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Diversities in the Indian Diaspora: Nature, Implications, Responses

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Book Reviews

JAYARAM N, (ed). 2011. *Diversities in the Indian Diaspora: Nature, Implications, Responses*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, pp 250.

The term *diaspora*, after much etymological confusion, has come to be used for a wide variety of migrant communities around the world. The Indian diaspora, too, has evolved into an overarching term, which includes several communities and a wide variety of people living outside India. However, such a broad-based interpretation in itself subsumes the idea of diversity, and problematises the whole notion of the Indian diaspora as a homogeneous unit either for policy-making or for the purposes of study. Also, diversity within the Indian diaspora can manifest several dimensions: for example, the history of migration, phases of migration, regional origin, religion, caste, and so forth.

The book under review sets out 'to problematise the study of the Indian diaspora by … [highlighting] the aspect of diversity'. Wrapped in an extremely colourful cover, representing the diversity of Indian society, it is a product of an international seminar organised by the Indian Institute of Advanced Studies (IIAS) at Shimla and the Institute for Social and Economic Change (ISEC) of Bangalore. It is divided into 5 parts and a total of 14 chapters. Aspects of diversity covered are regional origins, religion, country case studies, and gender. The introduction, by N. Jayaram, a well-known scholar of Indian diaspora studies, is an effort to theorise or conceptualise the diversity within the diaspora by emphasising some of the most interesting nuances in terms of phases, patterns, and processes of migration. Nevertheless, the diversity of the Indian diaspora is not only a representation of the heterogeneity in the phase, pattern, and process of migration or a reflection of diverse Indian social set-ups, but also emerges from the host country's own dynamics or the prevailing conditions in the 'new homes' where Indians settled. To quote the author, 'theoretically, 'the

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Indian diaspora' is a relativistic construct; empirically, it is heterogeneous in manifestation'.

Part I of the book consists of two chapters by Paramjit S. Judge and Ravindra K. Jain, respectively. The first essay, 'Diaspora from the Indian State: Punjab', brings to the fore the shades of diversity within the Punjabi diaspora, and tries to map them on the basis of the three regions of the Punjab (Majha, Doaba, and Malwa), phases of migration, religion, caste, and language. The highlight of the essay, however, is Judge's effort to situate the ideas of nationhood, nation-building, and separatism within this diversity. The author concludes that racial and cultural differences, and the difficulties of integration or assimilation in the host society, pave the way for longing and excessive concern for the motherland. In the initial stages, it was in the form of the anti-colonial struggle through movements like *Ghadhar*, and later in the form of nation-building and separatism. This is not to say that all Punjabis or Sikhs in the diaspora belong to the same category; they belong, in fact, to all typologies and form a very diverse group.

The second essay, 'From Product to Process: Sikhs in South East Asia', is concerned with host-country dynamics and the Sikh diaspora. It brings out the heterogeneity of the Sikh community based on region, caste, sub-sect affiliations and, more importantly, on the basis of country, class, and interaction with other Indian communities such as the Sindhis and Tamils. There are significant country-specific variations: for example, Singapore has a history of the valorisation of Sikhs by the British and, at present, the community is looked upon as a 'model minority', but in the Philippines they are considered as a kind of 'freak'. Overall, Sikhs have experienced huge economic mobility over the years (more than other Indian communities). The story of 'rags to riches' is common to the Sikh community; and Jain attributes it to what he calls, the 'thermostat', which is the Sikh resilience, adaptability, ability to coalesce, and co-operate with each other by coming to terms with local realities. Another highlight of the essay is the role of *Gurudwaras* in the socio-economic lives of Sikhs in different Southeast Asian countries.

Part II of the volume deals with locale-specific Indian diaspora and the locations covered are Malaysia, Mauritius, and the French overseas territories. The two essays on Malaysia (by T. Marimuthu and Amit Kumar Mishra) highlight the heterogeneity of the term 'Indian' (which has a generic usage and includes all South Asians), and also discuss the different state policies (on education/economy/culture and *Rakun Negara*/*BangsaMayasiya*/multiculturalism) which has kept the people of Indian origin at the periphery of the overall developmental process in Malaysia. The

Indian diaspora in Malaysia mostly originates from the indentured labour period, or what has been termed the 'old diaspora'. Thus, the majority of Indians are from the labour class, but business and professional people are also present in significant numbers. Moreover, although it is the third largest ethnic community in Malaysia, Indians are divided on class, caste, linguistic, and religious lines — a situation which the Malaysian state has exploited for its own interests. Both essays discuss the problems and alienation faced by Indians in Malaysia, as well as the internal differences within the community. The focus, however, is on the evolution of the Indian community in Malaysia against the backdrop of the preferential, pro-Malay policies of the state. Mishra goes on to conclude that people 'with histories of displacement and loss', and who become 'victims of ongoing structured prejudices and discrimination …, cannot be assuaged by imposing a chauvinistic national identity'.

The two essays on Mauritius, the first by Vinesh Y. Hookoomsing, and the second by Chandrashekhar Bhatt and T.L.-S. Bhaskar, complement each other to a large extent and speak of the history of the Indian arrival in Mauritius, along with the diversity within the Mauritian Indian community which is mainly linguistic-based: 'Hindoos' (Hindi- and Bhojpuri-speaking), Tamils, and Telugus (who, too, are mainly Hindus). Indians were brought to Mauritius in the eighteenth century, first by the French as artisans for construction work, and then by the British as convicts (to serve their sentences) and, finally, as indentured labourers. Some free-passage Indians, mostly Gujaratis, also arrived later. Early migration and settlement promoted an identity free from caste, language, and religion. But, subsequently, a revival of religious and linguistic identities resulted from the British policy of 'divide and rule', and the rise of a politically powerful Hindi-speaking, Hindu elite. Developments inside India, such as partition and language-based provincial divisions, also served as push factors for the stronger emergence of ethno-religious and linguistic identities. However, the idea of 'Chota Bharat' (as Mauritius is sometimes referred to) is more of an 'ideological construct, symbolising an idealised motherland' rather than anything else.

The essay by J.-C. Sharma is about a group of people who is not often the focus of discussion: the francophone Indian diaspora, settled in the French overseas island territories of Réunion (in the Indian Ocean), and Guadeloupe and Martinique (in the West Indies). These territories are now regarded as overseas *departments* of France, with French as the official language, the euro as its currency, and all inhabitants being French citizens. The majority of Indians in these islands belong to the indentured labour category and their experiences are not too different from indentured

labourers in Mauritius, Fiji, and other such countries. Réunion has many Gujarati merchants, who went there as free-passage Indians to do business. The most interesting narration in this essay is of survival, revival, and the hybridisation of Indian cultural and religious traditions in the face of an aggressive assimilation policy by the French government, including an all-out attempt at conversion to Christianity. In the recent past, however, with growing connectivity to India, the people of Indian origin have experienced a reinvention and reassertion of their Indian identity.

Part III of the book deals with religion: the three essays are on Jews (by Ginu Zacharia Oommen), Jains (by Prakash C Jain), and Hinduism (by Kamala Ganesh). The first essay is on the Cochini Jew diaspora in India; they have moved back to Israel, and their case appears to be an interesting one of what is known as 'double diasporisation'. The essay is based on field-work conducted in Israel. Cochini Jews are divided into two groups: the Pardesis, who migrated to India in the fifteenth century; and the Malabaris, who moved to Cochin some 2000 years ago. In contrast to what happened in some other countries, Jews in India lived in relative peace and harmony. Consequently, they still have fond memories of India and maintain elements of their Cochini culture and identity even after migrating back to Israel. Interestingly, Jews migrating back to Israel from all over the world, apart from their socio-cultural practices, differ in religious traditions as well — and so do Cochini Jews. However, they are a marginalised community in Israel, and have also become 'victims of general Israeli ignorance and stereotyp[ing]'; as one of the field-study respondents has been quoted as saying: 'In India I was a Jew, and in Israel I am an Indian.'

The essay on the Jain diaspora by P.C. Jain is a complete commentary on this community in the diaspora. It provides a broad and region-wide profile of the Jain diaspora in terms of migration patterns, population estimates, economic status, sectarian composition, and socio-cultural activities. The Jains in the diaspora — as they are inside India — is a prosperous community, and their belief in the doctrines of *Syadvad* and *Anekantvad* has inculcated a sense of peaceful co-existence and a tolerant attitude in them. Jain migration, both during and after the colonial period, has been prompted mostly by trade, business and commerce, and their involvement in other professions. Although the history of the Jain diaspora is quite old, for a very long time were regarded as part of the overall Hindu diaspora. The assertion of Jains as a separate diasporic community is a recent phenomenon, becoming more apparent over the last 30 years or so. This reassertion of Jain identity is not quite unique, as within the Hindu diaspora too, there has been an upsurge in expressions of other identities, one of which is the caste identity.

The essay by Kamala Ganesh on Hinduism introduces caste as a source of diversity in the Hindu diaspora. While it is true that Indians have carried socio-cultural baggage with them wherever they went, they nevertheless developed their own forms when encountering new situations, as some elements were retained while others were recreated. Ganesh's essay is based on a survey of Brahmins in North America and the discussion covers four aspects: the personal views of individuals, the function of caste associations, temple-building activity, and guru-based charismatic sects.

Part IV of the volume is on gender and identity (by Aparna Rayaprol and Vijay Agnew). Both the subjects are emerging as important fields of research in diaspora and migration studies. Rayaprol problematises overarching terms like Asian-Americans (as described in the US census) by pointing out that within it there are also other (different) group identities like the Chinese, Japanese, Hispanics, and so forth. Initially, women were subsumed in these overarching terms, but an upsurge in feminist scholarship in migration studies brought their issues from the margins to the centre. However, Rayaprol goes further in criticising the essentialisation of gender as a homogeneous category regardless of differences in class, race, ethnicity, and religion, and calls for an analysis of women's issues in terms of 'concrete historical experiences and political practices'. She explains how these generalisations affect US government policies: for example, battered women programmes failed to understand the psyche of South Asian women and accommodate their requirements. To quote Rayaprol: '… the assumption that women are a coherent group with homogeneous interests, problems and desires, regardless of differences in class, ethnic and racial origins or religion, implies … that gender as a category can be applied universally'.

The essay by Agnew is based on first-hand experiences in Canada. The issue of identity is closely related to the existence of diasporic communities. She focuses on identity construction in the diaspora, which is different for different generations, and situates it in the context of race and the stereotypical portrayal of India. She explains that 'the journey, the process, moulds and shapes who we are as … individual[s] and [as] a collective'.

Part V, the conclusion by N. Jayaram titled 'Heterogeneous Diaspora and Asymmetrical Orientations', instead of being concluding remarks in the conventional sense, actually provides a detailed typology of the Indian diaspora in a tabulated format. The essay also discusses the orientation of the diaspora towards India and Indians, on the one hand, and of India and Indians towards the diaspora, on the

other hand. To quote the author: '… there is [still] a long way to go before we could confidently theorise the Indian diaspora; what is important is to unravel as many aspects of diversity as we can, from as many perspectives as we can, so that in due course we will have sufficient building blocks of data and conclusions to build a theory upon'.

The problem that this book faces, like several other volumes on the Indian diaspora in recent times, is that it tries to be too many things at the same time — yet, not being able to cover even a fraction of the vast array of diversities in the Indian diaspora. Taking one aspect at a time could have fashioned it into a more coherent read. Nonetheless, the book is a great collection of essays and will prove valuable for students and scholars from various disciplines, from sociology, anthropology, history, and politics to gender studies, religious studies, culture studies, and diaspora studies. Also, all the chapters contain extensive reference and reading lists for further study.

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GALLYA LAHAV, 2004. *Immigration and Politics in the New Europe: Reinventing Borders,* New York, Cambridge University Press, pp 334, 5600 INR, ISBN 0521828147, 9780521828147

This book qualifies as a must-read from two perspectives: first, it is an exciting and informative read for those interested in immigration issues, in general, and immigration in Europe, in particular; second, it serves as a valuable guide and departure point for students of research methodology. The volume is a systematic attempt at addressing the issue of immigration, which has occupied centre stage in public debates in Europe over the last couple of years.

The realisation of a single-market Europe, with freedom of movement of goods, services, labour and capital between member states of the European Union (EU), is one of the fundamental, founding principles of the union. As a result, immigration in