

## **Diasporas: The Human Face of Globalisation**

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The interplay of migration, culture, technology, and economics is shaping a world that is defined by integration, interconnectedness, and interdependence which further offers the potential to create value, globally. Along with this comes the growing concept of universal kinship, powered, in large measure, by diaspora communities whose hyphenated identities enable them to contribute to their country of origin and the country in which they live, through entrepreneurship, volunteerism, mentorship, philanthropy, and diplomacy. By tapping into the experiences, the energy, the expertise of diaspora communities, the so-called brain-drain can be reversed. The concept of the loss of intellectual capital in areas of the world from where people migrate can be converted to that of brain-gain.

Diasporas are the human face of globalisation and strengthening of diasporas has important implications for global economics, politics, and security. Diaspora consciousness is on the rise and diasporas are becoming more interested in their origins and organising themselves more effectively; homelands are revising their opinions of their diasporas as the stigma attached to emigration declines. Meanwhile host countries are witnessing more assertive diasporic groups within their own national communities. The recognition of diaspora contribution towards their home country through remittances, investments, and networks has facilitated a shift in attitude and this shift in thinking is also evident in India in recognition of the manifold contributions being made to the home country.

The NRI Punjabi diaspora in the UK and USA is a heterogeneous community, contributing towards the economic, social, cultural, and political sectors but large scale investments are deterred by corruption, an inefficient bureaucracy, and lack of supportive diaspora policies at the state and central levels. The migration of highly qualified, talented professionals from developing countries to highly developed countries driven by 'push' factors such as the lack of opportunities for career development in sending countries and 'pull' factors such as higher wages and skill shortage in receiving countries has been an issue of grave concern for economists since the 1960s.

Diaspora contributions towards their home country take the form of remittances, technology, or expertise. It is held that diaspora groups contribute phenomenally towards the development of less developed nations, primarily through monetary remittances, investments, and by building social networks. Such contributions by the diaspora have facilitated a shift in attitude and thinking regarding migration, from brain-drain to brain-bank and brain-circulation. The contributions of the Punjabi, Gujarati, and Keralite diaspora are noteworthy in this regard. The remittances sent by these migrants have helped in the development of their respective state's economy and these remittances sent by the migrants have helped in improving the standards of living of millions of families. As India is a diverse nation, its diaspora consists of many ethnic subgroups. The UK and the US have always been important destination markets for Indian emigrants and each has a sizeable Indian diaspora community.

There is a vast body of literature on the contribution made by the diaspora to their countries of origin which discusses the direct and the indirect economic returns. The direct economic returns from the diaspora communities consist of financial flows in terms of foreign direct investment, imports of technology, and transfer of technical knowhow which help to enhance productivity in their respective home countries. Indirect economic returns consist of the benefits to the native country arising from

networks formed by its diaspora. Thus, diaspora is fast emerging as one of the forces for development in the globalising world. Remittances are a big deal as they overwhelmingly travel from wealthy countries to the poorer ones. Some critics argue that they create dependency, letting bad governments off the hook, and removing the incentive to reform their broken economies.

The World Bank has argued that a large, well-educated diaspora can improve access to capital, information, and contacts for firms in countries of origin. As quicker and cheaper transport and communications close the gap between diasporas and homelands, the extent to which skills are actually 'lost' with migration may be reduced. The new global changes are gradually shifting skill migration away from its fixed, unidirectional pattern which, in the past, generally resulted in a permanent loss of talent for the home country, into a new transnational model of 'skills sharing'. Recent research has pointed to a number of network benefits flowing from diasporas. First, there is good evidence that people living in a country other than their own can stimulate bilateral trade between the two markets. Immigrant ties to their homelands, including their knowledge of home country markets, languages, preferences, and business contacts, can reduce transaction costs and facilitate trade. Given the mobility of highly skilled people in particular, there is always the possibility of migrants returning home to match their internationally acquired skills and contacts with their understanding of the indigenous culture.

Diaspora contributions for philanthropic activities have not only provided some basic services to needy people but have also helped to generate economic activities that support a section of society. The Punjabi Sikh diaspora, for example, is particularly known for its philanthropic activities given its strong cultural beliefs in 'daswandh' and 'daan.' Funds for charitable purposes are channelled through post, personal visits, friends, and religious intermediaries.

When it comes to thinking about the South-Asian diaspora bodies, food is never far. Discursively, the terms by which 'Indianness' is imagined almost always mobilize a culinary idiom, and the contributions of South-Asian diasporas, separated by oceans, can be made to best resonate if apprehended through culinary metaphors and symbols. Much of the valorisation of Indianness is linked to the growing popularity of Indian food, and the popularity of India-inspired clothing and commodities within spaces and communities that have become South-Asian diasporic sites. Indian food has turned global and represents a new form of multiculturalism by adapting to the culinary histories of various cultures – homeland as well as the host country.

The very conditions of colonialism that brought Indians to lands abroad – the conditions of race and class which made it necessary for South-Asian immigrants to enter into the business of making Indianness palatable to western tastes. A study devoted to food within the larger field of ethnic studies poses some unique challenges and possibilities for cultural inquiry. For some years, food has been garnering interest as a subject for cultural, literary, and economic inquiry. It is not an overstatement to suggest that food poses particular challenges for literary studies. Among the most important theorisations are those that consider how taste for certain foods can be seen reflecting social and cultural patterns, and how culture, in turn, shapes food preferences.

For South-Asian diasporic cultural texts, the culinary most typically occupies a seemingly paradoxical space – at once a site of affirmation and resistance. Affirmation, because food often serves to mark defining moments in marking ethnicity for communities that live through and against the vagaries of 'diasporised' realities, marred by racism and xenophobia. Resistance, in so far as the evocation of a culinary register, can deliberately and strategically disrupt the notion that cultural identity is always readily available for consumption and commoditisation, and always already conjoined to culinary practices. Food, as a central part of the cultural imagination of diasporic populations, becomes one of the most viable and valuable sites from which to inquire into the richly layered texture of how race is

imagined and reinterpreted within the cultural arena, both to affirm and resist notions of home and belonging. When we think about food it is often to discern some truthful fictions or fictive truths about group identity. Such interest in linking discourse with cultural contexts almost always leads to an automatic assumption that food studies is exclusively concerned with the material realm of food culture, completely disregarding the returns in the form of remittances and skill sharing. An overview of the culinary in the US and UK based popular culture signals the multiple ways in which everyday Indianness is scripted within the language of consumption and culinary practices. A culinary register becomes the most salient, and often the most palatable index of managing difference in the South-Asian diasporic literary and cultural production in addition to an identification of the economic index.

The pioneering efforts of Indian cooks and their achievements abroad cannot be overlooked; cooking and food preparation have become technical jobs and cooks enjoy the reputation of TV stars. Being a part of both worlds – the host country and the homeland – they come home looking for the best Indian packaged food, to be exported for those with nostalgia for home-cooked food. Indian migration has spread the culinary traditions of the sub-continent throughout the world. These cuisines have been adapted to local tastes and have also affected local cuisines, leading to the mushrooming of Indian food restaurants abroad, selling ‘brand India.’ As the Indian diaspora increases in size and visibility, a large array of ethnic food – be that ingredients or ready to eat meals, are making their way onto shelves of mainstream supermarkets. A survey by the National Restaurant Association in early 2000 revealed that the consumer awareness of Indian Food had increased by 75% since the early 90s.

Culinary artists remain in constant endeavour to create and recreate new dishes to offer their growing clientele who are always hungry for something new. Indian food has gone global and has become palatable world over. Indian chefs, the world around, are using new cooking styles, throwing in local ingredients and mixing cultural influences to reinvent India’s rich cuisine which has shaped the history of international relations. The connection between the growth of a global Indian diaspora and the export of Indian food abroad is a deep one. Currently, Indian food is a five billion dollar industry in the UK alone. What possesses most Indian diaspora to plunge into the food business is a mixture of passion and a conviction that they can explore a hitherto unmet market. Celebrity chefs jockey for positions abroad, independent restaurateurs and chains compete across the continents. Food TV shows, blogs, and magazines all vie for audiences. Amid this global gastronomic revolution, outside India, Indian food is gaining ground and currency. The New York Times has observed that Indian food rescued the British from ‘bland boiled food’ by lending it a previously unknown component: flavour. We still produce over 80% of the world’s spices and the Indian chefs have learnt to market India as a pre-eminent culinary destination, thereby promoting tourism. Winning over Michelin has put India on the international culinary map and has succeeded in luring tourism and remittances that inevitably follow food.

The economics of food divulges that joining forces with the long-running multi-million-dollar ‘incredible India’ campaign or partnering with key western culinary institutions, to sponsor awards for Indian influenced restaurants across continents, might increase the influx of wealth. Road shows, tasting festivals, and a network of celebrity chef exchanges can be launched in close association with India’s tourism ministry, to showcase our cuisine in strategic global cities. India’s vast network of embassies and consulates can assist in this process.

A number of elite diaspora private clubs exist, to further networking, to monitor the potential of the human heart – the possibility of creating success for millions of underprivileged people. These initiatives can be called the Do-Gooder’s Billion Dollar Club which, through high profile events get high net worth individuals and corporations to write substantive cheques for initiating change in the lives of the neediest in India. Several non-profit organisations like Pratham USA and Akshaya Patra

exist in big cities like New York, Los Angeles, and Chicago, and help channel the wealth from Silicon Valley and Wall Street moguls to the villages and slums of India. For over two decades, major Indian-American non-profit organisations have been tapping the NRI community to finance projects across India from schools to hospitals. The Indian diaspora in the USA is becoming richer and increasingly philanthropic who want to give money to good causes. Over the years American India foundation has raised \$87 million and continues to raise \$7-10 million annually. Due to increased cross-border exchanges – cultural, economic et al – the global Indian diaspora's imagination has suddenly been fired by the realisation of their power as possible catalysts in the making of a global Indian identity.

## REFERENCES

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