

## Social Problems of Indian Diaspora Living in Abroad

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**Abstract :** *India has one of the world's most diverse and complex migration histories. Since the 19th century, ethnic Indians have established communities on every continent as well as on islands in the Caribbean and the Pacific and Indian oceans. The composition of flows has evolved over time from mainly indentured labor in far-flung colonies to postwar labor for British industry to high-skilled professionals in North America and low-skilled workers in the Middle East. In addition, ethnic Indians in countries like Kenya and Suriname have migrated to other countries, a movement called secondary migration. In this paper try to explain various socio cultural problems of Indian Diaspora and also highlighted some recommendation for solve this problems. Leaving India and going abroad -USA, Canada, England....-is a very big step, a life changing experience in the true sense of the words. To search for a better future, we often leave behind everything- the friends, the family members, the social circle and the personal identity in most cases. It is a very common perception, – and true to an extent – that going abroad will improve our life and the lives of those who depend on us. It is always made to sound all too easy to settle and prosper in Western countries as an NRI.*

**Keywords :** *Diaspora, Problem, Ethnic, Movement*

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## **Introduction**

The term “Indian Diaspora” refers to all persons of Indian descent living outside India, as long as they preserve some major Indian ethno cultural characteristics. Only nationals of Pakistan and Bangladesh are excluded from this term since those countries were part of the larger British India before 1947 and thus constitute a special case.

A common distinction with regard to ethnic Indians outside India, often referred to as overseas Indians, is made between non-resident Indians (NRIs), who hold Indian citizenship, and persons of Indian origin (PIOs), who do not.

The overseas Indian community thus constitutes a diverse, heterogeneous and eclectic global community representing different regions, languages, cultures and faiths. The common thread that binds them together is the idea of India and its intrinsic values. Overseas Indians comprise People of Indian Origin and Non Resident Indians and today are amongst the best educated and successful communities in the world. In every part of the world the overseas Indian community is recognized and respected for its hard work, discipline, non-interference and for successfully integrating with the local community. Overseas Indians have made significant contributions to the economy of the country of residence and have added in considerable measure to knowledge and innovation.

The overseas life is always portrayed to be full of luxury and without hardships. The big mansions and large farming lands in any neighborhood of India are invariably linked to those who have gone abroad. But, this is far from the real truth. There is no doubt that many of these countries are considered the land of opportunities with a lot of promise. The amenities of daily life and conveniences of a developed society combined with buying power of the dollar offer a lot of lure and attraction.

However, the reality is far different and a newcomer from India is hit with the real truth about life soon after departing the plane. What was taken for granted till yesterday – the language, the education and common social behavior – is all up for recalibration in the new land. The fact is that the challenges overseas are very real and hurdles to succeed are much higher for a foreigner. It is not one or two isolated issues but a combination of many such problems that create the real experience abroad, an experience quite different than anyone expects.

### **The Full Picture: The Global Indian Diaspora**

According to 2001 estimates by the High Level Committee on the Indian Diaspora, the 18.5 million-strong Diaspora (including descendants of Indian migrants) is widely dispersed. The Indian government claims Diaspora communities in as many as 110 countries; however, three-quarters of the Diaspora population live in 12 countries (see Table). Since 2005, the Indian government claims that the community numbers approximately 25 million.

#### **The Indian Diaspora: Places with More than 100,000 Members**

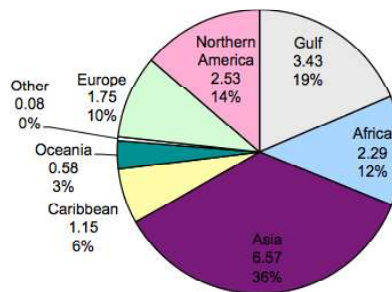
Asia	
Myanmar	2,902,00
Malaysia	1,665,000
Sri Lanka	855,025
Nepal	583,599
Singapore	307,000
Africa	
South Africa	1,000,000
Mauritius	715,756
Reunion	220,055
Kenya	102,500
Oceania	
Fiji	336,829
Australia	190,000
Caribbean	
Trinidad & Tobago	500,600
Guyana	395,350
Suriname	150,456
Northern America	
USA	1,678,765
Canada	851,000
Europe	

UK	1,200,000
Netherlands	217,000
Gulf	
Saudia Arabia	1,500,000
UAE	950,000
Oman	312,000
Kuwait	295,000
Qatar	131,000
Yemen	100,900

*Note:* The numbers are estimates of the Diaspora populations including both actual migrants and descendants of migrants. For Nepal, data refer only to persons born in India. *Source:* High Level Committee on the Indian Diaspora (2002). Sri Lanka and Nepal: 2001 Census.

share, 6.5 percent and 3.3 percent, respectively.

**The Indian Diaspora by World Region in Percent and Millions, 2001**



*Note:* The numbers are estimates of the diaspora populations including both actual migrants and descendants of migrants.

*Source:* High Level Committee on the Indian Diaspora (2002). Sri Lanka and Nepal: 2001 Census.

While ethnic Indians are a minority in most countries, they constitute around 40 percent of the population in Fiji, Trinidad, Guyana, and Suriname. They make up 70 percent of the inhabitants of Mauritius.

The Indian Diaspora in developed countries, especially in the United States, is highly organized with many regional and pan-Indian cultural, professional, religious, and charity organizations. In recent years, advocacy groups, political ambitions of individuals like Louisiana Governor Bobby Jindal, and the Congressional India Caucus have demonstrated Indians' increasing political influence.

Other countries, however, have seen more Indians elected to national legislative bodies. In Canada, eight ethnic Indians all of them Sikhs were elected to the House of Commons in October 2008. Currently, six elected Members of the British Parliament and eight Members in the House of Lords are of Indian descent.

In Mauritius, where 70 percent of the population is of Indian descent, the prime minister has been an ethnic Indian except for between 2003 and 2005. As noted earlier, Singapore's current president is an ethnic Indian. Seven cabinet members and 27 parliamentarians in Fiji are of Indian descent; in Malaysia, the count goes to one cabinet minister and three members of parliament. In Germany, two ethnic Indians are elected representatives in the central parliament, as is one India-born person in New Zealand.

### **NRIs and India Diaspora – the key challenges abroad!**

Here are the key challenges that a newcomer encounters overseas:

#### **Language Barrier**

Yes, we speak English in India too; actually most of the education is in English now-a-days. However, it is not the language itself but the way it is spoken. It is not wrong or right way, but a different way. The slang, the pronunciation, the body language for subtle differences of meanings.....; combine all that with the Indian accent, and you have the language barrier. To be successful in a new society, effective communications is a must, as we all soon learn. The language barrier requires new adjustments and it takes time to improve the communication skills.

#### **Cultural Shock**

Everything is very different all of a sudden for a new person. The language,

the market places, the scene on the street– it is all a bit too much to adjust to overnight. It has nothing to do with being open-minded, fast learner or quick to adapt. It is just like being parachuted into a place far away and far different, and you don't know where to go once you touch the ground and remove the parachute. The race relations in America are very dynamic and much different from multi-cultural Indian society. Going through the culture shock phase is one of the common experiences abroad. 'How to overcome the Culture Shock abroad' article goes into the remedial actions against culture shock.

### **Family and Peer Pressure**

This may be self inflicted pressure in many of the cases, but it is there. We want to be successful and most of us end up being successful, may be in a very different way than we first thought of. However, for a newcomer, the expectations are generally quite high. Based on the stories told back home, -the common perception about living in West – there is this expectation that opportunities would be in abundance and easy to find. Not really.

### **Ego and Pride Adjustment**

As the days go by and there is no luck in finding the kind of career opportunities once dreamed of, the pressure starts to build. The weight of all this combined with the realities of daily hurdles can play a big drag on anyone's psyche. That is when many questions get raised: was it the best decision to go abroad? Is it all really worth it? What am I doing wrong? ....The bright lights of the future that once shined so strong is not-so-bright in reality.

### **Education**

This may not be an issue; it is just one more thing to question. Is it my education or lack of it that is pulling me back? Do I need a local degree or diploma to succeed? Once again, it is the combination of all negatives that affects the self-confidence.

### **A dollar is a dollar**

In India, a dollar earns high value and respect because of the currency exchange rate. A few hundred dollars are many thousands in rupees. When they live in US and work in US, they earn in US dollars and spend in US dollar. And here in US, a few hundred dollars are just that – a few hundred of dollars.

### **Marital problems**

Most of the cases are dowry-related. Since the groom's main qualification of

being an NRI seems to supersede all other academic qualifications, the parents prefer to spend on NRI bride-grooms as the parents wish to see their daughters go abroad. When she lands her she finds him far away from her ideals. The one who could have been a match to her is often, in terms of dowry, out of the capacity of her parents. Therefore, the parents have to overlook the criteria of mental or intellectual or educational matching, they wed their daughters according to their financial affordability. There are many cases where the bride-grooms provided incorrect information about their job, earning, qualifications etc. before the marriage. As a result, the innocent girls found an entirely different standard of life upon arrival, far below their expectations.

Many expatriates do not qualify for maintaining “family status” so they cannot obtain the family’s visa. The distance creates many disputes with in-laws and, consequently, they go to the police and courts. The women seeking divorce do not get any help from Qazi. The courts take too long as unless the bride-groom appears in the court, no fast judgment can be passed. Even if the court summons or sends warrant to the bride-groom, he does not respond as the Indian Embassy is not equipped with any power to catch hold of such violators. West Asia is a safe land for those who run away from the family disputes. No Qazi or Court can serve notice to them unless they return back.

The sufferings of the Indian Muslim girls married to Arab Shiekhs are common phenomena. The brokers including Qazis convince the parents of the girls under the pretext of Islamic permission to such marriages and wed the girls with Arabs. The poor parents fall prey. The Sheikhs abandon these girls within a week or two after enjoying a few nights with these girls. There is no agreement between India and other Arab Governments to bring these sheikhs to the courts. There are many girls with children out of this short-term relationship.

Similarly, there are many girls who married to the Arabs and came here. They found on arrival that the Sheikh is already married to other wives. Since the Indian maids are considered as more efficient and loyal here, these girls are forced to work like maids.

### **An example**

Case of a Keralite Muslim girl namely Rehana Kulsoom. She belonged to a very poor family. An aged Saudi married her and brought her to Saudi Arabia on a Maid’s visa as the Saudi nationals are not permitted to marry any non-Saudi woman.

The innocent girl did not know this. She was assigned to look after the Saudi's ailing mother who was on wheel chair. The Saudi used to come home once or twice a week and always used to make excuses of his excessive traveling. Later she found out that the man already has got two wives and several children, he needed only a maid to look after his mother. When the mother died after a few years, he sent her back giving her a few hundred Riyals only. While she was forced to attend his mother, he had taken her passport and local ID in his custody and made excuses that he has lost. Eventually, the Embassy had to come to rescue the woman and got her relieved from the torture.

The educated girls who had been at jobs in India find very difficult to adjust here as the women are not allowed to work except in the profession of teaching or nursing. The husbands want to live together but the women do not find any attraction in the life without going to jobs. As a result, many a complications arise in the married life.

It is not that only the women are victimized. In many cases, we witnessed the men too are harassed by the wives and their parents. Since most of the expatriates' second generation too has become a working class abroad, the men who marry locally here, find an army of in-laws around them. The involvements of in-laws from both sides often multiply the problems.

The advancement of the social media like Face book and twitter etc have destroyed the morality. Since the women are mostly alone at home, willingly or unwillingly they indulge in acquaintance of many such friendships that arouse the suspicions in their husbands' mind and subsequently the relations start getting strained.

### **Recommendations to the Ministry of Overseas Indians**

1. The embassies must be given power to withhold the passport, or to influence the courts or local police stations in India with their report. Since revocation of the passport needs a long judiciary process, the embassies should have power to instruct the Indian immigration department to seize the passport at the airport itself as soon as the violators arrive at any Indian airport.
2. NGOs who come forward to counsel in the marital problems must be given legal support by the embassies to take action. The embassy should support the action taken by the NGOs. This will not only reduce the domestic violence, divorces etc but also reduce lot of pressure from the embassy



staffs that willingly or unwillingly have to get involved in the disputes.

3. There is already an agreement between the Indian Government and most of the Gulf Governments on exchange of terrorists, smugglers etc. There should also be an agreement to exchange the persons who are wanted by any Indian court but they are absconding. If any Indian court issues a warrant against a person, the embassies should be able to compel the Arab sponsor to arrange the deportation of the wanted person.
4. The Community Welfare section of every embassy must be provided with an official counselor to counsel between the wives and husbands.
5. Most important: The Government must ban the dowry system. This is the root of many crimes in the society as well as a worst violation of Women's Rights. The article 498A or anti-dowry act 1961 and 1986 are not enough to curb the present day's dowry trends. New strict laws must be introduced to eradicate it.

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