socio-historical and political conditions they have been situated in. The Indian community in Anglophone region occupies a unique position. Indians are considered to be a disciplined and model community. Their high and commendable levels of educational attainment and their distinct profile, as compared to others, have created a new image of India as a dynamic nation.

Indian Diaspora in Francophone Region of Africa. Francophone as a region consists of French-speaking countries, and there are around 25 countries in Africa which fall under this category. Indians have contributed significantly to the economy, society, politics, and culture of these countries. Indian labour has been the main force for transforming the physical landscape of many Francophone countries like Mauritius, Reunion, Seychelles, Guadeloupe, and Martinique. The Indian diaspora constitutes an important and unique force in these countries with its significant presence in various businesses and high-skill professions. PIOs are extremely successful in knowledge-based sectors, particularly in Information Technology. They also very successfully run small businesses in countries like Madagascar.

Indian Diaspora in Lusophone Region of Africa. Lusophone Sub-Saharan Africa covers four per cent of the African population. Unlike the Francophone and Anglophone where PIOs can be found in large numbers, in Lusophone Africa, however, their numerical strength is much less - except in Mozambique.

Policies Adopted by the Colonial Powers

France, unlike Britain, always followed the policy of assimilation in their colonial possessions. The French ruled their colonies as an extension of their empire. Like Francophone Africa, there was no colour bar in Lusophone Africa, as a part of its assimilation policy. Gunther in his book, *Inside Africa*, states that Portuguese Africa has one unique phenomenon, the 'assimilado' or 'civilizado' system. Any native may rise from his status as an 'indigo' and become 'civilised' by a process of law. He passes certain tests, and then he becomes a white man instead of black, no matter what his skin colour maybe. Many

Indians passed this test and held white collar jobs. But this policy was not as successful as that of the French policy of assimilation.

The Portuguese, during the colonial period, were mostly involved in solving problems back home. They could not give attention to the colonies under its rule. They did not have a systematic policy towards colonies as the French and British did. The British trained Africans to eventually have self-government, and the French trained them to be Frenchmen. The British had the long range aim of creating African domains within the Commonwealth; the French ambition was to make the African territories as a part of France. However, no such arrangement was made by the Portuguese. In fact, after decolonization also they made no arrangement to maintain links with Africa. Hurriedly, they left the occupied territory after facing grave resistance. As a result, Portuguese influence in its territories in the post-independence period is not much, though its influence can be seen in Mozambican society.

Identity Formation of Indian Diaspora in Africa: Issues, Challenges, and its Significance

Identity formation is a constantly evolving and continuous process. Instead of thinking of identity as an already established fact, we should think of identity as a product in motion which is never complete. The process of identity formation is a long-drawn one and in the case of diaspora, it plays a major role in helping the diaspora find acceptance within the society of the host country. There are three major aspects of identity formation:-

Cultural identity formation. Cultural identity is one of the most vital aspects of identity formation which pose a significant challenge for the diaspora. In most of the cases, the diaspora tends to bring in their cultural beliefs and practices to the new society. This might act as a source of confrontation between the diaspora and the citizens of the host country. In the case of significant cultural differences, the diaspora might find it difficult to adjust to a new setting. Also, in the case of enforced diaspora, fragmentation and segregation are starker as compared to the diaspora who move of their own accord. The loss of identity can prove to be a major hindrance in the proper assimilation of the diaspora.

Social Identity Formation. The idea of identity formation from the social perspective gains significance because the diaspora. No matter how aligned or diametrically opposite they might be with regard to their social traits, they need to adjust and respect the social customs of the host countries, e.g., in developed countries the idea of relationships and kinship might be loosely defined, however, a person moving from a developing nation might be extremely attached to his/her relatives. In such a scenario it might come as a rude shock to the immigrant, and he/she has to try and appreciate the differences that exist between his/her society and that of the host country.

Economic Identity Formation. Economic identity is one of the most visible aspects of the identity formation. A particular diaspora correlates to a particular trade due to historical factors and forced dispersion. In the current times of globalisation and liberalisation, the diaspora has come to play a key role in the economic development of the host country, as well as the economy of their motherland. Gone are the days when certain races were looked down upon as mere sources of physical labour. Nowadays, any capable person can travel to any part of the world and set up a business or pursue a profession of interest.

Significance of Identity Formation in Africa. The concept of identity formation for any diaspora around the world is a vital one and goes a long way towards facilitating the assimilation and association of the diaspora with the society of the host country. No matter which angle we view it from, we will always find that the concept of identity is of paramount importance. The various aspects of identity – cultural, social and economic - play vital roles in the process of identity formation for the diaspora. The process of identity formation is not a one-way process. The diaspora is judged on the basis of their character traits and they, in turn, are influenced in their decision to get absorbed in the society of the host country based on its openness. A host country which provides avenues for the diaspora to carve their own niche and the environment to practice and propagate their distinct identity traits, will always be favoured as compared to another country where this freedom is found lacking. To illustrate, if a person practicing the Christian faith decides to settle down in a nation which has adopted a different religion as its official religion and does not tolerate a different faith, the person is more likely to look at a different country for long-term settlement even though the economic opportunities might be superior in the country cited in the example above. When the Parsis were persecuted in their homeland, many of them migrated to India, and today they are among the most successful business people in India. At the same time, they also practice their own faith of Zoroastrianism freely.

It would be worthwhile to highlight the fact that the process of identity formation for the same diaspora can vary significantly within society. For example, if the diaspora believes that cremation is the right custom, they might get support from the Hindus of the host country; however, it will not be favoured by the Muslim citizens. The same group in the diaspora, if they are mostly non-vegetarians will find the going easy with Muslims, however, they might be resented by other Hindus. Thus, we see that identity formation is not a process in isolation. It is composed of myriad facets and also influences different sections of the society in different ways. Though these traits might be inconsequential to the naked eye, they might go on to determine the identity of the diaspora in the long run.

Challenges Faced. Identity formation is an ongoing process and is prone to significant challenges both at the micro and the macro level. From a small incident where the cultural ideology of the diaspora can hurt the feelings of a citizen, to when some states might entirely ban the religious practices of a particular section of the diaspora, the identity

formation process can suffer significant challenges. The right approach would be to examine these challenges holistically and not in a piecemeal manner. This would help us understand that these difficulties are inter-connected and need comprehensive redressal. Failure to redress these challenges would be detrimental to the needs, nay, rights of the diaspora in forming their identity and seeking opportunities for assimilation and integration in the society of the host country.

- a) **Initial Challenges.** From the moment the diaspora decides to make a new country their home to the actual arrival, the concept of identity formation mainly takes place in the minds of the diaspora. They try to gauge the attitude of the people in the host country. Similarly, from the point of the native citizens of the host country, the perceived identity of the immigrants is often shaped through literature and their past experiences with the society of the immigrants. The nature of the reception of the diaspora hinges on the positive/negative understanding of the identity traits of the diaspora. For example, people from Romania are not welcomed into most of the European societies, since they are equated with misery, poverty and considered fit for menial jobs only.
- b) **The Attitude of the Government.** Attitude and the policies of the government also significantly determine the identity formation process of the diaspora. If the government takes steps to curb the entrepreneurial spirit of the immigrants and devises its economic policies in ways that thwart the economic and professional goals of the diaspora, the end-result would be disenchantment. At the same time, it would also lead to an adverse identity of the diaspora. Society plays a vital role in the process of identity formation and is one of the most critical components for determining whether the diaspora is treated as the 'other' or welcomed with open arms.

Demands of the Indian Diaspora in Africa

India has signed Social Security Agreements (SSA) with 18 countries that include Australia, Austria, Belgium, Canada, Czech Republic, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Hungary, Japan, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Sweden, Switzerland and South Korea. Moreover, the comprehensive SSA is in the process of being operationalised with Portugal and the Quebec Province of Canada. The Ministry of External Affairs, is now planning to enter into agreements with countries like China, Russia, South Africa, Peru, Cyprus etc (MEA, 2017). But it is also important that agreements are negotiated with other African nations as well, which have a sizeable Indian diaspora and several investments projects.

Diaspora have made certain demands; these are:-

- i) In many countries of Africa, the Indians have shown their reluctance for acquiring dual citizenship. In fact, they feel that such a status would only cast doubts on their loyalty to the countries of their permanent domicile. So, there has been a demand from Indians in countries like Seychelles and Madagascar, for a reduction in the fee for the acquisition of a PIO Card (Bhatt and Sahoo, 2002).
- ii) There should be direct flights from major African cities to India. The connectivity issues should be addressed, as a lot of people belonging to the Indian community travel for education and medical assistance.
- iii) Many PIO would like to send their children to India for education in the Indian institutions. It would be helpful if information regarding the courses of study available at various educational institutes in India, their fee structure, the minimum eligibility qualifications, and other admission requirements could be made easily available (Dutt, 1980).
- iv) Healthcare - many PIOs would like to avail themselves of medical facilities existing in the various prestigious hospitals in India. To facilitate this, a detailed publication containing relevant information should be produced and made accessible to PIOs through all the Indian diplomatic and consular missions abroad.
- v) The community has an immense interest in Indian classical music and dance, and one or more Indian Cultural Centre should be established in these countries. Suitably qualified and experienced artists should be deputed to train PIO children in various disciplines of Indian dance and music, both vocal and instrumental (Lall, 2001).
- vi) Accelerating trade opportunities on concessional terms, scholarships for study in India, training of local pundits in performance of Vedic rites, religious ceremonies, marriages etc., and financial grants to local Indian cultural and religious organisations. Assistance in tracing Indian roots, etc. are also suggested.

Implications for India

- The role of the Indian Diaspora can be imperative in shaping the future policy. There are different ways to facilitate this process:-
- Indian Missions should have regular meetings not only with the people doing business in Africa but also with the countrywide associations. India Africa

Forum Summit, Pravasi Bhartiya Divas, Namaskar Africa are good platforms for fostering co-operation as well.

- More dialogues and meetings should be held with the Indian diaspora youth. The young generation has to be given more opportunities. They are the leaders of future, and this would give new ideas for new projects.
- India should focus on the younger generation and should increase scholarships. When the youth stay in India and study for various professions, then they will automatically develop an emotional attachment with India. It would help them to feel 'Indian' and develop a sense of belonging with India.
- Indian Missions in Africa should appoint those government officers who are open minded towards both communities, NRIs and PIOs in order to serve as a bridge between both Indian communities. Commitment for the speedy implementation of projects is expected from the Indian government.
- Focus on new avenues of cooperation involving the diaspora like food security, renewable energy (by promoting development of solar energy and accelerating cooperation in training and capacity building in this sector), and security cooperation (as India shares the waters of the Indian Ocean with Africa, issues relating to terrorism, piracy and illegal fishing, etc. are of great concern.)
- Several steps have already been taken by the Indian Government - electronic visa facilities have been provided to 30 countries in Africa, vocational training centres are being established, and 18 new missions in Africa by 2022 have been promised. All these measures will serve to strengthen relations between India and Africa.

Conclusion

The Indian community residing in Africa is very special as it has contributed its skills to the development of the country of adoption, and is integrated with the indigenous populace. Staying away from their homeland, the diaspora been very successful in Africa. Furthermore, it is seen that the Indian government is no longer ignorant to the success and activities of the PIO's, as they have retained their emotional, cultural and spiritual links with India. The Government has also recognised the success stories of the community. Also, the potential that the Indians offer for the country's development is highly appreciated. Thus, we see how significant the role and contribution of Indian diaspora is, in Africa.

References:

- Bhat, CSK. Lxmi Naraya and Sadanand Sahoo. 2002 'Indian Diaspora' *Employment News*, Volume XXVII. No. 38. 21-27 December, P.1.
- Bhat, Chandrashekhar), 'India and the Indian Diaspora: Inter-linkages and Expectations', in Ajay Dubey (eds.), *Indian Diaspora: Global Identity*, Delhi: Kalinga Publication, 2003.
- Dubey Ajay, 'Indian Diaspora in Africa: Diversity and Challenges' in Dubey Ajay (ed.) *Indian Diaspora in Africa: A Comparative Perspective*, New Delhi: MD Publications Pvt. Ltd, 2010.
- Dutt, S. 'India and the Overseas Indians', *India Quarterly*, Vol. 36, 1980, p.307.
- Reddy E.S, Some of Gandhi's Early Views on Africans Were Racist. But That Was Before He Became Mahatma, *The Wire*, 2016 at <https://thewire.in/history/gandhi-and-africans>
- Gupta, Rajneesh, 'Non-State Actors in International Relations: A case of Indian Diaspora in Africa.', at <http://www.iriis.in/pdf/2030452091.pdf>. Accessed March 12, 2013.
- Gupta, Rajneesh Kumar. *Role of Indian diaspora in East Africa: Challenges of Integration, 1963-2003*, New Delhi: JNU. 2008.
- Gupta R.K. 'Indian Diaspora as a Non-State Actor in Promotion of India-Africa Partnership' *Journal of Social and Political Studies*, Vol. IV (1), June 2013 pp. 135-148.
- *Government of India (December 2001), *Report of the High Level Committee on the Indian Diaspora*, Indian Council of World Affairs, New Delhi, Accessed February 6, 2013, URL: <http://indiandiaspora.nic.in/diasporapdf/part1-exe.pdf>.
- Lal, Brij V (eds.) *the Encyclopedia of the Indian Diaspora*, Singapore: Editions Didier Millets., 2007.
- Lall. M.C.2001. 'India's Missed Opportunity – India's relationship with Non-Resident Indians'. Hampshire Asghate Publishing Ltd. p.27.
- *Ministry of External Affairs (MEA), Government of India, *Foreign Affairs Record*, New Delhi: Ministry of External Affairs, 1973 .
- Mathews, K. ("Indian Diaspora in Africa", *World Focus*, 22(3):, 2001, 5-8.
- Ministry of Overseas Indian Affairs, Government of India, Estimated Number of Overseas Indians,2012, Accessed 1 July 2014 URL: <http://moia.gov.in/writereaddata/pdf/NRISPIOSData.pdf>
- Ministry of Overseas Indian Affairs, http://mea.gov.in/images/attach/NRIs-and-PIOs_1.pdf.2016.
- Parameswaran Pragiti, 'Indian Diaspora: A unique global asset', Press Information Bureau, Government of India, Special Service and Features, 2017.

- Tripathi Upendra, Amit Kumar Jain, and Vinita Katiyar, 'An Overview on Indian Diaspora in Africa', *Educational Quest: An Int. J. of Education and Applied Social Science*: Vol. 8, No. 1, pp. 17-21, April 2017.
- Sahadevan, P. , *India and Overseas Indians: The Case of Sri Lanka*. Delhi: Kalinga, 1995.
- Sheth, V. S, India and Indian Diaspora in Eastern and Southern Africa: Issues and Prospects, *Think India Quarterly*, 8 (2): 2005, 29-36.
- Sheth, V.S 'Dynamics of Indian Diaspora in East and South Africa and changing Global Order' in Ajay Dubey (eds.), *Indian Diaspora: Global Identity*, Delhi: Kalinga Publications, 2003.
- Sheth, V.S. 'Africa's India Diaspora: a strategic link in India's Africa policy in 21st century,' *Think India Quarterly*, 9(1), 2006, 7-15.
- Sheffer, Gabriel., *Diaspora Politics*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003.
- Tololyan, K. 'Rethinking Diaspora(s): Stateless Power in Transnational Movment', *Diaspora*, Vol.5, 1996.
- https://mea.gov.in/loksabha.htm?dtl/28266/QUESTION_NO4517_SOCIAL_SECURITY_AGREEMENTS.
- <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2015/06/15-facts-about-the-indian-diaspora-in-africa/>

About the VIVEKANANDA INTERNATIONAL FOUNDATION

The Vivekananda International Foundation is an independent non-partisan institution that conducts research and analysis on domestic and international issues, and offers a platform for dialogue and conflict resolution. Some of India's leading practitioners from the fields of security, military, diplomacy, government, academia and media have come together to generate ideas and stimulate action on national security issues.

The defining feature of VIF lies in its provision of core institutional support which enables the organisation to be flexible in its approach and proactive in changing circumstances, with a long-term focus on India's strategic, developmental and civilisational interests. The VIF aims to channelise fresh insights and decades of experience harnessed from its faculty into fostering actionable ideas for the nation's stakeholders.

Since its inception, VIF has pursued quality research and scholarship and made efforts to highlight issues in governance, and strengthen national security. This is being actualised through numerous activities like seminars, round tables, interactive dialogues, Vimarsh (public discourse), conferences and briefings. The publications of VIF form lasting deliverables of VIF's aspiration to impact on the prevailing discourse on issues concerning India's national interest.



VIVEKANANDA INTERNATIONAL FOUNDATION

3, San Martin Marg, Chanakyapuri, New Delhi – 110021

Phone: +91-11-24121764, 24106698

Email: info@vifindia.org, Website: <https://www.vifindia.org>

Follow us on [twitter@vifindia](#)