MIGRATION AND INDIAN DIASPORA: SOCIAL AND CULTURAL HISTORIES

B.A.(PROGRAMME) HISTORY

SEMESTER-VII
DISCIPLINE SPECIFIC ELECTIVE COURSE (DSE)
COURSE CREDIT-4

As per the UGCF - 2022 and National Education Policy 2020

READING NOTES

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Printed at: Vikas Publishing House Pvt. Ltd. Plot 20/4, Site-IV, Industrial Area Sahibabad, Ghaziabad - 201 010 (130 Copies) October 2026

UNIT I

UNDERSTANDING THE INDIAN DIASPORA: ANCIENT AND HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVES

1.1 INTRODUCTION

This study is structured to interpret the complex concepts of migration and diaspora within their historical contexts. Today, the term 'diaspora' is widely used to describe communities characterized as 'transnational' or 'dispersed.' These communities exist beyond the land of their current residence, maintaining networks that transcend the boundaries of nation-states. Diaspora theory poses a significant challenge to the sovereignty of modern nation-states, as it demonstrates that identity need not be tied to a single political or geographic entity in a binary fashion; instead, it can involve allegiances to multiple entities. The concept of diaspora is defined through the history of a community's dispersal, its collective memories or myths, and the construction of a collective identity.

Historical patterns of the Indian diaspora encompass ancient, medieval, and early modern phases, followed by significant waves during the colonial era. This period witnessed a global dispersal under the *Girmitiya* (indentured) labor system—a practice often described as a "new system of slavery." Subsequently, a new wave of diaspora emerged in the post-colonial era, characterized by a surge of highly skilled professionals migrating to regions such as North America, Europe, and the Middle East. In the contemporary context, the Indian diaspora is viewed as a valuable economic and strategic asset for India. This unit is based on the principles of diverse historical monasteries and transnational identities, maintaining a continuous dialogue with the youth of host countries regarding concepts such as *Jokan* (assimilation) and multiculturalism.

1.2 CONCEPTS AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK OF MIGRATION AND DIASPORA

In the context of migration studies, 'mobility' is the most general concept. It encompasses all forms of territorial movement, whether temporary or permanent. Historical evidence indicates that migration is not a new phenomenon; rather, humans have always relocated to improve their way of life.

The term 'diaspora' has acquired a broad semantic domain. It now encompasses diverse groups such as political refugees, guest workers, immigrants, expelled populations, ethnic and racial minorities, and overseas communities. It is increasingly used by displaced individuals who feel, maintain, and revitalize a connection with their former homeland.

The concept of diaspora involves several key characteristics: the dispersal of a population from its original 'center' to two or more foreign territories—often occurring under traumatic circumstances or driven by work, trade, or colonial ambitions; the tendency to maintain a collective memory or myth regarding the location, history, and achievements of the original homeland; and the idealization of the ancestral home—whether real or imagined—along with a collective commitment to its preservation, security, prosperity, or even its creation. A diaspora experiences

a sense of incongruity or alienation in the host country, establishing an identity distinct from the local population—an identity defined by the aforementioned connections.

1.3 THEORETICAL PARADIGM AND KEY COMPONENTS OF DIASPORA

The structure of diaspora theory revolves around three principal actors: the homeland, the diaspora group, and the host. The relationships among these three are multidimensional and dynamic. Scholars aim to move beyond descriptive research to develop a comprehensive typology capable of mapping the characteristics of various types of diasporas.

Theoretical Relationships and Interactions: Diaspora theory is deeply interconnected with other major theoretical disciplines.

Ethnic Theory

The concept of ethnic theory is intrinsically linked to diaspora theory; while it constitutes an independent theoretical category, it is deeply connected to other discourses. This theory is grounded in the fundamental premise that individuals seek a shared social identity. This quest becomes particularly significant in the era of large-scale urbanization and amidst the weakening of localized, specific ties. The primary objective of ethnic theory is to understand the processes through which people derive their identities based on shared elements such as history, language (and in some cases, religion), and past achievements. This shared identity provides a foundation for collective solidarity.

Theoretically, the formation of a diaspora is considered a specific instance of ethnicity, as diasporas are "imagined transnational communities" that unite groups of people living in geographically dispersed locations. It is important to note that not all migrants form communities, and equating all migrant communities with diasporas is a conceptual error. Incorporating the element of a "homeland" into ethnic identity provides an additional focal point for solidarity. For instance, the invocation of the country (homeland) is often underpinned by ethnic ideologies rooted in exclusivism and purity, which may be linked to the group's religiously based communal solidarity.

Historically, prior to the 1960s, immigrant groups were generally expected to shed their ethnic identities and assimilate into local norms. However, as these assimilation models effectively failed, some societies—from the 1970s onwards—began to permit or even encourage immigrants to retain various aspects of their ethnic traditions. Thus, a resurgence of ethnicity occurred at a time when, according to classical modernization theory, it was expected to fade away. This resurgence reinforces the contemporary reality of multi-ethnic and multi-communal states.

Transnationalism and Globalization

The discourse surrounding transnationalism and globalization is deeply rooted in the theoretical framework of Diaspora Theory. The process of globalization manifests as worldwide financial, economic, technological, and ecological interdependence. This process facilitates the flow of goods, capital, knowledge, and culture across regional boundaries. Over the past two decades, the dramatic expansion of communication media—including print, oral, electronic media, and the internet—has created a rapidly interconnected world. Coupled with affordable transportation,

advanced communication technologies enable the swift dissemination of information and images, thereby intensifying the scope and velocity of global interconnections.

Against this globalized backdrop, the concept of transnationalism refers to the sustained cross-border relationships, patterns of exchange, and social configurations that link individuals or institutions across the boundaries of nation-states. Highlighting this connection, the scholar Tololyan observes that "diasporas are the exemplary communities of the transnational moment." Transnational discourse reflects a sense of belonging to an ongoing transnational network that encompasses the original homeland.

A distinctive feature of transnational life is that it is characterized by the simultaneous experience of inhabiting one location while remembering or longing for another. This perspective gives rise to the concept of "multi-centered diasporas," whose lives unfold across the borders of two or more nation-states. Transnationalism poses a unique challenge to the sovereignty of modern nation-states. It disrupts the traditional belief that allegiance to a political or geographical entity must be exclusive, establishing instead that identity can encompass loyalty to more than one entity. Thus, transnationalism challenges concepts of assimilation and claims regarding the nation-state's demand for exclusive loyalty by offering the alternative of multiple identities. These transnational connections bring about changes in the social, cultural, economic, and political landscapes of groups and societies.

The Nature of Identity

In contemporary literature, three coherent meanings have been identified to understand the concept of diaspora: a social form, a type of consciousness, and a mode of cultural production. Diaspora is defined as a social structure grounded in emotions, consciousness, memory, mythology, history, meaningful narratives, group identity, longings, and virtual elements. As a social form, diaspora refers to globally dispersed ethnic groups that maintain a collective identity. It often operates through a triadic relationship involving the dispersed group, the host state of residence, and the state of the ancestral homeland. Scholars have also described the diaspora as an "exemplary community of the transnational moment."

Consciousness here refers to a specific type of awareness that emerges within contemporary transnational communities. It is characterized by a dual or contradictory nature. On one hand, it is negatively shaped by experiences of discrimination and exclusion; on the other, it is nurtured by a positive identification with historical heritage or contemporary global cultural and political forces. According to James Clifford, diaspora consciousness exists within the defining tension between loss and hope. It is an awareness of multi-locality, where "while living here, a sense of solidarity and connection with 'there' is maintained."

The dimension of diaspora as a mode of cultural production is linked to globalization and views the diaspora as a mechanism for the production and reproduction of transnational social and cultural phenomena. This process involves the global flow of cultural objects, images, and meanings, resulting in diverse processes of hybridity, creolization, and transformation. From Stuart Hall's perspective, diaspora identity is not based on essence or purity but on the recognition of necessary heterogeneity and diversity. These identities constantly regenerate themselves through change and difference. Thus, the diaspora offers a "hybrid, indeterminate, and deterritorialized" expression of culture.

The diaspora presents a unique challenge to the sovereignty of modern nation-states. It demonstrates that identity or allegiance to a political or geographical entity need not be binary (an all-or-nothing proposition) but can encompass loyalty to multiple entities. Consequently, traditional notions of assimilation and claims of exclusive loyalty to a single nation are challenged by the diaspora, whose members maintain connections with both the host nation-state and other nation-states. This leads to the deterritorialization of social identity, whereby the nation-state's claim to exclusive loyalty is challenged by the alternative of multiple identities.

In recent years, social constructionist critiques have also emerged. These argue that in the postmodern world, identities have become deterritorialized and flexible, constructed and deconstructed in a fluid and situational manner. Brubaker has termed this proliferation the "diaspora of diaspora." Despite these criticisms, during a phase of consolidation, theorists have reaffirmed three core elements of the diaspora: dispersion, orientation towards the homeland, and boundary maintenance.

A distinct form of consciousness emerges within the diaspora, characterized by a dual or contradictory nature. It is shaped, on the one hand, by experiences of discrimination and exclusion, and on the other, by identification with historical heritage or contemporary global powers. Scholars suggest that diasporic consciousness experiences the tension between loss and hope as a defining characteristic.

1.4 INDIAN MIGRATION PATTERNS: FROM ANCIENT TO POST-COLONIAL TIMES

Migration processes in the Indian subcontinent are not a contemporary phenomenon; they existed as far back as the Harappan and Vedic eras. Ancient DNA studies establish that migration has been a persistent phenomenon in India. The settlement of the Great Plains in the pre-Common Era period marked a watershed moment in India's global history. Among the early waves of migration, farmers from the Zagros region of Iran mingled with the earliest Indians, likely giving rise to the Harappan civilization (approximately 9,000 to 5,000 years ago). Additionally, people migrated for reasons related to pilgrimage, trade, and climate. Routes were developed to facilitate political and economic activities; for instance, the Mauryan administration constructed a royal highway from Taxila to Pataliputra, which was later reconstructed as the Grand Trunk Road by Sher Shah, the Mughals, and the British. Such connectivity linked remote regions to trade networks. In the early modern period, merchant groups such as the Sindhis and Parsis established their presence as trading diasporas, particularly by capitalizing on business opportunities in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries.

Migration During the Colonial Era

Indentured Labour: The most extensive and traumatic phase in the history of Indian migration occurred during the colonial period, primarily characterized by the indentured labour system. This migration began alongside the Industrial Revolution, as colonial powers required cheap and abundant labour for sugarcane, tea, coffee, and rubber plantations. Indenture was defined as a contract-based manual labour agreement designed to bind workers to employment for a specified period. The system formally came into existence in 1834 and continued until its abolition by law in 1917. Historian Hugh Tinker termed this arrangement "A New System of Slavery."

Under this system, over a million Indians were displaced. The migrants were primarily landless agricultural labourers, marginal farmers, and uneducated, naive rural poor—unaware of the realities of the outside world—who were often recruited through deception. Most of them hailed from regions in North, South, and Central India, such as the United Provinces, Bihar, Odisha, and Awadh. Calcutta was the primary port of departure, leading to these migrants being referred to as 'Kalkattiyas.' These workers were sent to distant colonies such as Mauritius, British Guiana, Trinidad, Jamaica, Fiji, and Natal. In host societies, they faced exclusion and hostility. Plantation life was harsh, often described as "hell" or a "brothel." Indentured Labourers and the

Global Spread of Indian Workers

Migration during the colonial era represents a watershed moment in the history of Indian migration, defined primarily by the indentured labour system. This massive outflow of workers began following the Industrial Revolution; after the abolition of slavery in 1833, a huge demand arose for cheap, unskilled labour to work on sugarcane, tea, coffee, and rubber plantations across British colonies. Historians have termed this system "a new system of slavery."

'Girmit' was defined as a contract-based manual labour agreement under which workers were bound to work for a fixed period (usually five years). The system formally began in 1834, when Mauritius was selected as the hub for the "Great Experiment" involving the first batch of labourers. Over the course of the 19th and 20th centuries, this system led to the migration of more than a million Indians.

At the root of this mass emigration lay the wretched socio-economic conditions prevailing in India. The collapse of cottage industries due to British colonial policies, exorbitant land revenue demands, and recurring famines forced landless agricultural labourers and marginal farmers to migrate. Most recruitment took place in North India (primarily western Bihar and eastern Uttar Pradesh) and the Madras Presidency in South India. Workers were recruited through deception or lured by false promises of a better life.

These indentured labourers—known as 'Girmitiyas' due to the 'Agreement' they signed—spread across vast regions. Key destinations included British Guiana, Trinidad, Fiji, Natal (South Africa), Jamaica, and Suriname. During long and arduous sea voyages, traditional barriers of caste, religion, and language dissolved, and the surviving migrants addressed each other as 'Jahaji Bhai' (ship brothers). Although this system was abolished by law in 1917, the descendants of these six million migrants have today formed a vast global Indian diaspora that cherishes its cultural heritage.

The Indentured Labour System

The indentured labour system—based on contractual agreements for manual labour—represents a significant and traumatic phase in the history of Indian migration. Some historians have described this system as "a new system of slavery." It formally came into existence in 1834 following the Industrial Revolution; the abolition of slavery in 1833 had created a demand for cheap and abundant labour for sugarcane, tea, coffee, and rubber plantations across British colonies.

The emigration of indentured labourers was driven by the socio-economic deprivation prevalent in India, including the decline of cottage industries, policies of exorbitant land revenue, and recurring famines. The majority of those recruited were landless agricultural labourers, marginal farmers, and the uneducated rural poor. These migrants typically hailed from densely populated

regions of North India, such as the United Provinces, Oudh, Bihar, and Orissa. Since their departure was primarily from the port of Calcutta, they came to be known as 'Kalkattiyas'.

Under the indenture agreement, labourers were bound to work for a fixed period (often five years). Through this system, over a million Indians were displaced globally. They were sent to distant colonies such as Mauritius, British Guiana, Trinidad, Fiji, and Natal. Life on the plantations was extremely harsh, often described as hell (*narak*) or a brothel (*kasbhagar*).

Although the indentured labour system was legally abolished in 1917, these labourers and their descendants formed a vast diaspora. Although provisions existed for the workers' return journey upon the expiration of their contracts, the majority chose—for various reasons—to remain in their host countries; this led to the emergence of large Indian ethnic communities in places such as Trinidad and British Guiana.

Destinations and Spread:

The era of the 'Labour Diaspora' stands as a significant and exploitative feature of the colonial period in the history of Indian migration, defined by the Indentured Labour System. This form of migration is classified as an 'ideal type'—specifically a 'Labour Diaspora' or 'Proletarian Diaspora'—wherein migrants were recruited primarily for work on tropical plantations.

The impetus for this mass emigration lay in the search for employment and the policy imperatives driving colonial ambitions. Under this system, over a million Indians were displaced from their homelands. This vast dispersal involved primarily landless agricultural laborers and marginal farmers from North India, with regions such as the United Provinces, Bihar, Odisha, and Awadh playing a prominent role.

The global dispersal of these workers was extensive and multi-regional, spanning multiple foreign territories. Key destinations where these laborers were deployed on sugar, tea, coffee, and rubber plantations included Mauritius, British Guiana, Trinidad, Natal (South Africa), and Fiji.

In addition to these, Jamaica and Suriname were also significant destinations for the Indian labour diaspora. This type of dispersal—which often began as a traumatic scattering—ultimately became the basis for these migrants to maintain a collective identity and a sense of multiple loyalties within their host countries. Transcending the boundaries of host nation-states, this labour diaspora established enduring cross-border connections, thereby laying the foundation for the modern diaspora.

Origins and Social Structure

The laborers were largely drawn from Northern, Southern, and Central India (such as the United Provinces, Bihar, and the Central Provinces). They primarily came from intermediate peasant castes, followed by lower castes (Dalits), and to a lesser extent, upper castes and Muslims.

The origins of Indian migration lie in a complex web of historical and socio-economic factors that have taken diverse forms from ancient times through the colonial era. The most profound wave of migration arrived with the advent of the *Girmitiya* (indentured) labor system, driven by the need for cheap and abundant labor for sugarcane, tea, and coffee plantations in British colonies following the abolition of slavery in 1833.

This mass emigration was a direct consequence of dire socio-economic conditions within India. Under British colonial rule, the collapse of cottage industries, exorbitant land revenue demands,

and recurring famines created a vast class of landless agricultural laborers in rural India who were compelled to go abroad in search of a livelihood. The migrants were predominantly landless agricultural laborers, marginal farmers, and uneducated rural poor; they were often recruited through deception, as they were unaware of the realities of the outside world.

The social structure of the diaspora is viewed through a theoretical framework centered on three actors: the homeland, the diaspora group, and the host society. In the context of the labor diaspora, these migrant groups were not initially ethnically homogeneous; they encompassed religious differences (Hindu, Muslim), caste distinctions, and linguistic and regional variations (such as the 'Calcuttiyas' from North India and 'Madrasis' from South India). During the long sea voyage to the plantations, traditional distinctions of caste and religion temporarily weakened, leading the surviving passengers to address one another as 'Jahaji Bhai' (ship-brothers). However, upon settling in the host societies, the social hierarchical structures brought from India—particularly caste distinctions—were re-established. For instance, in Trinidad between 1876 and 1885, approximately 41% of Hindu migrants belonged to lower castes, while 18% were Brahmins or belonged to other upper castes. Upon settlement in the host societies, the divide between castes such as Brahmins and Chamars was largely reinstated. Thus, the construction of the diaspora's identity was shaped by memories of the homeland, the trauma of displacement, and the struggle to maintain ethnic distinctiveness within the host society.

Post-colonial migration: The post-1960s era witnessed the emergence of the "New Diaspora," a phenomenon unfolding against the backdrop of globalization and hyper-mobility. This migration was primarily characterized by high-skilled professionals and a high degree of human-capital intensity. During this phase, large numbers of Indian migrants moved to Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries—particularly driven by the 1970s oil boom—contributing to sectors such as construction, healthcare, and information technology. Concurrently, skilled professionals migrated to developed nations in North America (the US and Canada) and Europe. Generally, this community is better educated and more affluent than the average citizens of their host countries. However, this migration has not been without human costs; for instance, H-4 visa holders—wives dependent on men working in the US on H-1B visas—often fall victim to domestic violence and financial dependency. Thus, patterns of Indian migration have undergone a significant transition, shifting from forced displacement to high-skilled, voluntary mobility.

Studies on the Indian diaspora argue that a comprehensive understanding of the community is possible only by focusing on the specific contexts of both the "Old" and "New" diasporas.

1.5 IDENTITY FORMATION IN DIASPORA

Communities and Engagement with Host Countries

Identity formation within diaspora communities is a complex social process arising from displacement from the country of origin, interaction with the host society, and the continuous maintenance of transnational networks. Diaspora theory views this identity as the outcome of a conceptual framework structured around three key actors—the homeland, the diaspora group, and the host country—which collectively provide the basis for understanding the group's shared identity. Diaspora identity relies on preserving myths and memories of the homeland, a process that also encompasses experiences of alienation and a sense of otherness within the host country. This consciousness exists within a paradoxical tension between loss and hope.

Host Country Policies and the Struggle for Assimilation: The engagement of diaspora communities with host countries is primarily shaped by the latter's acculturation policies. Two major models are evident in North America. On one hand, the United States has predominantly followed an assimilationist approach, often associated with the "melting pot" concept. In this model, immigrants are expected to blend into the host culture; successful immigrants—often labeled as the "model minority"—frequently face pressure to conform to mainstream norms. On the other hand, Canada has adopted an official policy of multiculturalism. By regarding inter-group differences as a valuable asset, multiculturalism assures all citizens that they can retain their identities and take pride in their heritage. This policy fosters greater political participation among minority groups. However, multiculturalism faces criticism for potentially inadvertently reproducing cultural differences, thereby compelling ethnic groups to engage in specific cultural performances that align with their "hyphenated" identities. Furthermore, in the United Kingdom, under the politics of the "accountable ethnic", identity is defined as a category of the nation-state—one that perpetually marks Asian groups as non-British.

Cultural adaptation, hybridization, and political activism: Diaspora communities are not merely bearers of their original culture but also creators of culture, giving rise to hybridity by blending elements from both the host society and the homeland. For instance, within the Hindu diaspora, hybridization has led to a transformation of cultural traditions. Certain Hindu communities began to regard aspects of Gujarati culture (such as family structure and language) as quasi-religious phenomena, thereby blurring the boundaries between religion and culture. Processes of political exclusion are also frequently at play in host societies. In Trinidad, for example, the Indian population was initially excluded during the early stages of their history. This community sought to become a legitimate part of the nation by challenging the definition of national identity while simultaneously preserving its ethnic distinctiveness. Thus, diaspora groups attempt to influence the host country's foreign policy by occupying political and administrative positions or through international lobbying—as demonstrated by the Indian-American community. These communities also serve as strategic assets for their countries of origin. However, this transnational existence is also fraught with serious social challenges, such as the high rates of domestic violence among H-4 visa-holding spouses in the United States. In short, the construction of identity within diaspora communities is a dynamic and transnational process, in which groups continuously redefine the terms of their engagement with the host society through cultural transformation and political activism.

1.6 THE NATURE OF CONTEMPORARY MIGRATION

Understanding the nature of contemporary migration is linked to comprehending the post-colonial era and the forces of globalization. This phase differs significantly from conventional depictions of migration, which primarily focused on unidirectional and permanent flows. This shift has occurred against the backdrop of 'hypermobility' since the 1960s.

A key characteristic of contemporary migration is its skilled and professional nature. It is primarily marked by the movement of highly skilled professionals and workers possessing significant human capital. This 'new diaspora' migrating from India consists largely of English-speaking, degree-educated, middle-class individuals—particularly Information Technology (IT) specialists—who migrate to developed nations such as North America, Europe, and Japan.

Migration in this era is defined by the theoretical framework of 'transnationalism.' Transnationalism is a social process wherein migrants voluntarily establish and maintain

multifaceted connections across multiple national borders. Advanced communication technologies and affordable modes of transport—such as the internet, e-mail, and satellite TV—have dramatically enhanced 'technologies of connection.' These technological advancements have increased the speed and intensity of circular flows and continuous interactions between places of origin and destination.

Consequently, the lives of migrants now unfold across two locations simultaneously—a defining feature of the 'new diaspora.' This transnational network has led to an unprecedented increase in the scale and flow of remittances. Remittances have now become a vital and stable source of external development finance for the national economies of many countries. This overarching trend demonstrates that contemporary migration is not merely the geographical movement of individuals but a transnational social reality that transforms the social, cultural, and economic landscapes of both the societies of origin and the host societies.

The Diaspora in the Middle East

The Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries—comprising Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates—have historically been a significant destination for Indian migrants. The roots of the Indian diaspora lie in centuries-old trade routes that connected India to the Arabian Peninsula. However, the real surge in this migration occurred during the post-colonial era; the flow increased dramatically, particularly following the oil boom of the 1970s. Oil-rich economies generated a massive demand for labor across various sectors.

This massive and unique migration flow reshaped the South-South migration pattern, distinguishing itself clearly from the migration organized within former imperial frameworks. Today, GCC countries are home to over 8 million Indians—a population that has become an integral part of the region's economic, social, and cultural fabric. The Indian diaspora has made significant contributions to diverse sectors such as construction, healthcare, finance, education, and information technology.

Migration flows from Indian states like Kerala are heavily concentrated towards the Gulf countries, making Kerala one of the top recipients of international remittances in India. This inflow of remittances renders these states highly dependent on such funds relative to their Gross Domestic Product (GDP). The relationship between the host country and the diaspora is also characterized by mutual respect and cultural exchange, with Indian festivals like Diwali being celebrated. However, GCC countries also implement policies such as Labour Nationalization Programmes to manage unemployment among their native populations. Globalization has further strengthened this interconnection, making the diaspora a key hub for economic and strategic cooperation within a transnational context.

The Diaspora in North America and Europe

The emergence of the Indian diaspora in North America and Europe is primarily a post-colonial phenomenon that evolved within the broader context of globalization and hypermobility. This 'new diaspora' consists largely of highly skilled professionals and workers possessing significant human capital. In both Canada and the United States (US), the Indian diaspora has proven to be a highly successful immigrant group in terms of economic achievement and educational attainment. According to the US Census Bureau, the Indian-American community is one of the fastest-growing ethnic groups. These immigrant groups are more affluent and better educated than the average American or Canadian citizen. For instance, over 58% of Indian-Americans aged 25 and older hold

a college degree (compared to a national average of 26%), and more than 40% possess a master's or doctoral degree.

The acculturation policies of host countries in North America shape the outcomes for this community. The United States has historically favored an approach of assimilation, often characterized as the 'melting pot.' Assimilation entails an expectation that minority groups conform to the dominant culture to achieve full citizenship. This emphasis makes it difficult to preserve ancestral cultures across generations, resulting in greater geographical dispersion within the diaspora. In contrast, Canada's official policy has been one of multiculturalism. Multiculturalism values inter-group differences as a significant asset and encourages all citizens to take pride in maintaining their distinct identities. This policy makes Canada an attractive destination for certain regional groups (such as Punjabis) because preserving regional culture is easier there. The Indian-American community is rapidly gaining political influence commensurate with its financial wealth, and its lobbying efforts on behalf of India are considered far more robust than those of Indo-Canadian communities.

In the European context, beyond the United Kingdom, Western Europe (e.g., Germany, France) emerged as a significant destination around the turn of the 21st century. Indian migration to this region accounts for approximately 5 percent of total Indian migration, and these groups have been among the fastest-growing migrant communities in Europe in recent years.

Economic and Political Role

Diaspora communities perform vital economic and political functions for both their countries of origin and their host nations. On the economic front, the diaspora's most significant and visible contribution is in the form of remittances. Remittances—now exceeding $300 billion globally—are regarded as a stable source of external development finance that boosts household income, stimulates consumption, and alleviates poverty in source regions. India became the top recipient of remittances in 2003. Due to the volume of these inflows, Indian states such as Kerala, Punjab, and Goa rely heavily on these funds for their economies. Furthermore, the diaspora serves as a strategic asset by facilitating international trade and channeling the capital and skills honed abroad—as well as their expertise as highly skilled professionals—into Indian industries. These economic activities drive significant transformations in the economies of both the host country and the homeland. Politically, the diaspora presents a unique challenge to the sovereignty of modern nation-states, as it demonstrates that allegiance to a political entity need not be binary but can extend to multiple entities. Diaspora groups have mobilized to influence political outcomes in their homeland, providing support that ranges from political backing to economic and military aid. The Indian-American community serves as a prime example; owing to its educational achievements and financial prosperity, it has gained the capacity to influence the policies of its host country. India's foreign policy has shifted from purely government-to-government relations toward "people-centric diplomacy," with the diaspora serving as a vital pillar and strategic asset. This community acts as a torchbearer of India's cultural identity and is considered a primary instrument of its "soft power." Beyond their achievements in higher education and politics, members of the Indian diaspora now hold influential administrative and diplomatic positions, helping to safeguard India's interests on global platforms. Thus, the diaspora plays a decisive role not only in economic development but also in the homeland's international political engagement.

1.7 SUMMARY

The history of Indian migration reveals diverse patterns spanning from ancient times to the post-colonial era. Its most defining phase was the *Girmitiya* (indentured) labour system (1834–1917), which resulted in the global dispersal of over a million landless agricultural labourers and the rural poor. This labour diaspora settled in colonies such as Fiji, Trinidad, and Mauritius, where the indentured workers faced harsh conditions.

Contemporary migration is characterized by a highly skilled 'new diaspora'—comprising primarily IT professionals—who establish transnational networks across North America, Europe, and the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries. These migrants are generally more educated and affluent than the average citizens of their host countries.

Identity formation within diaspora communities is defined by a continuous dialogue between memories of the homeland and the policies of the host society—such as assimilation in the US or multiculturalism in Canada. Economically, the diaspora's most significant contribution is in the form of remittances; India is the world's top recipient of international remittances, which serve as a stable source of funding for the national economy and domestic consumption. Politically, these communities act as a strategic asset and a lobbying force for India's foreign policy.

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UNIT-II

(SECTION-1)

SOCIAL AND CULTURAL HISTORY OF THE INDIAN DIASPORA

INTRODUCTION

The study of Indian migration and the diaspora reveals a complex, multi-dimensional process spanning from ancient times to contemporary transnational networks. The term 'diaspora' encompasses diverse groups—such as political refugees, guest workers, and immigrants—who maintain emotional or imagined connections to their ancestral homes despite the trauma of displacement. This identity is defined by the history of dispersal and memories of the homeland.

A pivotal phase in the historical pattern of migration is the *Girmitiya* (indentured) labour system (1834–1917), often described as a "new system of slavery." Under this system, over a million landless agricultural labourers were sent to colonies like Mauritius, British Guiana, and Fiji to work under harsh conditions. These workers forged a collective identity known as *Jahaji Bhai* (ship-brothers), which transcended traditional caste barriers.

Contemporary migration is characterized by two main groups: workers who migrated to GCC countries following the 1970s oil boom, and highly skilled professionals settled in North America and Europe (the 'new diaspora'). These migrants rank among the wealthiest and most educated communities in their host countries. Economically, the diaspora is the world's largest source of international remittances. India’s foreign policy views the diaspora as a strategic asset and an instrument of soft power.

Identity is continuously reconstructed through cultural mediums such as literature and cinema, reflecting a sense of hybridity. These communities face challenges in host societies—including racism, xenophobia, and pressures to assimilate—where they are often perceived as the "perpetual other." Part A: Theoretical and Conceptual Foundations

In the study of migration and diaspora, mobility is considered the most general concept. Mobility encompasses all forms of territorial movement, whether temporary or permanent. However, with the rise in international and internal migration, diaspora migration has emerged as a significant topic in the 21st century. The semantic domain of the term 'diaspora' has expanded vastly. It now includes diverse groups such as political refugees, guest workers, immigrants, ethnic and racial minorities, and overseas communities. According to Steven Vertovec, the term 'diaspora' is used today to describe any population considered 'deterritorialised' or 'transnational'—that is, a group whose place of origin differs from its current place of residence and whose social, economic, and political networks transcend the boundaries of nation-states. This broad usage, which gives rise to definitional ambiguity, poses a threat to the term's descriptive utility.

The concept of diaspora is employed by displaced individuals who feel, maintain, invent, or revitalize connections to their former homes. The concept of diaspora encompasses several fundamental components:

1. A history of dispersal

2. Myths or memories of the homeland

3. Alienation in the host country

4. A desire for eventual return

5. Ongoing support for the homeland

6. A collective identity defined by the aforementioned connections

It is incorrect to assume that a diaspora is always the result of exile. In reality, individuals may choose to migrate due to factors such as political domination and oppression, economic inequality, powerlessness, or minority status. The factor that distinguishes diaspora groups from other types of migrants is their enduring or reawakened attachment and loyalty to their original culture and, specifically, to their homeland.

A.2 DIASPORA THEORY AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORKS

To better understand the diaspora, Judith T. Shuval presents a meaningful theoretical paradigm structured around three key agents or components: the homeland, the diaspora group, and the host. These three agents interact within a set of multidimensional and shifting relationships. This approach acknowledges the dynamic nature of the social processes involved in a diaspora. It implies that a group can acquire, lose, or transform its sense of diaspora over an indefinite period.

A.2.1. Transnationalism and Globalization

Modern diasporas are understood within the context of globalization and transnationalism. Advanced communication technologies sustain global culture and facilitate the accelerated dispersal of information and images across borders and cultures. Open borders, dynamic labor markets, and modern modes of transport enable migrants to maintain continuous contact with their countries of origin and significant individuals there. The transnational activities of diaspora groups serve as strategic assets, channeling the financial and intellectual capital of the Indian diaspora into Indian industries.

To unravel the complexities of the diaspora, Steven Vertovec proposes three common meanings that resonate particularly well in the context of South Asian religions:

1. Diaspora as a social form: This is the most common meaning, linked to experiences of historical dispersal, victimization, and loss, including the dream of return. It also encompasses economic strategies arising from a sense of group solidarity on a global scale.

2. Diaspora as a form of consciousness: This places greater emphasis on the diversity of experience, state of mind, and sense of identity. It serves to hold a group together or recreate it through an awareness of multi-locality and a shared imagination.

3. Diaspora as a medium of cultural production: This refers to the hybridized cultural forms and processes that migrant groups generate and reproduce within their new contexts.

A.2.2. Nation-state and Loyalty

The presence of a diaspora poses a unique challenge to the sovereignty of modern nation-states. Diaspora demonstrates that loyalty to a political entity need not be binary but can involve

allegiance to multiple entities. Host societies need to be tolerant of the competing loyalties held by diaspora groups.

A diaspora group's attitude toward the homeland is often ambivalent—a combination of longing and distance. In many instances, migrants do not voluntarily return to the homeland because doing so could be "highly disruptive or traumatic." For many diasporas, the homeland may be defined as an imaginary, virtual, or utopian goal, reflecting the sentiment that "where there is profit, there is my country" (*ubi lucrum, ibi patria*). Conversely, the homeland also utilizes the diaspora to secure political or material support from host countries.

A.2.3. Structure and Parameters of Diaspora Groups

Within the theoretical framework of diaspora, the diaspora group, the homeland, and the host are each characterized by specific parameters:

I. **Characteristics of the Diaspora Group**: Key parameters for studying diaspora groups include the reasons for dispersal (e.g., persecution, economic inequality), the retention of ethnic culture (active or passive), and the quality of relationships among members. Spatial dimension: Members may be geographically decentralized (widely scattered across various settings) or concentrated in specific host countries. Attitude towards the homeland: This encompasses the level of support (financial, moral, political), the degree of emotional attachment (enthusiastic, subdued, rational), and the extent of ongoing contact.

II. **Characteristics of the Homeland:** Significant parameters for the homeland include the nature of its reality (virtual, inaccessible, or accessible), its legitimacy, and the attitude of its residents and government towards the return of diaspora communities (accepting, rejecting, or hostile).

III. **Characteristics of the Host:** The characteristics of the host society are defined by its cultural-ideological stance towards ethnic groups. This may involve support for assimilationist or pluralistic norms. The behavior of the host government and subgroups can range from indifference and disdain to hostility or discrimination. The homeland may hold high relevance for the host's foreign policy and domestic political interests.

This theoretical framework aids in mapping various types of diasporas and elucidating the structural differences and similarities between them, thereby fostering comparative research.

PART B: HISTORICAL MIGRATION PATTERNS

B.1. ANCIENT, MEDIEVAL, AND EARLY MODERN INDIAN MIGRATION PATTERNS

The history of Indian migration is not merely a phenomenon of the modern era; rather, it has been characterized by continuous territorial movements since ancient times. Evidence of migration exists even from the earliest periods of history, and mobility is considered the most fundamental concept in migration studies, encompassing both temporary and permanent forms of territorial movement. There were various drivers behind migration, such as the search for a better lifestyle, trade, pilgrimages, fairs and festivals, and climate change.

Evidence of agricultural settlements has been found in the early Indian subcontinent—such as at Mehrgarh near Balochistan—where inhabitants lived in mud-brick huts, cultivated wheat and barley, and raised cattle. This development marked a fundamental departure from nomadic lifestyles. Furthermore, the people of the Harappan civilization belonged to diverse racial types, pointing to distinct streams of migration. Out-migration is considered a probable cause for the decline of this civilization.

During the Vedic period, a gradual eastward shift was observed in the geographical distribution of the Indo-Aryans. Vedic texts, such as the *Shatapatha Brahmana*, contain references to migration into the Gangetic plains. Videha Mathava is credited with leading his people eastward as far as the Gandak River. By the end of the Later Vedic period, this movement had extended to Kosala in eastern Uttar Pradesh and Videha in northern Bihar. These Aryans traversed regions that were relatively dry and accessible, capable of sustaining the requirements of their mixed economy (pastoralism combined with wheat and barley cultivation). In the context of Bihar, the rise of the region surrounding Pataliputra is closely linked to migration and state formation. Between 2000 BCE and 300 BCE, the center of political and urban gravity shifted eastward—moving successively from the Indus Valley to the Yamuna-Ganga Doab, and finally to the area around Pataliputra. Pataliputra, which later became the seat of the Mauryan and Gupta empires, emerged as a strategic location. To its south and west lay arid tracts suitable for the agricultural practices of migrants; additionally, it enjoyed access to the mineral resources of the Chota Nagpur Plateau and was supported by the more fertile, humid regions to the north and east.

B.1.2. Migration in the Gangetic Plains and the Role of Mauryan Administration

The Mauryan administration played a pivotal role in managing migration and developing new agricultural settlements. Insights into migration in the ancient world are provided by Kautilya's *Arthashastra*. The Mauryas undertook significant initiatives to improve internal communication networks, which boosted trade and facilitated the expansion of new village settlements. For instance, the rivers of North India eased internal transport; the colossal monolithic pillar of Ashoka, quarried at Chunar, was likely transported to distant locations via river routes.

Kautilya also enumerated other causes for migration, such as pilgrimages, fairs, and festivals. He described the history of tribal migration in detail, including methods to systematically dismantle autonomous tribal groups. Furthermore, Magadha (the ancient kingdom of Bihar) witnessed the emergence of two major religious movements associated with the Buddha and Mahavira. Buddhist monasteries (such as Nalanda) attracted monks and students from as far away as China. Buddhism spread from the Silk Road to East Asia through merchants and monks, while Jainism moved towards the south and west (Gujarat). Both religions were urban-based and enjoyed the patronage of merchants. Thus, even in ancient times, migration shaped the expansion and regional structure of Indian civilization.

B.2 COLONIAL ERA MIGRATION: INDENTURED LABOR AND GLOBAL DISPERSION

B.2.1. Indentured Labor System: Definition, Context, and "A New System of Slavery"

The colonial era migration was a highly exploitative phase of Indian history, defined by the indentured labor system. The system began formally in 1834 and ended by law in 1917, although it continued informally in various countries until the 1920s. 'Girmit' was a contractual bound

manual labor agreement under which a migrant was obliged to work for an employer for a fixed period of time (usually three to five years). The agreement specified fixed wage rates, working hours, free housing and medical aid.

The main context of this arrangement was the abolition of slavery in the British colonies in 1833, which led to a severe shortage of cheap and abundant labor force for sugarcane, tea, coffee and rubber plantations. British colonists turned to Indian workers to fill this shortage, which was "an absolutely novel phenomenon in economic history". Many historians and contemporary critics described this system as "A New System of Slavery".

B.2.2. Reasons for migration: Demand for cheap labor for plantations after the end of slavery

The driving force behind indentured migration was a combination of economic compulsion and the demand for labor in the colonies. In India, the adverse socio-economic conditions prevailing during British rule were prompting workers to emigrate. These included British expansionism, integration of the Indian economy with the world economy, decline of cottage industry, excessive land revenue and frequent famines. Poor rural migrants were lured by recruitment agents (Arkatis) with false assurances of stable income and better living standards. Lord John Russell warned as early as 1840 that the system could lead to "terrible loss of life or a new system of slavery".

B.2.3. Origin and recruitment

Indentured laborers were recruited mainly from northern, central and southern India, but the largest numbers were from the Hindi-speaking districts of western Bihar and eastern Uttar Pradesh. These workers departing from Calcutta port were called 'Calcuttias'. Workers from southern India used to depart from Madras port.

Most of the migrants were landless agricultural labourers, marginal farmers, and the illiterate rural poor. Recruitment of migrants was controlled by the state; A government official called 'Protector of Emigrants' looked after emigration matters at the ports. Laws such as the India Act XV of 1842 and the Emigration Act XXII of 1882 were enacted to regulate migration. However, deception and coercion were common in actual processes, as recruitment agents often ensnared people at fairs and pilgrimage centers.

B.2.4 Major destinations and spread

This migration was a global spread, with more than one million Indians displaced. Mauritius was chosen as the 'Great Experiment' for the first batch in 1834. Other major destinations were:

- Mauritius: 4,53,063 migrants.
- British Guiana: 2,38,909 migrants. Migration to the Caribbean began in 1838 with the arrival of the ship 'Whitby' in British Guiana.
- Trinidad: 143,939 migrants.
- Fiji: 60,965 migrants.
- Natal (South Africa): 1,52,184 migrants.

B.2.5. The Harshness of Plantation Life, Resistance, and Identity Formation

During long and harrowing sea voyages, laborers lived in unsanitary conditions on overcrowded decks, resulting in many deaths. Having endured these hardships, the survivors transcended traditional barriers of caste, religion, and language, coming to address one another as *Jahaji Bhai* or *Jahaji Bahin* (ship-brothers or ship-sisters).

Historians have described life on the plantations as "hell" (*narak*) or a "brothel" (*kashabhagar*). Life was strictly controlled and restricted. Laborers were housed in wooden, barrack-style dwellings—formerly slave quarters—where poor drainage and ventilation led to the spread of disease. They faced severe punishments and imprisonment for minor offenses, and magistrates often colluded with plantation managers to exploit the workers. In British Guiana, the mortality rate ranged up to 4% between 1864 and 1868. A gender imbalance was a defining feature of this system; the number of women was very low—in Mauritius, the ratio was 33:100. Female laborers faced specific forms of exploitation on the plantations.

Upon the expiration of their contracts, laborers were entitled to a return journey. However, many did not return. From Trinidad, only 22.47% (33,294) of the migrants chose to go back to India. The majority opted to remain in the host countries, where they were granted Crown lands in lieu of the return journey; this enabled them to become independent farmers and, eventually, major producers of sugarcane and rice in places like British Guiana and Trinidad.

The formation of identity within this labor diaspora was a complex process. The long journey weakened the traditional caste structure, giving rise to a homogeneous identity. However, upon settling in host societies, caste distinctions re-emerged, albeit in a somewhat diluted form. Thus, migration during the colonial era was a painful yet culturally and geographically expansive chapter in Indian history that laid the foundation for the modern Indian diaspora.

PART C: POST-COLONIAL MIGRATION AND CONTEMPORARY DIASPORA

The phase of post-colonial migration in the history of Indian migration—often referred to as the 'New Diaspora'—marks a fundamental shift; the nature of the migrants and their destinations differ significantly from the *Girmitiya* (indentured) labour diaspora of the colonial era [1, Conversation History]. This contemporary migration is primarily characterized by the flow of high-skilled professionals and human-capital-intensive workers seeking better economic opportunities in developed nations, particularly in North America and Europe. Additionally, a parallel stream of labour migration to the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries emerged from the 1970s onwards.

C.1. Indian Diaspora in the Middle East (GCC)

The countries of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC)—comprising Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates—host a significant Indian diaspora. Large-scale labour migration to the region began following the oil boom of the 1970s, giving a new direction to this migratory trend.

This migration is primarily labour-centric, with Indian migrants making substantial contributions to the workforce, business sectors, and healthcare industries of these countries. As of 2023, over 8 million Indians reside in the GCC region—a population that, in some instances, exceeds the

number of local citizens in the host nations. This group plays a pivotal role in the economic and social development of these countries. However, this migration has primarily focused on unskilled or semi-skilled labor, often involving so-called '3-D' jobs (dirty, dangerous, and difficult).

C.2. Indian Diaspora in North America and Europe

C.2.1. Patterns of Migration

The rise of the Indian diaspora in North America and Europe gained momentum following the US Immigration Act of 1965, which abolished national-origin quotas and opened the doors to large-scale immigration from non-European countries. During the Cold War, the demand for engineers in the US defense and aerospace industries spurred this type of high-skilled migration from India. Between 1965 and 1980, a large number of Indians arrived as professionals, although many subsequently arrived under family reunification categories.

This contemporary Indian diaspora is among the wealthiest and most educated communities in the host countries. For instance, the Indian-American community in the United States boasts high levels of financial prosperity and educational attainment. 58% of Indian-Americans hold a college degree (compared to a national average of 26%), and 40% possess a master's or doctoral degree (compared to a national average of 10%). Similarly, in Canada, 26% of the Indo-Canadian population aged 15 and older hold a university degree, whereas the national average is approximately 12%.

C.2.2. Ethnic Transnational Middle Class (ETMC)

The migration of Indian Information Technology (IT) professionals has been identified as a distinct class known as the 'Ethnic Transnational Middle Class' (ETMC). Engineers, doctors, and IT professionals are prominent within this group.

The concept of ETMC replaces the traditional notion of 'brain drain' with the idea of 'brain circulation.' This group is crucial for global capital, as these migrants not only provide cheap skilled labor but also facilitate the entry of global capital into the developing world. This labor supply system is often based on ethnicity. Thus, the ETMC acts as an intermediary between the global and the local, and between capital and labor.

C.3 Host Country Acculturation Policies and Outcomes

The acculturation policy of a host country plays a crucial role in determining the integration of diaspora groups and the outcomes of their activities. A comparative study of the experiences of culturally similar yet policy-divergent countries—such as the United States and Canada—is useful for understanding migration outcomes.

C.3.1. United States (US): Assimilation (Melting Pot)

The United States has historically been viewed through the 'Melting Pot' model. Under this concept, it is assumed that immigrant groups must conform to the dominant culture to attain full citizenship. Assimilation policies aim to align minority groups with the dominant culture, often requiring them to relinquish their cultural roots. In this model, assimilation was considered a unidirectional pathway to structural incorporation, resulting in immigrants losing their ethnic distinctiveness.

C.3.2. Canada: Multiculturalism

In contrast, Canada's official policy has been one of multiculturalism. This policy regards inter-group differences as a valuable resource and a foundation of cultural strength. Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau declared this as official government policy in 1971.

Multiculturalism embraces mutual accommodation and ensures that all citizens can maintain their identities, take pride in their ancestry, and foster a sense of belonging to the country. Under this policy, no single dominant culture takes precedence over another. However, critics argue that multiculturalism can perpetuate 'otherness' by maintaining cultural distinctions and may contribute to the ghettoization of ethnic communities.

Differences in Outcomes

These variations in host-country policies influence the behavior of the Indian diaspora. The Indian-American community (associated with the 'melting pot' model) has been more robust in its lobbying efforts for the homeland compared to the Indo-Canadian community (associated with the multiculturalism model). A notable example of this was the 2006 civil nuclear technology agreement; the Indian diaspora engaged in intensive lobbying, leading then-Senator Obama to remark that he was being approached by every single Indian-American individual. This disparity is also partly attributable to the fact that the United States is a larger and more influential nation, and the host country's policies encourage the Indian government to engage with the diaspora.

Thus, while the post-colonial diaspora gains economic power through high-skilled migration, the processes of identity formation and integration within the host country are shaped by that nation's specific policies regarding adaptation.

PART D: POLITICAL ECONOMY AND CONTEMPORARY ISSUES

The study of the Indian diaspora is not limited merely to social and cultural dimensions; it is also of immense significance in the context of political economy and contemporary global issues. Today, the diaspora community serves as a powerful strategic, economic, and diplomatic asset for India.

D.1. Economic Contribution and Remittances

The most tangible and significant manifestation of the Indian diaspora's economic role is in the form of remittances. Remittances are considered a "crucial and stable source of external development finance," aiding in the reduction of poverty among recipient families.

D.1.1. International Remittances and India's Position

India is the world's largest recipient of international remittances. This inflow, which has grown rapidly over recent decades, is regarded as a stable source of foreign exchange earnings for developing countries and has proven to be more stable than other forms of external capital inflow.

In 2007-08, the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) recorded $43.5 billion (approximately ₹1.74 lakh crore) as private transfers. These private transfers comprised three main categories: family maintenance (50%), local withdrawals/payments from Non-Resident Indian (NRI) deposits (43%), and personal gifts/donations (6%). Withdrawals from NRI deposits are often considered to be directed towards domestic investments (such as real estate or equity markets).

State-level Concentration and Dependence

The inflow of international remittances is highly concentrated in specific states across the country. According to 2007-08 data, a significant share of these remittance inflows was received by Kerala (39.9%), Punjab (12.7%), and Tamil Nadu (12.4%). To measure the dependence of states on remittances, remittances are viewed as a percentage of Gross Domestic Product (GDP). Based on this metric, Kerala (30.9%), Goa (20.8%), and Punjab (11.4%) were the states with the highest dependence. These states rank among the economies globally that are most reliant on remittances. For instance, in Kerala, the substantial inflow of remittances has helped bridge the rural-urban consumption gap, as the majority of these funds reach rural households.

The primary sources of international remittances are the Middle East (35%), North America (35%), and Europe (20%). Countries like India, which have diverse migration destinations, demonstrate greater resilience compared to nations that rely on a single, narrow migration corridor (such as the Mexico-USA route).

D.1.2. Domestic Remittances

India also possesses a vast domestic remittance market driven by internal migration. In 2007-08, the estimated size of the domestic remittance market was approximately $10 billion (roughly ₹45,000–50,000 crore). About 80% of this flow is directed towards rural areas. Uttar Pradesh (20%) and Bihar (12%) were the leading recipients of domestic remittances. Domestic remittances contributed approximately 5% to Bihar's GDP, highlighting the state's high level of dependence on these inflows.

D.1.3. Remittance Usage, Inequality, and Financial Inclusion

Usage: At the national level, over 90% of recipient households utilize remittances for household consumption expenditure, financing up to one-third of total household consumption. There are also regional variations: high rates of debt repayment were reported in Kerala and Tamil Nadu. In Odisha, increased spending on housing improvements, weddings, and ceremonies was observed, whereas in the Northeastern states, a significant portion of remittances was spent on education.

Inequality: Since migration in India is a self-selection process—with greater participation from individuals possessing higher levels of education and income—the distribution of remittances is also unequal. Households in the top 25% consumption bracket receive approximately 50% of domestic remittances. This concentration indicates that remittances can exacerbate inequality in the source regions.

Financial Inclusion: A substantial portion of domestic remittances in India flows through informal channels. It is estimated that the formal sector (banks and post offices) handles less than 30% of the domestic remittance market. In contrast, the formal sector in China manages 75% of the remittance market. There is an urgent need to enhance financial inclusion by improving remittance services, particularly for rural populations and unskilled migrant workers.

D.2 Diaspora in Indian politics and foreign policy

The diaspora has become a pillar of India's foreign policy, reflecting a move away from traditional government-to-government relations to a multi-layered, society-centred approach.

D.2.1. Policy change and soft power

Historical context: In the colonial period, Gopal Krishna Gokhale and C.F. Nationalist leaders such as Andrews took up the plight of indentured workers and pressed for a ban on emigration to Natal in 1911. After independence, Prime Minister Nehru advised Indians abroad to adopt the citizenship of their country of residence, and said that they could only claim 'the most favorable foreign treatment' if they remained Indians.

Modern changes: The policy changed in the 1980s under Rajiv Gandhi, when the Indian diaspora came to be seen as a valuable bridge between India and the US. The Atal Bihari Vajpayee government acknowledged the importance of the diaspora for a more meaningful role.

Soft Power: Diaspora is India's biggest source of soft power. Through culture, values and language (e.g. Hindi, Tamil, Malayalam), diaspora groups build India's civilizational spirit and democratic image globally.

D.2.2. Major Government Initiatives and Strategic Partnerships

The Government of India has taken several important steps to strengthen institutional engagement with the diaspora:

1. High Level Committee and PIO Card: LM in 2000 A High Level Committee (HLC) was constituted under the chairmanship of Singhvi, which examined the PIO. Card (PIO card) scheme, aimed at facilitating people of Indian origin through visa free travel.
2. Pravasi Bharatiya Divas (PBD): This event is celebrated every year on 9 January to commemorate the anniversary of Mahatma Gandhi's return from South Africa. It aims to recognize the achievements of and enhance engagement with the Indian diaspora.
3. Formation of the Ministry: The Ministry of Overseas Indian Affairs was formed in 2004, which runs specific programs to build partnerships with the diaspora.

D.2.3. Economic and political lobbying

The diaspora today is making significant economic contributions not only through remittances, but also through direct investment, IT-professional leadership and science-technology partnerships.

In the political sphere, the Indian diaspora has influenced India's interests through lobbying in host countries. A classic example of this was the 2006 U.S.-India Civil Nuclear Technology Agreement. The Indian-American community lobbied intensely in favor of this agreement, which led to its passage. The Indian diaspora was also instrumental in reducing the sanctions imposed on India after the 1998 nuclear tests.

This contemporary engagement highlights that the diaspora has transformed its identity from mere cultural heirs to economic, diplomatic and intellectual assets. They actively participate in new dimensions of India's foreign policy, such as public diplomacy and development diplomacy.

PART E: SOCIAL AND CULTURAL HISTORY AND IDENTITY FORMATION

The social and cultural history of the Indian diaspora reflects a complex and dynamic process of identity formation, emerging from the continuous interplay between the trauma of displacement, cultural adaptation to host societies, and enduring memories of the homeland. This section

analyzes hybridity and the transformation of social categories within diaspora communities, as well as the role of literature, cinema, and popular culture.

E.1. Cultural adaptation, hybridization, and syncretism; and social categories within Indian diaspora communities

Social structure and cultural adaptation within diaspora communities are understood through a theoretical framework shaped by the multidimensional relationships between the homeland, the diaspora group, and the host society. Diaspora identity is defined by the history of dispersal, myths and memories of the homeland, and feelings of alienation in the host country.

E.1.1. Cultural adaptation, hybridization, and syncretism

The diaspora is viewed as a 'mode of consciousness' and a 'medium of cultural production.' Identity within the diaspora is not based on essence or purity but is defined by inherent heterogeneity and diversity, constantly reshaping itself through transformation and difference. This process of continuous construction is known as hybridity.

Migrant groups integrate into the host society while acknowledging mutual loyalties. This process of adaptation often presents minority groups with the challenge of either retaining their cultural roots or molding them to align with the dominant culture.

Separation of culture and religion: A significant process within Indian diaspora communities has been the distinction drawn between religion and culture. To avoid accusations of orthodoxy and ignorance, diaspora groups had to seek an adaptive strategy that could separate the fundamental and essential aspects of religion from its cultural accretions. However, this process has resulted in the emergence of a more exclusive and homogeneous version of Hinduism within the diaspora—one that often redefines itself as 'Brahminical' or 'Semitic' to align with Western conceptions of religion.

Acculturation vs. Assimilation: In host societies like Trinidad, the adaptation of Indian culture occurred through the process of acculturation—defined as a two-way exchange—rather than through assimilation, which is a one-sided, asymmetrical process. In Malaysia, key pillars of Tamil culture, such as caste and kinship, have transformed in response to regional economic demands; for instance, there has been a shift away from traditional institutions like cross-cousin marriage.

E.1.2. Social Categories within Diaspora Communities

Migration under the *Girmitiya* (indentured) labor system reshaped the rigid caste structure of Indian society within new contexts. This transformation unfolded in two stages:

1. Erosion during the sea voyage: During the long and arduous sea journey from Calcutta to the Caribbean or Mauritius, traditional barriers of caste, religion, and language weakened. The laborers who survived these voyages addressed one another as '*Jahaji Bhai*' (Ship brothers) or '*Jahaji Bahin*' (Ship sisters), signifying the emergence of a collective identity. 2. Re-establishment in the host society: However, after being 'freed' from colonial plantations and settling in new village communities, the social categories brought from India—particularly caste distinctions—re-emerged, albeit in diluted forms. For instance, in Trinidad, the divide between Brahmins (the highest priestly caste) and Chamars (Untouchables) remained quite pronounced until the 1990s. Caste data regarding Hindu migrants between 1876 and 1885 reveal that 41% belonged to lower castes, while 18% belonged to Brahmin and other upper castes.

E.2 Indian Cinema, Literature, and Popular Culture in the Construction of Diaspora Identity

Both literature and cinema serve as essential transnational mediators for reflecting the diaspora communities' sense of a 'lost self,' nostalgia, and the trauma of displacement, as well as for reconstructing identity.

E.2.1. The Role of Diaspora Literature

Diaspora literature documents the experiences of uprooting and exile faced by displaced individuals. This literature focuses on universal themes such as alienation, displacement, existential rootlessness, and the quest for identity.

1. Early Writings: Dean Mahomed's *The Travels of Dean Mahomet* (1794)—an autobiographical travelogue—was a pioneering work of Indian diaspora literature, appearing long before the first English-language work was published within India itself.

2. Generational and Cultural Conflicts:

◦ V.S. Naipaul: For Naipaul, a second-generation immigrant, the homeland exists solely within the realms of memory and imagination. His travelogue *An Area of Darkness* offers a critical perspective on his ancestral homeland, highlighting the contrast between the imagined home and the actual one.

◦ Salman Rushdie: A first-generation writer, Rushdie employs 'magic realism' to present issues of emigration and displacement metaphorically. He characterizes diaspora identity as 'plural and partial,' defined by the simultaneous attempt to reconcile with two distinct cultures. He views the diaspora as a construct of "imaginary homelands," creating visions rather than reflecting actual cities or villages.

◦ Anita Desai: Her writing prominently features themes of existential rootlessness and a sense of isolation. In *The Inheritance of Loss*, a character expresses feelings of envy toward the British and hatred toward Indians, while also realizing that—whatever he becomes—he will be despised by absolutely everyone (both the British and Indians).

◦ Bharati Mukherjee and Jhumpa Lahiri: Mukherjee has depicted the challenges of interracial love and assimilation, whereas Lahiri is known for universal themes of solitude, longing, and a lost sense of self in her novels, reflecting the identity crises inherent in the immigrant experience.

◦ Amitav Ghosh: He has addressed contemporary challenges such as human migration and climate change in historical novels like *Gun Island* and regards the diaspora as one of the most significant forces in global culture.

E.2.2. Indian Cinema and Popular Culture

Following the liberalization of the Indian economy in the 1990s, Bollywood began producing films specifically targeting the diaspora. These films earnestly address the nostalgia and longing experienced by expatriate Indians, thereby fostering a sense of cultural connection.

1. Diaspora-centric narratives: Films often portray upper-middle-class or elite Non-Resident Indian (NRI) and Person of Indian Origin (PIO) families—examples include *Dilwale

Dulhania Le Jayenge* (1995), *Pardes* (1997), and *Kabhi Khushi Kabhie Gham* (K3G). In these films, expatriate Indians are depicted as a "model minority," highlighting their financial and educational success.

2. Cultural Reinforcement: These films help sustain the sense of 'Indianness' and reaffirm the significance of timeless traditions like Karva Chauth. Thus, cinema serves as a powerful tool in addressing the sense of loss stemming from cultural alienation.

3. Transnational Transmission: Advanced communication technologies (such as VCRs) have enabled the 'reconfiguration and translation of cultural traditions' within the diaspora for the purposes of religious instruction and worship. Acts such as lighting incense or offering devotional salutations to the 'sacred screen' while watching mythological serials like the *Ramayana* exemplify the global preservation of the sense of 'Indianness.' This cultural transmission also serves as a key instrument of India's soft power.

PART F: CHALLENGES FACING DIASPORA COMMUNITIES

Indian diaspora groups—whether historical indentured laborers or contemporary highly skilled professionals—have faced complex legal, social, and cultural challenges in establishing and maintaining their presence in host societies. These challenges stem from the historical trauma of their dispersal, the host country's policies regarding assimilation or multiculturalism, and various forms of racial and economic exclusion.

F.1. Citizenship, Belonging, and Challenges in the Host Nation

The fundamental challenges facing diaspora communities have been linked to the host nation's cultural-ideological stance and its reluctance to accept the group as full citizens.

I. HISTORICAL AND LEGAL EXCLUSION

Indentured Laborers: A New Form of Bondage and Slavery: During the colonial era, indentured laborers were subject to harsh contractual terms—described by British historian Hugh Tinker as "A New System of Slavery." These laborers were controlled through coercive labor practices and endured grueling conditions, including low wages, malnutrition, and substandard housing. Formal and informal systems of control were employed to confine workers to the estates. Life on the plantations was likened to 'hell' (*narak*) or a 'brothel' (*kasbhigar*).

Statutory Discrimination in North America: Indians migrating to North America in the early 20th century faced immediate racial discrimination. In Canada, Sikhs encountered open discrimination despite being citizens of the British Empire. The 'continuous journey' rule was specifically designed to prevent the entry of Indians, as there were no direct voyages from India to Canada at the time. In the United States, the Supreme Court ruled in the 1923 case of *United States v. Bhagat Singh Thind* that Indians were 'ineligible aliens' for citizenship.

II. THE PARADOX OF ASSIMILATION AND MULTICULTURALISM

The manner in which diaspora communities are integrated into host societies depends on the country's official policies regarding adaptation: assimilation (the "Melting Pot" model) or multiculturalism.

Pressure to Assimilate (USA): The United States has historically been viewed through the "Melting Pot" lens, where minority groups are expected to conform to the dominant culture to attain full citizenship. This perspective posits that relinquishing cultural roots may be necessary for structural integration.

Criticism and Contradictions of Multiculturalism (Canada/UK): While the official multiculturalism policies in Canada and the United Kingdom aim to celebrate cultural diversity, they have nonetheless created specific challenges for diaspora communities. Critics argue that by preserving cultural distinctions, multiculturalism can contribute to the confinement, marginalization, and ghettoization of identities. Cultural difference is often perceived as a "problem" to be overcome.

III. IDENTITY CRISIS AND THE QUESTION OF "ORIGIN" (THE IDENTITY QUESTION)

One of the most profound challenges facing diaspora communities is the need for their "multiple loyalties" to be acknowledged by the host society. Modern, transnational diaspora groups are frequently viewed by host societies as the "perpetual other."

The Imperative of "Origin": Migrants in host societies are often asked, "Where are you originally from?" This question implicitly ties the individual to a place of displacement and denies the validity of their connection to the host society. It is based on the 'principle of foreignness,' implying that the migrant is a permanent visitor who 'does not truly belong here.'

State-determined identity: Census forms in Britain employ ethnic classifications such as 'Indian,' which invariably attribute an 'immigrant syndrome' and allegiance to a distant nation-state to migrants or their children. This validation of identity creates a 'zero-sum' dynamic of multiculturalism, wherein difference is tethered to a specific origin, effectively casting the migrant as an 'accountable ethnic subject.'

IV. THE TRAUMA OF DOUBLE MIGRATION

In the post-colonial context, many Indian diaspora communities have faced ethnic or racial discrimination due to majoritarian nationalism in their first country of residence, compelling them to become 'twice migrants.' For instance, military coups, discriminatory legal provisions, and rising conservatism in Fiji forced the Indo-Fijian community to re-emigrate to countries like Canada and Australia.

F.2. Contemporary Issues: Racism, Xenophobia, and Exploitation

The contemporary diaspora faces challenges stemming from racism and xenophobia, particularly within the labor market.

I. XENOPHOBIA AND DISCRIMINATION

Xenophobia is defined as a sentiment of rejection and stigma directed at foreigners, often driven by severe economic inequalities and a sense of marginalization by the dominant culture.

Exploitation in the Labor Market: Migrant workers, especially in Gulf countries, are frequently engaged in '3-D' jobs (dirty, dangerous, and difficult). Significant wage disparities exist in the labor market between host country citizens and foreign workers. For example, a survey in Korea

revealed that foreign workers earned less than half the wages of national workers. High unemployment rates among ethnic minorities and immigrant workers have been recorded in many Western European countries. Furthermore, studies indicate the presence of direct discrimination in access to employment, even when other factors (such as education or experience) are comparable. Vulnerability of unauthorized migrants: Migrants lacking legal status or citizenship become 'invisible' to state welfare, police, judicial, and healthcare agencies, thereby increasing their risk of exploitation and discrimination. Unauthorized workers are easily intimidated—through threats or actual acts of deportation—to prevent them from joining labor unions or protesting. Victims of human trafficking (exploitation involving deception) and migrant smuggling (illegal movement for profit) are also entitled to basic human rights protections, yet they frequently fall victim to violence and abuse.

II. SUPPORT FOR VIOLENCE AND POLITICAL EXTREMISM

Diaspora communities sometimes face racially motivated violence in host countries; for instance, reports emerged of attacks against Sikhs in the United States following the 9/11 attacks.

Transnational extremism and political polarization: A significant segment of the diaspora actively participates in the politics of their homeland—a phenomenon known as 'long-distance nationalism.' This engagement is often linked to various forms of global extremism—such as Islamic radicalism and Khalistani activities—through complex, cross-border networks of finance and religious identity.

• Khalistani terrorist activities drew support from deterritorialized Sikh populations in the United Kingdom, Canada, and the United States. This movement received backing in the form of funds and manpower, leading to incidents like the 1985 Air India bombing, which cast a 'dark shadow' over Indo-Canadian relations. Similarly, Hindu religious and nationalist political organizations in India receive substantial support and funding from diaspora communities.

Human cost for highly skilled migrants: Although the migration of IT professionals fosters 'brain circulation,' it entails a significant human cost. For instance, spouses of H-1B visa holders in the US (H-4 visa holders) are not permitted to work and are entirely dependent on their husbands, a situation linked to reported high incidences of domestic violence. This highlights a lack of human security even among the highly skilled demographic in the host country.

SUMMARY

The concept of Indian migration and diaspora refers to a deterritorialised or transnational population. It encompasses diverse groups such as political refugees, guest workers, and immigrants. This identity is primarily defined by a history of dispersal and myths or memories associated with the homeland.

Migration during the colonial era centered on the *Girmitiya* (indentured) labour system (1834–1917), described by Hugh Tinker as "a new system of slavery." Mauritius was the first destination to import these workers in 1834. Post-colonial migration saw labour flows to GCC countries alongside the rise of highly skilled professionals in North America and Europe; Indian-Americans are among the wealthiest and most educated communities in these regions.

In terms of political economy, India is the world's largest recipient of international remittances. Kerala, Punjab, and Goa are heavily dependent on these inflows. The diaspora serves as a "pillar" of India's foreign policy and a key instrument of its soft power.

Cultural identity is characterized by hybridity and a dual consciousness—a sense of being "here and there." In the 1990s, Bollywood targeted the diaspora by producing films like *Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge* that addressed themes of nostalgia. However, diaspora communities face racism and xenophobia in host societies. Distinct adaptation policies—such as assimilation (the "melting pot" model) in the U.S. and multiculturalism in Canada—influence their integration. The challenges facing migrant communities are akin to a two-sided mirror. On one side, the policies of the host country impose a specific cultural identity that casts them as 'outsiders'—even if they have lived there for generations—much like seeing one's reflection but having it linked to a context where one does not belong. On the other side, exploitation in the labor market and racial prejudice resemble the shattered surface behind that mirror, reflecting their economic and social vulnerability, where their worth is defined by their 'foreignness' rather than their skills.

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(SECTION-2)

A DETAILED ACCOUNT OF THE SOCIAL AND CULTURAL HISTORY OF THE INDIAN DIASPORA

1. THE CONCEPT OF THE INDIAN DIASPORA: DETERRITORIALIZATION AND TRANSNATIONALISM

The study of the Indian diaspora has been gaining momentum in recent years. This momentum is primarily driven by the fact that it describes populations considered 'deterritorialized' or 'transnational'. 'Deterritorialization' refers to the process wherein people are physically displaced from a geographical location yet remain culturally, economically, and emotionally connected to their homeland. Meanwhile, 'transnational' communities are those that maintain a network of social, economic, and political ties across various national borders.

The term 'diaspora' is now being used as a broad and loose reference for categories such as 'immigrants', 'guest-workers', and 'refugees'. This indicates that it is not a homogeneous concept; rather, it encompasses diverse groups displaced for various historical, economic, and political reasons.

Three common and significant meanings have emerged to understand the concept of diaspora:

* Diaspora as a social form: Emphasizes the relationships and networks of the group despite physical dispersal.
* Diaspora as a type of consciousness: Emphasizes experience, state of mind, and a sense of dual identity.
* Diaspora as a mode of cultural production: Emphasizes the process of creating and reproducing transnational social and cultural phenomena. Indian cinema, literature, and popular culture play a significant role in the social and cultural history of the Indian diaspora, particularly regarding cultural adaptations, hybridity, syncretism, social categories, and identity formation. Collectively, these elements illustrate how diasporic communities engage with new cultures, redefine their identities, and articulate the complex experience of their existence.

2. DIASPORA: SOCIAL FORM AND TRIPARTITE RELATIONSHIPS

Diaspora is often understood as a social form—a concept emphasizing a group that maintains internal and external connections despite physical dispersal. This structural perspective aids in understanding the functioning and persistence of diasporic groups.

Key Characteristics of the Social Form

This social form possesses certain common characteristics that distinguish it from other migrant groups:

- ❖ Social Relations: Bonds among diaspora members are strengthened by specific historical and geographical experiences. A diaspora emerges from voluntary or forced migration from a homeland to at least two other countries.
- ❖ Maintenance of Collective Identity: This is often sustained through an 'ethnic myth'—a sense of connection based on shared origins, historical experiences, and ties to a geographical location. This myth fosters an imagined solidarity that binds the group together despite geographical distance.
- ❖ Networks and Exchange: These groups institutionalize networks of communication and exchange that transcend territorial states. These networks encompass economic, social, and political exchanges, lending the diaspora a 'transnational' character.
- ❖ Rejection/Alienation by Host Society: An inability or unwillingness on the part of the host society to fully accept the group often fosters a sense of alienation or exclusion. This can become a significant factor in strengthening the internal solidarity of the external pressure group.

'Triadic Relationship'

In the contemporary era, the diaspora is characterized by a 'triadic relationship.' This relationship is formed between three poles:

(a) Ethno-groups that are globally dispersed yet share a collective self-identity.

(b) The territorial states where they reside (host countries).

(c) The homeland state.

Significant examples of this 'triadic relationship' among Indian diaspora groups are observed in the political and economic spheres.

- ❖ Economic and political engagement: The Government of India has taken measures to attract the intellectual and financial resources of Non-Resident Indians ('NRIs'). This is a clear example of how the homeland state views its diaspora as an asset capable of contributing to national development.
- ❖ Influence on homeland politics: Politically, diaspora groups may develop "exaggerated and intense sentiments—whether of criticism or attachment—towards the politics of the homeland." The issue of cultural reproduction among Hindus abroad has been linked to the politics of Hindu fundamentalism back home. Similarly, the movement for the establishment of Khalistan serves as an example of an 'invented homeland' observed among the Sikh diaspora in Canada and the United States.
- ❖ Social and cultural manifestations: Events such as the demolition of the Babri Masjid in Ayodhya (December 1992) illustrate other facets of the 'triadic relationship' through the campaigns and dialogues that emerged among Hindu and Muslim organizations in the UK. This demonstrates that events in the homeland directly influence identity and social dynamics within the diaspora.

3. AS A FORM OF DIASPORA CONSCIOUSNESS: DUALITY AND FLUIDITY

The perspective of 'diaspora consciousness' places greater emphasis on experience, state of mind, and a sense of identity. It is a specific type of awareness that emerges within contemporary transnational communities, reflecting the inner lives and worldviews of diaspora members.

Duality or Paradoxical Nature

Diaspora consciousness entails an inherent duality:

- ❖ It is negatively shaped by experiences of discrimination and exclusion, which reinforce the sense of being the 'Other' within the host society.
- ❖ It is also shaped by positive identification with historical legacies (such as 'Indian civilization') or contemporary global cultural forces.
- ❖ According to James Clifford, diaspora consciousness "lives loss and hope as a defining tension." It is a paradox wherein the grief over the loss of the past coexists with the hope for a better life in the future. This consciousness acknowledges a sense of solidarity and connection with 'there' while living 'here'—that is, remaining emotionally and ideologically linked to the homeland despite physically residing in the host country.

Multiplicity and Fluid Identities

An awareness of 'multi-locality' plays a central role in diaspora consciousness. This awareness drives the need to connect ideologically with those who share similar 'routes' and 'roots' in both 'here' and 'there.'

- ❖ Continuous Self-Renewal: Diaspora identities are those that "constantly reinvent themselves through change and difference." * Fluid Identities: These groups often maintain multiple, fluid, and plural identities that connect them to both their societies of origin and their host societies. This fluid nature enables them to adapt to diverse social and cultural contexts.
- ❖ Fractured Memories: Diaspora consciousness encompasses 'fractured memories' and new maps of attachment; these do not necessarily reinforce a singular identity but may instead align with generational politics.

Separation of Religion and Culture

Migrant groups gain self-awareness within the context of religious pluralism and find themselves compelled to rationalize and justify elements of their faith and practices.

- ❖ Distinctions among the Younger Generation: Driven by this consciousness, young South Asian Muslim women are establishing a clear distinction between 'religion' and 'culture'—concepts their parents largely viewed as inseparable. This trend leads to a self-aware 'rationalization of the religion/culture distinction.'
- ❖ Fundamental vs. Cultural: Migrant Hindus attempt to distinguish between what is 'fundamental and essential' for religious continuity and what constitutes 'cultural

accoutrements.' This separation represents a strategic effort to sustain religious identity within the diaspora.

4. DIASPORA AS A MODE OF CULTURAL PRODUCTION

In this sense, the diaspora is characterized by the production and reproduction of transnational social and cultural phenomena. This process is intertwined with globalization, resulting in creolization, back-and-forth transferences, and continuous transformation. Hybrid Cultural Forms

Cultural production encompasses forms such as 'hybrid', 'creolised', or 'cut 'n' mix'.

New Ethnicities: These 'new ethnicities' are often found among migrant youth, who self-consciously select, synthesize, and elaborate upon aspects of culture and identity drawn from multiple heritages. Examples include "Brit-Asian" music or fashion, which blend Indian and British elements.

Trends in Cultural Reproduction

Certain trends have been reported regarding religious rituals within South Asian religions:

* Homogenisation: The simplification and standardisation of religious practices.
* Retraditionalisation: The deliberate—and often conservative—reinforcement of traditions.
* Complexification and conspicuous consumption: Making rituals more elaborate and publicly visible, thereby reflecting economic prosperity.

Influence of Media

Global media and communication serve as crucial channels for the flow of cultural phenomena and the transformation of diasporic identities.

* Cinema/TV in identity formation: Television and film play a role in shaping and transforming the identities of young Punjabi Londoners.
* Transnational connections: Media communication systems—such as 'video letters' and home videos—have strengthened ties between India and the diaspora, bridging the distance between 'here' and 'there'.

5. THE ROLE OF INDIAN CINEMA, LITERATURE, AND POPULAR CULTURE

Indian cinema, literature, and popular culture serve as vital platforms for shaping and expressing diasporic identity. These mediums portray the emotional, political, and social dimensions of the diasporic experience.

Diaspora Literature

Diaspora literature encompasses works written on the subject of the diaspora—often by individuals belonging to the diaspora—and is distinct from academic writing on the phenomena of migration and diaspora.

* Key Themes and Narratives: These narratives explore cultural identity, ethnicity, nostalgia, alienation, racism, displacement, and the conflict of cultural values. The most prominent themes include the loss of the homeland, nostalgia, and a sense of 'otherness.'

* Generational Narratives: Indian diaspora writing comprises two phases: Colonial and Post-Colonial.

* First-generation writers: They experienced the pain of displacement and dislocation. For them, India represented a memory and a source of nostalgia. Examples include Nirad C. Chaudhuri, Raja Rao, and G.V. Desani.

* Second-generation writers: They were born and raised in their adopted countries. They grappled with rootlessness and identity crises arising from straddling two cultural constructs. Examples include V.S. Naipaul, Salman Rushdie, Anita Desai, and Jhumpa Lahiri.

Key Writers and Their Themes:

* V.S. * V.S. Naipaul: His characters (such as Mohan Biswas and Ganesh Ramsumair) attempt to live out the legacy of the past alongside the collective memory of displacement, while constantly searching for a home. According to Naipaul, "home" exists merely as an idea—within a child's imagination.

* Salman Rushdie: His work often explores migration and translocation through the lens of magic realism and allegory. Rushdie places the concept of an "imagined homeland" at the center of his narratives.

* Anita Desai: The sense of displacement and the loneliness experienced by immigrants are portrayed in novels such as *Fasting, Feasting* and *Bye-Bye Blackbird*. Her characters lead lives fraught with anxiety, where questions of identity and belonging become an intrinsic part of their existence.

* Bharati Mukherjee: Her novels depict the challenges associated with interracial love, immigration, assimilation, and cultural pluralism. In her novel 'Wife' .The protagonist Dimple becomes immersed in cross-cultural conflicts, feeling trapped between two cultures—the East and the West.

* Jhumpa Lahiri: Lahiri portrays the lives of first- and second-generation Indian immigrants. Her characters are in a constant quest for belonging, identity, and the fluidity of movement. She views diasporic women through the lens of a "composite diasporic feminism." Indian Cinema and Popular Culture

Indian cinema, particularly Bollywood, is one of the most prolific film industries in the world. Over time, it has significantly transformed its relationship with the diaspora.

* **Early Portrayals:** Dadasaheb Phalke is considered the father of Indian cinema. Early films depicted Indian migrants; for instance, the 1921 film *Bilet Pherat* portrays an Indian man who acquires peculiar habits upon returning from Britain. The 1970 nationalist film *Purab Aur Paschim* depicts Indians in London as completely Westernized.

* **Targeting the Diaspora (1990s):** In the 1990s, the film industry began targeting the diaspora. *Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge* (DDLJ, 1995) was the first film to take the

diaspora's "feelings of nostalgia and longing" seriously, rather than turning them into a "joke." Post-1990s films, such as *Kabhi Khushi Kabhie Ghaam* (K3G), portrayed NRIs/PIOs who explore India as a site of longing centered on culture, heritage, and national identity.

* **NRI Portrayal and Identity:** Bollywood attracts its diasporic audience with idealized depictions of "traditional and contemporary India." It became a tool for connecting with India's cultural ethos through cultural affinity. Commercial Indian cinema portrays NRIs as wealthy and prosperous Indians.

* **Cultural Adaptation and Female Identity:** Diaspora films can articulate the sense of displacement, intolerance, and stigma faced by migrants. Bollywood's growing popularity plays a crucial role in shaping the identity of Indian women within the diaspora. Second-generation Indian-American women use these films to establish their sense of 'Indianness'.

* Film Tourism: This is a new trend where the choice of a tourist destination is directly influenced by cinematic productions. It is deeply rooted in the cyclical process of watching films, imagining the locations, and subsequently reflecting on the journey.

6. SOCIAL CATEGORIES WITHIN INDIAN DIASPORIC COMMUNITIES

Social categories and stratification within the diaspora are complex and must be understood through the lenses of both structure and agency.

East Indians in Trinidad

The East Indian community in Trinidad was initially both an exclusive and an excluded group.

* Origins and Caste: Most immigrants hailed from the central Gangetic plains (United Provinces, Awadh, Bihar, and Odisha). They were religiously and linguistically heterogeneous. Although some scholars believe the immigrants represented castes from the general category, their collective identity was nonetheless homogeneous. Even after village settlement, caste distinctions and other differences—such as the divide between Brahmins and Chamars—re-emerged.

* Mobility and Exclusion: In the late 19th century, the primary avenues for mobility among East Indians were land acquisition and education. However, this mobility was constrained by the dominance of the plantation system. Regarding education, East Indians utilized missionary schools as a lever for economic advancement but remained unwilling to abandon their traditional beliefs.

* 'Outsider' Identity: In Trinidad, East Indians were perceived as 'outsiders.' According to Munasinghe, while Afro-Trinidadian and European identities are based on skin color, East Indian identity is rooted solely in 'ancestry.' The exclusion of East Indian ethnicity was a reflection of social stratification driven by a race-cum-class structure. Transnational Middle Class (ETMC)

In the context of globalization, the migration of Indian Information Technology (IT) professionals signifies the formation of an 'Ethnic Transnational Middle Class' (ETMC).

* Ethnic Networks: Ethnic networks play a crucial role in the migration of IT professionals. These networks establish a synergy between the state and the market. They enable 'body

shops' (placement agents) to keep workers on hold without pay while they are 'on the bench,' thereby transferring the costs of a volatile market onto the workers.

* Channeling of Resources: The institution of dowry represents a novel method of channeling resources within the ETMC. Dowry is often viewed as a direct reward to the groom's parents for their investment in expensive private education, or as sponsorship for IT studies and migration. This illustrates how traditional social structures influence transnational mobility and economic investment.

7. CONCLUSION: INTERCULTURATION AND CULTURAL COMPETENCE

The Indian diaspora is complex and multifaceted. It manifests through social forms, types of consciousness, and modes of cultural production. The reconstruction and reproduction of identity within the diaspora depend on the combined interplay of structural, conscious, and non-conscious factors.

Indian diaspora literature and cinema play a significant role in articulating cultural hybridity, nostalgia, and identity crises. This process is not merely one of unidirectional adaptation but a two-way process of 'interculturation,' as suggested in the context of Trinidad. Interculturation refers to the active and reciprocal exchange and influence between two or more cultures. Just as a bilingual individual can code-switch when appropriate, a person can be culturally competent across various domains. Cultural competence and improvisation are key characteristics of the concept of 'habitus.' Habitus is a set of non-conscious dispositions acquired through experience, providing a repertoire for situationally competent action. It is this unconscious knowledge that enables a diasporic individual to function with ease across diverse cultural contexts.

UNIT III

POLITICAL ECONOMY AND CONTEMPORARY ISSUES AMONG THE INDIAN DIASPORA

INTRODUCTION

The study of Indian migration—whether stemming from the historical trauma of indentured labour or contemporary high-skilled migration—now lies at the heart of political economy and strategic interests in both national and international contexts. The Indian diaspora has evolved from being mere cultural heirs into robust economic, strategic, intellectual, and diplomatic assets for India.

This unit examines two central dimensions of diaspora engagement: economic contributions and remittances, and participation in politics and foreign policy. Globally, remittances sent by migrants are considered a crucial and stable source of external development finance. India is the world's largest recipient of international remittances. These financial flows—which help alleviate household poverty, boost consumption, and strengthen foreign exchange reserves—are heavily concentrated in the economies of specific Indian states (such as Kerala and Punjab). Today, the diaspora has become a "pillar" of India's foreign policy, reflecting a shift from traditional government-to-government relations toward a multi-layered, society-centric approach. The diaspora serves as the greatest instrument of India's soft power. They influence India's interests through political lobbying in their countries of residence, as evidenced by the U.S.-India Civil Nuclear Agreement. However, divisive aspects—such as "long-distance nationalism" and the financing of religious extremism—have also presented complex security challenges. This chapter analyzes the dynamics behind the growing influence of the Indian diaspora, examining how they are shaping India's democratic image and interests on the global stage as co-creators.

1. Economic contributions and remittances to India

1. Economic contributions and remittances to India

The economic contribution of the Indian diaspora is not limited to mere statistical figures; rather, it has become a decisive component of the country's political economy and strategic capacity. Remittances sent by the diaspora—encompassing both international and domestic flows—provide a vital and stable source of external development finance for India.

1.1 SIGNIFICANCE AND THEORETICAL CONTEXT OF REMITTANCES

In development studies, remittances are considered a significant and stable source of income that helps alleviate poverty among recipient families, addressing both transient and, at times, structural poverty.

1.1.1 Nature and Stability of Remittances

1. Stability and Resilience: At the macro level, remittance flows have often proven to be more stable than other external capital flows. For countries like India, where migration destinations are diverse (e.g., the Middle East, North America, and Europe), remittance flows are more resilient to economic conditions in host countries compared to nations reliant on a single, narrow migration corridor.

2. Performance During Crises: Remittances recorded a Compound Annual Growth Rate (CAGR) of 14% between 1990 and 2008, without experiencing a decline in any single year during this period. Even after the 2008 financial crisis—when global remittance flows fell by 6%—remittances to India saw a marginal decline of only 1%, demonstrating their status as a stable monetary flow.

3. Instrument for Development: Remittances enable developing countries to earn valuable foreign exchange.

1.1.2 Economic Risks and Inequality

1. Financial Dependency: Remittances can lead to increased financial dependency among households.

2. Widening Inequality: Due to the self-selecting nature of migration—where individuals with higher education and income levels are more likely to migrate—the distribution of remittances is also unequal. This concentration can potentially exacerbate existing inequalities in the regions from which remittances originate. For instance, approximately 50% of total remittances are received by households in the top 25% consumption bracket. 3. Non-productive investment: Theoretically, remittances can divert attention away from productive investments.

1.2 INTERNATIONAL REMITTANCES: VOLUME, SOURCES, AND COMPONENTS

India is the largest recipient of international remittances in the world.

1.2.1 Volume and types of remittances

1. **Total private transfers**: In 2007-08, the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) recorded ₹1.74 lakh crore (approximately $43.5 billion) as 'private transfers'. RBI estimates do not include informal flows, although the significance of informal flows is considered to have diminished following exchange rate liberalization in the 1990s.

2. **Components and purposes:** The RBI classifies these total private transfers into three main categories:

   - Family maintenance, etc.: Approximately 50% of total remittances fall under this head; these primarily support household consumption and are routed through wire transfers or bank drafts.
   - Local withdrawals/payments from Non-Resident Indian (NRI) deposits: About 43% of the share comes from this category. This represents a capital withdrawal rather than a capital inflow.
   - Personal gifts/donations: Approximately 6% of the share consists of personal gifts or donations to charitable/religious institutions.

3. **Domestic versus total remittances:** The 64th round (2007-08) of the National Sample Survey Organisation (NSSO) estimates 'household remittances' at ₹16,700 crore (approximately $4 billion). This figure is significantly lower than the RBI's total 'private

transfers' (approximately $43.5 billion) or the RBI's 'family maintenance' component (approximately $9 billion).

1.2.2 Bias in NSS Data

NSSO estimates regarding household remittances are considered to be downwardly biased. There are several reasons for this bias:

1. Underestimation of the number of households: The NSS underestimates the total number of households in India (22.254 crore households based on a population of 101 crore, rather than the estimated population of 114 crore).
2. Lower proportion of remittance-receiving households: The proportion of households receiving remittances in NSS data was found to be approximately 20% lower compared to the Kerala Migration Survey (KMS).
3. Exclusion of entire-household migration: Surveys in source regions omit instances of entire-household migration. The NSS report estimates the number of Indians living abroad at 4.44 million (44.4 lakh), whereas other estimates (World Bank, MOIA) range from 8 million to 10 million (80 lakh to 1 crore).

1.2.3 Origins of International Remittances

According to the RBI (2006), the major sources of international remittance inflows are: the Middle East region (35%), North America (35%), and Europe (20%). It is precisely this diverse destination structure that allows India's remittance inflows to remain resilient against external economic crises.

1.3 STATE-LEVEL DEPENDENCY AND CONCENTRATION

India's economy as a whole is not considered dependent on international remittances; however, there is significant concentration and dependency in certain states.

1.3.1 Top Recipients and Dependency Ratios

1. Share in household remittances: According to NSS household remittance data, Kerala accounted for approximately 39.9% of the share. Punjab (12.7%) and Tamil Nadu (12.4%) were also major recipients.
2. Measurement of dependency (Remittances/GDP): When viewing total international remittances (RBI figure of $43.5 billion) as a ratio of GDP, Kerala (30.9%), Goa (20.8%), and Punjab (11.4%) emerged as highly dependent states. These states rank among the world's top remittance-dependent economies.
3. Concentration of NRI deposits: Maharashtra accounts for nearly one-quarter (26.8%) of all foreign deposits. As India's financial hub, Mumbai (Maharashtra) attracts vast amounts of capital for financial investments—concentrated primarily in urban areas—whereas remittances in Kerala and Punjab flow predominantly to rural areas.

1.3.2 Rural-Urban Impact

1. Bridging the rural-urban divide: In Kerala and Punjab, the majority of remittances are received by rural households (over three-quarters in both states). This substantial inflow of remittances

helped bridge the consumption expenditure gap between rural and urban areas in these states; the disparity in rural consumption expenditure was lower compared to the all-India average (73%).

1.4 DOMESTIC REMITTANCES: VOLUME, USAGE, AND INCLUSION

Unlike international remittances, there has been a lack of data regarding domestic remittances resulting from internal migration in India.

1.4.1 Volume and Distribution of Domestic Remittances

1. Volume: In 2007-08, the estimated volume of domestic 'household' remittances was in the range of ₹32,500 crore (approximately $10 billion).
2. Rural Destinations: Approximately 80% of domestic remittances flowed to rural areas.
3. State-level Distribution and Dependence:
    - Top Recipients: Uttar Pradesh (20%) and Bihar (12%) were the leading states receiving domestic remittances.
    - Dependence: The domestic remittance-to-GDP ratio in Bihar was around 5%, indicating the state's high dependence on domestic remittances.
4. Inter-state vs. Intra-state Transfers: At the all-India level, 60% of domestic remittances were inter-state transfers, reflecting significant out-migration from these states. The remaining 40% were intra-state transfers.

1.4.2 Usage of Remittances and Regional Variations

1. Primary Usage: At the all-India level, over 90% of recipient households used remittances for household consumption expenditure, financing up to one-third of their total household consumption spending.
2. Regional Variations:
    - Debt Repayment: In Kerala and Tamil Nadu, there were higher reports of remittances being used for debt repayment, likely because loans were initially taken to cover the high costs associated with migration to Gulf countries. ◦ Housing and Ceremonies: Odisha reported high usage of remittances for housing improvements and for weddings and ceremonies.
    - Education: A significant portion of remittances in Northeastern states (such as Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur, Meghalaya, and Mizoram) and Jammu & Kashmir was spent on education (reported by over 55% of families).

1.4.3 Challenges to Financial Inclusion

1. Dominance of the Informal Market: The formal sector (banks and post offices) handles less than 30% of the domestic remittance market. In contrast, the formal sector in China handles 75% of the remittance market.
2. Key Formal Channel: Post office money orders have been a popular formal instrument, but the service charge is approximately 5%. In 2007-08, post offices handled money orders worth ₹8,363 crore.

3. Reliance on Informal Channels: Most domestic remittances still flow through informal channels, such as friends and relatives returning home. These channels come with drawbacks like the risk of theft, low frequency, and a lack of timely delivery—whereas 'timely delivery' is the most critical requirement for migrants.

4. Need for Financial Solutions: There is an urgent need for affordable and accessible remittance services for the migrant population. Financial inclusion can be enhanced through better identification and technologies like mobile banking, particularly for those who do not have bank accounts or do not use the internet.

1.5 BEYOND REMITTANCES: THE BROADER ECONOMIC AND INTELLECTUAL CONTRIBUTIONS OF THE DIASPORA

Beyond the direct monetary benefits of remittances, the Indian diaspora has made many other important contributions to India's economic and diplomatic development, making them a strategic asset.

1.5.1 Intellectual capital and brain circulation

1. Brain Drain to Brain Circulation: The migration of high-skilled migrants (engineers, doctors, IT professionals) replaces the traditional notion of 'brain drain' with the idea of 'brain circulation'. These migrants form the Ethnic Transnational Middle Class (ETMC).

2. Intellectual Diplomacy: Experts of Indian origin play an important role in global universities, research institutes and multinational corporations, thereby promoting 'Intellectual Diplomacy'.

3. Technological and entrepreneurial contribution: The diaspora is strengthening India's economic structure through innovation, technological investment, startup ecosystem and skill development. Overseas Indian IT workers have increasingly become transnational entrepreneurs. For example, in 2000 AD there were more than 7,000 high-tech companies in California run by Indians, which depended on their networks in India.

1.5.2 Investment and capital flows

1. Government incentives: The Rajiv Gandhi (1980s) and Vajpayee governments provided favorable rates for NRI investors and concessions for foreign currency deposits. After liberalization, NRIs were allowed to acquire majority stake in Indian companies, set up new industrial enterprises, and invest in India Development Bonds.

2. Facilitating global capital: ETMC acts as an intermediary between the global and the local, and helps global capital enter the developing world. The collectivism of the diaspora is key to success in their economic strategies, which include sharing of resources and investment of capital.

1.5.3 Human and social costs

This economic model of ETMC, called the 'Indian System', comes with high human costs.

1. Domestic Violence and Dependency: U.S. In the U.S., wives of H-1B visa holders (H-4 visa holders) are completely dependent on their husbands because they are not allowed to work. This dependency has led to high incidences of domestic violence being reported.

2. Transfer of resources: In India, especially in Andhra Pradesh, the institution of dowry is used to finance IT training and emigration, which is 'a direct transfer of surplus value from the organized sector to the unorganized sector, from rural to urban, and from local to global. Dowry rates for US-based grooms were twice that of Australia-based grooms.

2. DIASPORA PARTICIPATION IN INDIAN POLITICS AND FOREIGN POLICY

The process of Indian migration and the rise of diaspora groups has become an integral part of India's political economy and foreign policy. Diaspora groups are today seen as a strategic, economic, intellectual, and diplomatic asset for India. Moving away from traditional government-to-government relations, bilateral negotiations, or multilateral fora, India has now adopted a comprehensive, multi-layered, and society-centric approach to engaging with the diaspora.

2.1 HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE: NATIONALIST STRUGGLE AND NEHRUVIAN INDIFFERENCE

Since the early days of Indian migration, the diaspora has influenced India's nationalist struggle and international relations; however, a significant shift occurred in India's policy following independence.

2.1.1 The *Girmitiya* Struggle and the Role of Nationalist Leaders

During the colonial era, *Girmitiya* (indentured) laborers—whether sent to the West Indies, Mauritius, Burma, Fiji, Ceylon, or Malaya—faced oppression wherever they were located. Indian political activists championed the cause of these emigrants. Nationalist leaders such as Gopal Krishna Gokhale and C.F. Andrews focused on the plight of the emigrants and succeeded in pressuring the government to appoint a commission to investigate the allegations. Notably, the prominent nationalist leader Gopal Krishna Gokhale himself visited South Africa. He highlighted the wretched condition of Indian emigrants, which ultimately compelled the British-Indian government to ban the emigration of *Girmitiya* laborers to Natal in 1911.

During this period, Gandhi—who was leading the struggle of Indians in South Africa—visited India twice and addressed joint meetings of the Indian National Congress, Chambers of Commerce, and other organizations to draw attention to these issues. Pattabhi Sitaramayya, the then President of the Indian National Congress, publicly acknowledged that Indians abroad had played a crucial role in India's freedom struggle.

2.1.2 Post-Independence Policy: Nehru's Approach

After independence, India's first Prime Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru, adopted a cautious stance regarding Indians living abroad. He advised overseas Indians to adopt the nationality of their country of residence. If they chose to do so, they could only claim 'most favoured alien treatment' abroad. Nehru further stated that India would certainly not want any country to mistreat Indian citizens or accord them a status inferior to that of others. This stance of Nehru reflected a lack of engagement with Indians abroad, but this policy shifted in subsequent decades.

2.2 POLICY SHIFT: RECOGNIZING THE DIASPORA AS A STRATEGIC ASSET

From the 1980s onwards, there was a fundamental shift in India's approach towards the Indian diaspora, as they began to be viewed as a valuable diplomatic and economic asset.

2.2.1 The Rajiv Gandhi Era and Economic Liberalization

The Indian perspective underwent a change with Rajiv Gandhi becoming Prime Minister in the 1980s. He gave a new dimension to India's economic and foreign policy. His first visit to the United States in 1985 marked the beginning of recognizing the Indian-American diaspora as a potentially valuable bridge between the two nations. At a state dinner, the then US President Ronald Reagan remarked that perhaps India's most precious gift was the many Indians who had become proud citizens of the United States, symbolizing the human bond between the two countries.

The liberalization of Indian economic policy opened avenues for diaspora investors for the first time. They were permitted to acquire majority shareholdings in Indian companies. This reform included several concessions and incentives for Non-Resident Indians (NRIs):

1. Investment Opportunities: They could invest in Indian industries, establish new industrial ventures, or deposit their foreign currency in Indian banks.
2. Investment in High-Priority Sectors: 100 percent investment was permitted in 34 high-priority industries. 3. Financial Product: Investment in India Development Bonds.
4. Administrative Reforms: Appointment of a Chief Commissioner for Non-Resident Indians (NRIs) and exemptions from the Foreign Exchange Regulation Act (FERA) regarding various issues.

These benefits further strengthened the diaspora's bond with their native land.

2.2.2 The Vajpayee Government and Institutional Engagement

The coming to power of the BJP-led NDA government marked a fundamental shift in India's policy towards the diaspora. The Atal Bihari Vajpayee government acknowledged the significance of the diaspora and sought to define a more meaningful role for them.

Against this backdrop, the Government of India constituted a High-Level Committee (HLC) on the Indian Diaspora in September 2000, chaired by L.M. Singhvi (Member of Parliament, Rajya Sabha). The committee was tasked with preparing a comprehensive report addressing issues concerning Non-Resident Indians (NRIs) and Persons of Indian Origin (PIOs), including their achievements, challenges, and expectations from their motherland.

The Singhvi Committee made the following key recommendations:

1. Persons of Indian Origin (PIO) Card: Introduction of a scheme to facilitate a visa-free regime for Persons of Indian Origin.
2. Pravasi Bharatiya Samman Award: Institution of these awards to recognize the achievements and contributions of Indians abroad.

3. Pravasi Bharatiya Divas (PBD): A proposal to celebrate Pravasi Bharatiya Divas annually on January 9th, commemorating the anniversary of Mahatma Gandhi's return to India from South Africa. The inaugural event was held in 2003.

2.2.3 Formation of the Ministry of Overseas Indian Affairs

With the Manmohan Singh government assuming office in 2004, the process of engaging with the diaspora was further formalized. The government established a dedicated ministry named the Ministry of Overseas Indian Affairs. The objective of this ministry was to foster partnerships with the Indian diaspora through various initiatives, including the continued organization of Pravasi Bharatiya Divas. 2.3 Diplomatic Influence and Political Lobbying

2.3 DIPLOMATIC INFLUENCE AND POLITICAL LOBBYING

The diaspora has emerged as a powerful instrument influencing India's foreign policy today, particularly in influential nations like the United States.

2.3.1 Diaspora's Influence on US Foreign Policy

Since the early 1990s, the Indian-American diaspora has significantly influenced US foreign policy. This influence grew due to two key factors:

1. Rise in India's economic confidence: Policy changes in the 1990s and the success of the diaspora—especially in the United States—boosted India's confidence.
2. Development of transnational networks: Diaspora groups acted as a bridge between India and host countries.

Easing of nuclear sanctions: The Indian-American community was instrumental in easing the sanctions imposed on India following the 1998 nuclear tests.

Stance on terrorism: Following the terrorist attack on the Indian Parliament in 2001, the Indian diaspora played a similar role in shaping the US perspective. The US-India Political Action Committee (USINPAC) pressured US lawmakers to amend legislation regarding aid to Pakistan.

High Technology Transfers: In the mid-1990s, the Indian government sought high-technology transfers from the United States, but the US government was reluctant due to the 1998 nuclear tests. Members of the Indian-American diaspora—specifically a group of prominent scientists and businesspeople—approached the US Department of Commerce and persuaded them to engage with the Indian government. This resulted in the issuance of the "Next Steps in Strategic Partnership" (NSSP) joint statement in September 2004. 2.3.2 U.S.-India Civil Nuclear Agreement

2.3.2 US-India nuclear deal

The U.S.-India Civil Nuclear Agreement serves as an excellent example of the intermediary role played by the Indian diaspora. This agreement was passed despite strong opposition from many members of the U.S. foreign policy establishment.

The agreement demonstrates the power of the Indian-American lobby. President Barack Obama, who was a member of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee at the time, remarked before the vote that he was being approached by "every Indian-American" in support of the agreement. This highlights the intense lobbying undertaken by the Indian diaspora.

Economic Impact: Approximately 50 major service-oriented U.S. companies—where Indian-Americans served as Chief Executive Officers (CEOs), Chief Financial Officers (CFOs), or Chief Information Officers (CIOs)—were able to persuade their respective firms to invest in India. Consequently, the diaspora's activities and influence within the private sector expanded, enabling a larger and more powerful U.S. business community to act as a lobbying force that strengthened relations between the two nations.

2.3.3 Differences in Host Country Policies: Impact on Lobbying

The acculturation policies of the host country influence the outcomes of the diaspora's political engagement.

- United States (Assimilation/Melting Pot): In the United States—considered a "melting pot" society—lobbying efforts by the Indian-American community on behalf of their home country are significantly stronger than those of Indo-Canadians.
- Canada (Multiculturalism): Canada follows a policy of multiculturalism, which fosters cultural dialogue and tolerance. While political participation among the Indo-Canadian community is high—with members elected to all three major national parties—their influence regarding lobbying for the homeland is less than that of Indian-Americans. This is partly because the Indian government is likely to invest greater effort in cultivating its diaspora within the more influential and larger nation (the U.S.).

2.4 DIASPORA'S SOFT POWER AND CULTURAL INFLUENCE

The diaspora embodies India's civilizational ethos and represents India's economic, intellectual, and strategic interests on the global stage. It serves as the greatest instrument of India's soft power.

2.4.1 Components of Soft Power

1. Cultural Representation: Through culture, values, and languages (such as Hindi, Tamil, Malayalam, and Gujarati), diaspora groups help shape India's image as a democracy.
2. Academic and Intellectual Contributions: From business gurus to spiritual leaders, Buddhism to Yoga, classical music to beauty pageants, and academics to cuisine—Indian soft power is abundant and multifaceted.
3. Impact of Cinema: From Bollywood to Bhangra, the diaspora has amplified cultural influence.
4. Redefining Identity: Diaspora media and literature not only present the Indian worldview but also shape discourses that redefine Indian identity within modern contexts.

2.4.2 Co-creators of India's Global Reach

Professor Anil Sooklal (India's High Commissioner to South Africa) has stated that the *Girmitiyas* are not merely part of India's past but are active agents within its current policy framework. Gandhi's experience as a member of the diaspora in South Africa is particularly noteworthy. The diaspora is strengthening international partnerships by participating in India's 'Look East,' 'Act West,' and 'Indo-Africa' strategies. Thus, the diaspora are co-creators of India's global vision.

2.5 DIVISIVE ROLE AND SECURITY CHALLENGES

Diaspora engagement has not always been positive; it has also contributed to fostering 'long-distance nationalism' and radicalization.

2.5.1 Long-distance Nationalism and Separatism

Diaspora groups actively participate in long-distance nationalism, leading to the politicization of relations within international politics.

1. Khalistan Movement: The militancy in Punjab received significant support from the Sikh diaspora settled in Canada, the United Kingdom, the United States, and Australia. They backed the Khalistan movement with both funds and manpower. The 1985 Air India bombing, which claimed 329 lives, cast a 'dark shadow' over India-Canada relations. During the Canadian Prime Minister's 2018 visit, the Indian government even gave him the cold shoulder because some ministers in his government were pro-Khalistan.
2. Politicization of Ethnic Consciousness: Theorists like Stuart Hall have defined diaspora identity as an 'essential heterogeneity,' yet this ethnic consciousness is shaped through processes of conflict and interaction within the host society.
3. Support for Ethnic Conflicts: A significant segment of the diaspora is linked to Hindu radicalism through a complex network of religious identity and finance. Right-wing religious organizations such as the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) and the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) often receive substantial support from the expatriate population. It has been alleged that Hindu nationalism received support from the Indian diaspora settled in Western countries during the 1980s and 1990s.
4. Divisive Financing: It has also been alleged that the anti-Muslim violence in Gujarat in 2002 was funded by RSS supporters through 'diaspora philanthropy.'

2.5.2 Impact of the Homeland's Struggles on the Diaspora

Counter-forces of racism, xenophobia, and religious intolerance are rising in host societies.

1. Babri Masjid Dispute: A triadic relationship emerged around the demolition of the Babri Masjid in Ayodhya in December 1992. Prior to this event, Hindu organizations in the UK (particularly those affiliated with the VHP) had conducted vigorous campaigns advocating for the removal of the mosque and the construction of a temple. Following the mosque's demolition, several Hindu temples and cultural centers in the UK were damaged, leading to communal polarization within the diaspora. This illustrates how events in the homeland are instantly transmitted via transnational media, thereby impacting the diaspora.

3. CONCLUSION

The economic contribution and remittance system of the Indian diaspora resemble a multifaceted irrigation system. While international remittances act like major rivers that steadily irrigate the national treasury (foreign exchange reserves) and the rural economies of specific states (such as Kerala and Punjab), domestic remittances function like smaller canals that finance the consumption and daily subsistence of local, marginalized rural populations across the vast Gangetic-Yamuna plains (Uttar Pradesh and Bihar). However, if the distribution system (financial

inclusion) is outdated and informal, the irrigation water is distributed unevenly, potentially widening the fissures of economic inequality.

Diaspora engagement is a central element of India's foreign policy today. Policy shifts under Rajiv Gandhi and the institutional recognition granted by the Vajpayee government (such as the PIO card and Pravasi Bharatiya Divas) transformed the diaspora into a strategic asset. The diaspora has not only strengthened India's economy through international remittances and investments but has also advanced India's global interests through advocacy, intellectual capital, and soft power. However, challenges such as 'long-distance nationalism' and the financing of extremism have also emerged. India's foreign policy views the diaspora as embodiments of the country's civilizational ethos and as co-creators of India's role on the global stage.

The diaspora's engagement in Indian politics and foreign policy functions much like a global communication satellite. It broadcasts signals of India's culture, values, and economic interests across the world (through soft power and advocacy). Yet, simultaneously, it amplifies voices reflecting the homeland's political divisions—such as the Khalistan movement or communal extremism—thereby creating far-reaching consequences, both positive and negative, and leading to the globalization of India's domestic politics.

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UNIT-IV

CHALLENGES FACED BY INDIAN DIASPORA COMMUNITIES

1. INTRODUCTION

The existence and geographical spread of diaspora communities represent a complex narrative of cultural adaptation and the continuous construction of identity. Due to its vast size and historical background, the Indian diaspora has faced numerous legal, social, economic, and cultural challenges in host societies.

Theoretically, diaspora migration is viewed as a composite of various groups—including political refugees, guest workers, immigrants, expellees, and members of foreign communities. These groups forge a collective identity defined by elements such as the history of migration, myths and memories of the homeland, a sense of alienation in the host country, and—ultimately—a desire to return (which may be vague or imagined). Diaspora members maintain an enduring or reawakened attachment and loyalty to their culture of origin—and specifically to the homeland—which distinguishes them from other types of migrants. This attachment does not hinder their integration into the host society, provided the host society accepts the existence of competing loyalties.

The challenges confronting the Indian diaspora are shaped by the multidimensional and dynamic relationships among three key components: the homeland, the diaspora group, and the host society. Changes in any of these components—such as shifts in the host country's immigration policy or political developments in the homeland—alter the nature and intensity of the challenges faced by diaspora groups. 2. Historical Challenges: Exploitation and Bondage in the Indentured Labour System

The most harsh and oppressive phase in the history of Indian migration was the Indentured Labour System, which began in Mauritius in 1834 and ended in 1917. Under this system, millions of Indian workers were sent to work on sugar plantations in British colonies.

2. HISTORICAL CHALLENGES: EXPLOITATION AND BONDAGE IN THE INDENTURED LABOUR SYSTEM

The harshest and most oppressive phase in the history of Indian migration was the Indentured Labour System, which began in Mauritius in 1834 and ended in 1917. Under this system, millions of Indian workers were sent to work on sugar plantations in British colonies.

2.1 'A NEW SYSTEM OF SLAVERY'

British historian Hugh Tinker described the indentured labour system as "A New System of Slavery." Tinker’s characterization highlights that although the system was not legally slavery, it kept workers in bondage and pushed them from one form of poverty and servitude to another—conditions akin to slavery.

2.1.1 Deception in Recruitment and the Trauma of Migration

Most migrants were marginalized farmers, landless agricultural labourers, and illiterate, unsophisticated, poor villagers. They were recruited through deception by *arkatis* (recruiters or brokers) who painted an alluring picture of plantation work while keeping them ignorant of the realities of the outside world. The Sanderson Committee reported to the British Parliament that many Indian emigrants did not fully comprehend the implications of the indentured system and the migration process. Workers were lured and ensnared at fairs, pilgrimage sites, and towns.

2.1.2 Harsh Working Conditions and Physical Abuse

Under the indentured labour system, workers faced harsh and oppressive conditions.

1. Contract Duration and Wages: The duration of the contract varied across different colonies; in Mauritius, it was eventually set at five years, whereas in the West Indies, it was initially ten years but later reduced to five. Wage rates were fixed for the entire duration of the contract.
2. Oppressive Working Hours: In British Guiana, the requirement was a five-day, seven-hour workday, whereas in Trinidad, Jamaica, St. Lucia, and Grenada, workers toiled six days a week for nine hours a day (excluding holidays), totaling 280 days a year. In Mauritius, laborers worked nine hours a day from Monday to Saturday and two hours on Sundays.
3. Penalties and Control: Absence from work resulted in the forfeiture of wages and rations, deductions from monthly pay, or penalties involving imprisonment for up to 14 days and an extension of the contract. Plantation owners—whose mindset was shaped by the exercise of coercive control over formerly enslaved people—saw little distinction between the new laborers and the old slaves. Cases involving brutal whipping and physical injury inflicted by plantation managers were also brought before the courts.
4. Quality of Life: Life on the plantations was wretched. Girmitiyas in Fiji described plantation life as 'hell' (*narak*) in the 1950s and as a 'brothel' (*kasbhigar*) in the 1970s. Workers were subjected to extreme poverty, malnutrition, chronic illness, and imprisonment for contract violations.

2.1.3 The Illusion of Return and High Mortality Rates

1. The Deception of Return: There was a provision for a return journey upon the completion of the contract. However, 'free return passage' was a misleading term. In reality, the laborers were paying for it themselves, as the funds for the return journey came from deductions made from their wages. For instance, the indenture agreement in Mauritius allowed the employer to withhold one-fifth of the wages until the end of the contract. In Trinidad, until 1898, male laborers were required to pay half the cost of the return passage, and female laborers one-third.

2.2 INITIAL OPPOSITION AND DEMANDS FOR REFORM

Opposition to this exploitative system began in Britain. The Anti-Slavery Society petitioned the British House of Commons, citing the lack of guarantees regarding fair and dignified treatment for Indian migrants.

1. John Scoble’s Report: The Society sent John Scoble to British Guiana to investigate the conditions of Indian migrants. His report, "Brief Exposure," highlighted the wretched plight of "Hill Coolies" and called for executive intervention.
2. Lord John Russell’s Warning: In February 1840, Lord John Russell warned that he was unwilling to take any step that would lead to "appalling loss of life on the one hand" or "a new system of slavery on the other."
3. The Role of William Des Voeux: William Des Voeux, a magistrate in British Guiana, attempted to expose abuses in 1869 by writing a 100,000-word letter to the Secretary of State for the Colonies. He found that magistrates were actively colluding with plantation managers to violate labor laws.

3. CITIZENSHIP AND LEGAL EXCLUSION

Beyond historical exploitation, Indian migrants faced legal and political exclusion regarding their identity and status in host societies.

3.1 STATUTORY DISCRIMINATION IN NORTH AMERICA

3.1.1 Policy of Exclusion in Canada

In the early 20th century, Sikhs in Canada faced blatant discrimination, despite being citizens of the British Empire.

1. Continuous Journey Rule: In 1908, the Canadian government implemented the 'continuous journey' rule, which effectively restricted the entry of Indians traveling from India to Canada, as there were no direct voyages available at the time (ships had to stop in Hawaii to refuel). This rule was specifically designed to exclude immigrants of Asian origin, as Canada—being part of the British Empire—could not directly override British imperial policy.
2. Komagata Maru Incident: In 1914, the ship *Komagata Maru* was denied permission to dock in Vancouver, and the passengers were sent back to India at gunpoint. This was one of the most notorious incidents in the history of laws enacted to exclude immigrants of Asian origin.

3.1.2 Denial of Citizenship in the United States

In the United States, Indians faced significant legal obstacles to obtaining citizenship prior to the Immigration Act of 1965.

1. Bhagat Singh Thind Case (1923): In the 1923 case of *United States v. Bhagat Singh Thind*, the US Supreme Court ruled that Indians were "aliens ineligible for citizenship."
2. Revocation of Prior Citizenship: This ruling not only barred Indians from obtaining naturalized citizenship but also allowed for the retroactive stripping of citizenship from Indians who had previously been naturalized, as they were now classified as non-white Asians. These discriminatory laws were eventually repealed due to growing public support from India's allies during World War II, resulting in the signing of the Luce-Celler Act in 1946, which granted Indians the right to citizenship.

3.2 THE TRAUMA OF 'TWICE MIGRATION'

Another serious challenge facing diaspora communities was the prospect of re-migration from their initial country of residence due to majoritarian nationalism.

1. Coups in Fiji: Military coups led by indigenous Fijians took place in Fiji in 1987 and 2000.
2. Reasons for Emigration: In the wake of the military coups, the Indo-Fijian community was compelled to leave the country due to discriminatory legal provisions and rising conservatism. This community had to re-migrate to diverse countries such as New Zealand, Australia, Canada, and the United States, thereby emerging as a transnational community. This experience can be termed the trauma of 'twice migration,' where they faced displacement once again due to racial or ethnic hostility in their initial host country.

4. HOST COUNTRIES' ASSIMILATION POLICIES AND IDENTITY CRISIS

The policies of the host country profoundly influence the integration and identity formation of the diaspora. These policies primarily revolve around assimilation and multiculturalism.

4.1 ASSIMILATION VS. MULTICULTURALISM

4.1.1 Assimilation

1. Expected Conformity: The United States, historically referred to as a 'melting pot,' expects minority groups to conform to the dominant culture in order to attain full citizenship. This approach posits that the abandonment of cultural roots may be necessary for structural inclusion.
2. Indian-American Outcome: Despite the 'melting pot' policy, the Indian-American community's lobbying efforts for their home country remain very strong. Conversely, prominent Indian-American politicians and commentators who succeed in the host society often lean towards conservatism; this suggests that upon achieving success, they are willing to adhere to the norms of the dominant culture to embody the 'model minority' image.

4.1.2 Multiculturalism (Canada and the UK)

1. Celebrating Cultural Pluralism: In Canada and the United Kingdom, the official policy of multiculturalism views cultural differences as a valuable resource and a foundation for cultural strength. It strives for a reciprocal relationship in which space is accorded to all cultures.
2. Criticism: Multiculturalism faces criticism because, by preserving cultural distinctiveness, it can contribute to the containment, marginalization, and ghettoization of identities. Critics argue that it perpetuates cultural essentialism.
3. Indo-Canadian Outcome: Due to the policy of multiculturalism, political participation among the Indo-Canadian community is high, with members being elected to all three major national parties. However, since Indians in Canada often originate from a specific region (such as Punjab), there is a greater likelihood of the formation of homogeneous neighborhoods—or 'Little Indias'—which can lead to increased self-segregation.

4.2 "WHERE ARE YOU ORIGINALLY FROM?" (CRISIS OF IDENTITY)

Members of the diaspora are often viewed within the host society as the "perpetual other"—a challenge that arises from the auditing of difference (or the validation of identity).

1. The Principle of Foreignness: Studies on migrant Hindus in Britain indicate that the question "Where are you originally from?" links the migrant to a "displaced location," thereby denying their sense of belonging within the host society. This is rooted in the principle of "autochthonous foreignness," implying that the migrant remains a permanent visitor [Conversation History].
2. Auditing of Identity: British census data employs ethnic classifications such as "Indian," which perpetuates a "constant immigrant syndrome" and implies an allegiance to a distant nation-state for migrants and their children. This "audit of difference" creates a "zero-sum" dynamic within multiculturalism, wherein cultural differences are tethered to a specific place of origin.

4.3 CONTRACTION OF CULTURAL IDENTITY

A heightened self-consciousness regarding identity emerges within diaspora communities.

1. Contraction of Religion: Ashis Nandy argues that the diaspora has narrowed traditional Indian identities. Hinduism within the diaspora tends to be more exclusive and homogeneous, as many Hindus have attempted to redefine it according to the concept of dominant Western religions, resulting in a version that is 'more Brahminical' and 'more Semitic'.
2. Separation of Religion and Culture: A process of consciously distinguishing between elements of religion and culture is observed in diaspora communities. To facilitate adaptation, migrants attempt to separate the essential and fundamental aspects of religion from cultural accoutrements.

5. CONTEMPORARY SOCIAL CHALLENGES: RACISM, XENOPHOBIA, AND DISCRIMINATION

Contemporary diaspora communities also face serious challenges stemming from racial hatred and xenophobia.

5.1 NATURE OF RACISM AND XENOPHOBIA

1. Definition of Xenophobia: Xenophobia describes attitudes, prejudices, and behaviors that reject, exclude, and often vilify individuals by regarding them as outsiders or foreigners to a community, society, or national identity.
2. Catalyzing Factors: Manifestations of xenophobia and racism are often driven by severe economic inequalities and feelings of marginalization, with groups perceived as outsiders—such as migrants, refugees, and non-citizens—being the primary targets.

3. Role of immigration policy: Restrictive immigration policies also fuel racism. Xenophobia rises when illegal migrants are criminalized and scapegoated as the cause of unemployment or crime.

5.2 RACIAL VIOLENCE AND DISCRIMINATION

1. Targeted attacks in the US: Following the 9/11 terrorist attacks, there were reports of attacks on Sikhs in the United States who were mistaken for Arabs.
2. Discriminatory language: In 2006, Virginia Senator George Allen insulted an Indian-American political staffer by calling him "Macaca" (a French slur used against Black people in Africa). The Indian-American community viewed this insult as a cultural turning point that demonstrated the burgeoning confidence of Indian-born American citizens.
3. Employment discrimination: Surveys conducted in European countries reveal the existence of direct discrimination in access to employment. High unemployment rates have been recorded among immigrant workers and ethnic minorities in European countries.

6. EXPLOITATION AND HIGH HUMAN COST IN THE LABOUR MARKET

The diaspora—whether traditional or highly skilled—faces various forms of exploitation and insecurity in the labour market.

6.1 EXPLOITATION OF LOW-SKILLED AND UNAUTHORIZED WORKERS

1. Wage disparity: A survey of manufacturing firms in Korea found that foreign workers received less than half the wages earned by national workers. This trend exists in many other countries as well.
2. Insecurity of unauthorized migrants: Migrants lacking legal status become 'invisible' to the host country's agencies, thereby increasing their risk of exploitation and discrimination. They are often prevented from joining unions or protesting through threats of deportation.

6.2 HUMAN COSTS FOR HIGHLY SKILLED MIGRANTS

Even the economically successful and highly skilled diaspora faces social security and psychological challenges, resulting in high human costs.

1. Family dependency and domestic violence: In the United States, spouses of H-1B visa holders are granted H-4 visas, which do not permit them to work. They become entirely dependent on their husbands. Maitri, a South Asian women's organization based in San Francisco, received calls from over 1,500 H-4 visa holders reporting domestic violence between 2000 and 2001. This dependency and isolation reflect a lack of human security.
2. A new form of dowry: Among highly skilled migrants, the institution of dowry has taken on a new form. In Andhra Pradesh, dowry has been utilized in the form of sponsorship for IT training and emigration. This represents a direct transfer of surplus value from the unorganized sector to the organized sector, from rural to urban areas, and from the local to

the global level. The dowry rate for a US-based groom was approximately double that for an Australia-based groom.

7. NEGATIVE CONSEQUENCES OF TRANSNATIONAL ACTIVISM: LONG-DISTANCE NATIONALISM AND RADICALISM

The diaspora engages in transnational politics through feelings of intense attachment to or criticism of their homeland—a phenomenon known as 'long-distance nationalism.' This connection sometimes leads to negative consequences for India's security and international relations.

7.1 RADICALISM AND FINANCIAL NETWORKS

Steven Vertovec notes that transnational deterritorialization often gives rise to global fundamentalisms, including Islamic and Hindu radicalism.

1. Khalistan Movement: The movement to establish Khalistan—centered on an 'invented homeland' for the 'deterritorialized Sikh population'—received massive support and funding from Sikhs settled in Canada, the UK, and the US.
2. Hindu Radicalism: Right-wing religious organizations in India, such as the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) and the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), receive substantial support and funding from overseas populations. Allegations have also been made that the anti-Muslim violence in Gujarat was financed through diaspora philanthropy.

7.2 GLOBAL IMPACT OF RELIGIOUS CONFLICTS

Political and religious events in the homeland immediately affect the 'triadic relationships' of diaspora communities.

1. Demolition of the Babri Masjid (1992): Following the demolition of the Babri Masjid in Ayodhya, the event was instantly broadcast via transnational media. Consequently, several Hindu temples and cultural centers in the UK were damaged, leading to communal polarization within the diaspora. This incident demonstrated how communal tensions within the homeland can have immediate global repercussions.

8. CONCLUSION: ONGOING STRUGGLE AND HYBRIDITY

The Indian diaspora has traversed a long journey—from the shackles of historical indentured servitude to becoming highly skilled professionals. Their success is measured in terms of economic prosperity (such as the highest average household income) and educational achievements (such as holding advanced degrees in the US and Canada).

However, this success has not come without challenges. Legal exclusion (the Thind case), social discrimination (such as racial attacks), and identity crises within the host society (pressures to assimilate) have remained persistent challenges. Even liberal policies like multiculturalism can give rise to self-segregation—manifesting as "Little Indias"—and the commodification of ethnic identity. Furthermore, engagement in homeland conflicts through "long-distance nationalism" can lead to negative consequences for global security and India's interests.

The diaspora community navigates these challenges with a fluid, hybridized identity that preserves cultural roots without compromising with the host culture; yet, these processes often entail

significant human and social costs. Their story exemplifies resilience, cultural transformation, and the necessity of maintaining a continuous dialogue with both the host society and the homeland.

SUGGESTED READING

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