
Emerging Dynamics of Diaspora Studies: A Literary Perspective

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Abstract

Diaspora study is an emerging academic discipline covering different aspects of traditional subjects. The term Diaspora was first used in the Jews context but in our generation, it is applied to any migrant community retaining specific features of motherland in the place of their current settlement. Diasporas are an important segment of international relations and we see creation of huge literature dealing with this. Theories of international relations pay adequate attention on the Diaspora factor in bilateral and multilateral relations between states. Those have often been studied as non-state actor and a 'soft power' tool of diplomacy. These communities have also been an important matter of governance at local as well as at global level which has resulted in the evolution of the concept of 'Diaspora Governance'. This article analyses literary perspectives of emerging dynamics in Diaspora Studies.

Keywords

Diaspora Governance, Diaspora Studies, Motherland, Nation-state, Soft Power.

Acknowledgement

This research article is product of ICSSR funded project (under IMPRESS Scheme) on 'Migrant and Diasporic Communities in the Agenda of Global Governance: Opportunities and Challenges for India. Author is highly indebted to the ICSSR for providing financial support to carry out research project.

Introduction

History has witnessed tremendous migration of man, material and ideas since the beginning of the human civilization. Advent of the practice of colonialism accelerated this process and people moved from one place to another sometime by choice but mostly due to compulsions. Millions of people were transported from Africa under the inhuman practice of slavery. After abolition of slavery, system of indentureship was introduced in the nineteenth century and victims of this 'new form of slavery' were mostly Indians and Chinese. During the two World Wars a huge migration occurred at

global scale and thereafter many waves of human voyage have been approaching time to time. It is a matter of fact that whenever human migrate, they carry their socio-cultural baggage with themselves and make significant imprints in the place of their new destiny as well as in homeland. Thus, we see gigantic literature created on the matter covering various academic disciplines. In our generation such discourse has been studied under the rubric of Diaspora. This article aims to study literary perspectives of emerging dynamics of Diaspora studies with a significant thrust on India.

Expanding Ambit of Diaspora

Etymologically, the term ‘diaspora’ derived from the Greek term diaspeirein, in which dia means ‘across’ and -speirein, means ‘to sow or scatter seeds.’ Initially, it referred to the dispersal of Jewish community from Jerusalem and used in Israeli context. So, debates over the theoretical, cultural, and historical resonances of the term were largely confined to its application on particularly Jews community residing in different parts of the world. The Oxford English Dictionary (1989) traces the etymology of "Diaspora," back to its Greek root and mentions its appearance in the Old Testament with reference God's intentions for the people of Israel to be "dispersed" across the world. Although even since 1970s scholars began using the term ‘Diaspora’ to study in the global context. John A. Armstrong (1976) brought Diaspora in the discourses of Political Science through “Mobilized and Proletarian Diasporas” arguing that these groups are making ‘multiethnic polities’ in the hostland. The Irish diaspora in America (1976) by Lawrence John McCaffrey studied Irish community in America using this concept. The concept was also used by several scholars to study African, Chinese and other communities residing outside their homelands. M.J. Esman (2009) in *Diasporas in the Contemporary World* refers that the concept was frequently used by Van Hear to study Mexican living in the United States of America; Munz and Ohliger to study migrants from the defunct Soviet Union, including Russians in Israel; and authors in the Routledge series to study the contemporary Sikh, the Italian, the Israeli, the Hindu and the Ukrainians living abroad.

So, in the later phase of twentieth century the term Diaspora gained acceptance to describe any particular community residing outside political boundaries of their original habitation having certain elements of identity retention brought from motherland. Domain of migration and Diaspora has attracted scholars of various fields-literature, sociology, anthropology, film studies, queer theory, area studies, ethnic studies, geography, political science, international relations, governance and so on. Further, studies conducted by governments of nation-states, regional and multilateral organizations as well as global institutions have also contributed to the growth of migration and Diaspora studies. This has resulted in generation of vast literature in the domain.

Features of Diaspora

Now, the term Diaspora is used to describe ‘ethnic minority groups of migrant origin residing and acting in host countries but maintaining strong sentimental and material links with their countries of origin – their homelands. International Organization of Migration defines Diasporas as “migrants or descendants of migrants, whose identity and sense of belonging have been shaped by their migration experience and background”. (Glossary on Migration, 2019). In his editorial preface to the first issue of Diaspora, Khachig Tololian writes, "the term (Diaspora) that once described Jewish, Greek, and Armenian dispersion now shares meanings with a larger semantic domain that includes words like immigrant, expatriate, refugee, guest-worker, exile community, overseas community, ethnic community"(1991: 4-5). Encyclopaedia of Diasporas gives a very broad and liberal definition of Diaspora, “a people dispersed by whatever cause to more than one location. The people dispersed to different lands may harbour thoughts of return, may not fully assimilate to their host countries, and may maintain relationship with other communities in the Diaspora” (Melvin, Ember & Skoggard, 2005: xxvi). Vertovec considers diaspora to be any “imagined community living away from a professed place of origin” (2009: 5). Migration Data Portal prescribes five essential features to qualify diaspora groups-

1. Migration: Migration from a country of origin in search of work, trade or to escape conflict or persecution.
2. Collective Memory: An idealized collective memory and/or myth about the ancestral home.
3. Connection: A continuing connection to a country of origin.
4. Group Consciousness: A strong group consciousness sustained over time.
5. Kinship: A sense of kinship with diaspora members in other countries (Migration Data Portal).

Diaspora Literature and Theories of International Relations

Academic deliberations on transnational aspects of Diaspora were began in 1991 with the launch of Diaspora: A Journal of Transnational Studies by University of Toronto. William Safran, in his article “Diaspora’s in modern societies: myths of homeland and return” (1991) considered Diaspora a matrotrophic designation to describe different categories of people- expatriates, expellees, political refugees, alien residents, immigrants, and ethnic and racial minorities. Khachig Tölölyan in “The Nation-State and Its Others: In Lieu of a Preface” (1991) brands Diaspora ‘a transnational

community in the age of nation-state'. In past thirty years of its existence the journal has produced substantial literature in the domain mostly dealing with role of migrant and Diasporic communities in shaping international relations.

Robin Cohen in his article "Diasporas and the Nation-State: From Victims to Challengers" (1996) argues that modern Diaspora is an outcome of victimization of people, a large number of persons from Asia and Africa were forced to leave their usual habitations and were transported to unknown places in extremely difficult circumstances. With the collective memories and continuous linkages of homeland descendants of those people are posing major challenge to the nation-state itself. In his seminal work *Global Diasporas: An Introduction* (1997 and 2008), Cohen attempts to conceptualize, categorize and analyze the notion of Diaspora at global scale. He identifies four broad phases of Diaspora studies from latter part of twentieth century to first decade of twenty-first century. He also provides categorization of Diaspora using Max Weberian conception of ideal types.

Judith T. Shuval, in his study on "Diaspora Migration: Definitional Ambiguities and a Theoretical Paradigm" (2000) have established a set of parameters for analyzing Diasporic communities. Gabriel Sheffer in *Diaspora Politics: At Home Abroad* (2003) opines that in the post-cold war era by using various strategies and by forming organizations Diaspora groups are actively participating in political matters on one hand and negotiating their interests on the other not only with host countries but also with home countries, gradually becoming the global actors in the political arena.

Shain Y. & Barth A. in "Diasporas and International Relations Theory" (2003) discuss how Diasporas as independent actors actively influence the homeland foreign policies. Diasporas as an ethnic lobby in the hostland advocate for the foreign policy of the homeland. Though, Diasporas are increasingly able to promote transnational ties and act as bridges between homeland and hostland those can also lead to destructive acts. Yossi Shain in *Kinship & Diasporas in International Affairs* (2007) examines role of Diasporas in international relations and considers them as independent actors highly influential in the making of foreign policies in the 'kin-state (homeland). His work analyzes capabilities of Diaspora in conflict perpetuation or resolution in the context of Nation-States; financial flows and their impact on national identity; and transnational religion and the struggle for Jewish Pluralism to explain place of Diaspora in international relations. Author concludes that in the theoretical paradigm of international relations Diaspora can be placed in the constructivist and liberal credence whereas both approaches provides space for acknowledgement of identity in domestic politics as well as international behaviour.

Soft Power Dimensions of Diaspora

Joseph Nye in *Bound to Lead* (1990) proposed the term 'Soft Power' to study elements of international relations having thrust on the aspects of cooperation instead of coercion. This term became very popular among the current generation of scholars in Diaspora studies. J. S. Nye in *Soft power: The means to success in world politics* (2004) analyzed the concept of soft power and concluded that in the present information age, states are likely to successfully gain soft power those whose cultures, political ideals or norms are closer to the prevailing norms across the globe. Author argues that apart from the USA, India and China are potential nations having tremendous scope of soft power at global scale. G. M. Gallarotti in "Soft power: what it is, why it is important, and the conditions for its effective use" (2011) argues that in the age of rapid technological advancements lives of the people are witnessing fast transformation and determinants of power in international politics have also changed accordingly. Today's globalized modern world is evolving into a "softer world" and soft power is a decisive factor in augmenting influence over global consequences. According to author, soft power represents a form of meta-power i.e. the shaping of social relationships, social structures and situations by altering the conditions and orientations within which social action occurs and by facilitating others and thereby, influence the outcomes.

Diaspora groups have been recognized as essential component of soft power, particularly in case of India and China. Stephe P. Cohen in his book *India: Emerging Power* (2004) argues that India which was conventionally seen in USA for its inherent weaknesses has acquired a new face in the past twenty years, because of the noticeable presence of the Indian communities and phenomenal achievements in the US which has created a positive image of India having a perpetual impact on the relationship between the two countries. Thussu, D. Kishan in *Communicating India's Soft Power: Buddha to Bollywood* (2013), examines India's achievements in the age of globalization and concludes that the first two decades of globalization have facilitated the global expansion of western culture and consumer culture. Author argues that the second decade of present century is endorsing growing visibility, volume and value of cultural products from India. Now the Indian ideas are reaching almost every corner of the world, this is largely through the increasingly active and visible 25 million strong Indian diasporas residing almost every corner of the world making substantial contribution to India's growth story.

H. Lai & Y. Lu in the edited volume *China's Soft Power and International Relations* (2012) provides theoretical and empirical perspectives on the various issues about China's rising soft power, comprising foreign policy discourse, public and cultural diplomacy, international communication,

and foreign aid. C. Li and H. Xiao in “Chinese Diaspora as People of Their Own Countries and Chinese Philosophy as World Philosophy” (2013) discusses contributions of Chinese immigrant thinkers’ in disseminating Chinese philosophy on a world stage and especially in North America to make it a world philosophy. They argue that migration of Chinese people in different parts of the world is not merely a demographic phenomenon but also a cultural phenomenon because these migrants when move they do not move alone but carry their culture along with them and wherever they go they spread Chinese culture there. S. Ding in the article “Engaging Diaspora via Charm Offensive and Indigenised Communication: An Analysis of China’s Diaspora Engagement Policies in the Xi Era” (2015) argues that China’s haunted image at the international level due to its poor record of human rights and its assertiveness in its foreign policy matters can be reshaped by proactively engaging its Diaspora.

Diaspora Governance

Contemporary scholarship on Diaspora engagement argues that concepts of ‘public diplomacy’, ‘Diaspora diplomacy’ or ‘soft power’ merely explains state-led initiatives ignoring crucial elements of other elements- family networks, community organizations, religious grids and so on. Thus, those prefer to use the term ‘Diaspora Governance’. Alen Gamlen in his article “Diaspora Governance” (2014) explains meaning, definition, nature and uses of the term Diaspora governance. In the World Bank sponsored study on Working Definitions of 'Diaspora' used in Migrants' States of Origin (2014), C. McIntyre, E. Jacoby & A. Gamlen explores uses of the term Diaspora in 130 member states of the United Nations. The study reveals that about two third surveyed states have evolved the mechanism to govern migrant and Diasporic communities. In another article on “Explaining the Rise of Diaspora Institutions” (2019), A. Gamlen, M.E. Cummings & P.M. Vaaler examines phenomenal growth in the evolution of Diaspora institutions at global scale between 1980 to 2014. Robin Cohen and Carolin Fischer in and edited volume Routledge Handbook of Diaspora Studies (2019) attempts to study status of Diaspora studies, complexities of Diasporic groups, their potentials in the involvement of the affairs of homeland- ways and means and finally deals with the critiques and applied Diaspora studies.

At institutional level, the World Migration Report published annually by International Organization for Migration (IOM) is considered most authentic document for statistical information on trends and scale of migration. In 2006, the World Bank under the WBI Development Studies brought an edited volume Diaspora Networks and the International Migration of Skills-How Countries Can Draw on Their Talent Abroad. Edited by Yevgeny Kuznetsov, the volume consists of 11 chapters divided

into 4 parts. Authors of this volume examines analytical framework and major policy issues with regard to mature Diaspora networks in mature groups and emerging groups to suggest a model for development network. Authors of this series kept India in the mature Diaspora network category. Publication of the policy document on Global Governance and Global Rules for Development in the Post-2015 Era (2014) by United Nations brought the agenda of migration and governance in the global discourses. The Migration Governance Framework published by IOM explores interlinkages between international migration and development with the three basic principles leading to three objectives. IOM also brought a document- Migration and the 2030 Agenda- A Guide for Practitioners (2018) that analyzes goals, targets and required actions of SDGs directly or indirectly linked with migration. Catherine Ruth Craven in Thinking About Governance Through Diasporas: Decentering the State and Challenging the External/Internal Binary (2018) considers Diasporas as powerful and sometimes contentious actors with a complex impact on global political processes. Author believes that in the present generation whereas non-state actors are increasingly seen as important drivers of international relations, governance measures at the national and global level are required. As an effort to formulate standard operating procedures to conduct study on Diaspora related issues and evolve research methodology for the discipline IOM has recently released The Diaspora Mapping Toolkit (2022). It is based on IOM's rich experience of over 150 diaspora mappings implemented in different contexts.

Diaspora in Indian Context

In Indian context, although the term Diaspora came in use recent studies Indians living abroad have been in the forefront in academic discussions since the beginning of the twentieth century. Initial works on Indians living abroad were focused on particular clusters like East Africa, South Africa, Fiji, America, countries of Caribbean and so on. Such works include- "Indians in British East Africa" (Andrews, 1920), "Indians in Kenya," (Das, 1927), "Indians in East Africa" (Desai, 1920), Fiji Dwip Me Mere 21 Varsh (Totaram Sanadhya, Reprint 1972) etc. C. Kondapi in his Indians Overseas 1838-1949 (1951) made one of the earliest effort to record a comprehensive information on Indians living abroad. Similar efforts were made by I.M. Composston in the book Indian Overseas in British Territories (1969) in the context of Indians living in the countries of British subjugation. H. Tinker examined the practice of indentureship in India and its applications through A New System of Slavery: The Export of Indian Labour Overseas 1830-1920 (1974). Indians Abroad: Asia and Africa (1971)- a seminar proceeding edited by Prof. Anirudh Gupta tries to asses socio-economic conditions and preservation of cultural identities of Indians living abroad with

special attention on Asian and African region. P.C. Jain in his article “Emigration and Settlement of Indians Abroad” (1989) highlighted various waves of migration and settlement of Indian communities abroad.

The edited volume *Global Indian Diaspora: Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow* (Motwani et al., 1993) published by GOPIO was the first ever effort to study past, present and future of Indian community residing abroad from their own perspectives. Authors of this volume were generally aware and experienced of the regions/countries and provided real insights. The Report of High Level Committee on Indian Diaspora (2001) was an sincere effort to compile history of Indians living abroad, study their present status, assess their problems in the hostland and convey expectations from motherland. Under the chairmanship of L.M. Singhvi the committee prepared a detailed report containing 38 chapters each dedicated to specific theme. It estimated the strength of Indian Diaspora about 20 million and suggested many policy measures to strengthen mutual engagements of India and her Diaspora. This report laid the foundations of the new era of India in terms of Diaspora policy.

Ajay Dubey in his edited volume *Indian Diaspora Global Identity* (2003) examines global identity of Indian Diaspora. Contributors of this volume study presence of Indian Diaspora in different countries and highlights history of migration and settlement with the adequate focus on identity retention aspects. Fahmida Ashraf in the article “Indian Diaspora: Projecting India’s Image” (2005) explains importance of Indian Diaspora for India through various examples. An accurate analysis has also been presented on how the attitude of the Government of India towards its Diaspora has been in history, and how it has changed in the present. This article also throws light on the geographical or global dispersion of the Indian Diaspora, which shows the number of people of Indian origin in other countries and what kind of role they are playing. Along with this, the author has described Hindutva as a major factor in relation to Diaspora engagement. L.N. Kadekar in his research monograph on *Global Indian Diaspora: An Overview*, (2005) provides the historical perspectives of migration and settlement of Indians in different periods. Author makes a detailed assessment of migration in the colonial period as indenture labours besides making profile of Indians living in different regions. Brij V. Lal in *The Encyclopedia of the Indian Diaspora* refers to the gloomy picture of the Indian Diaspora living in different parts of the world. It studies immigration from India in different phases from the age of colonialism to present day and narrate success stories Indians in different regions in the domain of economy, polity, culture and so on. Gijssbert Oonk in his book *Global Indian Diasporas: Exploring Trajectories of Migration and Theory*

(2007) gives an account of migration from the South Asian region since ages and provides general idea about the Indians in abroad and their wish to connect to their homeland and how few are not interested in re-connecting with the homeland. It clarifies that Indians abroad do not so much identify with India as a nation but with the 'homeland', that is, the specific region where the migrants – or their descendants come from.

Shashi Tharoor, in his article "India as soft power" (2008) states, "the associations and attitudes conjured up in the global imagination by the mere mention of a country's name is often a more accurate gauge of its soft power than a dispassionate analysis of its foreign policies". He argues that a country's soft power emerges from the world's perceptions of what that country is all about or in other words one can say that what other countries think about that country or what type of picture comes into the mind of the people of the different countries' when the name of that country is mentioned. The links and outlooks made up in the global imagination by the mere mention of a country's name are often a more accurate device of its soft power than an objective analysis of its foreign policies. J. E. Hymans in the article "India's Soft Power and Vulnerability" (2009) describes the recent rise of the Indian soft power as the fourth element by using the term 'boy next door' to the large and highly successful Indian Community in the USA. Author states that despite of a small segment in the total population of the USA, Indian-Americans have shown impressive economic performance. Those have also refuted the stereotypes, which were attached to Indians as naturally apathetic or inactive. Author concludes that after finding a new social position, Indian Americans have also begun to exercise a stronger political voice.

Darvesh Kapur in his book *Diaspora, Development, and Democracy: The Domestic Impact of International Migration from India* (2010) analyses role of Indian citizens residing abroad in the development process of India. He highlights notable contribution of Indians in terms of transferring money through remittances. Author believes that Indian Diaspora has become an inevitable partner in the development process of India. Latha Varadarajan in the book *The Domestic Abroad-Diasporas in International Relations* (2010) refers overseas Indians as Domestic Abroad and states that with the phenomenal success those have really become Global Indians. Author argues that it is not only the remittances but Indian community residing abroad has made tremendous contributions in many other ways. It also examines efforts of Indian government to engage her diaspora especially in the twenty-first century. A.D. Singh in his work entitled *Working with the Diaspora for Development Policy Perspectives from India* (2012) examines recent policy initiatives of India for engaging Diaspora. His work pays substantial attention on role of Diasporic communities in the

development of India. Mohan Kant Gautam in *Indian Diaspora: Ethnicity and Diasporic Identity* (2013) assess the issues of ethnicity and identity among Indian Diaspora and argues that identity element in 'old Diaspora' are stronger than of 'new Diaspora'. The *Routledge Handbook of The Indian Diaspora*, (2018) edited by Radha Sarma Hegde and Ajaya Kumar Sahoo makes an overview of Indian Diaspora in current scenario. It is divided into six parts- first part deals historical aspects of migration, second part provides analysis of Diaspora and infrastructure, third part takes up the cultural dynamics, fourth part analyses issues of representation and identity, fifth part examines the politics of belonging and last part of the book scrutinizes aspects of networked subjectivities and transnationalism. Vidhan Pathak in his article 'Indian Diaspora and Sangh Pariwar: A Study of HSS' Role' (2019) study the global networking of Sangh Pariwar through various organizations and associations, especially through HSS. He believes that these efforts are strengthening India's engagement with Diaspora. Ramakrushna Pradhan & Atanu Mohapatra in their article 'India's Diaspora Policy: Evidence of Soft Power Diplomacy under Modi' (2020) study the evolution of Diaspora policy in India and argues that concrete efforts towards Diaspora were not done before the government of Shri Atal Bihari Vajpayee ji in later 1990s. Further, authors believes that Modiji has truly recognized the potentials of Indian Diaspora as Soft Power diplomatic tools.

Ajit Doval in his article, 'Tackling Adversaries through Strong and Effective National Security Policies' (2022) analyzes policies of Modi government regarding ensuring national security. He emphasizes that personal convictions of Shri Narendra Modiji honourable Prime Minister of India about India's spiritual and civilizational roots that envisages the 'world as a family' (vasudhaiva kutumbkam) and 'happiness for all' (serve bhavantu sukhinah) are integral part of his policymaking. This has helped him win the faith of the people including the Indian Diaspora. Further, he argues that strong and effective policy measures of current government like neutralization of large numbers of terrorist modules, steps to provide justice to the victims of the 1984 anti-Sikh riots, dialogue with Indians residing in the Gulf region etc. have made positive impact on Indian Diaspora. Manoj Ladwa and Bharat Barai in their article 'The Emergence of a Global Phenomenon' discusses close association of Shri Narendra Modiji with Indian Diaspora in early 1990s when NRIs were labelled as 'Not Required Indians'. Authors argues that he has recognized Indians living abroad as 'brain grain' and 'living bridge' and Diaspora has equally responded by making his visits to USA, UK, South Africa and elsewhere mega events by attending in huge numbers. It had helped in image branding of India and emergence of Modiji as most popular leader of the world. S. Jaishankar, in his article 'Foreign Policy: Vision and Achievements' (2022) argues that Indian Diaspora has been an integral part of the foreign policy of Prime Minister

Modiji and in his every foreign visit he meets Indians living abroad. To get real insights on Indians living in the UAE and Qatar he has visited labour camps, expanded the usage of the Indian Community Welfare Fund and ensured help to them at the time of crisis and distress.

Conclusion

Migration is an inevitable human nature and people have been crossing political boundaries since ages. During colonialism people were compelled to migrate and settle in far plung areas to serve interests of their colonial masters. In the modern age people are moving largely in search of better life opportunities. Nevertheless, this process makes significant imprints in the various facets of human life. There has been flood of literature in different disciplines dealing with causes and consequences of migration and settlement of human being. Initially, attached with the settlement of Jews, the term Diaspora has become a fashionable expression for communities residing outside their homeland. Diaspora has been studied in various traditional disciplines and in our generation, it has evolved as an multidisciplinary domain. The realm of international relations is not untouched with the concept of Diaspora and significant literature is developed in past five decades making deep impacts in the theoretical aspects of the subject. Now, Diaspora is seen as a popular non-state actor in international relations having huge potentials of soft power in the diplomatic arena. Similarly, Diaspora Governance has emerged a critical matter in bilateral, multilateral and global negotiations. Being one of the most powerful nations in the world in terms of Diasporic strength, India has a strong tradition of Diaspora Studies. However, there have been different phrases used to study Indian communities living abroad and it was only in 1990s when the term Diaspora began getting popularity in Indian academic discourses. After the constitution of High Level Committee on Indian Diaspora by Government of India in 2000, the term got official recognition and now the Diaspora Studies is flourishing in India and we see development of huge literature covering various academic domains.

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