



Indian Diaspora: Understanding meaning of the conceptual term ‘Diaspora’ in its various forms with special reference of Indian Diasporic community

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Abstract: Migration and dispersion are natural phenomena, widely familiar both in the world of plants and in the animal kingdom. Human beings have been no exception. In case of human beings, anthropology has recorded nomadism as a stage preceding their evolution as communities; human beings have been experiencing temporary, seasonal or permanent migration from their original habitat. The implication of such migration vary in terms of factors such as the nature of the community’s boundary, the reasons for the migration of its members, the nature of the recipient society, the magnitude of migration, the distance that the migrants traverse.

This paper discusses that the Diasporic community is not inevitably and irrevocably cut off completely from the land of their breed. They retain physical and/or mental contact with their home land. Transmission of cultural characteristics is more important than the transmission of physical characteristics. The diffusion of cultures, including tools, habits, ideas and forms of social organization is the reason of conflict as well. This paper discusses the various meanings of the concept ‘Diaspora’. It shows social form of Diaspora with special reference to Indians. Diasporic community after settling in the adapted land starts taking active interest in the field of Economics and politics. It talks about how Diasporic community contributes in the economic growth of the country. ‘Diasporic consciousness’ is particular kind of awareness generated among contemporary transitional community. The concept of Diaspora can be discussed from various angles and through different meanings.

Keywords: Diaspora, cultural production, ethnic identity, political orientation, economic strategies, de-territorialization, displacement, fundamentalism, historical heritage, emulation of Jews.

I. INTRODUCTION

Diaspora was initially used for the dispersal of Jews when they were forced in to exile to Babylonia. Today, it has been used for any sizable community of a particular nation or region living outside its own country and sharing some common bonds that given them an ‘ethnic identity’ and ‘resultant bonding’. The element that constitutes ethnic identity is fluid and changes over time. It means differently to different people at different points of time, place, and circumstances.

1st generation: Views it as a strong feeling about the country of their origin.

2nd generation: The ties with the homeland get replaced by those with the adopted country. This generation does not remain ‘adopted’, ‘host land’ becomes their own country.

Ethnic identity: It is made of certain elements like food, clothes, languages, religion, music, dance, myths, legends, costumes of individual community etc.

They are retained, discarded or adopted differently at different times and places but a feeling of oneness persists even after several years and centuries.

II. DIASPORA

The term is often used to describe practically any population which is ‘de territorialized’ or ‘transitional’ that is, which has originated in land other than which is currently resides, and whose social, economic and political networks cross the borders of state, nation or indeed span of the globe. Of late intellectual shave begun to utilize the term Diaspora to describe themselves. ‘We have witnessed the emergence’, James Clifford notes, ‘of Diasporic language which appears to be replacing, or at least supplementing minority discourse’.

Academics, transnational, intellectuals, see the nation of ‘Diaspora’ as a term which becomes a loose reference conflating categories such as immigrants, guest workers, ethnic, and ‘racial minorities’, refugees, expatriates, and travellers.



III. CURRENT MEANING OF DIASPORA

Recent writing on the subject conveys at least three meanings of the concept 'Diaspora' -

1. Diaspora as a social form
2. Diaspora as a type of consciousness
3. Diaspora as a mode of cultural production

IV. DIASPORA AS A SOCIAL FORM

Diaspora was at one time a concept that referred exclusively to the experiences of the Jews, invoking their traumatic exile from a historical homeland and dispersal throughout many lands. With this experience as a reference connotation of a 'Diaspora' situation were negative because they were associated with forced displacement, victimization, alienation and loss.

Martin Baumann indicates three referential points with respect to the historical empirical experience of Jew 'in the Diaspora':

- a) The process of becoming scattered
- b) The community living in foreign parts
- c) The place or geographic space in which the dispersed groups live.

The social category of Diaspora beyond the classic Jewish model include following traits:

Specific kinds of social relationship relate to history and geography these see Diasporas broadly as:

- Created as a result of voluntary or forced migration from one homeland location to at least two other countries.
- Consciously maintaining collective identity – common origin, historical experience and some kind of tie to geographic place.
- Institutionalizing networks of exchange and communication – creating new communal organization in place of settlements.
- Maintaining a variety of explicit and implicit ties with their homelands
- Developing solidarity with co-ethnic members in other countries of settlement.
- Inability of unwillingness to be fully accepted by 'host society'- fostering feeling of alienation or exclusion or superiority or other kind of difference.

In Political Field: A tension of political orientations

Diasporic people are often confronted with divided loyalties to homelands and host countries. Immigrants may be significant actors, or collective associations may be powerful pressure groups in the domestic politics or their host countries as well as in the international political arena, prompted by their interest in the political plight of a country of their origin.

Sheffer underscores the growing role of 'new non-governmental trans-state political organization 'in the global political arena. For example, groups such as American organizations linked together in the U.S.A., France, and the Middle East demonstrate how trans-national communities 'are among the world's most sophisticated lobbyists, according to western political analyst and diplomats'.

The Economic Strategies:

Of transnational groups represent an important new source and force in to international finance and commerce. A sense of collectivism on a world-wide scale provides a key to success in the new global economy. The economic achievements of Diasporic groups are seen as a result from the mutual pooling of resources, transfer of credit, and investment of capital and provision of services among family extended kin or co-ethnic members.

In the homeland political orientations of South Africa religious groups are even rapidly evolving and intensifying. Arjun Appadurai suggests that the process of deterritorialization among Diasporic groups sometimes crates 'exaggerated and intensified sense of criticism or attachment to politics in the home-state' for example, movement for the establishment of 'khalistan'. This has been the case among overseas Sikhs since 'storming of the golden temple' – (1984). They supported the movement Hindus-V.H.P. in India and Muslims-Jamaat- i-islami in Pakistan.

In the sphere of 'Economic Strategies', the Govt. of India enacted measures to attract the intellectual and financial resources of N.R.I.s. by way of salary Incentives for return, favourable rates for N.R/I/ investors. Kotkin gives detailed examples of the intra-group business connections between Sikhs, Parsis, Jains, Islams and Gujarati Hindus to the promotion of any kind of religious cause.



Destruction of the Babri Masjid in Ayodhya in the year 1992 was much campaigned in U.K. by V.H.P. for removal of mosque for the creation of Rama Mandir. Following mosque's destruction, several incidents were noted of damaging and destructing Hindu temples and Hindu cultural centers. Numerous local state organized forums for inter-community dialogue, leafleting of the South Asian population by Hindu and Muslim organizations. Alliance against communalism and for democracy in South Asia, public events were arranged and distributed information with the aim of combating all forms of religious communalism. The explosion of violence in Ayodhya-sent a shock wave through Britain.

There are many examples which show relationship between Indian and Indian Diaspora. 'Milk Miracle' of September 1995 is one of the best examples for proving the point of relationship. Murtis (images of deities) in Hindu temples from London, Leicester and Birmingham to New York, Delhi, Hong Kong and Bangkok were observed 'to drink'. Substantial quantities of such miracle spread everywhere through media. South Asian religious Diaspora is strongly connected through advance global telecommunication.

V. DIASPORA AS A TYPE OF CONSCIOUSNESS

'Diasporic consciousness' is a particular kind of awareness generated among contemporary transnational communities. It is particularity described as being marked by a dual or paradoxical nature which is constituted by experience of discrimination and execution and by identification with a historical heritage, Indian Civilization, or world culture or political forces.

James Cliffore describes 'Diaspora consciousness as live, loss, and hope as a defining tension. While Paul Gilroy writes a kind of duality - Du Bois - nothing of double consciousness with regard to Diasporic individuals' awareness of decentered attachments 'home away from home' or 'here and there'. The awareness of multi-locality stimulates the need to connect oneself with others who share same 'routes and roots'. In the age of cyberspace, a Diaspora can be held together or recreated through the mind and through shared imagination when an identification, with a Diaspora serves to bridge the gap between the local and the global.' Diaspora consciousness can be described by way of functions of the mind.

Arjun Appadurai and Carol Breckenridge insightfully mentions 'Diaspora always leave a trail of collective memory about another place & time and create news, maps of desire and attachments.' Diaspora consciousness is considered to be the source of resistance through engagement with and consequent visibility in, public space. Cohan comments, 'Awareness of their precarious situation may also propel members of Diaspora to advance legal & civic causes and to be active in human rights and social justice issues.' Ethnic mobilization, identity or community politics or the politics of recognition or difference are the best examples. Another kind of Diaspora consciousness is specific to religious groups. A kind of self-questioning is stimulated by conditions of Diaspora coupled with religious pluralism.

VI. CONDITIONS OF DIASPORA

In a superb ethnography of Southall, West London, Gerd Baumann describes how the dominant discourse of 'culture' and 'community'— both refined as notions of connoting homogeneity, fixity and boundaries - are reproduced in the everyday classification of residents. The combined context of ethnic pluralism and conditions of Diaspora, impacted upon by the dominant discourse instills a 'culture consciousness' which Baumann describes as: "heighted awareness that one's own life, as well as the lives of all others, are decisively shaped by culture as a reified heritage... an awareness that whatever one, or anyone, does and thinks is intrinsically and distinctively culture and the cultures of others.' Sikhs, Hindus, Muslims, Afro-Caribbean and Whites' are the examples of Reified communities.

The heightening of awareness with regard to 'culture' is paralleled by new kinds of self-awareness with regard to religious belief and practice. With a further view onto the emergent distinctions between 'religion' and 'culture' among Diaspora groups, David Pocock noted that the goal of 'emulating the Jews' was long advocated for immigrants in Britain – a goal understood to entail preserving distinct religious ideas and customs while achieving a highly successful level of Socio-culture and economic integration with encompassing society.

Pocock observed that in one branch of the Swaminarayan movement, whose members long resides in East Africa before settling in Britain, there emerged a tendency to consider certain aspects of Gujarati Culture (including family structure, language, diet, marriage networks, and the position of women) as quasi-religious phenomenon. That is, as behavioural and ideological facets contributing to the fulfilment of dharma. By equalling religion and culture, Pocock observed, the sansthan is faced with a dilemma; to the extent that Gujarati culture becomes the culture of religious and succeeds in establishment. This concept in the minds of its youngest adherents can ensure its own continuing and emerge not similar to the Jewish orthodox and conservative congregations in great Britain but the parallel with the Jews would break down to the extent that such an assimilation of 'culture' to 'religious' could heighten the isolation of the sansthan members, and thus frustrate the second part of the advice, 'Emulate Jews' which urges not only the preservation of religious but also the maximum degree of integration compatible with that.

The problem which Pocock has discovered for the Sansthan is that of 'dis-embedding a set of beliefs and practices, a 'religion' from a 'culture' which would then be defined as 'secular', is a critical one for South Asian religious groups around the world. It entails moves toward a self – conscious 'rationalization of the distinction religion or culture despite everywhere asserted a dictum that 'Hinduism is a Way of life'.



Prominent development can be seen in one form or another, throughout many South Asian religious communities overseas. It is a common trend to Diasporas, fostered by self-reflection stimulated amongst minorities in concepts of ethnic and religious pluralism. Hinian Stuart writes, 'Diaspora reinforces contact with major world cultural forces. This factor underlines the need for the faith to express itself in the face of universal religious and secular valued. Each such religion needs to give a universal account of it, and to articulate its teachings, perhaps under some principle.'

VII. DIASPORA AS A MODE OF CULTURAL PRODUCTION

The notice of 'Diaspora' is usually conveyed in discussion of globalization. It is examined in its guide as the world-wide flow of cultural objects, images and meanings resulting in variegated process of creolisation, back and forth transferences, mutual influences, new contestations, negotiations and constant transformations. In this way 'Diaspora' is described as involving the production and reproduction of transnational social group of globalization, an interest in 'Diaspora' has been equated with anthropology' is common place anti-essentialist, constructivist and processual approach to ethnicity. In this approach the fluidity or constructed styles and identities among Diasporic people is emphasized. These are evident in the production and reproduction of forms which are syncretic, creolized, translated, crossover, 'cut' n 'mix', hybrid or alternate production of such hybrid cultural phenomena and new ethnicities is to be sound among Diaspora youth whose primary socialization has taken place with cross-currents of differing cultural fields.

Global and media communications is the key avenue for the flow of cultural phenomena and the transformation of Diasporic identity. Cultural production and reproduction of religious belief and practice among South Asian Youth is field of interest. It is a field too broad to summarize but findings indirect that youth adapt their own interpretations of belief, consciously decide the nature of their religious values, and specify for themselves modes of in 'religious community' activities. Young Muslim women conduct their own discussion and prayer groups (Khokher and Knott) are one of the best examples. The examination of media and communications in the South Asian religious Diaspora is very new.

Marie Gillespie produced most valuable ethnographic study of the role of transnational television and film in the formation and transformation of identity among young Punjabi Londoners. Gillespie looks at the transformation ties such media creates between India and persons throughout the Diaspora.

VIII. MEDIA AND COMMUNICATION

Media and communication created Diasporic awareness among Punjabi families. Videos of weddings, other rites of passage, age celebrations, disseminate propaganda for the Khalistan-'land of the pure' made them aware. Life and work of Sikh saint circulated among people across globe are used in religious worship. VCR, DVDs and other means are used for the purpose of reformulating and 'translating' cultural traditions in Indian Diaspora.

Hindu families enjoy 'religious' and 'mythological' films and soaps for devotional purposes and viewing them is often integrated into daily acts of worship. Episodes of Ramayana or Mahabharata made for T.V. in India influence people overseas. They offer 'devout salutation' when a deity appear on screen, conduct puja before or after viewing and establish that the video must be watched in its entirety 'out of respect'. Gillespie demonstrates ways in which patterns surrounding the consumption of traditional media including the notes through which it is viewed and discussed both serves to secure the conservative value of 'traditional' South Asian culture among older South Asians in U. K., and to prompt cosmopolitan admixtures of South Asian and other culture streams among younger, British born and raised Asians.

By way of 'microelectronic trans-nationalism', Amit S. Rai examines contested notes of constructing Hindu identity in Diaspora via electronic bulletin boards and discussion groups. Casual 'surf' of the internet reviews hundreds of home pages and hypertext links to sites designated to the world wide maintenance and propagation of South Asian religions. E.g. Global Hindu Electronic Network, the Jain list Home page, Sikh net and the Muslim world monitor.

How we can methodologically best grasp changes among transnational communities such as those which are represented among South Asian religious groups abroad, we need systematic account of:

- Facets of historically conditioned structure
- Composite parts of habitus multiplied
- Conscious intervention of social actors
- The outcomes of mediation, negotiation and contestation within and between self-defined social groups.

All of these complex matters are addressed when we considered the complimentary three meaning of 'Diaspora'.



IX. CONCLUSION

The word Diaspora come from the ancient Greek meaning ‘a scattered or sowing of seeds’. The meaning has altered over the centuries. In the Old Testament the word came to be used for Jews who were exiled from their country. Many ethnic groups have been forced to leave their native lands for a variety of social, economic and political reasons. Since the latter half of the 20th century, the word Diaspora is being used as a substitute of de territorialized or ‘transnational’ which refers to population that has originated in a land other than in which it currently resides and whose social, economic and political networks across the borders and which plays significant role in the lives and societies of the country of its adoption as well as the countries of its origin. The concept of Diaspora has changed with time. It has different social form from generation to generation. The type of consciousness has also witnessed major changes with the changes in the migration and concept of settlement. The culture of the Diasporic community has also changed and took a new shape which is very much different from the first generation migrants.

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