

An Overview on Indian Diaspora in Africa

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ABSTRACT

The Indian Diaspora, comprising People of Indian origin and Non-Resident Indians, as India itself, constitutes a heterogeneous and global community, representing diversity of forms, types, geographies and times of formation. It, therefore, requires diverse and distinct approaches to engage them and connect with India. The common thread that binds them together is the idea of India and its intrinsic values. Historically, the dispersion of people from India and the formation of Indian Diaspora communities is the result of different waves of migration over hundreds of years driven by a variety of reasons: slavery under mercantilism, indentured labour under colonization, and guest work programmes post colonialism. Contemporary flows from India are of two kinds: the first is the emigration of highly skilled professionals, workers and students with tertiary and higher educational qualifications migrating to developed countries, particularly to the USA, UK, Canada, Australia and New Zealand. This flow started after Indian independence and gathered momentum with the emigration of IT professional in the 1990s. The second is the flow of unskilled and semi-skilled workers going mostly to the Gulf countries and Malaysia, following the oil boom in the Gulf countries, mainly from Kerala and other south Indian states. Indians have been visiting the African continent since ages. Despite age-old linkages, modern settlement of Indians in Africa is certainly linked with the colonial exploration of the continent.

Today, estimates on overseas Indians indicate sizeable strength of Indian Diaspora in the African countries as Persons of Indians (PIOs) as well as Non-Resident Indians (NRIs), a large number of Indians is residing as PIOs and NRIs in other part of world. Thus, Indian communities in Africa constitute 9.11% of the total strength of India Diaspora and they reside in 46 countries of Africa inhabiting all linguistic, cultural or geographical regions of the continent. These people faced great difficulties in finding resources, wealth, and place along with challenging climatic and physical conditions of the region. However, their hard work, commitment, courage, given a hand them to conquer the unfavorable conditions and stay alive there, away from their country of origin. This paper attempts to present some qualitative and quantitative characteristics of Indian diaspora with special reference to African countries.

Keywords: Diaspora, Africa, cultural, Non-Resident Indians, Gulf countries

The term diaspora is used to refer to any people or ethnic population forced or induced to leave their traditional ethnic homelands; being dispersed throughout other parts of the world, and the ensuing developments in their dispersal and culture.

In the beginning, the term Diaspora was used by the Ancient Greeks to refer to citizens of a grand city who migrated to a conquered land with the purpose of colonization to assimilate the territory into the empire. The original mean Indian diaspora has a significance presence throughout

the globe. India has been the highest receiver of remittances since few years. So, the contribution of the diaspora to our Gross Domestic Production (GDP) is pronominal, whereas Kerala economy, specially works on remittance model. It is, therefore, a significant source of investment for India. Other role played by Indian diaspora is its strong foothold in the Americas and Europe. Indian Diaspora has had a great role to play in furthering bilateral ties between India-US and India-UK. It becomes the bridging factor.

Indian diaspora is always live in a dilemma; they are neither the citizens - except for the name sake - of the countries of their adoption nor the citizens of India. In the countries of their adoption they are not treated as first-class citizens and they are not willing to merge or dissolve in to the mainstream. Indian culture is unique and it has a world of difference from other cultures (Mishra and Ranjan, 2016).

India's booming economy, the appetite of its public and private sector enterprises for investment overseas, and its leadership in science and technology, have together shaped its policy toward Africa. As such, India is focused on intensifying economic and commercial ties whilst contributing to African countries' development through cooperation and technical assistance (Mthuli *et al.*, 2011).

A fundamental characteristic of people is their movement from one place to another place; anthropology has noted nomadism as a stage previous human settlement in communities. Even after their evolution as communities, throughout the civilization human beings have been experiencing temporary, seasonal or permanent migration from their original habitat either voluntarily or forced. Migration is closely related to a variety of demographic, political and socio-economic factors. People who migrate also carry their socio-cultural heritage with them and protect their distinct identities. There is an increasing trend among scholars to study migrant communities, having a sense of their motherland and a differentiated identity.

Study of Diaspora

Originally associated with Jewish migration, the term Diaspora has received acceptance as a reference to migrant communities from any political space. The Indian Diaspora is a generic term to describe the people who migrated from territories that are currently within the borders of the Republic of India. It also refers to their descendants.

India-Africa Relationship – At a Glance

India has more than 3000 year's history of cultural and commercial relations with Africa. Commercial relations have a longer history than cultural contacts. Indian sources indicate that there were contacts and trade relations between Dravidians and Babylonians

as early as the 17th century B.C. On their way to Mesopotamia, Indian merchants and sailors would have certainly visited Southern Arabia, which is situated on the maritime route and the Eastern part of Horn of Africa - the Somali peninsula. In modern history major gesticulates of migration are closely related to colonialism. In the days of the British Raj, Indians were taken as indentured labourers to far-flung parts of the Empire in the nineteenth and early twentieth century. In this period Indians went abroad in three different capacities (Dubey, 2010) such as:

- ♦ Under Kangani/Maistrysystem to Malaysia and Ceylon
- ♦ As an indentured workers in the sugar colonies of Caribbean, Oceania and Africa
- ♦ As free or passenger Indians primarily in East Africa

It has been estimated that during 1829-1924 about 769,437 Indians migrated to Mauritius, South Africa, Reunion Island, Seychelles and East African region (Kadekar, 2005). However, prevailing opportunities in Africa still attract significant number of Indian migrants.

Majority of the new immigrants go there on temporary work permit and do not seek permanent citizenship. After working there for some time, they explore opportunity in Western countries, and as soon as they get a chance they emigrate from these countries. In late 1990s, this trend increased many fold and illegal migrants also took advantage of this. The High Level Committee on Indian Diaspora (2001) estimated the total number of Indian Diaspora in Africa 2,063,178 which includes 1,969,708 People of Indian Origins (PIO's), 89,405 Non Resident Indians (NRI's) and 3,500 stateless people. Latest available estimates on overseas Indians indicate that current strength of Indian Diaspora in the African countries is 2811415 out of those 2590448 are PIOs and rest 220967 are NRIs (Table 1), while total overseas Indians are 30,843,419, 17,835,407 are PIOs and NRIs 13,008,012 (Ministry of Overseas Indian Affairs, 2016).

Indian Diaspora in Africa constitutes 9.11% of the total Diaspora of India. It would be interesting to note that among Indian Diaspora in Africa are 14.52% (Fig. 1). Thus majority of the Indian communities in Africa possess citizenship of their

country of adoption and many among them have attained important positions. They could be crucial in strengthening India-Africa relations.

Categories of Indian Diaspora

According to the size of its presence, Indian Diaspora in Africa can be divided in four categories such as: (1) Substantial Strength (2) Dominant Strength (3) Minimal Strength and (4) Marginal Strength (Gupta R.K, 2013).

Substantial Strength: This category consists of countries in which Indian communities have a population of more than 1,000,000. South Africa and Reunion Island can be included in this category. In South Africa, the total strength of Indian Diaspora is 1,56,0000 and they constitute nearly 3% of the total population of South Africa. They are concentrated in the major industrial centres of South Africa and around 75% of the Indian community lives in Kwazulu Natal. Durban, the capital of this province accounts for a considerable part of the largely urbanized Indian population of this country. This concentration makes them politically influential in this area which is incidentally among highly industrialized and prosperous regions of South Africa. Similarly, in France (Reunion Island), the total strength of Indian Diaspora is 109,000 and they constitute almost 30% of the total population.

Dominant Strength: In this category we can include countries where Indian communities make a majority in terms of total population of the country. Mauritius is the only country not only in Africa but in entire globe which could be included in this category. Recorded by the High Level Committee on Indian Diaspora that Indian Diaspora in Mauritius as unique and distinctive as here Indian Diaspora constitutes an overwhelming majority- nearly 70% of the total population and they were among first permanent settlers in the island. They play a vital role in the political process of the country and hold important elected posts.

In the current parliament of Mauritius there are 36 members of Indian origin; although, unlike other parts of the world they are not an economically affluent community. Indians in Mauritius are not a monolithic or homogenous community. There is diversity on the basis of religion, caste, place of origin, language etc. Each of them has

beautifully preserved their cultural identity. They have associations and organizations associated to their culture/language.

Minimal Strength: This category includes countries where the strength of Indian community is less than 10000 people. There are some 32 African countries which fall under this category such as Algeria, Angola, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Cape Verde Islands, Comoros, Democratic Republic of Congo, Djibouti, Egypt, Equatorial Guinea, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Gambia, Republic of Guinea, Guinea Bissau, Ivory Coast, Kingdom of Lesotho, Liberia, Malawi, Mali, Mauritania, Morocco, Namibia, Niger, Rwanda, Republic of Sao Tome and Principe, Senegal, Seychelles, Sierra Leone, Sudan, Swaziland and Togo. Indian communities in these countries are spread over a wide area and do not make up one constituency. Moreover, in several cases they are temporary residents working in projects and still hold an Indian Passport. Therefore, in political terms their presence is insignificant and in most of the cases they are not able to obtain political offices in their host-land.

Marginal Strength: In this category, countries which have a population of Indian Diaspora between 100,000 to 10,000 could be included. By this criteria Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda, Nigeria, Madagascar, Mozambique, Zambia, Botswana and Zimbabwe would fall in this category. In these countries, strength of Indian Diaspora in terms of total population of host country is very small and is scattered in various regions. Therefore, they do not make for an influential political constituency and there is very little chance of them obtaining political offices on the basis of ethnic identity. However, the Indian Diaspora in these countries are economically well off and culturally keen to retain identity. Some of the leading journalists, prominent academicians and lawyers, who shape public opinion in these countries, are from the Indian communities.

According to a survey carried out by United Nations on international migrant trends that India's diaspora population is the largest in the world with 16 million people from India living outside their country in 2015. It is the largest diaspora in the world, followed by Mexico and Russia. The rise in the number of international migrants reflects the increasing importance of international migration, which has become an integral part of our economies

and societies” (Wu Hongbo, UN under secretary general for economic and social affairs) (TOI, January 14, 2016).

Indian diaspora has transformed the economies and has come to occupy a pride of place in the life of those countries. In these countries Indian diaspora communities found as entrepreneurs, traders, researchers, doctors, engineers, workers, inventors, lawyers, managers and administrators. By playing a leading role in the global technological revolution, it has transformed India’s image abroad.

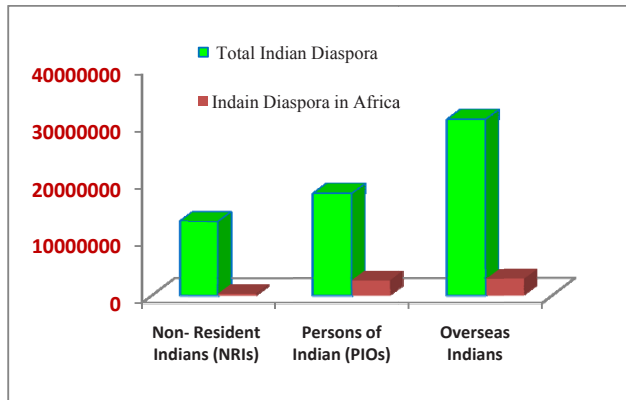


Fig. 1: Comparison between Diaspora in African Countries and total Indian Diaspora across the world

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

Sl. No.	Country	Non-Resident Indians (NRIs) 2016	Persons of Indian (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 (Dem. Rep. of)	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 (Republic of)	700	0	700
17	Guinea Bissau	100	3	103
18	Ivory Coast	1500	0	1500
19	Kenya	20000	60000	80000
20	Lesotho (Kingdom of)	500	1000	1500
21	Liberia	3000	0	3000
22	Libya	1500	2	1502
23	Madagascar	2500	15000	17500
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 and Principe (Republic of)	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)

CONCLUSION

Indians have been visiting the African continent since ages. Despite age-old linkages, modern settlement of Indians in Africa is certainly linked with the colonial exploration of the continent. In the colonial period migration occurred in two

ways - by force as well as by choice. Further, large scale migration occurred in the post-independence period. As mentioned, today, Indian communities in Africa constitute 9.11% of the total strength of India Diaspora and they reside in 46 countries of Africa inhabiting all linguistic, cultural or geographical regions of the continent. The influence of Indian communities in their country of adoption varies from one country to another which is largely dependent on their size of population. In case of Mauritius, they have been able to dominate in the political and socio-cultural domain. They have also been an important pillar in the political space of South Africa as well as the socio-cultural life of Reunion Island. On the other hand, Indians have made significant contributions in other countries of Africa although their numerical strength is marginal or minimal.

The Diaspora is very special to India. Residing in distant lands, its members have succeeded spectacularly in their chosen professions by dint of their single-minded determination and hard work. Moreover, they have retained their emotional, cultural and spiritual links with the country of their origin. The government of India is no longer oblivious of the communities of Indian origin abroad, increasingly celebrating the success stories of these people while also recognizing the potential they offer for the country's development. The government has made proactive efforts to engage these communities, and people of Indian origin abroad have responded to these initiatives, making

significant contributions in several tangible and intangible forms (Mishra, 2016). Recently, under the dominate leadership of Ms. Sushma Swaraj, Ministry of External Affairs Government of India has presented some notable success stories in terms of engaging the Indian diaspora and addressing their issues.

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