

Cultural Retention among the Indian Migratory Communities

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Abstract – The Indian music and dance in Bollywood is not only practiced by Indians only now, it has travelled abroad. The countries like Turkey, Russia, Gulf nations, have separate channels to telecast the Indian movies and Dramas, though in the dubbed format. Bollywood, the soft power of India hasn't only helped the Indian Diaspora stay connected to its culture, but the people of the host country have also developed their interest in the Indian culture. Some countries even celebrate the festivals of India like Diwali, and Holi. This paper tries to study the phenomenon of cultural retention among the Indian Diasporas, made possible by lot of factors that will be outlined in this paper. This research paper comprises of seven parts. The first part discusses the history of Indian migration patterns. It includes how the migration began in India, how Indian migrants lived abroad and how they worked to retain their culture. The second part talks about the Indian Diaspora before and after colonialism. Since the patterns of Indian Diaspora before and after colonialism is different, their migration patterns and cultural adaptation varies too. The third part elucidates the role of Bollywood in taking the Indian Culture abroad, not only for its Diaspora, but attempting to globalise it. The fourth part of the paper focuses on the Indian communities abroad and their collective work. The fifth part talks about Yoga culture of India becoming Global. The last part discusses the cultural diplomacy of Indian government, especially under the government of Narendra Modi, who has travelled 92 nations in past 55 months to spread the Indian culture.

Key Words – India, Migration, Yoga, Bollywood.

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INTRODUCTION

People migrate for a lot of reasons, but what they take along to the host country, is the culture of their homeland. Culture is one of the most pre-dominant features for the society, and it goes to the host country with the migrant. Then it depends on the host country whether they let the migrant live his own culture, or he is supposed to subscribe to their culture. There could be a number of reasons why a migrant would want to stick to his own culture, which could be the myth of return, the fear of identity crisis, or the attachment to his homeland and so on. The problem is usually for the first generation migrants, who stay much, attached to their culture, form their own communities, and create a mini-homeland in the host country. The second and third generations somehow get dissolved in the culture and the lifestyle of the host country.

Indian Diaspora is in significant number in the world, let alone in Fiji, it happens to be the 40% of their population. Currently the total population of Mauritius is 960,000 and the Indian population 71.9% of it. The current estimated Malaysian population is 13 million

and Indians are 1.2 million of it. Singapore has 170,000 Indians and Burma has 1.2% Indians in its population. The number of Indians living in South Africa is 800,000. In Europe and North America, there are around half a million Indians settled down. In West Asia, it's around 60,000 (Jain, 1982).

Malaysia has Indians as one of the largest communities apart from Chinese. They can still celebrate their festivals, wear their traditional outfits, and speak their own languages. The question that can be raised is who helps them retain their culture, the host country or something else. In case of Indian Diaspora, Bollywood has a huge contribution in letting the Diaspora stay in touch with their culture and help them live it overseas. Moreover the communities like Indian Communities Abroad, Indian Diaspora at the University of Hyderabad and such initiatives have helped them stay connected to their homeland. Yogawhich used to be the practice of meditation in India is now being practiced throughout the world; it lately seems as if Yoga was never an Indian thing. The Prime Minister of India, Narendra Modi, also

frequently visits the countries that have Indian Diasporas, offering them various opportunities, to stay connected to their roots. He is the most celebrated Prime Minister among the Indian Diaspora abroad, for his frequent overseas trips. In last 55 months, he has visited 92 nations

HISTORY OF INDIAN MIGRATION

The British history regarding Indian migration claims that emigration in India is a British creation. In 1834, when slavery was abolished in the British Empire, they needed someone to work on their plantation in Britain. This emigration from India didn't happen until British started its imperialistic practices in India and established itself completely. After British came to India, the Indian labourers immigrated to Britain for agricultural work. This is where the migration from India is believed to have started from (Jain, 1989). British Guyana received its first Indian immigrants in 1838, followed by Trinidad in 1845, and Dutch later in 1873. These labourers were mostly recruited from North and South India. The number of Indian labourers was 2,500,000. Only less than quarter of this number returned to India, rest of them stayed back as residents. Since India is a diverse nation, it doesn't have only different cultures, but people of different faiths and languages, not talking of different dialects but languages. And because of this diversity, a new name was coined to get them together under one culture in Britain and that is plantation Hindi (Veer & Vertovec, 1991).

These labourers in different part of Britain even started practicing their religion, Brahmanism. Although the British missionaries tried to convert the Indians to Christianity but the Indians still didn't give up their religions. The Brahmin gurus were accused of poisoning the minds of the Indians but it was their consistent efforts that proved their authority. And since Brahmins is referred to as the upper caste of the Hinduism, they were reluctant to work under lower caste Dalits. English people would call Brahmins as trouble makers and at a certain point of time they even stopped their immigration because they had carried the caste system of Indian culture abroad. This even shows that the host country stops the migrants to practice their culture for a reason, because not all cultural practices are right and accommodating.

The Patterns of Indian culture abroad varies in age, number and historical perspectives. In the regions like East Asia, they have lived for six or more generations but in the gulf countries they are recent arrivals. In Mauritius and Fiji they are economically and politically dominant. The migrations that happened before the independence of India were temporary; people would go to work abroad for a specific time but return as well. But it was only in the nineteenth century or what is called the post-colonial period that Indians started to settle abroad as residents (Oonk, 2007). Since India is very diverse,

it's Diaspora don't necessarily identify with the India as a nation but with their respective homelands or what can be called as States. For some instance, the culture of Gujarat is nowhere closer to the culture of Kerala. In that way, the Diaspora identifies its cultural linkage with its respective State not India as a whole. India can be couple of countries if it was to be divided on religion, culture or language. India is a multiculturalist nation in a real sense.

Apart from the labour migration to Britain from north and south India, there were migrations from Gujarat too. But the reasons that are cited for this migration is not poverty but the disintegration of the village communities. The citizens were losing their customary rights on the lands. The bonds between the village communities were weakening (Jayewardena, 1968). The Indian Diaspora in the beginning was mostly of labourers and small scale entrepreneurs. According to a survey, the Indians in East Africa and Ceylon had maintained closer ties with their homeland, but the Indians living in Fiji had no contact with their homeland. The caste system which is very common in India, although it was not being practiced apparently among the Diaspora, but the marriages they do are still kept same, keeping a way open to return home.

For the labourers it was a little hard to live on their terms because of their financial positions. They would be made to compromise to live according to the person who would control their means of livelihood. For the merchants it was easy to live on their own terms, because they would control their own livelihood and could be influential in the society too. So the historical patterns show that it was hard for labourers to retain their own culture, while as for merchants they could practice the Indian culture even abroad. The host country would let them live on their terms if they were financially independent.

The Indian Diaspora which had begun to migrate from India after 1947 to Britain did not at first bring about real achievements. The situation changed during the 1980s. There was a reason for this. The Indian Diaspora was comprised mainly of villages and individuals working as labourers in industrial factories and other low-paid areas of employment. During the 1970s, Indians also arrived from the former African colonies of Britain. They were not poverty-ridden but well-educated, middle-class Hindu (as well as Muslim and Sikh) professionals and businessmen from Uganda, Tanzania, Kenya, and Malawi. They were second-generation migrants—the first generation having migrated from India to Africa. They had worked with the British colonial authorities, and established their trustworthiness with them but had not identified with the African population at all. During the post-independence period, the Africanization policies of the new African states resented the Indian presence because of their high levels of economic

development and the social distance which existed between the two groups (Hussain, 2005).

COLONIAL AND POST-COLONIAL MIGRATION

Apart from the Colonial narrative of migration, there is another migration that says the migration in India started long back before Colonialism. There are accounts of Buddhists bhikkus who travelled into the remote areas of Central and Eastern Asia. There are evidences that show the continuous contact between the Kingdoms of Coromandel Coast and Islands of South East Asia. There has been a contact of Palas of Bengal with the Sailendra Kings of Indonesia. Several elements of Hindu and Buddhist religion can be seen in the States like Thailand and Bali. Research on the pre-colonial period of Indian migration is very less documented (Jayaram, 2004).

In the Post-Colonial Period, there were three patterns of migration to be identified: the emigration of Anglo-Indians to Australia and England, the emigration of professionals and semi-professionals to industrially advanced countries like United States of America, England and Canada, and the emigration of skilled and unskilled labourers to West Asia. The Anglo-Indians that had married English women felt unaccepted back in India post-independence and decided to move to India. But when even England didn't show them a welcoming face, they moved to Australia and since then Australia became a second home for Anglo-Indians.

The first generation Indian Diaspora had carried a socio-cultural baggage along that consisted of art, language, music, dress, cuisine etc. Some were able to keep them, for some they disappeared depending on their host country. India by then had a very demeaning image abroad, they would be called as coolies, and even the Gandhi was called as a coolie lawyer. Coolie means cheap labourer. This always was there because of the fact that the first migration according to the colonialist narrative was the labourer migration (Jayaram, 2004).

BOLLYWOOD AND INDIAN CULTURE

Bollywood has played a huge role in taking Indian culture abroad. Although the Indian cinema is couple of decades old but Bollywood which is just a decade old, has reached billions of audiences around. The movie called *DDLJ (Dilwale Dulhaniya LeJayengey)* was the biggest hit of the Indian Cinema. It has a British Indian Hero and Heroine, who fall in love but the father of the heroine is very traditional and wants her to marry the choice of her father, which is an Indian culture. She agrees to that but before moving back to India she asks her father to let her go for Europe tour. Back in Europe, she gets drunk and ends up in the same bed with Shahrukh Khan. She doubts him for making out with her in unconsciousness but Shahrukh Khan tells her that

even though he was born and brought up in Britain, he is still attached to the Indian values and traditions, which teaches us that for an Indian girl, her modesty means everything (Athique, 2011).

The above example of an Indian movie tries to show that the generations of Indians abroad haven't forgotten their values and are still connected to their deep roots. In another movie called *Kabhie Khushi Kabhi Gham*, all the children of the lead actor Amitabh Bachan receive their education from London, and still they hold to their Indianness and follow the *Parampara* (values) of their homeland. In the movie, all of the family members wake up to the Morning Pooja (Hindu Praying rituals) and sing a song dedicated to their Goddess. But the movie also shows the class difference as one of the Indian cultures, where the upper class doesn't marry in the lower class. In the later part of the movie, Shahrukh Khan along with his wife move to London and start a new life there, but following complete rituals and values of Indian culture. The movies show that despite living in foreign the Indians don't give up their culture (Punathambekar, 2005).

Findings revealed that the Indian Diaspora's imagination of India is strongly informed by Bollywood movies. All the three generations of India have different reasons for travelling to India. The first generation's craving arises from the Bollywood movies and makes them imagine their old homeland that they left long back. For them it is a myth of return. The second generation's motivation is to experience their travel to the Modern India while as the third generation romanticises the idea of their homeland and creates an urge in them to travel to their homeland, which they have never seen (Bandyopadhyay, 2011).

Several scholars have termed this homecoming as Diaspora tourism or roots tourism. There are several reasons why migrants travel back to their homelands, one of them is strong nostalgic feelings. In the above mentioned movie *DDLJ*, the father of the actress Kajol receives a letter from Punjab sent by his friend. He smells the letter and tells his wife that I can smell the soil of Punjab from this letter. He is shown feeling very nostalgic about going back to his homeland, he infact tells his wife that now is the time that they should be going back to India. Although, his children are born and brought up in London, he still wants his daughter to marry in India with his best friend's son. The father of the actress promises his friend in her childhood, that she will be married to his son. This even shows that Indian movies still endorse kind of childhood marriages which used to be a part of their culture in the early times.

Another movie called *Pardes* (foreign country), whose tagline is American Dreams but Indian Soul, is a perfect example of Indian culture preserved abroad. The main character of the movie is a

leading businessman who travels to find his son a match. When he lands in India he says that,

“Though I lived 35 years in America, whenever I return to India, I feel excited every time. I feel as if I have returned to my mother’s lap. Everything in India echoes love. Despite being so successful in America, I still consider myself a failure”.

There is a certain methodology to understand how Bollywood movies construct the identity of Indians, the notions of home and the colorful culture India shares. The interview was done with first generation, second and third generation Britishers. The first generation sample tells that he misses home and visits it every year to meet his old friends and resurrect old memories. He would like to stay but his family lives in UK and he cannot leave them alone there and cannot bring them to India either. The second generation like the older interview tells that he likes the idea of Modern India and admires the fact that stereotypes related to India are wrong. The thing that was common among all was that they are able to connect back to their roots because of Bollywood (Bandyopadhyay, 2011).

In the case study of Indian Diaspora in Australia, the Punjabi migrants stay in touch with their culture, by marrying their children back in their villages in India. The traditional pattern of patrilocality has given way to a system whereby the spouse of male or female can migrate from India to Australia. Punjabis in Australia are well positioned to arrange strategic transnational marriages with a view to open migration routes (Voigt-Graf, 2005).

INDIAN COMMUNITIES ABROAD

Among the Indian Diaspora scattered over the world, the Indo-Mauritians offers the most shining profile of what looks like the most successful overseas Indian community. Both Indian Hindu and Muslims have together shaped the social, cultural and political life of modern Mauritius. This country itself looks the perfect picture of Indian Diaspora. The Mauritius is even referred to as *Chota Bharat* (Little India) (Parekh, Singh & Vertovec, 2003).

The famous Cultural festival of India that took place in 1991 for four weeks in New Jersey, USA, presented an extravagant and general vision of India. The festival was organized by Gujarati Hindu Sect and the culture of India was displayed through arts performances, shopping displays, food stands and cultural exhibits. Indians form larger and visible populations in the First world countries like United States of America, they have begun to develop strategies for constructing associative identities. Nationalism, Culture, Diaspora and Identity of India has become both theoretical as well as material forces. This festival demonstrates the continuation of the colonial and the post-colonial strategies of

building national and transnational communities (Shukla, 1997).

The Indian Diaspora could organize this festival only with the help of the host country. It was the United States Headquarters in Queens, New York that sponsored the cultural festival of India. Edison, New Jersey once used to be the hub of Italians and Irish populations but now it is full of young and significant middle class Indian immigrants. This cultural festival in America was aimed at creating the image of real India through dances, music and food and they accomplished it. The banners at the Cultural festival read; Beautiful Borderless World, A Cultural Millionaire, and In the Joy of Others.

In India, the Indian-American community is now viewed as helping further Indian foreign policy and security goals as well as contributing towards its economic development. The Government of India’s High Level Committee Report on the Indian Diaspora states: “A section of financially powerful and politically well-connected Indo-Americans has emerged during the last decade. They have effectively mobilized on issues ranging from the nuclear tests in 1998 to Kargil, played a crucial role in generating a favourable climate of opinion in Congress and defeating anti-India legislation there, and lobbied effectively on other issues of concern to the Indian community. They have also demonstrated willingness to contribute financially to Indian causes, such as relief for the Orissa cyclone and the Latur and Gujarat earthquakes, higher technical education and innumerable charitable causes.” The report continues, “For the first time, India has a constituency in the US with real influence and status. The Indian community in the United States constitutes an invaluable asset in strengthening India’s relationship with the world’s only superpower (Gupta, 2004).

Coupled with rise of Indian-American activism has been a shift in the policies of the Indian government towards its greater Diasporic community. In the past, India had typically adopted a hands-off approach towards its Diaspora communities. Jawaharlal Nehru said that these communities should not call themselves Indian and, instead, identify with, and assimilate into, their host countries. It was only in the early 1990s, when India dropped its socialist pattern of economic development and initiated market reforms, that there was a drive to encourage Non-Resident Indian (NRI) investments in the country (even though for two decades prior to this decision Indians in the Persian Gulf countries had been repatriating large amounts of money to their families in India). Since then, both the Indian central government and Indian state governments have started developing ties with the Indian Diaspora and particularly with the Indian-American community.

YOGA GOES GLOBAL

After Indian People's Party (BJP) came into government in India, Prime Minister started working on his three soft powers, yoga being one of them. According to Joseph Nye, Soft Power is the ability to influence others by attracting them to something rather than paying or coercing them. Yoga is one of the famous cultural exports of India. It is almost practiced all over the world. The stress level from the modern world, the technological addictions, and the couch potatoes system of work, all of this has provoked people to the meditating practice called yoga. A recent survey conducted by the Yoga Alliance, the largest non-profit organization representing the U.S. yoga community, reported that the number of practitioners in 2016 was about 37 million, up from about 20 million in 2012.31 Practitioners spent around \$17 billion in the same year on courses, clothes, supplies and accessories, up from \$10 billion in 2012 (Mazumdar 2018, 479-482).The international day of Yoga is celebrated on 21 June every year since 2014. In United Nations General Assembly, the Prime Minister of India Narendra Modi said,

"Yoga is an invaluable gift of India's ancient tradition. It embodies unity of mind and body; thought and action; restraint and fulfillment; harmony between man and nature; a holistic approach to health and well-being. It is not about exercise but to discover the sense of oneness with yourself, the world and the nature. By changing our lifestyle and creating consciousness, it can help in well-being. Let us work towards adopting an International Yoga Day."

The Modi administration's use of Yoga as a soft power asset is designed to achieve some of the same purposes that the promotion of Buddhism and the outreach to the Diaspora are expected to achieve. The promotion of Yoga is designed to boost India's international image, project it as a peaceful rising power and use it as a means to disseminate and popularize other aspects of India's ancient culture, including other soft power assets, like Ayurveda.

CULTURAL DIPLOMACY OF INDIA

The Government of India since the day of independence has been actively working in making the Indian culture global. They have been organizing festivals around the world to demonstrate the richness of its culture. It was Prime Minister Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru and APJ Abul Kalam Azad, set up the Indian council for cultural relations in 1950. Since then this council has been working around to showcase India's civilizational heritage. It has presence in 35 countries in the form of cultural centers established in the various regions of these countries. Bollywood as a part of cultural diplomacy which itself is a sub-variant of soft power is swiftly making inroads in Poland. An article on the online

page "theindiandiaspora.com" under the heading "Bollywood's" soft power visible all over Poland" stated that Bollywood films have made inroads in Polish society and the soft power of Bollywood is visible all over Poland. According to this article the song *Dola Re Dola* from *Devdas* prompted many Polish girls to choreograph this number for their dance presentations. In the last eight years many dance groups like Warsaw's Mohini, Krakow's Chameli etc have become very popular and successful. Newly appointed Indian ambassador to Poland, Ajay Bisaria has requested the Indian Council for Cultural Relations to give these dancers more facilities to learn and master their art in India. According to Bisaria they should be encouraged in their pursuit as they have become our envoys of Indian culture in Poland (Bhanu, 2015).

In recent times, Buddhism has been witnessing a resurgence of popularity globally. Modi has taken a keen interest in promoting India's rich Buddhist heritage. More than once, he has highlighted the philosophical similarities between Hinduism (India's largest religion) and Buddhism. He has emphasized Buddhist values like equality, non-violence, discussion and dialogue and righteous conduct as key to an Asian 'renewal' and the basis for productive relations between various Asian countries. Buddhism is considered as the common bond that ties Asian countries together and Buddha's message of peace is just as relevant today as it was in the past (Mazumdar, 2018).

More recent administrations in India have cultivated the Diaspora in a sustained manner, using them to reach out to their adopted countries for the purpose of transmitting information about developments in India, and seeking investors and partners for India's economy. The Modi administration has continued the practice of previous administrations in organizing the annual "Pravasi Bharatiya Divas" (non-resident Indian day), to celebrate the successes of the Indian Diaspora and to recognize their contribution to India's growth and development. The administration appears to be convinced that the Diaspora not only plays a key role in India's economic development (as a source of investment, knowledge and technology), but also contributes to strengthening existing bilateral ties between India and the countries in which they are based.

Finally, Diaspora groups, tend to support the home country as long as it fits into the interests of the host nation. When these interests diverge, the Diaspora group tends to side with its country of domicile rather than its country of origin. The development of significantly better ties between India and the United States have come about not primarily because of the lobbying efforts of Indian Americans but, instead, due to a changed political perception in both countries. In the 15 United States, in the latter part of the Clinton Administration, interest arose in trying to develop a

better relationship with India. India's market reforms coupled with the recognition in Washington that India was an emerging power, led to a push for a better relationship. In New Delhi, there was a recognition that India had to adjust to the existence of a unipolar international system (Gupta, 2004).

CONCLUSION

The establishment of the notion of soft power diplomatic practice became modernized in light of the fact that the idea of soft power gives a contrasting option to the discretionary emissaries to lead conciliatory practice without relating to candy and twig method (Sheikh & Rashid, 2018). The soft power diplomacy used by India to take the Indian culture abroad is not actually what Indian lives back home. The nostalgia that is created through the Bollywood movies, in the minds of First generation of Indians abroad is the image of old India. The modern India is different and Bollywood doesn't necessarily portray the Modern India in its movies. Bollywood only portrays the good picture of India through its movies, but there are lots of Indian cultures that are unhealthy and toxic and outdated. In most of India, still the children get married on the choice of their parents, they are actually forced to, but Indian movies show a different picture of Indian culture that in the end, the Love wins. But they don't show the dark side of India where honor killings are still legitimized. The Culture that is taken by migrants abroad is entirely different from how it is practiced in India. In the foreign lands, only the good side of culture was allowed to be practiced, the bad cultural practices were prohibited, like the discrimination on the basis of religious classes.

The myth of return that actually motivates the migrants to preserve the culture is more of a fallacy, because they don't find their homeland in the same situation as it used to be by then. So this phenomenon of cultural retention amongst migratory communities in India, helps them stay in touch with their homeland but in imagination, because in the reality, there is a cultural transformation in homeland too. The Bollywood movies promoting the Indian language, the Indian culture, religion make it seem like this how Indians live, but no, Indians dress up like westerners, they speak mostly English because of being the official language and are very lenient about religion too. The soft power gives a very different picture of India to the Indian Diaspora, who get very nostalgic by watching their beautiful culture through Bollywood movies, but when the return, they see something else. There has been a for sure cultural retention among Indian migrants in various parts of the world, but Bollywood has raised their expectations towards returning to their homelands. Bollywood and the Indian government are trying really hard to make the myth of return a reality.

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