Amba Pande *Editor*

Women in the Indian Diaspora

Historical Narratives and Contemporary Challenges

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Preface

Patterns of migration and settlement among Indian women are as diverse as that of the overall Indian diaspora. They have shared space with men in most of the groups and streams of people moving beyond Indian borders. However, the initial theoretical and empirical models either omitted or undermined their experiences under homogenised perceptions. As a result, women's voices, experiences and their critical role in the success story of the Indian diaspora remain to be unnoticed and unmapped. Feminist epistemological interventions in diaspora and migration studies made gender fundamental to the critical understanding of migration and settlement processes and the ongoing course of identity formation in a foreign setting. However, the centrality of gender still revolved around the 'victimhood' or 'passive agents' paradigm, particularly with regard to women from the Third World. The feminist and subaltern scholarship did take note of this stereotypical representation and started articulating the voice of the 'other' woman in the receiving societies. The increasing feminisation of international migration from and among the developing societies further made the incorporation of the sociocultural moorings of the women from these societies an imperative. As the diasporas are embedded in both host and homelands simultaneously, the natural corollary is that factors from both the host land and the homeland—including gender relations and gender hierarchies—have an impact on diasporic women. Feminist inquiries suggest that migration and diasporic conditions, on the one hand, can be liberating, bringing more egalitarianism in the family and opening avenues for women to strengthen their agency and create new opportunities for themselves. However, on the other hand, it is also sometimes evident that gender hierarchy gets reinforced and becomes more rigid and traditional than in the homeland. Although standing 'in-between' the two worlds—with complex realities of unequal power dynamics of the homeland and stereotypical spaces of the host land—Indian women tend to experience conflicting subjectivities of freedom and subjugation, yet they do find a freedom for self-exploration and deliberation to conceive new identities and move beyond the fixed definitions of femininity.

This volume is an attempt to capture the processes of migration and settlement of women in the Indian diaspora during the colonial as well as contemporary period

and map their struggles, challenges and agency. The principal aim motivating the present volume is to look beyond the stereotypical representation of Indian women as the 'victim', the 'passive agents' or mere 'custodians of Indian culture', and bring into focus the agency and space women have shown in redefining roles and transforming the lives of their own and those of their families in process of migration and settlement. I am not a scholar of gender studies but during my work on Indian diaspora and transnational migration I came across various issues related to women and developed an understanding of their problems, challenges and their agency in addressing and redressing the complex issues faced by them; structuring and restructuring the cultural formats of patriarchy and gender relations; managing the emerging conflicts over what is to be transmitted to the following generations, and how social history is to be interpreted; renegotiating their domestic roles and embracing new professional and educational successes; and adjusting with the institutional structures of the host state. The essays included in the volume discuss women in the Indian diaspora from a multidisciplinary perspective eschewing the essentialising tendencies and acknowledging the intersectionality of the gender with race, class, religion, national and several other categories. Overall, this volume resists the portrayal of women in the Indian diaspora only as victims by emphasising their agency. Such an effort will privilege women's experiences and perspectives by raising consciousness and developing a deeper understanding about their issues in academia and among policymakers.

New Delhi, India Amba Pande

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This project would have been impossible without the support and expert advice of my fellow scholars and colleagues in diaspora studies. I am particularly grateful to Prof. Samual Asir Raj (M.S. University), Prof. Ajay Dubey (JNU), Prof. Irudaya Rajan (CDS, Trivandrum), Prof. Bhaswati Sarkar (JNU), Prof. Arvinder Ansari (Jamia Milia Islamia), Prof. Malakar (JNU), Dr. Kavita Sharma (South Asia University), Dr. JM Moosa (JNU) and Dr. Nadaraja Mannikkam. My special thanks also to Dr. Sadanand Sahoo (Indira Gandhi National Open University), Dr. Mahalingam (Jamia Milia Islamia) and several other friends and colleagues for their constant support and encouragement.

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Contents

1 Women in Indian Diaspora: Redefining Self Between Dislocation and Relocation 1
Amba Pande

Part I The Context of Theory and Identity

2 Centring Gendered Narratives of the Indian Diaspora 15
Sandhya Rao Mehta

3 The Rhetoric of Deliberation and the Space of the Hyphen: Identity Politics of the Indian Women Diaspora in the Fictions of Jhumpa Lahiri 27
Nabanita Chakraborty

4 Freedom or Subjugation: Interpreting the Subjectivity of Women in Indian Diaspora Communities 39
Sheetal Sharma

Part II Revisiting Historical Narratives

5 Indian Indentured Women in the Caribbeans and the Role Model of Ramayana's Sita: An Unequal Metaphor 53
Archana Tewari

6 'The Men Who Controlled Indian Women'—Indentureship, Patriarchy and Women's 'Liberation' in Trinidad 65
Radica Mahase

7 Tamil Women of the Diaspora: Indentured to Independence 77
Bernard D'Sami

Part III The Contemporary Challenges

8 Fitting in: The Joys and Challenges of Being an Indian Woman in America 91
Mahua Bhattacharya

9 Three Tamil Diasporic Women's One Mission: *Discover New Identities* 105
Gopalan Ravindran

10 Gender Differentials of Indian Knowledge and Service Workers in the US Labour Market: A Comparative Analysis in the Context of 'Age, Wage, and Vintage' Premia 119
Narender Thakur and Binod Khadria

11 Unemployed Female Skilled Migrants from India in the Netherlands: The Entrepreneurial Self Under Structural Dependency 133
Kathinka Sinha-Kerkhoff and Kate Kirk

Part IV Diasporas Across the World

12 Curry and Race: Gender, Diaspora and Food in South Africa 149
Movindri Reddy

13 Diversities, Continuities and Discontinuities of Tradition in the Contemporary Sikh Diaspora: Gender and Social Dimensions 161
Shinder S. Thandi

14 Anglo-Indian Women: A Narrative of Matriarchy in a Global Diaspora 177
Ann Lobo

15 Lived Experiences of Sikh Women in Canada: Past and Present 187
Amrit Kaur Basra

Editor and Contributors

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Chapter 1
Women in Indian Diaspora: Redefining Self Between Dislocation and Relocation

Amba Pande

The initial theoretical and empirical models of the migration discourse either omitted any specific reference to women migrants or downplayed their experiences generally presuming that it would same as those of the men. The experiences of Indian women were also subsumed under homogenised perceptions and meta-narratives of the processes of migration and settlement of the Indian Diaspora. An upsurge in the feminist scholarship on Migration Studies definitely brought the dimension of gender to the forefront, but unfortunately issues related to women's identity and women's agency remain marginalised with very limited systematic research being undertaken. In reality, the conditions propelling the migration of women, their experiences during the process of migration and the subsequent efforts at adaptation and settlement have always been different; rather they have been unique and very specific to them. As highly skilled women professionals, they successfully balance domestic life with professional life. Similarly, semiskilled and skilled women migrants risk the hostilities of a new environment and struggle to improve the conditions of their families back home and at the same time enhance their own career prospects. Women married into diaspora families attempt to recreate home and culture in a foreign setting often ridden with politics of race. As the indentured labourers, women faced the tyranny of the plantation life as well as exploitation by their own men yet rapidly adapting and liberating themselves through education and economic opportunities.

Indian women usually migrate within the patriarchal framework and cultural considerations, and are supposed to preserve it as the 'bearers of Indian tradition,' yet the process of migration and economic self-dependency give them an opportunity to assert independence, and redefine roles and perceptions of the self. While many of the problems, women in the Indian Diaspora face, arise out of patriarchal

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structures besides foreign settings, one can find innumerable instances of their struggles and triumphs over adversities and hostile situations. Standing 'in-between' the two worlds, with complex realities of unequal power dynamics of the homeland and stereotypical spaces of the hostland, women tend to experience conflicting subjectivities of freedom and subjugation. The space of the 'hyphen' often gives them a freedom for self-exploration and deliberation to conceive new identities and move beyond the fixed definitions of femininity. This volume is an attempt to capture the process of migration and settlement of women in the Indian Diaspora during the colonial as well as contemporary period. The essays map the struggles, challenges and agency of the immigrant women in their ongoing process of the reproduction of identity and culture in a foreign setting.

Migration and Diaspora: Theoretical Understandings

Migration is a perpetual phenomenon that human beings have undertaken but in the last century or so, it has grown exponentially and is a much more marked, analysed and theorised phenomenon that has received attention from numerous disciplines and cross-disciplinary studies. Closely related to the process of migration is the term diaspora which is in a sense more specific (because it concerns only with International migration and permanent or long term settlements) but in another sense it is more inclusive (because it also includes second- and third-generation migrants) (Tigau et al. 2017, 183). There has been a significant shift in the understanding of the term diaspora over the years, as Jewish and Armenian paradigms marked by exile, loss and victimhood have given way to vibrant communities who maintain multiple ties with their homelands while at the same time also getting incorporated into the countries that receive them (Pande 2017, 27).

In my conceptualization of Indian Diasporas (EPW 2013, 59–65) I have tried to draw four basic characteristics or core elements that can be treated as the starting point for the understanding of the diasporas

1. Cross-border Migration/Dispersion and Settlement which implies voluntary or involuntary cross border movement leading to permanent or long-term settlement;
2. Hostland Participation which signifies not only residence but participation in the socio-economic and political processes of receiving country;
3. Homeland Consciousness which can also be termed as 'continuity' or 'manifestation' of 'roots';
4. Creation and Recreation of a Multi-locational 'Self' or Identity which involves recreating an identity that draws from both home and hostlands, and which is hybrid and distinct in itself.

In a nutshell, diasporas are specific types of transnational communities marked by migrations, by continuity and rupture, by hybridity and by dual or even a multiple belongingness which, manifest through economic, political and social interaction

with home and the hostland simultaneously (see Pande 2013; Pande 2017). Rather than being wedged into either home or hostland the diasporas are embedded in both the cultures and in the process negotiate and create new hybridised cultures and identities that intersect nations, races, class and gender (see Bhabha 1994; Sheffer 1986; Schiller et al. 1995; Clifford 1994; Safran 1991; Cohen 1997). In the present world, diasporas are seen as 'vibrant communities', much 'in demand' as they seek to participate in the developmental process of both home and the hostland.

Indian Diaspora with all its heterogeneities can be considered as a representative case of diasporic formation. A broad definition of Indian Diaspora has been given in the Report of the Singhvi Committee or the High Level Committee on Indian Diaspora constituted by Government of India: 'Indian diaspora is a generic term used for addressing people who have migrated from the territories that are currently within the borders of the Republic of India' (High Level Committee 2001). As far as the classification of Indian Diaspora is concerned, as mentioned earlier it is a diverse group. This diversity is not only a representation of the plurality of Indian society (in terms of region, religion, language, caste, creed, etc.) and heterogeneity in the phases and patterns of migration over a long period of time, but also emerges out of the variations of the more than hundred countries where Indians are now settled (see Pande 2013). While the government of India's definition has only three categories for the diaspora, namely: Non-Resident Indians (NRIs),[1] People of Indian Origin (PIOs)[2] and Overseas Indian Citizens (OICs)[3] researchers and academicians/scholars have identified classifications on the basis of history, nature and pattern of migration. I have presented these in Fig. 1.1.

At the first level, I divide the Indian Diaspora into two parts: the 'Old Diaspora' that emerged from the colonial migrations and the 'New Diaspora' that emerged from the post-colonial migrations. The 'Old Diaspora' can be further divided broadly, into another two subdivisions—first group includes 'Indentured' labourers and migrants under similar systems and the convicts; the second category comprises of 'Free Migrants' like traders, professionals and employees of the British Government. On the other hand, 'New Diaspora' may be broadly divided into different categories of people who migrate to western countries—first highly skilled/skilled, and small-time traders and retailers; second, to semiskilled/unskilled labourers to the West and to Southeast Asia; third student migrants; and finally political diaspora. Most of the Indian Diaspora groups have achieved astounding success contributing significantly in their respective adopted countries in economic political, academic and social spheres. They have also made considerable contribution to the development of the homeland giving pride or winning accolades for India and its people (see Pande 2014).

[1]NRIs are Indian citizens and hold Indian passport. MOIA records their number as 10037761.

[2]PIOs are no longer Indian citizens and number around 11872114.

[3]OIC is a partial citizenship given to PIOs. Till 2014 around 1203613 OCI cards were issued by Government of India.

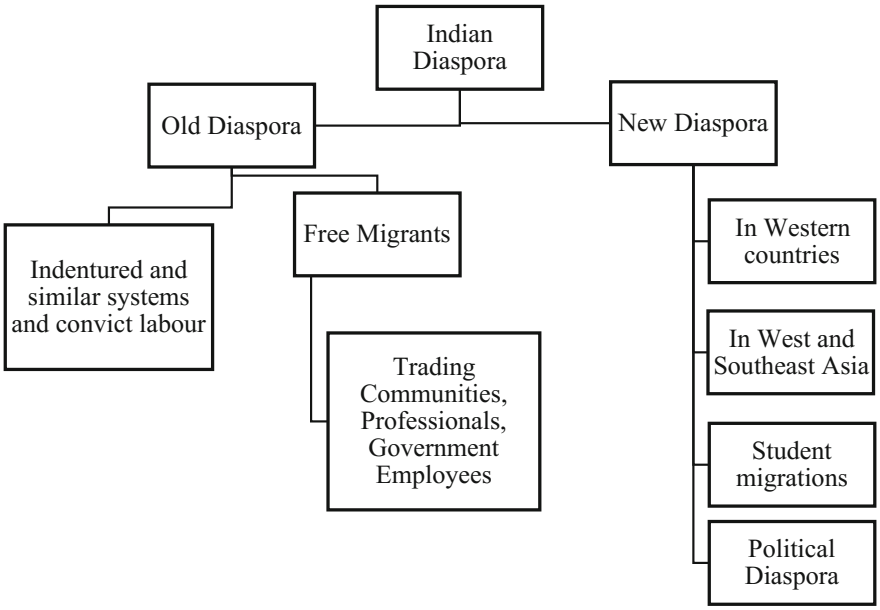

Fig. 1.1 Classifications on the basis of history, nature and pattern of migration

Women in the Diaspora Discourse

A major thrust of scholarship on Migration Studies has focussed on patterns of migration and settlement and economic contribution of the migrants but has failed to specify the unique experiences of women who have always been part of the migration process voluntarily or involuntarily. Overall women either remained as passive agents, or their experiences were overlooked under homogenised perceptions. As a result till the 1960s and early 1970s the term 'migrants' largely stood for male migrants and their families that included their wives and children (Boyd and Grieco 2003). Ever since the rise of feminist scholarship, the scholarly discourse on migration has shifted decisively towards gender sensitive discourse bringing women from the margins to the centre. A review of the literature on migration reveals that although feminist empiricism did not necessarily include 'migrant women' in its ambit, it had an impressive and effective impact on Migration Studies. Migration theories were reinvented to incorporate and privilege the issues and experiences of women under the feminist influence.

However this shift was not sudden and can be divided into three phases (see Nawyn 2010; Pessar and Mahler 2001; Altamirano 1997; Helen Ralson 1988; Rayaprol 1997; Boyd and Grieco 2003; Hondagneu-Sotelo 2000; McDowell 1993). The first phase that started from late 60s to early 70s, 'added women' in the migration research in terms of a binary of male versus female. As the field evolved into the mid- and late-1980s—towards what has been termed as the 'Feminist Standpoint

Theory'—the gender became the core analytical category. This was radical feminist perspective that not only emphasised the difference but also tried to establish the superiority over the equality of the gendered analysis. Further during the 1990s, the centrality of gender as an analytical category in relation to other critical categories was questioned under the so called 'Post-rational Feminism'. For these scholars the issue of 'gender' was not the basic criteria of difference but other differences such as poverty, class, ethnicity, race, etc. hold equal if not more importance. In other words the scholarship became aware that the enthusiasm towards correcting the 'invisibility' of migrant/diaspora women ought not to overlook other analytical categories like race, class, language, caste and history of migration, etc.

In the recent, feminist epistemology and knowledge production consider gender an essential variable that impacts women and produces differential outcomes for them at every stage of migration—i.e. during the pre-migration stage, then through the process (of migration); and finally in the course of settlement (see Boyd and Grieco 2003; United Nations, 28). Gender is understood to be a constitutive element of society that permeates through micro- and macro-level processes, and institutions and creates complex layers of identity formations which ultimately become fundamental for understanding of economic, social and demographic realities. In this regard the inter-sectionality of gender with other social and cultural constructs like race/ethnicity/class and nationality comes out to be a powerful factor in the analysis of women's migration and their role afterwards (see Madonald 2007; Hom 1999; Shepporson 1966).

Within this framework one of the important variables of differences and fields of inquiry is the context of the 'Third World' and that of Asia where gender relations and hierarchies within the family, the society and the access to resources are markedly different from those in the western societies (see McDowell 1993; Di Stifano 1990). For decades after its emergence, feminist scholarship remained predominantly ethnocentric in its approach, tilting heavily and visibly towards perspectives and experiences of the West or of America (see Alund 1991; Mohanty 1991, 2003). The immigrant women from the third world in Western societies were stereotypically typified as oppressed and dominated by repressive patriarchical traditions. The concept of welfare of the immigrant women from the third world countries revolved around 'modernising' or 'liberating' them according to the Western paradigms. These ethnocentric and neo-colonialist theories and concepts were in many cases not even relevant from the perspective of the third world societies whose cultural formats were different and produced different readings of women's position and experiences. The research, analysis and policy options for the women from the third world remained deficient because of two reasons: first, gender as a category remained a marginalised subfield in diaspora studies[4]; and second, nearly all the research which focussed on women treated women from

[4]As a matter of fact the term 'diaspora' itself is said to be phallocentric and conveys a male act of dispersal and assert 'male procreation and patrilinear descent' (see Gopinath 2005, 5–6; Kosnick 2010, 123).

Asian countries in a stereotypical 'victimhood' paradigm projecting them as docile victims with little, if any, say in matters concerning them.

Although a bit late, the feminist discourse in the third world did take note of this oversight and started articulating the voice of the 'other' woman and also challenging her stereotypical representation (see Hugo 1999; Zlotnik 1995). The increasing feminization of International migration[5] from and among the developing societies further made the empirical and theoretical incorporation of the sociocultural understanding of other societies an imperative. As the diasporas are embedded in both host and homelands, the natural corollary is that factors from both the hostland and the homeland—including gender relations and gender hierarchies—impact the diasporic women. As diaspora studies developed over time, the androcentricism and western paradigms were further challenged. The narratives shifted to analysing how gender shapes both the material experience of migration and the ways in which diaspora is conceived and represented in gendered terms (see Emma Parker). Such efforts require a deeper understanding of how women cope with changes due to migration, their adjustment patterns and strategies, how their status in society and relationships with family members and spouses change with migration. It is important to raise several questions in this context: does migration affect women's authority within the family; does it influence power relations and decision making in the family and alter patriarchal structures? How do these women create a niche for themselves through personal growth, social networks and economic participation in the host country; as well as flaunt their multicultural identities? Most importantly, how do women adapt to the host country as well as maintain links with their country of origin negotiating and recreating new identities? Many studies have continued to assess several such questions. According to Reinhart (as quoted in Rayaprol 1997, 38) feminist ethnography mainly aims at three goals; (1) to document the activities and the lives of the women; (2) to understand and present women's experience from their own point of view; (3) to represent women's behaviours as an expression of their particular social context.

Indian Women in Diaspora

Women have been part of almost all the groups of people moving out of Indian borders which today constitute the Indian Diaspora. However as discussed before, their experiences have largely been subsumed under male-centric homogenised perceptions and meta-narratives. As a result their voices, experiences and their

[5]Recent migration statistics by the United Nations (27) Population Division estimates that as of 2000, overall 49% of all international migrants were women or girls, and in the developed regions it is 51%. Although the majority of women migrate as dependent family members they also migrate in several other forms such as professionals moving on their own, conflict-induced migrants, as labour force, illegal, temporary, permanent, forced, and trafficked migrants. All these factors have a significant bearing on the role, the behaviour and identity formation of migrant women.

critical role in the success story of the Indian Diaspora remain unnoticed and unmapped. Women in India are deeply embedded in the sociocultural moorings and belief systems that are ingrained in historical antecedents and mythical/religious narratives. Patriarchy, power hierarchies and gendered perceptions are the fundamentals of these narratives. Although Indian culture in reality is immensely diverse and heterogeneous with no uniform template, the patriarchal social order tends to dominate the overarching frame. The paradox is that, within this framework, women have been considered important agents in sustaining Indian culture and tradition, functioning as nodal points in the patriarchal family structure. Notwithstanding a subservient position in a culture riddled with patriarchy, women have been the bearers of tradition and the transmitters of culture to the next generation. Women in India have also shown and enjoyed a kind of power/agency/space/and rights, at times drawing from the very sources that provide the patriarchal order and at times creating it through their own sources. The example of Sita[6] in '*Ram Charit Manas*'[7] conveys an appropriate illustration of this paradoxical representation. Sita is presented as the ideal woman with ultimate grace and character, who moves from her father's home to her husband's home, goes to '*banbaas*' (in exile) with her husband, resists the overtures of the richest and the most powerful king '*Ravana*' and so remains loyal to her husband, goes to the extent of undergoing the '*agni pariksha*' (trial by fire) to prove her fidelity; and yet she accepts her fate when she is abandoned by her husband. Nevertheless, within this patriarchal framework also she is the centre of Rama's life. He never remarries. His life, his *yagna* (Sacrificial ritual) is incomplete without her. Sita also has the space to argue and reason with her husband and with her brother-in-law and make them accept her decision but of course—without ever crossing the limits set by the patriarchal order. Sita's character has been an important metaphor presented to Indian women—often selectively to impose the patriarchal power structure on them. This paradigm has also constantly undergone change and there has been a visible decline in women's position in India over the past few millennia. Women have faced extreme forms of exploitative practices such as '*sati*' (widow immolation), '*Purda*' (veil), dowry, female infanticide and deprivation in terms of education, upward mobility and other activities in the public arena over these years. Nevertheless, in the present context with education, modernization, economic independence and state intervention, Indian women have not only improved their position in the society but have also challenged—often successfully—the patriarchal order in several ways.

The same conditions are carried through in the process of migration. In the context of a country as diverse as India, what women carry as cultural baggage is an extremely heterogeneous, complex, fluid and dynamic set of values and practices that are rooted in centuries old civilizational consciousness. Women of all classes,

[6]Lord Rama's wife who is also considered as the incarnation of the "Shakti' or the female power.

[7]It is the epic poem composed by sixteenth-century Indian Bhakti poet Goswami Tulsidas. It narrates the life and deeds of lord Rama and represents the popular faith of Indian people.

castes, religions and social backgrounds have migrated from India. It is important here to understand how the notion of culture and tradition plays out in a diasporic setting. As we understand it, culture is not a static collection of customs, beliefs and practices, rather it is a dynamic process which continually gets reshaped and reconstructed by various factors and influences. In a diasporic setting the heterogeneity of the Indian culture further increases as several other factors and aspects of diversity are added to it. The 'continuity' with Indian cultural trends or manifestation of 'roots' is an important component of the diasporic identity and—in the case of Indians—is very well pronounced and marked. But at the same time association with new cultures and local conditions bring about significant ruptures and leads to the evolution of hybrid cultures with their own sociocultural distinctiveness (see Pande 2017, 33–34). These factors result in significant diversities and differences within the Indian Diaspora. The normative 'Indianness' too differs in the context of different groups based on the period during which the migration took place—for example the Indentured diaspora and the new diaspora and even within these groups. What they are bound by is a sense of 'belonging' to an ancient civilizational worldview that represents 'Indianness'. This sense of belongingness leads to Indian cultures being sustained even after centuries of separation and integration with the cultures of the receiving countries. Thus the Indian culture in a diasporic setting is under constant making and remaking while women as carriers of Indian culture play an important role in this process of both continuity and rupture. Their role in the inheritance of the 'Indianness' is as important as their role in integration in the host societies.

Feminist inquiries suggest that migration and diasporic conditions also affect women's authority and power relations within the family and alter patriarchal structures according to the changing socio-economic contexts of home and host countries. But such changes do not show a linear pattern and are unevenly expressed. On the one hand, migration can be liberating and bring about more egalitarianism in the family, and can open avenues for women to strengthen their agency, to negotiate many critical matters, to create new opportunities for themselves and even recreate alternative cultural practices (see Hondagneu-Sotelo 2000; Buijs 1993; Levitt et al. 2007). However, on the other hand, it is also sometimes evident that gender hierarchy gets reinforced and becomes more rigid and traditional than in the homeland. The idea of losing control over women, in a perceived insecure, hostile or immoral (as liberal societies are often seen) receiving society, results in situations like physical abuse, honour killings and other cruelties (see Kang 2003; Kurien 1999; Judge 1992, 1994). Moreover, issues like marital disputes, lack of adjustment in the changed environment; dowry demands; nostalgia; insecurity; get perpetuated. The dual belongingness between the host and the homelands is also at times more disadvantageous because home state intervention on welfare issues becomes a complex and difficult proposition. The Feminist and Civil Rights movements in various countries have not necessarily made the issues of migrant women rights as part of their agenda. Still there has been an overall positive impact of these movements on migrant women.

These conditions can be witnessed in almost all sections of women in the Indian Diaspora. For example, in the case of Indentured women who faced exploitation by

colonial authorities and plantation management as well as by their male counterparts because of the imbalance in the sex ratio of the labourers. It gave rise to suspicion and insecurity and consequently led to physical assault and other exploitation for women. Moreover the widely held view over the years (even during the campaign against the system of indenture in the early twentieth century) projected these women as morally lax, reckless individuals, which made them a target of malicious accusations (see Lal 1985; Reddock 1985; Niranjana 2006). This trend was strongly contested by later women scholars and also scholars of subaltern studies like Peter Emmer. They highlighted that migration through the system of indenture and the capacity of the indentured women to adapt, and respond to the rapidly evolving socio-economic conditions through education and economic opportunities had given them an opportunity to escape the exploitative situation in India, and also renegotiate gender roles and patriarchal structures.

A similar situation has been witnessed by the unskilled and semiskilled women migrating to Gulf countries in response to the gender-specific demand for labour. Although, in the present, the socio-economic conditions have undergone major change in terms of values, norms, stereotypes and gendered hierarchies, several of these factors have taken new forms of exploitation instead of getting annihilated. The so-called 'Gulf Wives' migrate according to the aspirations and parameters of their families, leaving behind the husband and children, with the consequential resultant experience of loneliness and emotional crisis in the new environment. Such a wife is deprived of a family life while, on the other hand, her children are deprived of proper maternal care (see Appadurai 2011; UNESCAP 2003). Yet the new generation is definitely more self-confident. Independent migrant females often find an outlet to their agency and thus experience empowerment in the process of migration as they contribute: directly to the economic development of their families, children and relatives and in turn, also to their countries of origin and destination. Women in India are also part of the highly skilled diaspora. Global economic opportunities and freedom for movement have provided these women space and empowerment. However they remain largely bound by the Indian family norms in the roles of wives and of mothers, at times even reproducing power relations in the family. Very often they are said to be carrying the burden of the 'respectable background' of Indian families and become the, so-called, 'symbolic capital of cultural superiority' (see Radhakrishnan 2011; Talukdar 2012). Yet, it cannot be denied that they do taste a new liberalism in a diasporic setting and exercise their agency for upward professional mobility. They are able to find—often—not one, but several wider scopes for social interaction, and opportunities to create new ties, new bonds—in the hostland—while still retaining their cultural roots of India.

It is clearly evident that in spite of many difficulties and constraints, the process of migration and the resultant diasporic conditions, still do offer women—new opportunities and financial independence in addition to the improved status within their homes and communities. Their encounters and contacts with other cultures also empower women by enabling them to become aware of their own repressive conditions, and exposing them to liberating notions of womanhood in different

nations. In this process of widening of vision, they also become active in taking up larger issues of women's liberation and gender equality and become catalysts of social change. Participating actively in 'transnational spaces' Indian women have also, now punctured into the male dominated transnational diaspora organizations. We see many contradictions as women encounter and negotiate with multiple conflicting situations from the public and the private spheres of both the homeland and the hostlands, in the process, shifting their perspectives from traditional to contemporary (see Thadani 1984; Pessar and Mahler 2003). It is a complex play, as the nostalgia and the sense of identity makes them adhere to, maybe cling to, Indian traditions and culture on the one hand but on the other diasporic spaces also provides them agency to flirt with new cultures and opportunities.

The twentieth-century scholarship on Diaspora Studies was slow and partial to take note of these perspectives, explore women's agency and the way they create their space in the diasporic conditions. The dominant thread in the discourses on Indian women diaspora was about women's role as agents and custodians of Indian culture, thus restricting them to subservient positions in society. The intention behind highlighting women's agency in this volume is not to undermine women's victimization in diasporic conditions but at the same time not to eulogise or enter into the politics of victimhood. Rather, I aspire to explore women's agency and the inventive tactics they develop to transform the lives of their own and those of their families holding on to tradition with one hand while also grasping change with the other.

This volume aims to bring into focus a range of less discussed, newly emergent or already recognised issues related to women in the Indian Diaspora. The essays included in the volume discuss women in the Indian Diaspora from a multidisciplinary perspective involving social, economic, cultural and political aspects. Overall this volume resists the portrayal of women in Indian Diaspora only as victims by emphasizing their agency. Such an effort will privilege women's experiences and perspectives by raising consciousness and developing a deeper understanding about their issues in academia and among policy makers.

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