



Circulation of Cultures and Culture of Circulation

**Diasporic Cultures of South Asia During
18th to 20th Centuries**

Editor
Sanjay Garg

SAARC CULTURAL CENTRE - SRI LANKA



South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation

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**SAARC Cultural Centre,
Sri Lanka
2014**

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ISBN 978-955-0567-12-6

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Preface

SAARC is one of the most diverse regions of the world. It is rich both in tangible and intangible cultural heritage. The region possesses a highly influential diasporic community that impacts cultures globally, and we could identify many cultural strands that have been transferred through the migrants from country to country. These cultural strands have tremendous potential to be used strategically for the benefit of the people of the Member States of the SAARC.

Understanding the crucial role played by the diasporic cultures in the region; considering the fact that the South Asian region is highly influenced by the diasporic movements; noting the timely and significant need to initiate dialogue on the diasporic cultures and its impact for human development; and believing in the possibilities of building peace and harmony through intercultural understanding of the diasporic communities, the SAARC Cultural Centre has initiated a series of activities focusing on diasporic cultures of South Asia, including, organising of a SAARC Regional Conference on 'Diasporic Cultures of South Asia during eighteenth to twentieth centuries', at Galle (Sri Lanka) (15-17 March 2012), and commissioning eight research projects by the scholars from the region, for probing different facets of this theme. These initiatives are a new attempt to use the crucial role of culture in bringing people of South Asia closer, to promote people-to-people contact, and cultural cooperation as directed by the SAARC Agenda for Culture.

It is my pleasure to present this volume which covers a period of three centuries which was the most active period of migration of people within and outside the region. I thank all the

contributors of this monograph for their valuable contribution. I am sure that the research findings on the diasporic cultures of the SAARC region presented in this volume would be found useful by the Governments of the Member States in laying out new approaches towards the development strategies that will help them to exchange material and moral benefits and create cultural integration among peoples. The findings will also contribute towards developing dialogue between cultures and interaction amongst civilisations in South Asia.

G.L.W. Samarasinghe,
Director, SAARC Cultural Centre

Introduction

Sanjay Garg

From the earliest times human beings have been avid itinerants. Our ancestors, who lived a nomadic life, opted to migrate due to various reasons from mere climatic changes to tribal conflicts. However, even the very earlier forms of migration compelled them to assimilate with the host environments for their survival and sustainability. With the advancement of technology the term migration has assumed many forms and interpretations and the idea of migration has taken myriad shapes, presenting itself in many forms.

Migration included not only the movements of people but also the movement of their cultures and knowledge systems. For example, old literary texts such as *Jataka Tales* and the *Panchatantra* themselves are stories of migration or the earliest work of travel outside their original abodes. These stories were carried by the people from the land of their origin to other territories and societies. Legends, stories, fables circulated like the human beings, spices, ivory, or gems and took root in the land of their destinations, formed their own versions of the story, but maintained the essence of the original version. Thus, the traces of literary texts such as that of the *Panchatantra* can be traced in literary works such as *Arabian Nights*, *Canterbury Tales*, and in *The Fables of La Fontaine*, etc. In fact, migration has been a major factor in human development, and the 'history of the world includes remarkable stories of migration in every era' (Manning 2005: 1).

Historically, the South Asian region constitutes an extended cultural zone which has contributed tremendously in practically all fields of human endeavour. Its pluralistic, multi-layered and

often overlapping ethos is manifested in the region's dresses, cuisine, customs, religions, traditions, rituals, languages, scripts and many other socio-cultural spheres, all unfolding within a greater cultural space. The region has served both as a melting pot as well as a fulcrum for the circulation of men and goods, ideas and cultures, money and material across the globe and today it boasts of the largest share in the world's diasporic population. This itinerant populace of South Asia have also served as the unnamed and unsung cultural ambassadors, not only within the region but also across the globe.

Thus when we see this region in the historical context of migration, circulation and diaspora formation, the debate becomes very pronounced when it comes to three centuries of colonial rule – roughly from the beginning of the eighteenth to the middle of the twentieth century. This was a period of great political turmoil in the region. It saw both the consolidation as well as collapse of a number of colonial powers and also the fructification of liberal and democratic aspirations of its people. This period also witnessed an unprecedented surge in the migration of South Asian workers to other colonial settlements across the globe. All these factors influenced and shaped the diasporic cultures of the region. During the colonial period a large populace of South Asians was traded as slaves by Portuguese, Dutch, French and English imperialists. They were taken to various countries as indentured labourers to develop plantation economies, construct railway networks and to serve as soldiers in the imperial military establishments. Large numbers of traders and professionals also accompanied these labourers and soldiers.

After their independence of India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, and later also of Bangladesh, the first set of scholars and academics

that came out from the universities of these South Asian countries migrated to the western countries for advanced studies and research and thus created a new form of diaspora in the modern period.

Thus, the problematics of diaspora and colonialism, together with the role of post-colonial forces in re-defining the dialectics of South Asian diaspora is what lies at the core of this volume which examines different aspects of diasporic cultures of South Asia in their historical perspective.

I

In the academic discourse the term ‘diaspora’ gained momentum with the introduction of the new phenomenon called globalisation induced neo-economic global agendas. Literally this term emanates from the root ‘to disperse.’ Etymologically, this word is of Greek origin. It is derived from two Greek words *dia* (through or over) and *speiro* (dispersal or sow) which means ‘scattering or sowing of seeds.’ However, it has meant different things to different people at different times. The ancient Greeks used this term to refer to citizens of a grand city who migrated to a conquered land with the purpose of colonisation to assimilate the territory into the empire. When the Old Testament was translated into Greek, the word diaspora was used to refer specifically to the populations of Jews exiled from Judea in 586 BCE by the Babylonians, and Jerusalem in 136 ACE by the Roman Empire. This term is used interchangeably to refer to the historical movements of the dispersed ethnic population of Israel as well as culture of that population.

The term has been used in its modern sense since the mid-twentieth century. Since 1960s the word diaspora has come to represent various kinds of population forced or induced to leave

their traditional ethnic homelands; being dispersed throughout other parts of the world, and the ensuing developments in their dispersal and culture. From about this time it has also been established as a branch of academic studies cutting across 'several disciplines and knowledge systems such as sociology, political science, ethnography, literature, anthropology, geography, history, international relations, women's studies' and so forth. The study about diaspora is now recognised as a branch of study researching into various dimensions of human population living transnationally. Diaspora organisations and a large number of centres of Diaspora Studies affiliated to universities are now engaged in researching about various spheres of diaspora formation, migration pattern, their 'connect' with the home and the host countries/ cultures, the issues of identity, etc.

There is no precise definition of the term 'diaspora' as it is used, understood and interpreted in different ways, by different people, in different contexts and to suit different objectives. It is no wonder that this word has become highly politicised in certain countries and societies. According to Brij V. Lal:

Ordinary usage of the word [diaspora] today would include reference to a common ancestral homeland, voluntary or involuntary migration, and a sense of separateness and marginality in the country of residence.

But the question of homeland and territoriality, of exile and return, and of belonging and alienation, are much more complex and contested today than ever before. (Sahoo and Maharaj 2007: ix)

In the world of globalisation, migration and transnationalism, in which travel and technology have made national boundaries porous and latent, the dialectics of diaspora have become more

and more complex. What is the difference between migration and de-territorialisation, de-territorialisation and transnational movements and the transnational movements and diaspora formation? These and similar other questions have been debated extensively and repeatedly by social-scientists, historians, demographers and international bodies such as International Organization for Migration (IOM). Sahoo and Maharaj (2007: 5), for example, state that:

... a migration can be defined as a ‘diaspora’ if four conditions are met: firstly, an ethnic consciousness; secondly, an active associative life; thirdly, contacts with the land of origin in various forms, real or imaginary; fourthly, there should be relations with other groups of the same ethnic origin spread all over the world.

A crucial element in the above and many other definitions of ‘diaspora’ is the ‘connect’ with the homeland, which could be real or imaginary, sentimental or material. Another factor that differentiates diaspora migration with other forms of migrations is “that it is based on claims to a “natural right” to return to an historical homeland.” (Shuval 2007: 33). This claim to return to their historical homeland as a “natural right” may be more metaphoric and rhetorical than legal or real, but the ‘connect’ between the ‘home and host’ plays a defining role in identifying the diasporic groups. The Indian state, for example, recognises two categories of its diaspora – Persons of Indian Origin (PIOs) and Non-Resident Indians (NRIs), and has a separate ministry – Ministry of Overseas Indian Affairs – which “seeks to connect the Indian Diaspora community with its homeland.” (www.moia.gov.in).

II

Like the term diaspora, ‘culture’ too has defied a precise definition. There is perhaps no phenomenon as complex as ‘culture.’ In a manner of speaking, culture incorporates everything in a particular society. It is not only a matter of music, dance, art, and cinema, but also marriage customs, death rites, patterns of pilgrimage to holy cities, modes of raising children, treatment of elders, and innumerable other aspects of everyday life that are stitched into the meaning of culture. Moreover, it can be described/ understood with relation to geography (Western Culture, Eastern Culture, Asian Culture, African Culture etc.), religion (Hindu Culture, Muslim Culture, Buddhist Culture, Christian Culture, etc.), language and ethnicity (Sinhala Culture, Tamil Culture, Bangla Culture, Pakhtun Culture, etc.) – to name a few. The complexity of the issue does not end here. People even within the same culture carry several layers of mental programming within themselves. Different layers of culture exist at the following levels:

- The national level: Associated with the nation as a whole.
- The regional level: Associated with ethnic, linguistic, or religious differences that exist within a nation.
- The gender level: Associated with gender differences (female vs. male).
- The generation level: Associated with the differences between grandparents and parents, parents and children.
- The social class level: Associated with educational opportunities and differences in occupation.

- The corporate level: Associated with the particular culture of an organisation. Applicable to those who are employed.

(<http://www.tamu.edu/faculty/choudhury/culture.html>)

In short, culture is a system of building identities. Identities that are developed by beliefs, faiths, practices, customs, traditions, arts, crafts, language, food habits, dress etc. of a society or social group. Most often, when cultures of two different societies clash, it leads to a conflict in which the stronger one usually overpowers the other. The dominant (often foreign) power establishes its hegemony, local or indigenous cultures are made to appear inferior, ridiculous or otherwise not worth preserving. These are often forced to adopt the ways of the dominant society. An apparent example is the western culture which has, in the last two or three centuries, spread in most part of the world. It may also be argued that this process, in a way, broadens the cultures of both – the victor as well as the vanquished or the dominating as well as the dominated.

The diasporic cultures of South Asia, therefore, incorporate many layers of human life and there are various factors that have influenced and shaped the diasporic cultures of this region.

III

A few words about the title of this book – ‘Circulation of Cultures and Culture of Circulation’ – seem rather necessary. Circulation is not a simple change of geographical place; it involves social, economic, cultural, material and ideological changes which result from crossing of cultural and political boundaries. Circulation of ideas, theories, methods, practices, and cultural expressions, together with circulation of both material and cultural objects such as instruments, devices,

implements, machines, artefacts, seeds, plants, minerals, animals, textiles, pottery, spices etc. (the list goes on), and carriers of knowledge – manuscripts, records, books, inscriptions, drawings, maps, paintings etc. have, for a long time, enriched our culture and it continues to do so. Circulation of human beings – from hapless victims of catastrophes to merchants and traders, and from religious preachers, pilgrims and mendicants to intellectuals, scientists and philosophers, has likewise played a very important role in our cultural development and it continues to do so.

Similarly, monetary and trade networks which stemmed out of this circulation of humans, material, ideas and cultural expressions, especially the networks of coins and currency systems as well as credit instruments, both proto and post-colonisation and also after the fall of colonial regime also deserve much greater attention than it has received so far. Wider issues of intra-regional circulation and cross-fertilisation of the monetary and trade practices; the role of the imperial financial administration in the monetisation of colonial economies resulting in the emergence of some sort of monetary unions within these regions; the issue of international trade in precious metals and the effect of metal-price disparity between the ‘global north’ and the ‘global south’ and its effect on the monetary policies of the imperial governments, are some of the issues that need be addressed so as to build an informed base for future dialogue between different communities of the region and of the world.

Thus, some of the questions that the study of circulation of humans and their cultural ethos focuses on include:

- What causes and precipitates circulation of ideas and cultures, and diaspora formation?

- What restricts the circulation of cultures and what promotes it? What are the barriers and filters? What are the dynamics of the diaspora?
- How is this circulation driven by global as well as local, regional, and national cultural and intellectual currents?
- How does the circulation of cultures contribute to the strengthening (in some cases subsuming or metamorphosing) of local cultures and traditions as well as cross-fertilisation?

The study of the circulation of ideas and techniques in understanding their evolution and distinctive elements of their construction is also essential for understanding a transnational reflection on cultural globalisation.

IV

The papers included in this volume were presented at the SAARC Regional Conference on ‘Diasporic Cultures of South Asia during eighteenth to twentieth centuries’ organised by the SAARC Cultural Centre from 15-17 March 2012 in Galle, Sri Lanka. The Conference was a brainstorming session to discuss key issues, deliberate moot research questions and to identify themes and sub-themes of diasporic cultures of South Asia that merit independent and in-depth research.

The relevance of studying the cultural aspects of the South Asian diaspora emanates also from the fact of growing recognition of diaspora as soft power in statecraft. APSARA KARUNARATNE argues that in an age where public diplomacy and strategic interests are placed in the forefront of foreign policy agendas of the states, it is pertinent to inquire into how the South Asian Diaspora can be considered an apt vehicle of

the soft power. In his overview of the circulation of South Asian peoples and commodities, SHAH MUHAMMAD IKHTIAR JAHAN KABIR presents a survey as to how the Colonial interests and livelihood needs necessitated circulation of South Asian peoples and commodities in and outside the region during the eighteenth to the twentieth centuries and how at the end of the twentieth century the South Asian diaspora has forged collective initiatives to strengthen the circulation within and outside the region.

There are over 7.3 million people of Bangladeshi descent who have immigrated to or were born in another country. The world's largest Bangladeshi diaspora population is in Saudi Arabia and Pakistan, where there are almost 3 million. Three papers included in this volume present the story of Bangladeshi diaspora and diffusion of Bengali culture. KARUNAMAYA GOSWAMI studies the tremendous impact that the Western culture had on 'the major dimensions of living [of the people of South Asia] from education to hospitalisation.' Citing examples from the music and dance traditions of Bengal, he concludes that the movement of people from beyond South Asia and within South Asia contributed very largely to strengthening and developing the existing cultural forms and leaving space for future developments. Another scholar from Bangladesh - SHARIF UDDIN AHMED – presents a historical review of the diasporic culture of the Bangladeshi people and suggests that recent surge in its diaspora 'owes to an unprecedented growth of population.' He discusses some unique cultural characteristics of this diaspora which have transformed the people as well as the places of their translocation. SHAMSUZZAMAN KHAN, also from Bangladesh, enters this discussion of the Diasporic Cultures of South Asia by presenting the Bangladesh perspective and

discusses the role of multi-layered and multi-dimensional meanings of context-specific diasporas.

The story of the diasporic communities living in the Himalayan state of Bhutan is narrated by HARKA B. GURUNG and TSHERING CHOKI. Dwelling upon the causes of diaspora formation in Bhutan they suggest that the country's diaspora that comprise mainly of the Tibetans and ethnic Nepalese communities, came into being mainly because of wars, political turmoil and labour migration. Their paper also analyses the impact of the cultural traditions of the Tibetan and Nepalese communities on the domestic populace of Bhutan within the larger framework of identity construction.

The Indian diaspora is unique as it surpasses all others in its extraordinary diversity and global spread. As per the UNDP's 2010 report, after China, India has the largest diaspora in the world. The population movement that took place in India during the colonial rule forms an integral part of the Indian diaspora, which is today estimated at about 30 million people, spread over 48 countries. In 11 countries there are more than half a million persons of Indian descent and they represent a significant population of those countries. WASEEM RAJA studies the undercurrents of the internal diaspora networks during the twentieth century in India. Focussing on the Bhojpuri speaking community from the Eastern Part of India, together with the Tamils, Sindhi, Parsis, Bengalis, Marwaris and the Punjabis he analyses the nature and functioning of such networks.

In Pakistan, the Pakhtuns constitute 11.5 per cent of the country's population, but share 33.5 per cent of the Pakistani diasporic population. Syed Minhaj ul Hassan discusses the changing cultural patterns of the Pakhtun society of the Khyber-Pakhtunwa province of Pakistan. He argues that in their search

for a better livelihood, the Pakhtun migration that started around 1970s, resulted in their economic prosperity but also affected their centuries' old traditions and life style. This impact was quite widespread as it changed their tangible as well as intangible culture.

Maldives has 1.5 million strong diaspora in its total population of 4.0 million. The traditional culture of Maldives has been shaped over the years by the diasporaic communities living in Maldives as well as by the returnee Maldivians from the foreign lands. ASİYATH MOHAMED and ALI WAHEED describe the impact of the diasporic communities on Maldivian food, attire, architecture and performing arts and conclude that the cultural practices of Maldives have undergone a transformation due to the diasporic contacts with the European, African and South Asian countries.

Sri Lanka has a sizable population of the ethnic Tamils, a majority of whom were brought by the British from India as labourers to work in tea and rubber plantations. Another group of the ethnic Tamils in Sri Lanka comprise of the business community concentrated mainly in the capital city of Colombo and a few other urban and rural areas of the country. A.S. CHANDRABOSE discusses the forces that have impacted the cultural identity of this community in Sri Lanka and contours of their adaptation of the Sinhalese culture. RAMESHA JAYANETHTHI describes the uniqueness of the dress code of Indian Tamil plantation labourers. She studies their cultural background and traces the causes of the evolution and significance of their 'unwritten' dress code which depicted their social status and caste hierarchy.

The Buddhist art of Sri Lanka during the eighteenth to twentieth century reflects the influence of the European diaspora

present in the country. BINDU URUGODAWATTE discusses the distinctive features of the local paintings and architecture that reflect changes brought about due to centuries of European rule. She demonstrates that this influence was more pronounced in the Buddhist paintings of Sri Lanka from eighteenth to twentieth century which depict the contemporary society, culture and even political turbulence.

V

The ethos of diaspora has been very aptly reflected in the title of a book published by the Temple University Press in 1998. The book is called *A Part, Yet Apart* (Shankar and Srikanth 1998). It deals with the societal divergences and cultural differences of the South Asian American diaspora, which, though ‘a part’ of the new geo-spatial surroundings, remains ‘apart’ from it, being deeply rooted in the cultural soil of their country of origin. The cultural differences between the host country and the country of origin could be subtle or sublime and, most of the times, not very apparent or tangible. While certain aspects of a culture may be learned consciously (e.g. methods of greeting people), some other differences are learned subconsciously (e.g. methods of problem solving). As Salman Rushdie (1992) puts it, “Sometimes we feel we straddle two cultures; at other times, that we fall between two stools.” An understanding, therefore, of the historical background and cultural differences of the diasporic communities by the host country is as essential for a harmonious and mutually rewarding co-existence as it is for the members of the diasporic communities. The building of cultural awareness may not be an easy task, but it definitely helps in mitigation of cultural conflicts and cross-cultural tensions.

Though South Asians do not constitute a single or homogeneous diaspora, they are now recognised as ‘a

significant global phenomenon' and the South Asian diaspora 'reflects the dramatic modern history of South Asia and the diversity of the geographical region of origin' (Jacobsen and Kumar 2004: x, xiii). The construction of the historical dynamics of the cultural identities of the South Asian diaspora – both as identity of 'being' (which offers a sense of unity and commonality), and identity of 'becoming' (of a process of identification, which shows the discontinuity in identity formation), is fundamental to establish an environment of respect, cooperation and peaceful co-existence, because "Cultural identities...Far from being eternally fixed in some essentialised past, they are subject to the continuous 'play' of history, culture and power" (Hall 1993: 394).

This book serves only as a prelude to many independent and in-depth studies such as: South Asian women in diaspora, intra-community relationship of the South Asian diaspora beyond the South Asian region, cultural implications of education overseas for the South Asian diaspora, sports (especially cricket) as carrier of diasporic culture in South Asia, to name a few, which may be taken up by competent researchers to foster a greater cultural cohesion between the diasporic communities of South Asia and their host countries as well as diasporic communities of other countries residing in South Asia.

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A Case for the South Asian Diaspora as Soft Power in Statecraft

Apsara Karunaratne

Abstract

The concept of 'Soft Power' is relatively new to the academic discourse of state power. In a wider connotation it also relates to the power embedded in a country's culture. In an age where public diplomacy and strategic interests are placed in the forefront of foreign policy agendas of the states, it is pertinent to inquire into how the South Asian Diaspora can be considered as an apt vehicle of the soft power. This paper argues for a case for South Asian diaspora to be recognised as a form of soft power and also proposes as to how it can be used trans-nationally.

Introduction

When Joseph Nye coined the term 'Soft Power' in the late 1980s he would not have imagined that the term 'diaspora' would soon gain momentum and acquire all the characteristics required to become a new form of Soft Power in the dynamics of global politics. The notion of soft power is relatively new in the academic discourse. Coined by renowned Harvard professor Joseph Nye Jr., soft power defines the influence and attractiveness of a nation and the ability of a nation to draw others to its culture and ideas. Soft Power enables nations to achieve desired outcomes in international affairs through attraction rather than coercion. Nye (2002) distinguishes between 'hard power' and 'soft power' and thus categorises military power and economic power as hard power while soft power is defined as 'getting others to want what you want.'

According to Nye (2002), soft power draws largely from the values of a country which are expressed in its culture, internal policies, and its international conduct. The subtleties of a culture, values, and opinions often have deepening effects upon the community at large and they are more powerful and have penetrative effects than the use of coercion.

In an age where public diplomacy and strategic interests are placed in the forefront of foreign policy agendas of states, it is pertinent to inquire as to how the South Asian Diaspora can be considered as an apt vehicle of soft power in the contemporary world. The people of South Asia have shared somewhat similar historic currents and have inherited a distinct identity that is projected in their cultures, sub-cultures, customs, traditions, costumes, and food, etc. There is, however, a need to inquire into how far the diaspora or more specifically the South Asian Diaspora has been incorporated into the notion of Soft Power in the country of origin and destination. Though, there is no finite definition for South Asian Diaspora, it could be defined if not described as “ethnic minority groups of migrant origins residing and acting in host countries but maintaining strong sentimental and material links with their countries of origin —their homelands” (Sheffer 1986: 3). South Asian Diaspora consists of people who originate from Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal Pakistan, and Sri Lanka.

Indian Diaspora constitutes to the largest number among the South Asian Diaspora and is present in more than 200 countries of the world. As per the estimates of the Ministry of Overseas Indian Affairs (MOIA), with over 25 million people spread across over 200 countries covering every major region in the world, India has the second largest diaspora in the world. As of May 2012, there are 21,909,875 Indians living outside India

which include both Non Resident Indians (NRIs) as well as Persons of Indian Origin (PIOs) (The Ministry of Overseas Indian Affairs: Online). According to the Pakistan Defense website, Pakistan's Diaspora is seventh largest in the world and constitutes over 5 million Pakistani emigrants (Pakistan Defence: Online). Sri Lankan diaspora comes third in the region with an estimated 3 million people.

Given the large number of South Asians living outside their countries of origin, and given the rapid changes induced by the globalisation taking place in every sphere of social and cultural lives, diasporic communities are increasingly becoming heterogeneous and they continuously recreate cultural identities in diverse locations. The South Asian diaspora, in large numbers have also gained leverage power over the past decades and are now making their impact felt on the socio-economic and political policies of the host country. 'Does the country of origin make use of the Soft Power of its diaspora?' is a question worthy of discussion and debate. As diaspora can be the most viable, closest, and effective form of soft power propagation of South Asian nations, this debate assumes greater importance in the modern age. The distinct culture that we boast of in South Asia, functions both as a discordant as well as a concordant factor that is capable of paving way for subscribing oneself to the common, subconscious sense of belonging to the 'Asianness' on the one hand and making themselves distinctive in foreign lands due to religious and ethnic disharmonies that are embedded in their historical legacies on the other. Thus, from the perspective of a soft power, the maneuvering potential that lies in the diasporic communities is splintered and becomes disjunctured. It is not only the countries of origin that tend to overlook the cultural potential of their diasporas as a form of power but also the host country where they have established

their roots. Therefore, Shankar and Srikanth (1998) describe the *Gandhabba* status or the ‘ready to be born’ status of diaspora as ‘a part, yet apart, admitted, but not acknowledged.’

South Asians in Diaspora

Diaspora is a term that has taken diverse undertones over the centuries which, in turn, is shaped by history, colonial legacies, and social currents. The concept of diaspora, therefore, has undergone many changes so as to produce diverse conscious and sub-conscious meanings to the scholars, to the diaspora themselves, and to those who are not part of diaspora. The term ‘diaspora’ was once used to refer to the Jews who were exiled from their homeland and assumed a connotation of people settled away from their homeland, a sense of trauma and banishment. As time passed by, the concept shared a wide range of meanings such as immigrant, refugee, exiled community, expatriate, overseas community, guest workers, expelled, ethnic and racial minorities (Shuval 2011). The list of meanings will continue to expand and subsume diverse other forms of migrations in the future. Hypothetically speaking, there could be a possibility of inclusion of tourists as a category of diaspora who would visit a particular land several times depending on conditions such as their longevity of stay, their forms of connections and forms of adaptability in the host environments. Thus the concept of diaspora will continue to evolve with the perpetually altering socio-political dynamics. Cohen (1997) has proposed a new typology of diaspora, namely victim diasporas, labour and imperial diasporas, trade diasporas, cultural diasporas, global-deterritorialised diasporas. However, Cohen (1997) notes that these typologies can overlap and change their character overtime. Vertovec (1997) defines the term diaspora as ‘any population which is considered deterritorialised and

transnational.’ He, however, notes that the term’s descriptive usefulness is marred by the conflating categories such as immigrants, guest workers, ethnic and ‘racial’ minorities, refugees, expatriates and travellers. He thus observes that the notion of diaspora has been subject to ‘over-use’ and ‘under-theorisation’ among academics. Vertovec (1997: 2) therefore, outlines three general meanings of diaspora, drawing from more recent literature. They include ‘diaspora as social form’, ‘diaspora as type of consciousness’ and ‘diaspora as mode of cultural production.’ The South Asian diaspora can belong to one or more of the above categories of people who are settled away from their homeland.

Within a gamut of definitions that characterise and distinguish diaspora, it is worthwhile to analyse how the South Asian diaspora can be placed in this contemporary discourse. To fulfil the said objective, it is first important to come to terms with a common acceptable definition about who and what constitute the South Asian diaspora. Whether a group called ‘South Asian’ diaspora exists and if so what are its common traits that can be identified or exemplified?

Historically speaking South Asia inherits a common civilisational, historical, and cultural continuum that binds the nations in the region together. The diaspora of South Asia, however, have undergone various currents of migration routes. The purpose of this paper however, is not to analyse the historical routes of the South Asian diaspora but to argue for the case of using the South Asian diaspora as a vehicle of soft power. Nevertheless, a brief look at the usage of the term within the region and how it has been imagined and constructed by the South Asians and their diasporic counterparts would give an insight into various connotations of the term ‘diaspora.’

The Diaspora Services Division of the Ministry of Overseas Indian Affairs deals with matters related to overseas Indians, comprising Persons of Indian Origin (PIOs), Non-Resident Indians (NRIs) as well as Overseas Citizens of India (OCIs) and overseas Indians who are not PIOs, OCIs or NRIs. The last category includes those overseas Indians whose forefathers migrated from India in the nineteenth and early twentieth century. Thus, the Ministry's categorisation is a seemingly explicit rejection of the term diaspora and instead prefers to branch out the generally termed 'diaspora' as PIOs, NRIs and OCIs. In the Sri Lankan context the terms 'diaspora' and 'expatriates' are used interchangeably to refer to Sri Lankans who work and live abroad. The term 'diaspora' however, in Sri Lanka is largely used to refer to Tamil diaspora whose ethnic identity is more pronounced than their transnational status. Thus, the concept of 'diaspora' for the Sri Lankans remains, exclusively, an ethno-political nomenclature rather than a social phenomenon. The above array of meanings brings us to the conclusion that despite the term's importance, the term 'diaspora' within the national level has not been well defined in South Asia.

South Asian Diaspora as a form of Soft Power

In the recent times, owing to growing politicisation of the diaspora, their trend has begun to shift from mere remittance generators to pressure groups. They have not only mobilised themselves politically but also provided economic aid as well as military assistance to their homelands. This has led to internationalisation of the concept. Diasporas no longer mean to refer to enclaves of communities but to groups of individuals whose activities transcend the borders of the host environments. Some of the well-known and influential diasporic organisations

such as Vishwa Hindu Parishad, has been active transnationally in the UK, USA, and Australia. Similarly, certain diasporic organisations of Tamils in Canada, UK, and Switzerland are known to have been supporting the demand for a separate homeland for Tamils in Sri Lanka.

According to Shuval (2001) there are three sets of actors relevant to diaspora theory. They are the diaspora group itself, the host society and the homeland which may be real or virtual. These three actors can be either mutually constructive or destructive and the attitude or policy changes of the homeland state towards the host state or vice versa are determining factors in the acts and actions of diaspora. This dual allegiance of the diaspora to the home and host has made it difficult for the homeland to utilise the diaspora as a vehicle of soft power.

This form of soft power contained in the diaspora can best be described as 'transnational soft power' which includes the diaspora as its main actor. There is a need for future research to be carried out to study as to how the soft power generated domestically can be adjusted and moulded on a foreign soil by the natives who reside outside the homeland. The Traditional Realist models of power in international relations have emphasised military strength and economic power to determine the capacity of a state. By contrast, Joseph Nye (2002) presented a new explanation to power which included the ability of a state to co-opt other states or in other words the 'soft power' approach. According to Nye (2002), co-optive power is the ability of a nation to structure a situation so that other nations develop preferences or define their interests in ways consistent with one's nation. He also argued co-optive power emerges from soft power and immaterial sources such as 'cultural and ideological attraction as well as the rules and institutions of

international regimes (Nye 2002). Adding more to the discussion of soft power, Shashi Tharoor (2009: Online) makes a very interesting distinction between soft and hard power by stating that “hard power is exercised; soft power is evoked.” The concept of diaspora, however, has so far remained peripheral in any discussion on soft power, for the soft power has been discussed with reference to how states manipulate their foreign policies and foreign relations.

As the South Asian diaspora case will demonstrate, there are a number of hindrances that lie ahead of the path in manipulating the diaspora as a soft power. The challenge is to bring South Asians as one, single entity of soft power for they represent eight countries and diasporic individuals belonging to diverse religious and ethnic origins. Countries of South Asian region share common soft power resources of culture and values but have failed to harness culture as a form of soft power for prosperity and strong regional cooperation. Ethno-political cleavages that ripped the countries in South Asia apart – geographically and emotionally – have far outweighed the level of attractiveness. It may also be argued that the ‘American-bred’ concept of soft power does not seem to fit the more heterogeneous communities of South Asians who live abroad despite their cultural similarities and civilisational linkages. As the population of South Asian diaspora rapidly increases, the question of its inclusion in the formation of Soft power becomes increasingly complex. The diasporic debate on whether the diaspora cultures were an integrating or segregating factor continues and Sunil S. Amrith (2011: 11) states that Asia’s mass migration is “far from being a process of cultural exchange” and instead it is another “culture of enclaves, segregated from one another.” This phenomenon, he attributes to a conscious process of colonial ‘divide and rule’ (Amrith 2011).

In practice, soft power of the South Asian diaspora remains weak for several primary reasons. First and foremost, unlike hard power, soft power, by contrast, remains intangible and discreet. It is also difficult to quantify the appeal and value of a country or their cultures for these are inherently subjective and fluctuating. When it comes to harnessing the benefits of soft power from a community which lives abroad, the best suggestion is to utilise it to stand united for rights in the areas of common interests concerning the South Asians. Areas of common interests of South Asian diaspora can be race related issues, nuclear testing, issues of intellectual property, bio-piracy, threats caused by multinational corporations or any such issue which poses a threat to the peaceful existence of human beings.

Considering the importance and increasing relevance of the use of soft power as a form of global dominance requires multilateral synergy and cooperation among states and the diaspora to create a sense of common identity. With the growing idea of 'Chindia' and 'Asian century', it is essential to give serious thought into the positioning of South Asian diaspora as a common cultural entity. Taking a broad view on diaspora as a vehicle of soft power can be empowering, illuminating, and enticing for the diaspora as well as the home country.

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Circulation of South Asian Peoples and Commodities: An Overview of 18th to 20th Century Cultures

Shah Muhammad Ikhtiar Jahan Kabir

Abstract

Colonial interests and the livelihood needs necessitated circulation of South Asian peoples and commodities in and outside the region during the eighteenth to twentieth centuries. The colonial powers valued the region as a source of raw material and cheap labour. They took the peoples and commodities from domino to the centre or from one domino to another. To serve their interests, they enacted laws and abrogated others. They changed agricultural (indigo) and production (textiles) lines, and did all that was needed to promote or block the circulations. They diverted resources and borrowed from the local lending houses. To maintain an edge for their commodities in the market they ill-treated the local industries. They keenly ensured the circulation of commodities, while did little for the distressed people facing famine.

Today, South Asians, a group of poor people, readily find new livelihood avenues outside. This has helped in the formation of the South Asian diaspora at an accelerated pace. For facilitating the circulation they develop communication arteries in the region. A great change came in the circulation dynamics of peoples and commodities after 1947. The idiosyncrasies of the national elite, and to a little extent the national boundaries debar the internal circulations within the region. At the end of the twentieth century, South Asian diaspora has forged collective initiatives to strengthen the circulation within and outside the region. Since the end of the 1970s the sojourners and

the return migrants, have reversed the process of brain drain.

Introduction

The circulation or movement of peoples of South Asia dates back to the Palaeolithic period, spanning from the beginning of human life until 10000 BCE (Movement of People and Goods: Online). The nomadic South Asians living in groups comprising about twenty persons migrated to the Americas across a land bridge and spread out there to create South Asian diaspora on the soil of the Americas. These diaspora later acted as a catalyst for the circulation of South Asian commodities to that part of the world.

According to the *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary*, 'circulation' is 'the passing or spreading of something' (Hornby 2005: q.v.) and 'commodity' is 'a product or a raw material that can be bought and sold or a thing that is useful and or has a useful quality' (Hornby 2005: q.v.). Marx explains 'commodity' as something independent of ourselves that meets a human want or need of any kind. Furthermore, that commodity is a use value and use value is determined by how useful it is. The use value can only be determined 'in use or consumption.' He explains that a commodity is also an exchange value. He stipulates this as the sum quantity of other commodities that it is exchanged for. He gives an example of corn and iron, and assumes that a certain quantity of iron is exchangeable for a certain amount of corn (Marx: Online). In the present context it could be interpreted as a certain number of human beings exchangeable for a certain amount of money. As Aristotle points a shoe as a commodity that has use value to people, a human being also may turn into a commodity which can be acquired through the exchange of money. However, in this paper, people (persons) and

commodities (mainly goods and sometimes money) are kept separate to a great extent.

The term ‘people’ refers to persons of different countries. Thus, circulation of commodities and peoples denote the spread or movement of persons and things produced or processed in one country and brought or bought by another for their use. The circulation of commodities in this discussion in general refers to import and export on both intra-regional and extra-regional pageants. As they have both ‘use value’ and ‘exchange value’, money and credit are also commodities. The paper uses this definition of terms in discussing the circulation of ‘commodities’ and ‘peoples’ of South Asia. The ground work of the paper faced constraints owing to a great rarity of relevant literature. It is worthy to note that sometimes circulation of goods also involves circulation of peoples, thus, leading to cultural diffusion between the different peoples. The spread of Buddhism from India along trade routes in Asia is an example.

Scope and Structure

The circulation of peoples from one country to another, mainly in the context of ‘diaspora,’ is the focus of the paper. The terms ‘migrant’ and ‘diaspora’ are very close in meaning, though different in essence. Nevertheless, the two are used interchangeably. This paper covers the following forms of migration:

- a. Internal circulation or migration i.e. from one place to another or from rural to urban areas within a country,
- b. Intra-regional i.e. from one country to another within the same region,

- c. Extra-regional i.e. from a country in one region to a country of another region. For instance from Bangladesh, a country of South Asia, to a country of Southeast Asia, Middle East, Europe, Americas, etc.

This paper concentrates only on two aspects, intra-regional and extra-regional circulation of peoples and commodities of the South Asian region.

Both short and long-term circulation or migration of people come within the scope of the paper, as does the sporadic incidents of circulation of peoples and the reasons for them settling there be it for better fortune or a quest for improving status. This paper does not take into account circulation that happens by way of human trafficking, political exile or forced migration. It provides snapshots of the dynamic cultures formed and shaped by diasporic communities from eighteenth to twentieth centuries. Thus, the analysis of the paper focuses only on the prevailing realities of those times. This paper comes in two parts. The first part deals with the circulation of peoples while the second deals with the circulation of commodities.

Circulation of Peoples

Intra-South Asian Circulation of Peoples

For hundreds of years, circulation of peoples has been taking place in South Asia primarily in search of new income sources other than that provided by agriculture. Historical records indicate large-scale labour movements, especially agricultural ones, from the upper Gangetic plains to the lower plains.

In the pre-colonial period the absence of strict demarcation of state boundaries resulted in the free circulation of peoples across the region. Starting from 1700 CE people of East Bengal

migrated to Assam, Meghalaya, and West Bengal, particularly Calcutta of present India. Malik (2000: 12) states that there was “a continuous movement of population within and without the defined political and geographical boundaries” of Bengal. Large-scale movement of peasants was recorded during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. In the eighteenth century when the British developed the tea industry in North-East Bengal in India, parts of which are now in Bangladesh, they brought indentured labourers from different parts of India. As the colonial policies destroyed the jute and cotton industries of Bengal and the market for fine muslin, a large scale migration of people took place from Bengal to Assam, part of the then undivided India and also of Myanmar (Siddiqui 2004). Similar migration is traced between and among other parts of the then India, which constitutes a major portion of the present region of South Asia.

From 1830-79, South Indian Tamil workers started going to Sri Lanka to work in tea plantations as bonded labourers in many cases and as non-bonded labourers in some. They had work permits for a temporary period. By 1930, the total circulation of such labourers rose to 1.5 million. During the 1880s people from Malaya, Java and other neighbouring archipelagos flocked to Sri Lanka to work as labourers by contributing to the development of Sri Lanka. In the eighteenth and the nineteenth centuries workers from Sindh of Pakistan and Gujarat of India used to go to Sri Lanka for similar purposes.

As migrants from South Asia faced maltreatment in their work destinations the migrant culture of South Asia underwent a sea of change. For example, nearly 420,000 people of Indian origin had to leave Sri Lanka (then Ceylon) between 1930 and 1935 due to differential treatment related to citizenship issues.

The colonial rule caused shifts in the pattern of circulation of peoples between the regional countries. The end of British rule in 1947 resulted in massive communal conflicts in the subcontinent, which killed nearly one million people and led to an exodus of 35 to 40 million peoples between India and Pakistan. This is surely the largest population movement of South Asia in recent times.

Political turmoil and civic unrest are the two other major reasons for people to emigrate from one country to another. India and Pakistan, the two big states of the region, hold 6th and 10th places respectively, in the list of top countries to host migrants, where the main reason for migration of peoples is more or less political. Larma (2000: 20) sketching out reasons for out-migration in South Asia from 1950-1990, states that in the 1960s and 1970s Bangladeshi Chakma people migrated to India since they were discriminated by the government machineries. In 1970s millions of Bengalis fighting for dismemberment from Pakistan migrated to India from East Pakistan, feeling insecure the *Biharis* in Bangladesh migrated to Pakistan, a large number of Afghans migrated to Pakistan, and a great number of Sri Lankan Tamils flocked to India. In the 1980s Rohingyas of Myanmar entered Bangladesh, and in the 1990s Bhutanese Lhotsampas migrated to Nepal fleeing state persecution (Larma 2000: 7).

After independence from Pakistan in 1971, Bangladesh repatriated 163000 *Biharis*, generally labelled as 'stranded Pakistanis,' to Pakistan. *Chakmas*, the main sub-nation (or tribe) in Bangladesh, felt that they were discriminated on the onset of the genesis of the country as the country's first government urged them to identify themselves as Bengalis. The problem intensified as post-1975 governments initiated mass settlement

schemes of Bengali Muslims in Chittagong Hill Tracts. This resulted in insurgencies and migration to India. Once the Chittagong Hill Tracts Treaty came into effect in 1996, most of the tribes returned. It is quite similar to the migration of Bangladeshi Freedom Fighters to India who returned home after independence in 1971. After 1990, particularly during 1997-2003, migration from Nepal to India increased. Political conflicts since 1995 and the consequent feeling of insecurity among the Nepalese, particularly among those living in the rural areas, pushed them to move out of the country (Gurung and Adhikari 2004: 101).

International migration from Afghanistan became highly conspicuous in the 1980s due to a civil war and foreign military interventions. According to a UNHCR estimate, with over 2.5 million people from Afghanistan, Pakistan became the host to the largest population of refugees anywhere in the world, though later some 1.2 million people returned home (Gazdar: Online). Today, Pakistan has migrants from Bangladesh, Burma, India and Afghanistan. These migrations are encouraged by a common factor i.e. religion. Migration from Bangladesh and India owe largely to the division of the country in 1947 and 1971, while that from Burma or present day Myanmar is because of atrocities at home. Migration from Bangladesh has a dimension of searching better economic fortunes. There are over 1 million ethnic Bengalis and 200000 Burmese in the city of Karachi alone.

Extra-Regional Circulation of Peoples

Migration of people from South Asia to the industrial countries of the West is connected to the colonial past. During the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, sailors from the

South-East part of East Bengal i.e. Chittagong and Noakhali found jobs in the British merchant navy carrying goods from Calcutta port to destinations across the world (Siddiqui 2004: 20). A portion of landless peasants from Northern Sylhet of East Bengal got employment in the dockyards of Hooghly near Calcutta, and another group joined the British merchant navy. Upon travelling to foreign countries, some of them abandoned their ships and settled in the United States, United Kingdom, Singapore, Malaysia, Brunei and Indonesia.

Russian chroniclers report the presence of Hindu traders of India in Moscow and St. Petersburg in the 18th century (Non-resident Indian and Person of Indian Origin: Online). Gujarati traders migrated under British dispensation in large numbers to Kenya, Tanganyika, South Africa, and Fiji among other places. In colonial East Africa, the presence of people from India was so prominent that bank notes in Kenya bore inscriptions in Gujarati (Lal n.d.: Online).

There has been constant mobility of people across the national border since the unification of Nepal as a country in 1768. This migration can be attributed to atrocities committed by both administrative and financial governance. Migration began as the Nepalese started to work in the British army on the wake of the defeat of Nepal in 1816. During the First World War about 243000 young Nepalese joined the British Army and most of them tried to settle in the UK.

Mass emigration from the subcontinent occurred as the British consolidated their power in the Indian Ocean. The majority of migrants were contract labourers of the indenture system. These labourers provided the workforce for sugar, coffee, tea and rubber plantations that were supplied to Europe along with other topical products. Kingsley Davis (Robinson et

al. 1980: 61) calculates that about 30 million Indians emigrated between 1834 and 1947. This scale of movement was as large as the European migration to the Americas in the nineteenth century. It declined with the ending of the indenture system in 1921. The labourers, signed in for a five-year term, were entitled to a free return passage. Despite adverse conditions, however, a large proportion of indentured workers chose to remain in the plantation colonies when their five years of bondage expired.

In Mauritius, the largest recipient of Indian labour, they formed the two-thirds of island population by 1880. In British Guyana, the Indian descent gradually overtook those of African origin, while in Trinidad, a society with many ethnic elements, they formed the largest minority. Indentured migration to Fiji began relatively late in 1879 but by 1920 they were overtaking the ethnic Fijians in numbers. To the Dutch Surinam the subcontinent provided almost all estate labor, to French Reunion, to Jamaica, to smaller Caribbean islands and to French Martinique and Guadeloupe. (Robinson et al. 1980: 61)

As slavery was abolished in the 1830s in the British Caribbean, and the labour shortage threatened the very existence of the plantation system, labourers from the Gangetic plains and present day Tamil Nadu went there to work as indentured labourers. The first shipload of Indians reached Trinidad in 1845, others went to Guyana, Surinam, Mauritius, Fiji, and Malaysia. Some Indians were there prior to 1834. The number of Indian indentured labourers rose to 1.5 million in a number of countries, including East Africa. The system of indentured labour came to a close in 1917, leaving behind big Indian populations in Mauritius, Guyana, Trinidad and Tobago, Surinam, Fiji, Malaysia, South Africa and the Reunion. From the nineteenth century till the end of the reign of the British Raj,

these migrants mainly constituted of poor workers who were sent to other British colonies under the indentured system (Robinson et al. 1980: 4).

Two territories, Malaya and Burma, were also important destinations for the circulation of South Asian peoples. The *Kanganis* (contractors) or enlisted groups of labourers financed their migration and usually deducted the cost of landing from the wages of the labourers. Another pattern evolved in East Africa, particularly Uganda. Workers there, although they entered as indentured railway workers, later became railway staff and petty traders in the up-country who supplied carpenters, tradesmen, clerks and technicians. Elsewhere Indians worked in other fields as well. These workers also spread to Upper Burma, Singapore, Malaysia and Hong Kong as members of the military police. The original nucleus of the King's African Rifles comprised of Indians. In Malaya and Jaffna, Tamils were employed as government clerks, doctors and many other white-collar professionals. People from Punjab penetrated North America despite having a bar on Asian immigration (Robinson et al. 1980: 62). In the early nineteenth century Indians voluntarily migrated to Britain on a large scale. The majority of such migrants are from Punjab and the western state of Gujarat. The Sikh community from Punjab dominated the early migrated population to Britain (Sahai and Chand 2004: 60).

The early twentieth century marks the beginning of free emigration of skilled labourers and professionals to Surinam, South Africa, Trinidad and Tobago, Guyana, Jamaica, Kenya, Mauritius, Fiji, Singapore, Malaysia, Thailand, Tanzania, Uganda, and other countries (Robinson et al. 1980: 4), all major destinations of extensive indentured labour industries in the 18th century.

Since the turn of the twentieth century, Sri Lankan people started to migrate for employment, with academically and professionally qualified persons migrating to Western Europe, North America, Australia, and East and West Africa. As Dias and Jayasundere (2004: 154) note “academics and professionals went abroad in search of secure employment that offered higher wages and chances of higher professional advancement.”

One of the most prominent mistreatments of migrants was in Natal of South Africa which led Mahatma Gandhi to launch his first *Satyagrah* campaign. Consequently indentured immigration to Natal came to an end in 1911. It ended in Malaya in 1909, and came to a complete end in January 1920 after a heavy campaign in India.

In the adjacent Southeast Asian countries such as Burma, there was a large number of South Asians. During the 1930s the 16,823,798 population of Burma consisted of one million Indian migrants (Robinson et al. 1980: 62) who took control of the Burmese rural credit market and acquired such power that as the Burmese failed to repay credit they seized their fields. Consequently, negative Burmese feelings culminated in an anti-Indian campaign in May 1930. Thus, about 7000 Indians were left homeless and 33000 frightened to return home. Facing a similar situation, 193000 Indians had to leave Malaysia for home between 1930 and 1935.

Indian students, members of the *Ghadar* Party and farmers, particularly from Punjab, started to go to the US in the early twentieth century. Peter Drucker (1959), inspired by the migration of educated and technical people to developed countries coined the term ‘knowledge worker’ to differentiate them from service workers. A bulk from India went to the US following the immigration reforms of 1965 with a great number

of knowledge workers migrating from developing countries to developed ones. Knowledge workers from this region included scientists and engineers, educators and trainers and entrepreneurs, executives and supervisors (Khadria 1999: 26). Recent movement of Indian people from home to United Arab Emirates (UAE), Saudi Arabia, Canada, the United Kingdom, and the United States too resembles such knowledge based migration. Also there is a great number of people of Indian origin in Southeast Asian countries like Burma, Malaysia, Philippines, Singapore, Indonesia, Thailand, and Brunei. Many of them went there in the late twentieth century (Non-resident Indian and Person of Indian Origin: Online).

Many people from East Bengal migrated to the United Kingdom and settled mainly in port cities like London and Liverpool. By late 1950s and early 1960s, people from Sylhet migrated and settled down in the UK in large numbers due to a policy adopted by the British government to recruit foreign workers through the social network of the early Sylhet settlers.

About 160000 Nepalis joined the British Army during the Second World War. After 1947, when the *Gurkha* unit of the British Army was divided between India and the United Kingdom, the British gradually reduced their numbers, but India did not. It is unfortunate that once the tenure of their security services came to an end both destination-masters held many of the Nepalese as prisoners. During this period some Nepalis served as security personnel in Brunei, Singapore and France (Gurung et al. 2004: 102) and many settled in those destinations.

The recent trend of recruitment of temporary labour from South Asia can be traced to the early 1970s during the wake of the labour boom in the Middle East. Gradually such migration also expanded to the newly industrialised countries of South-

East Asia and Far East (e.g. South Korea and Taiwan). As Siddiqui (2004: 21) points out “the nature of such migration was qualitatively different from that of the West. The migrants went on short-term employment, with specific job contracts, and had to return home on the completion of their contract period.” At present the dominant form of migration from South Asian countries is ‘short-term contact migration.’ The South Asians go to Southeast Asia and Europe for temporary employment.

A large number of Nepalese during the 1960s and 1970s migrated for work as Nepal was still in a pre-industrial stage with no non-farm employment opportunities. Migration of Nepalese increased by almost five times from 1997-2003 due to liberalisation of travel system and increased availability of information about overseas work opportunities. Unlike other neighbouring countries, Nepal found a good employment hub in Israel. Jordan and Malaysia also became important destinations for them. An increase in the scope of employment in Southeast Asian countries resulted in the decline of illegal migration to the Republic of Korea and Japan.

Migration from Sri Lanka accelerated in the 1970s. Though a slow starter compared to its regional neighbours to respond to the oil boom and massive construction works in the Middle East, in 1978 the Sri Lankan migration rose high only to dip sharply in 1979. Rather exceptionally, the migrant work force in Sri Lanka comprises a healthy gender balance of 36.6 per cent women to 68.2 per cent men. The skilled migrant workforce includes construction workers, drivers, carpenters, and mechanics, and the unskilled workers include housemaids and other workers. Two per cent of these migrant workers are highly skilled professionals such as doctors, engineers, technologists, and navigators. In 1980s they began to go to the Far East as

semi-skilled workers of the industrial sector. Dias and Jayasundere (2004: 156) note: "Records show that the migration for foreign employment has been increasing since 1998, touching 203710 in 2002." In 2002, 65 per cent of Sri Lanka's out-migrant population consisted of women.

With regard to migration from Pakistan, Gazdar (Online) presents four forms i.e. to developed countries, to Persian Gulf, between Afghanistan and Pakistan, and from other Asian countries. Migration to the developed countries occurs mainly through formal channels. Some have family connections in the destination country and they apply through formal legal channels for migrant status. This is generally true in case of immigration to the United Kingdom particularly exhausting the Mirpuri connections. Some go there as students and stay after completing studies. This is particularly true in respect to migration to North America. Generally young people enter these countries and stay there violating their visa rules.

Migration of the Pakistani workers to the Western countries, especially the United Kingdom, started in the 1950s and 1960s on a modest scale. The process gained momentum in the 1970s coupled with large-scale migration of workers, especially in the Middle East (Shah 2004: 131). In recent times Pakistani workers have concentrated in Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Libya, Qatar, United Arab Emirates, Oman, the United Kingdom and Bahrain, etc.

The late twentieth century and early twenty first century saw many of the migrants returning home, particularly for generational and economic reasons. This added another dimension to the regional diasporic culture. This caused two-way traffic in inter-regional circulation. In the cost-benefit calculation it bears 'brain gain' for South Asia, as the returning

scientists, researchers, doctors, engineers, managers and development activists had arguably an enriched ‘brain’ and ‘worldly gains.’ Thus, somebody may label returnee knowledge worker as ‘brain gain’ or ‘brain grain.’ In literature they are termed ‘sojourners’, who leave to earn money or education abroad with an aim of coming back home, not to settle there. With every passing day the number of sojourners increases in South Asia (Khadria 1999: 52). This happens because of the responsiveness of the people to the shifting global economic balance. India has taken steps to attract sojourners, as they contribute to improve the society, culture and economy in India. The story of sojourners in Pakistan and Sri Lanka are the same. The new web of young business entrepreneurs, managers and educationists in Bangladesh include a good number of sojourners from the Middle East, European Union, the United States, and Japan and many of their business bill boards speak for their destination countries. Their gesture and postures manifest circulation of cultures of the destination at home, as they did once by manifesting their home cultures in the destinations.

Circulation of Commodities

Intra-Regional Circulation of Commodities

After claiming the right to collect revenue in Bengal in 1765, the East India Company largely ceased importing gold and silver, which it hitherto used to pay for goods shipped back to Britain. In addition, land revenue collected in Bengal helped the company finance wars in other parts of India. During 1760-1800 Bengal’s money supply diminished with the closing of local mints, fixing of exchange rates and standardisation of coinage (Economic History of India: Online).

During 1780-1860, India's status as an exporter of processed goods changed. Earlier it received bullion against the bills of export. The changed situation demanded India to start importing manufactured goods and that in turn resulted in a demand to export raw material. In 1750s, India mostly exported fine cotton and silk to Europe, Asia and Africa.

The legendary wealth of Bengal and cheapness of its ware like raw silk, textiles or food grains attracted merchants from Asia as well as from Europe. European companies - Dutch, English, French, Ostend and Danish - established their factories in Bengal for trading, with their main interest focused on export of cheap commodities like textiles, raw silk and saltpetre to Europe (Chaudhuri 2007: 186). Comparatively minor items included sugar, rice, wheat, clarified butter, mustard oil, wax, borax, gumlac, cowries (seashells) and gunny bags.

During this period European companies faced an acute shortage of working capital while an organised credit market in India was ready for them. They started borrowing from local creditors. In 1720-21 the English companies' debt in Bengal amounted to Rs. 24 lakhs while the amount of debt exclusive of the interest turned out to be Rs. 55.5 lakhs. Among the main creditors the house of Jagath Seths is prominent. In terms of credit, the Jagath Seths then established a 'control' on the European companies with frequent threats to sever trade links, in case of non-payment of outstanding loan money (Chaudhuri 2007: 197). Owing to the Seths' monopoly on the mint business, the companies could in no way sell imported treasure to anyone else. This deprived the company of fair prices of commodities.

Mir Mir Zafar Ali Khan, the commander in chief of the army of Sirajuddaula, the Nawab of Bengal defected to the British side in the power struggle, being allured by some

business tycoons who secretly connived with the British for trade grants. The plot came out successfully with the Nawab facing a humiliating defeat in the battle of Plassey on 23 June 1757. As reward of betrayal Mir Zafar was sworn in as the Nawab who granted them a blank cheque of trade. This later came to be a sneaking back alley for unbridled plundering of commodities and resources of Bengal and the whole of South Asia to Europe. During this period Indian goods used to be exported bearing the seal of the British. Thus, the share of Indian trade in the 1780s came down to 22 per cent from 38 per cent in the 1730s.

The role of the colonial rulers in the subcontinent is debatable. Literature about the latter part of the twentieth century shows that under the colonial rule there was an easy flow of goods and commodities between provinces of British India mainly due to physical infrastructure being provided by the British. The government of British India invested heavily in the irrigation of Punjab and Sindh provinces as a strategy to compensate for food deficiency in other parts of the empire in the subcontinent. As Punjab and Sindh started to produce surplus to be transported to the northeast, especially the heavily populated province of Bengal, the transportation of goods necessitated the building of communication infrastructure. The Grand Trunk Road that links Kabul with Calcutta, railways, and the port of Karachi were built to serve this purpose. It virtually formed the artery of economic integration of different parts of the empire, which are now Bangladesh, India and Pakistan (Burki 2005: 12).

During the last quarter of the nineteenth century these raw material, which chiefly consisted of cotton, opium, and indigo, covered the majority of Indian exports. In the beginning of the

1830s, British textiles started to pave an inroad into the Indian market and inundate it. The value of textile imports grew from 5.2 million in 1850 to 18.4 million in 1896 (Economic History of India: Online).

The Great Depression of 1929 clearly shows the attitude of the British rulers towards the natives. They did little to alleviate the distress of the people of the subcontinent. The people, particularly the villagers, fell into debt. The rulers were more concerned about shipping gold to Britain. The depression hit the jute industry, an important export terribly. The jute industry gained momentum in the 1920s only to relapse into yet another economic crisis in the 1930s (Economic History of India: Online).

There is a great difference between the circulation of commodities during the first half and the second half of twentieth century. During the first half, the circulation pattern was quite similar to that of the preceding century. However, an abrupt change in the total system of circulation came in the second half, as the regional states emerged independent. The trading statistics available show, during the first three years of their independence, intra-regional trade in South Asia (between India, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka) as a percentage of their total trade was in the double digits (Panagariya n.d.: 180). In part, this large proportion reflects the relatively protectionist trade regime in the developed countries that came into existence in the 1930s and 1940s. It also reflects the low barriers in trade within the subcontinent. In the subsequent years, the developed countries opened their markets, and thus opened the door to trade between them and other countries including those in South Asia. In trade and commerce the countries of South Asia themselves turned inward. Import substituted industrialisation, with massive public

sector participation in the production activity and tight control of the private sector. According to Burki (2005: 12) the 1947 partition of India and Pakistan “need not have resulted in the sharp decline in trade between these new political entities. Trade declined mostly for political reasons.”

At independence, roughly 70 per cent of the imports of India, Pakistan and Sri Lanka consisted of either manufactured consumer goods or inputs for their own manufacturing industries. Demand for capital goods was very low and basic industrial inputs all came from abroad. Main exports included tea, cotton, jute yarn, and manufactured goods from India, raw cotton and jute from Pakistan, and rubber and tea from Sri Lanka (Robinson et al. 1980: 310).

In 1949 Pakistan refused to cooperate with other countries of the ‘Sterling Areas’ in devaluating currencies to the US dollar while India refused to recognise the new exchange rate of 144 of her rupees to 100 currency units of Pakistan, resulting in the total stop of trade between the two regional giant economies. Pakistan resorted to a rigorous import substitution policy, which later was adopted by all other regional countries and continued for the next 40 years since independence in the late 1940s (Burki 2005: 12). The import-substitution policies worked towards limiting not just total trade but in some ways asymmetrically towards limiting intra-regional trade. The countries deliberately attempted to replace imports from across the new borders. For example, before independence, the region that was East Pakistan grew most of Bengal’s jute, while textile mills in Calcutta processed it. After 1947, India protected and promoted cultivation of jute by restricting imports that traditionally came from East Bengal, while East Bengal imposed restrictions on jute exports to India and established its own jute textile mills.

Similarly, India restricted imports of raw rubber from Sri Lanka (and Malaysia) to promote the development of a rubber industry in Kerala. After Bangladesh emerged as an independent state in 1971, it chose to follow essentially the same road. Nepal and Bhutan, two landlocked countries, chose to have open trade relations with their neighbour India, though they followed similar restrictive policies towards other countries. Consequently, they traded more with India while their trade with others drastically dropped. The only exception to this general pattern in South Asia is the Maldives, the tiniest state.

Till the late 1970s, anti-trade policies remained dominant in the region for nearly four decades. The collapse of the Soviet Union, China's success through outward-oriented policies and transforming the *pacto-mania* of the Cold War era into trade blocks in the post-Cold War times gradually helped convince the South Asian policy makers to open up their trade regimes to the neighbours, at least in the policy level. Unilateral trade liberalisation policies, which began in the second half of the 1980s, were introduced on a more systematic basis in the 1990s. This change stimulated more rapid expansion of trade in India, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Nepal not only with the outside world but with the intra-regional ones. The states started to see increased cooperation and trade among them as a key to mutual development. The founding of South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) in 1985 reflected an expression to promote dialogue and cooperation. In 1993, the SAARC member states signed an agreement to forge the South Asian Preferential Trade Area (SAPTA), which became operational in December 1995. Though the actual exchange of preferences remained extremely limited, the process of negotiation kept the dialogue among member countries alive, which culminated in the South Asian Free Trade Area (SAFTA) in 2006, a step taken

towards changing the whole inward-looking trade policy into an outward-looking trade culture in South Asia.

Extra-Regional Circulation of Commodities

Trade between India and the Middle East has been in existence since the first people settled along the Indus River. After Alexander the Great conquered a part of India in the fourth century BCE, he established a permanent trade route between India and the Mediterranean. By one hundred BCE, a vast amount of commodities, such as textiles, gems, and spices, were exported from India to that region. Next came the Han Dynasty, which established the Silk Route for trade. It reached as far as Mesopotamia and became a main conduit for the exchange of goods and ideas between China and other civilisations. Over time, the trade route reached 4,000 miles. Most merchants traded their goods at one of many markets established along the way. China imported goods such as glass, muslin and various food products like cucumber and grapes. Bengal produced the best muslin and traded it. Extensive trade occurred throughout the Roman Empire during the *Pax Romana* (Roman Peace). Products such as Indian cotton and spices moved freely across the empire. History shows clear instances of trade between South Asians and Mongols, who at a certain stage conquered India. It helped strengthen trade between India and Central Asia. These trade relations continued till *Pax Mongolia* or Mongol Peace. The Ming Dynasty replaced the Mongols as rulers of China. Between 1405 and 1433, Chinese admiral Zheng sailed along the coasts of India and opened trade between China and these coastal belts. Sea routes across the Indian Ocean and into the Arabian Sea provided necessary links for Asia, including South Asia.

During 1700-1760, the main exports from South Asia to Europe were indigo, black pepper, raw silk, and saltpetre. Since 1730s opium export to China from South Asia became a profitable trade, which helped reverse the trade imbalances caused by British import of tea (Colonial India: Online). The Danish became a minor colonial power in India and consolidated such power to a certain extent after establishing their outposts in West Bengal (1755) and the Nicobar Islands (1750s). At one stage, the Danish and the Swedish East Asia companies together imported more tea than the British did.

During the eighteenth to the first half of the twentieth century, the circulation of South Asian commodities became more extensive than ever before. The colonial masters valued the region as a source of raw material. Among them, the British compelled the regional citizenry to produce commodities to accommodate their needs, ignoring priorities of the natives. During this period South Asia supplied the British with five major commodities: indigo, raw silk, raw cotton, opium and sugar.

European interest in goods from the East increased as the returning Crusaders took many enchanting things with them back home. The colonial rule in India by the Portuguese, the French and the English made trade between South Asia and Europe easy. But the trade statistics in this period are a little illusive. India was a major player in the world export market for textiles in the early eighteenth century, but by the middle of the nineteenth century it lost the export market and much of its domestic market, primarily to Britain, long before the Industrial Revolution (Clingingsmith et al. 2008: 3). Indian textiles export which was about 38 per cent in the 1730s, was reduced to 3 per cent in the 1840s and by 1860s, India became a net importer of

textiles. The Indian spinners, the only ones capable of producing yarn strong enough for warp, produced pure cotton cloth.

The Industrial Revolution began in Great Britain in the early nineteenth century. A visible result of this revolution is an increase in the circulation of commodities. Many industrial countries searched for new markets for their goods and raw material. A result of this increase in trade was imperialism in India and Asia. New methods of transportation such as steamships, railroads, automobiles, and eventually airplanes made this trade quicker and more reliable than before.

The crisis of the rupee, a silver-based currency continued throughout the nineteenth century. B.E. Dadachnaji shows the rate of exchange during 1871-2 and 1892-3. He also shows the price of silver in pence per troy ounce and exchange rate of the rupee in pence. While the price of silver is 60.50 pence per ounce and exchange rate of rupee is 23.13 pence in 1871-2, that declines gradually to become 50.50 pence and 19.50 pence during 1883-4 and 39 pence and 15 pence in 1892-3 (Dadachanji 1934: 15). Consequently, for “India which carried out most of its trade with gold based countries, especially Britain, the impact of this shift was profound. As the price of silver continued to fall, so too did the exchange value of rupee, when measured against sterling” (Economic History of India: Online).

Through imperial policy, the British made India dependent on them for cotton. Export comprised 55 per cent of the Indian market by the 1850s. The famous Indian Jamsetji family established the first cotton mills in Bombay during this decade.

Tata Iron and Steel Company (TISCO), launched in the 1890s in India for the manufacture, repair and maintenance of

locomotives, faced an all-out deprivation from the rulers. The railway companies purchased most of their hardware and parts from Britain, not allowing Indian-owned companies to manufacture or repair the locomotives. TISCO steel, did not obtain orders for rails until 1920s (Headrick 1988: 82).

Historically trade of South Asian countries with the external world has been greater than that of intra-regional countries. The trend still continues, even after the launching of SAPTA and then SAFTA.

As a destination country of the commodities of South Asia the US has an unparalleled position, accounting for 3 per cent goods and commodities of Bhutan, 36 per cent of Bangladesh, 21 per cent of India, 29 per cent of Pakistan, 38 per cent of Maldives, 21 per cent of Nepal, and 38 per cent of Sri Lanka. The former colonial master United Kingdom is the second in the ranking accounting for 3 per cent of Bhutan's commodities, 11 per cent of Bangladesh, 5 per cent of India, 10 per cent of Maldives, 2 per cent of Nepal, 9 per cent of Pakistan, and 13 per cent of Sri Lanka. Germany is emerging as an important destination. Now it is the second largest destination for the commodities of Bangladesh and Nepal, while France is also emerging as an important destination for the commodities of Bangladesh (Burki 2005: 17). Among Asian countries, China is an important country as a destination for commodities of the South Asian countries, particularly those of Pakistan, India and Bangladesh.

Conclusion

Circulation of peoples during the colonial rule, though uninterrupted legally, was carried out in line with the needs and at the behest of the colonial masters. Till independence in the

late 1940s, circulation of commodities also continued as per their choice, facing virtually no restrictions. After independence, the state governments adopted various policies that discouraged the circulation process.

The nature of commodities circulated in the 18th century changed by the twentieth century due to imperial policies and the Industrial Revolution. To ensure a steady supply of certain commodities and goods from South Asia, the colonial powers changed the agricultural setup and production lines in the region. In doing so they discouraged, and in some respects, even annihilated some commodities. Local industries, such as steel faced severe discrimination. But not all colonial acts and policies were bad. The colonial rulers introduced locomotives to the region, made massive investments in irrigation and agriculture with the idea of establishing a balance in supply of food grains throughout the region. For transportation of these agro-commodities they built communications infrastructure. These still are in function as arteries of routes of intra-regional circulation of peoples and commodities.

The circulation of peoples chiefly occurred by way of indentured labourer mobilisation to the centre and other dominions of the empire. The people became educated to adapt to the new world and were involved in diverse works other than those for which they were contracted, and stayed behind even after their tenure expired. Many went to the outer world to explore better education and income opportunities.

After independence, the circulation of peoples among the countries increased because of easy communication but the circulation of commodities decreased owing to various anti-trade policies of the regional states. Extra-regional circulation of commodities, dominated by the Western countries, is still very

high compared to that of the regional ones. On the wake of independence intra-regional circulation of commodities was about 18 per cent of the total circulation of commodities, and decreased to about two per cent by the end of the twentieth century despite having regional blocs such as SAARC to increase economic cooperation.

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Impact of Diaspora on South Asian Cultures from 18th to 20th Centuries

Karunamaya Goswami

Abstract

We may, in our context of discussion, take the word 'Diaspora' to mean what the dictionary says i.e. 'the movement of people from any nation or group away from their own country.' To serve our present purpose, it could be taken as the movement of people from one place to the other and the impact it has on cultures with regard to shaping and reshaping their forms.

The Diasporic impact on South Asian cultures has always been immense since antiquity. During the eighteenth to twentieth centuries it was very much felt since the East India Company started consolidating their power in the Indian Subcontinent from the second half of the eighteenth century. During this period, South Asia came under tremendous Diasporic influence of the Western culture and it affected in length and breadth the major dimensions of living from education to hospitalisation. There was also the impact of movement of people from one region to the other within South Asia itself. For instance, music and dance forms travelled to Bengal from far outside the Bengal region and cultural ideas from Bengal travelled to some other regions in South Asia to create an impact there. Tagore travelled to Sri Lanka and with him travelled the culture of Bengal which left a far reaching impact on the Sri Lankan culture. Camel drivers from Punjab came to Lucknow and with their songs they contributed to the shaping up of a new form of Hindustani songs known as Tappa which very soon travelled to Bengal and created a very great impact on the musical developments there.

So this is how movement of people from beyond South Asia and within South Asia contributed very largely to strengthening and developing the existing cultural forms and leaving space for future developments. This paper discusses such developments.

The word 'Diaspora' originally refers to the movement of the Jewish people away from their own country to live and work in other countries. A saying in the Bible i.e. 'thou shalt be a dispersion in all kingdoms of the earth' is supportive of such dispersion. The meaning of the word is made liberal to widen its content when by Diaspora we mean the movement of people from any nation or group away from their own country. It is this movement-factor that we emphasise when we try to speak of the impact of Diaspora on South Asian Cultures during the last three hundred years.

The Diasporic impact on south Asian cultures or cultures in any other region has always been immense. Civilisation grows through interaction and the interaction inevitably takes place due to the movement of people from their place of origin to others. Aryans, for instance, came to the Indian sub-continent from a faraway land and changed, in course of time, the major tone of the local cultures. Such Diasporic impact continued over centuries with groups of people, big or small, coming to the sub-continent on different pursuits, mostly for conquest or business. The Muslim conquest of India created a Diasporic impact on the Indian culture of very far reaching consequence. If we talk about the Diasporic impact on South Asian cultures during the last three hundred years, we must recognise that it was never felt so keenly and so widely as during this period.

Diasporic impact due to inter-regional movement of people i.e. movement of people from beyond the South Asian region

took place very frequently as the East India Company came to India initially for business, but ultimately created their regime. They raised fighting forces and fought battles one after another and defeated local kings and rulers and brought the entire sub-continent under the company's rule which was formally taken over by the British crown in 1858. Battle of Plassey in Bengal in 1757 was a great turning point. The East India Company captured Bengal and shifted the capital of Bengal from Murshidabad to Kolkata in 1773. In the course of time when entire India came under the British rule Kolkata remained the capital of British India until it was shifted to Delhi on 12 December 1911. As the East India Company felt it consolidated its Kolkata-centric power, it paid some attention to bring western cultural expressions to India, initially through Kolkata-based programmes. Warren Hastings (1772-85) was the person who brought about a multi-dimensional interaction between the urban cultural expressions of Bengal and those of the west. The Kolkata-based Bengali theatre was the first to come into interaction with the western theatre culture. The first westernised theatre was founded in Kolkata in 1775. Performers were brought from England to stage plays. Ladies acted on the westernised Kolkata stage in 1783. Gerasim Lebedoff, a Russian band master-musician came to Kolkata and staged two English plays which were translated into Bengali during 1795-96. Bengali actors and actresses took part in stage presentations. In the British Indian capital and in some places around it, some dramatic clubs were formed to entertain the European communities. The English, Italian, German, French and other European communities took part in the club-performances. All these performances brought about changes in Bengali play writing and stage performances. The idea of orchestration caught the imagination of Bengali stage-music directors. When

Italian opera troupes started travelling to Kolkata and living there for years on contract for stage performances, they created an impact of a different kind on Bengali drama. Bengali song dramas in particular were written and performed following Italian opera models. Drama, prose or be it song, western influence affected and transformed Bengali urban literature in all its forms. Presence of the people from England and other countries of West in South Asia and that of people from South Asia in England in particular, and in Europe at large accentuated the speed of transformation not only of art and literature but of all the important areas of living - from education to hospitalisation.

But Western music initially did not have much of an influence other than bringing some temperamental changes in Bengal's urban musical compositional styles. Only the essence of some performing ideas was adopted later on. For instance, Rabindranath Tagore adapted the western idea of composed music in matter of rendition of his songs and emphasised the concept and practice of writing down music in notation for the sake of correct singing and preservation. This is, in brief, what Diasporic impact created by the movement of people from West to South Asia during the second half of the 18th century. But the intra-regional movement of people i.e. within South Asia itself had also done a lot in shaping and reshaping the cultural expressions. Camel drivers from Punjab used to come to Lucknow on business missions. For instance they loaded the camels with goods in Lahore and delivered them to Lucknow and again loaded the camels with goods in Lucknow to carry them back to Lahore. The camel drivers used to sing some Punjabi folk songs of very light classical tone. Golan Nabi (1742-92), a noted *Kheyal* (a form of Northern Indian Hindustani classical music) singer of Lucknow, took interest in

the Punjabi folk songs sung by the camel drivers and felt that he could create a new form of songs by accommodating the Punjabi folk nuances into the *Kheyal* space. He did it and successfully created a musical compound which he called *Tappa* (a form of light classical Northern Indian Hindustani music). Ramnidhi Gupta, popularly known as Nidhu Babu (1741-1839) went to Chhapra in Bihar in 1776 to work as a clerk in the newly founded collectorate there. Chhapra in those days was a music centre of repute and a good number of Hindustani classical music trainers and performers used to live there. Nidhu Babu was trained at an elderly age, in singing Hindustani classical song-forms, particularly *kheyal*. He took immense interest in learning the newly initiated *Tappa* style and learned it quite profoundly. On retirement he came back to Kolkata in 1794. But earlier to it he decided to move away from the line of the Hindustani *Tappa* and create a version of his own. He wrote some *Tappa* texts in Bengali and set them to music as he loved to create it. He took the Kolkata audience by storm when he started singing them in *mehfils* (music session) after *mehfils*. That inspired Nidhu Babu to compose hundreds of *Tappa* songs and lay the great foundation of Bengali *Tappa* tradition. With Bengaliised Lucknow *Tappa* Nidhu Babu revolutionised the age-old trend of Bengali urban songs. Till the end of the eighteenth century the mainstream Bengali songs was devotional in tone. But by tone Nidhu Babu's *Tappas* were secular and by theme they were love songs, love in pure human sense, emphasising the pangs of ladies for not possessing liberty of being able to choose for the men of their love. So, as we see, *Tappa* travelled to Bengal via Chhapra through Nidhu Babu and formed the basis of modern age of Bengali songs and in larger sense, the modern age of Bengali literature on the basis of secularism and democratic spirit. Raga songs like *Dhrupada* (a

form of North Indian Hindustani classical music), *Kheyal* and *Thumri* (a form of North Indian Hindustani light classical music) had also travelled to Bengal from places like Agra, Gwalior, Rampur, Kirana, Banaras, Delhi, Lucknow, Patiala, Muradabad and so on. As the East India Company started taking the entire Indian sub-continent in its grip, the Mughal empire and local kingdoms declined and all the Hindustani musicians of vocal and instrumental genres started pouring to Kolkata, the capital city where they were offered patronage by the growing affluent families. And from Kolkata they dispersed to different *zamindar* houses in remote village areas throughout Bengal. *Baijis* or the professional dancing damsels too got liberal patronage in Kolkata from where they occasionally travelled to the rural *zamindar* houses on contract. The most significant event in this regard was the shifting of entire Lucknow family of court musicians by Wazid Ali Shah, Nawab of Awadh in the Matiaburj suburb of Kolkata where he was banished on a yearly allowance in 1858. Earlier in 1857 he was arrested and kept captive for one year on charge of his complicity with the 1957 Sepoy Mutiny. The shifting of entire Lucknow court was something very great and it acted very sharply in matter of ‘Hindustaniising’ the mainstream music of Bengal and the taste of the Bengali music loving people.

Rabindranath Tagore and his university Visva Bharati always had a warm relation with the people of Sri Lanka. Tagore had gone to Colombo on three occasions and was always full of admiration for the beautiful island. I quote from my own book, *The Art of Tagore Songs*, what I have written about Tagore’s last Sri Lankan tour in 1934:

In the month of May 1934 Tagore went to Colombo, Sri Lanka with a performing troupe. Tagore was full of praise for the island where he had gone in 1922 and 1928 when

there was no performing troupe with him. This time besides speeches delivered by Tagore, exhibition of Tagore paintings and performance of the dance drama Shapmochan took place. The people of Colombo came across a new experience about Indian music and dance. Colonial subjugation for many years had alienated Sri Lanka from the culture of the sub-continent. But the 1934 visit by Tagore had gone a long way in inspiring the Sri Lankan people about their cultural heritage and taking interest in Indian music and dance. Earlier to it three or four students from Sri Lanka came to Visva-Bharati for higher education. But as a consequence of this visit by Tagore students from Sri Lanka started to come in groups to read in the arts and the music faculties of Visva-Bharati. (Goswami 2011: 133)

Tagore's biographer Prabhat Kumar Mukhopadhyay calls it a very great event. Sinhalese newspapers commented on Tagore's visit in glowing terms. The 1934 Tagore travel played a very big role in enthusing Sri Lankan scholars and performers to take interest in the mainstream Indian culture. This is an example of how South Asian cultures came closer through movements of groups of people.

There is a Bengali folk song form known as *Ghatu*. *Ghatu* is a young boy good at singing and dancing who sings on boats. Although *Ghatu*s also sing on land, in *mehfils* and the *Ghatu mehfil* songs are of light classical trends. We also find a kind of song in Nepal which is known as *Ghatu*. It may have so happened that *Ghatu* songs have either travelled from Bengal to Nepal or from Nepal to Bengal. The kingly court of Nepal and the wealthy Nepalese families had always patronised Hindustani classical music and eminent *Gharanadar* musicians stayed in Nepal for years or decades.

Bangladesh emerged as a sovereign land through the glorious War of Liberation in 1971. During the last forty years Bangladesh has been a great centre of Diasporic activities. Bengalis from Bangladesh are today found living in large numbers in all the major cities of the world. They are taking the elements of Bengali culture with them and also accepting in some way or other the elements of culture of the places they are now living. This creates a chemistry of change in their mindset which they send back home in various cultural expressions and thus create a bridge of connection between Bangladesh and places they live in. Today Bangladesh plays a significant role in building up the global spirit by being a big partner in the global Diaspora. Bangladesh is also playing a role in creating an impact on South Asian cultures through organising or taking part in cultural programmes all across the region.

As matters go, people of South Asia should come closer to ensure peace in the region which is an essential prerequisite of development. We must together fight out our common enemy which is poverty. As for this, a strong environment of unity must be created between the SAARC member states. Be it in Bangladesh or in Sri Lanka, we will discover through investigation that at the root we are not very different at all. South Asia is like a huge tree and the member states are like fruits of different shapes and colours. This sense of regional belonging must be built on the grassroots level. Once this is done, political differences could be minimised. And this has got to be done for the sake of the countless South Asian people who are yet to enjoy the fruits of education, health, food and home.

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Diasporic Culture of Bangladesh - 18th to 20th Centuries

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Abstract

From time immemorial the mass movement of people and tribe has been going on. The area which now constitutes SAARC countries is no exception. Bangladesh is one of the important members of SAARC. It has however a rich history of its own. The land of Bangladesh being extremely fertile and the climate moderate, the outward movement of people seemed to have been less in the past. Rather more and more people were drawn to its bound from different directions for settlement giving rise to a unique growth of mixed cultural development.

Any significant diaspora of Bangladeshi people seems to be of recent origin. This is more due to exploring the outside world rather than finding alternative locations for livelihood. The people of Bangladesh have deep feelings for their culture and their language. These two things they would never give up wherever they go.

In the present article I have however emphasised that a dramatic change has recently occurred in the diasporic culture of Bangladesh owing to an unprecedented growth of population. It is a small country of 55,000 square miles but now has a population of about 160 million. The outside movement of people are thus taking place in extensive manner.

In this article I have also made a historical review of the diasporic culture of Bangladeshi people. I have examined the causes of this movement, and touched upon the nature of this diaspora. I have also indicated the destinations to

which the people of Bangladesh are heading for. This story of diaspora of Bangladeshi people is a mixed one some successful and others are awfully disastrous. But I have found out some unique characteristics of this diaspora which have transformed the culture of the people themselves and the places to which they went.

Introduction

In Greek, diaspora simply indicates ‘scattering across’ or ‘dispersal’, but in English language it has a specific meaning i.e. the scattering of people. It is in this context that this paper would examine the diasporic culture of Bangladesh from the eighteenth to twentieth centuries.

The mass movement of people and tribes has been going on for centuries. There were some 80 million Europeans who had “emigrated voluntarily or as convicts or indentured labourers to North America, and 20 million African slaves” to different countries since the eighteenth century (Cheesman and Khanum 2007: 583). In the twentieth century after the World War II an astonishing degree of migration took place driven by the demand of the most developed countries of the world for labour including both skilled and unskilled workers. At present migration takes place to provide skills and support service to maintain the globalised economy. Thus there is a continuous flow of professional and skilled personnel to different parts of the world sponsored by big multinational companies. In order to sustain prosperity and competitiveness every country now needs fresh people i.e. to rely on ‘brain circulation.’

The movement of people from Bangladesh to other regions of South Asia or the SAARC countries and beyond in any large scale is, however, a recent phenomenon. Bangladesh, for many

centuries, has been a place of relative peace, political stability and economic prosperity. Hence, there was no need for people to move out of the country. Rather many nations came here taking advantage of its economic prosperity, secular culture, and religious tolerance, contributing to the growth of a newer culture (See Chowdhury and Ahmed 2011).

During the medieval period people from the nearby Indian provinces and from far off places like Saudi Arabia, Iran, Afghanistan and Central Asia came to Bengal and settled here. Soon a mixture of culture started which influenced the language, culture, dress and food habits of both the settlers and the indigenous people (See Islam and Mahmud 2011). Bengal or Bangladesh has largely benefited from this diasporic culture being exposed to a wider world and a wider culture. The Arabs, Iranians, Pathans, Turks, Armenians, British, Dutch and the French contributed immensely to the cultural development of the Bangladeshis. They also enriched the Bangla language.

From the middle of the eighteenth century the movement of people from the area that now constitutes Bangladesh slowly started. Though there was no particular reason for this migration, people moved outside to fulfil their individual dreams, and also to use their skilled potential. Some even went as ordinary labour force. It was initially to the new capital of British India, Kolkata. Kolkata was gradually becoming the hub of all administrative, industrial and commercial activities of British India drawing people of all kinds – educated and uneducated, skilled and unskilled workers to its bound. Soon a group of people from East Bengal settled down in Kolkata with their own culture and ways of life, influencing the culture of the new metropolis. East Bengalis with their peculiar local dialect formed a distinct cultural group. Later a large number of big

Zamindars or landlords from East Bengal moved to Kolkata where they built their temporary mansions adding a new stratum to the metropolitan culture (Chaudhuri et al. 2008: 127).

The single most important element which heralded the dawn of modern India in the nineteenth century was the English education. This education began to be imparted in Dhaka, the present capital of Bangladesh in the early nineteenth century by the British government and the first Government English School in the subcontinent was founded in Dhaka in 1835. This school and subsequently a college founded in Dhaka in 1841 proved cataclysmic in changing the ways of life in Bangladesh. Soon English educated Bengalis arrived on the scene who as junior partners of the British rulers spread all over the subcontinent looking after administration and educational developments of colonial India. Initially in the neighbouring provinces and later to distant lands, the English educated East Bengalis moved, and wherever they went they soon built up a mini East Bengal where they continued their own culture and ways of life. At the same time they also influenced the local ways of life.

The neighbouring Assam in the north East India is a case in point. Many educated Bengalis went to the province in the mid nineteenth century as officials, teachers and businessmen. Since then the movement of Bangladeshis to Assam countryside and the cities like Shillong has continued. The first settlement of Bengalis in Shillong took place in 1864. The British government in India, particularly in the eastern and north-eastern parts, came to depend significantly on the Bengalis as they were the first to receive English education. The trend continued for a long time and in the second half of the nineteenth century, a large number of Bengalis went to Shillong, the capital of Assam to work for the British government. It was the Bengalis who up to 1897

dominated as the ‘native employees’ of the government. “The leading provision and department stores, book stalls and so on tended also to be owned by Bengalis” (Virtual Tourist: Online).

From the early twentieth century a large number of peasants both Hindus and Muslims went to Assam to cultivate lands which were then waste lands or which the Assamese would not dare to bring under cultivation. All these swelled the population of Bengalis in Assam. These Bengalis took with them their culture and ways of life which greatly influenced the local people. They now constitute the third major linguistic group in Meghalaya (8.95 per cent). The movement of Bengalis to Assam was not however free from any problem. Rather it gave birth to many issues which till today bother the local as well as central government of India, and India’s relations with Bangladesh.

The Departure of the British and the creation of India and Pakistan in 1947 opened further doors for Bangladeshis to step out into different parts of the world. Though still there was no such acute pressure, the people moved outside taking advantage of their new freedom to various countries to improve their socio-economic life. The newly independent countries of India and Pakistan also opened various opportunities for employment and business. After the partition, there was however an exodus of Hindu population to India particularly to West Bengal where they formed the largest group of refugee population. Similarly a large number of Muslim populations came to East Pakistan, especially to the capital Dhaka from India particularly from West Bengal. This led to the assimilation of a new culture (Dani et al. 1962: 154-5).

Initially only a handful of Muslim population of East Pakistan moved to West Pakistan particularly to the city of Karachi which was then the capital of Pakistan. In fact it was in

Karachi that the largest settlement of the Bengalis took place in Pakistan. These settlers included educated and uneducated workers, skilled and unskilled labourers, businessmen and various professional people. They settled down in different parts of the city, and also lived in various government colonies. As usual they clung largely to their own culture and ways of life. Their food habits or dress did not change much.

The bitter relations between the two wings of Pakistan leading to the formation of Bangladesh in 1971 cut short this first flow of Bengalis to Pakistan. In fact after the emergence of Bangladesh, the number of Bengalis of Bangladeshi origin in Karachi dwindled down to only 10,000. However, since then the number has been increasing through migration though the exact number is not known.

At present there are numbers of Bengali colonies in Karachi, often called 'mini Bangladesh.' Bengali communities are often found in the same areas where Myanmar (Burma) people in Pakistan are found, due to a shared culture and similar language. Among the Bangladeshi colonies in Karachi, 'Chittagong Colony' is very famous. It is so-called probably because people of Chittagong origin might have settled there first. Mostly Bangladeshi things dominate this place. When one walks through the colony, one can see the colourful Bengali signboards, *Bhasani* caps, *lungis* and *kurtas*. The Chittagong Colony has a Bazaar which is famous throughout Pakistan as the centre for Dhaka cloth. It is also the headquarters for the local Bengali language daily newspaper *Qaumi Bandhan*.

Middle East, Europe, America and Canada

The emergence of Bangladesh as a sovereign independent country in 1971 completely changed the situation in the country

so far as migration was concerned. A war ravaged the country, the socio-economic conditions of Bangladesh in the initial period, were under great stress. Added to this was the burden of rising numbers of population which was hitherto not severely felt much or to which the nation did not give much attention. But very soon the burden of population pressure was felt particularly as the economic sector did not recover as fast as was expected. Moreover, as citizens of a free country, the movement of population to outside places for the improvement of one's socio-economic life became much easier and government also encouraged it by making it easy to travel. So started the formation of a diaspora of Bangladeshi people towards the last decades of the twentieth century. About this time some countries of the world badly needed labour- both skilled and unskilled for the development and modernisation of their countries. The developed countries continued to have this labour to maintain their prosperity and competitiveness as well as for fulfilling their social welfare commitments. But there were other countries which became labour hungry to utilise their newly found wealth to change the face of their age old countries. This is the area which is known as the Middle East. The governments of the Middle Eastern countries adopted massive programmes to develop and modernise their countries and sought both skilled and unskilled labour from all over the world to implement these programmes. Thus there took place an unprecedented movement of work force to the Middle East. A large supply came from the South Asian countries including Bangladesh. There is however a major difference in this movement of people to the Middle East. The Middle East countries did not accept these workers as some kind of migrants but treated them as guest workers for a limited period. However, many of these workers stayed there for many years and have almost converted their status as settlers.

The movement of Bangladeshis, however, to Europe particularly Britain and America was a kind of potential migrants. Many were given entry as simple migrants or settlers. Hence their status and prospect for settling down permanently was more likely. Meanwhile the situation in Bangladesh was becoming desperate with the ever increasing pressure of population. The increased population and lack of employment forced many to emigrate, the government this time encouraged it more vigorously providing all kinds of facilities even training. Hence the movement of Bangladeshis to different parts of the world increased further and the destinations this time were not only the Middle East, Europe or America but also new countries like Canada, Australia, New Zealand and Malaysia.

The people of Bengal first went to England in the eighteenth century. "They worked as lascars, seamen, in the British merchant marine, and the first lascars from 'Chatgaon' and 'Juhangeer Nuggur' were reported in the London docks as early as 1765" (Cheesman and Khanum 2007: 598). They found their way in East London. Ever since then East London has become the home of diasporic Bangladeshis. At present one fifth of the Bangladeshi community in Britain "live around the old docklands area of the London Borough of Tower Hamlets" (Cheesman and Khanum 2007: 598).

However, the diaspora of Bangladeshis in Britain was not at this time a massive figure. In fact only a handful of them trickled down to the shores of Britain till the middle of the twentieth century. "In 1951, only 5000 people who were born in Bangladesh were recorded in Britain" (Cheesman and Khanum 2007: 598). However, the scenario began to change. Over the next twenty years, the number rose to 170000, an astonishing rise. By 2001, the number further increased to 283,000. "This

rise was almost due to immigration. Less than half of the present Bangladeshi community were born in the United Kingdom” (Cheesman and Khanum 2007: 598).

Initially the Bangladeshi population in Britain worked in various places mostly as unskilled labourers in factories, hospitals, transports and shops. Very soon an enterprising section of them moved to the restaurant business selling Bangladeshi cuisine or rather Indian cuisine for which the local population developed a taste. In course of time the number of Bangladeshi restaurants increased phenomenally becoming a significant part of British economy. It is curious to note that those restaurants owned by the Bangladeshis are generally known as Indian restaurants because at the beginning it was easier for the locals to identify them with India. Today the influence of these restaurants upon the indigenous people has become so deep rooted that it has changed their food habits.

Bangladeshis Abroad: Settler Societies

It is interesting to note that diaspora leads to many cultural changes. It changes the migrants themselves, the societies they move to and finally the places of their origin. As has been mentioned already the Bangladeshi diaspora in any significant manner is a very recent phenomenon. That is why the overseas Bangladeshi community is still a very young one. Hence they are yet unable to evolve their own traditions in a new society. Among the immigrants in the developed world, only in the United Kingdom there has emerged a second generation. In other countries as migration only started towards the end of the twentieth century the second generation is only now of school going age. Whereas in the countries of guest workers the Middle East, Malaysia, Italy, Japan, etc., the Bangladeshi community

“lack continuity since they consist of only temporary migrants separated from their families” (Cheesman and Khanum 2007: 612).

Circulation of Culture

The Bangladeshis who are now living abroad despite their employment and new environment, cling to Bangladeshi culture and ethos. They continue to keep ‘strong family values and work ethics.’ The notions of handing down religious and moral values including ‘honesty, respect and faithfulness in marriage’ have been kept alive. These Bangladeshis practice their religion very seriously and also are very conscious to keep their culture alive and are not willing to forget their roots. They watch Bengali films, listen to Bengali music and try to visit Bangladesh as frequently as possible (Cheesman and Khanum 2007: 612-3).

They have also set up a network among themselves. This networking grows big where the numbers of Bangladeshis are greater. As communities grow bigger they need more formal relationships. Wherever there is a sizable number of Bangladeshis they set up cultural associations, drama and music groups. They also organise schools for learning Bangla language and literature. Any town with a reasonably sized Bangladeshi community has cultural and social associations.

Those cultural and social associations follow typical Bangladeshi socio-cultural activities and create a circulation of foreign culture in a new country. Thus they nowadays celebrate International Mother Language Day on 21st February commemorating the martyrs of the Language Movement of Bangladesh, the *Pahela Baisak*, the first day of the Bengali year, *Iftar* parties or breaking fast parties during month of Ramadan, Eid Reunions, Victory Day Celebrations, Bengali Film

Festivals, Cultural shows of Bangladeshi dance and music etc. Many of the big and rich Bangladeshi associations abroad nowadays invite intellectuals, academics, artists and others from Bangladesh to give lectures and read papers on Bangladesh and Bangladeshi culture, and have Bangla cultural shows. “They also arrange youth exchange visits between their host countries and sports team and schools in Bangladesh” (Cheesman and Khanum 2007: 612-3).

Language

The most important aspect of culture is the language, and the Bangladeshis living abroad have put much importance in preserving their language, and even handing down it to the succeeding generations. For this they have to work hard. The majority of the Bangladeshis living overseas speak Bangla at home. The culture of Bangla language has nowadays become easier with communication revolution. Anywhere in the world wherever they live, the Bangladeshis can now have regular contact with Bangla language through Bangladesh satellite television channels. Bangladeshis living in the Middle East, USA, UK, and Australia have access to different Bangladeshi channels. “In Britain, a British Bengal Station, Channel S, has been broadcasting since 2004” (Cheesman and Khanum 2007: 615). Also in Australia and Canada there are Bengali Radio Stations. “More long established are Bengali language newspapers. More easily accessible are CDS, Videos, DVDs and more recently download facilities through websites such as mybanglamusic.com Bangladeshis abroad can keep up-to-date with the latest in Bangladeshi music and cinema” (Cheesman and Khanum 2007: 615).

However, “a more conscious effort is needed to maintain the language skills of the second generation-especially to raise them to a standard where they can go beyond day-to-day communication and appreciate Bengali literature” (Cheesman and Khanum 2007: 615). Various efforts are now being successfully made in this regard.

The emotional aspect of clinging to their own language is best shown during the time of the Nazrul and Rabindra Jayanti - i.e. the Celebration of birth days of two of the greatest poets of Bengal. To these has now been added the International Mother Language Day on 21 February. Commenting on the Celebration of Ekushey February, the martyr day of the language movement Cheesman and Khanum (2007: 616) state that the day:

... had been a regular feature of expatriate life, as in Bangladesh, but the UN Resolution declaring 21 February as the International Mother Language Day provided an opportunity to extend the occasion to a celebration of other languages spoken in the countries where Bangladeshi communities live. It also presented a legitimate opportunity for Bangladeshi communities to take the lead.

The Celebration of Ekushe February has also added a new feature in the cultural initiative of the diasporic people. They also wish to physically transfer some of the cultural symbols from home to their new lands of settlement. Thus they have already installed one of the most unique cultural symbols from home i.e. the Shaheed Minar of Dhaka (Martyrs Memorial) to the new homeland. Shaheed Minar has been erected in many places throughout the world. “The first was built in Oldham, Lancashire, England, but the most significant, outside Bangladesh, was erected in the heart of the largest overseas Bangladeshi community in East London in 1999” (Cheesman

and Khanum 2007: 616). The example is now being set in many other countries. Even in Tokyo where there is not a large Bangladeshi community, a Shaheed Minar has been recently constructed.

Family and Marriage

It is a general pattern that the diasporic people marry within their own community. There are various reasons for that. The experiences of the Bangladeshis in Britain are however a bit different. “Across the world and across the centuries, male pioneers have traditionally established their positions [abroad] and then brought wives from the home country when they felt sufficiently secure” (Cheesman and Khanum 2007: 617). The Bangladeshis in Britain did exactly the same and there was a huge migration of Bangladeshi girls to Britain as wives. The restrictions imposed on the entry of wives for a while put a break on this kind of South Asian immigration. “In Britain this resulted in split families” (Cheesman and Khanum 2007: 617). Bangladeshi men married in Bangladesh but were unable to bring their families back to Britain. Thus the wives were left back and the children who were born grew up in Bangladesh and in many cases entered Britain at an advanced age with little knowledge of English and the British system of life. It was even more difficult for them when they entered the job market which forced them to accept very ordinary jobs.

The situation has changed recently for the better and the Bangladeshis could now easily marry girls from their home towns or villages and bring them to Britain. This system of marrying girls or boys from home country still persists though a different environment has now emerged. In Britain today there

is a large pool of young men and women but the tradition of marrying someone from Bangladesh still persists.

The system of marriage is also traditional. Arranged marriages are the norm among expatriate Bangladeshis, and in practice some are even forced to enter into arranged marriages. However, most are done in accordance with mutual consent, and work well. It is interesting to note that every young man and woman born and brought up in Britain not only accepts but also welcomes arranged marriage. The family structure of Bangladeshis overseas thus remains strong. It is not only in the case of marriages but also in other spheres of life like respect for elderly and looking after the aged parents, the traditions continue.

Food

It is interesting to note that the food habits of the expatriates have not changed to any marked degree. They continue their old food habits. Although it is true that at the beginning they had problems and they missed their 'home cooking', as numbers of expatriates increased, enterprising businessmen and shop keepers started bringing food from Bangladesh. Initially what the Bangladeshis missed very much were the typical spices with which they cooked their food. But now all these are easily available even in high-street shops, and Bangladeshis can now have in their every-day meals menu items like Bangladeshi vegetables, Bangladeshi fishes like *hilsah*, *rui* and *pabda* and Bangladeshi sweets like *rashmalai*, *rashgolla* and *shandesh*.

By establishing Bangladeshi, though actually called Indian, restaurants in thousands the Bangladeshis even have spread their food habits among the host community. There are now about 9,500 'Indian' restaurants and takeaways in Britain, 85% of

them owned by the Bangladeshis (Cheesman and Khanum 2007: 620). The sub continental cuisine has become a very common thing among the host British community.

Impact of Bangladeshi Communities on Society

Settlers and migrant communities also have a deep impact on the host society, and the Bangladeshis have already shown that. The Bangladeshi guest workers in the Middle East are building networks, infrastructure and eating traditions which are changing the host countries whether those countries have noticed it or not. Bangladeshis in their diverse activities have caused significant changes in the culture and social life of the host countries. Many organised bodies have also been formed in this connection. Bangladeshi Associations, as they are usually called, have set out their goals in terms of participating and changing the socio-economic lives of their host countries and even for that matter of Bangladesh. Already they have participated vigorously in the life of the host countries including becoming elected members of Parliament, Councils and other bodies. They have contributed significantly to the economy of the country as well as in the cultural field by organising musical events, building Shaheed Minars and holding exhibitions and fairs of various kinds.

It is in the United Kingdom, which houses the oldest and largest overseas Bangladeshi community where Bangladeshi impact has been most profound. The UK may provide insights into how the inter-relationships may develop in other countries.

Brick Lane in Spitafields in East London where there is the largest concentration of Bangladeshis outside Bangladesh has already shown what things might come out in the future. The place is already recognised as *Bangla town* or Town of the

Bangladeshis where names of streets are even shown both in English and Bengali. It has also been found that “the ‘Cockney’ English of East London is developing a Bangladeshi/ Sylheti accent and Bengali words are gradually becoming part of the vocabulary of the white Cockneys” (Cheesman and Khanum 2007: 624).

As has also been indicated Bangladeshis have changed the entire eating habits of the British through their dominance in the Indian Restaurant trade. “Chicken tikka masala, a dish invented in Britain by Bangladeshis, is now one of the favourite meals of Britain, Samosas have become a standard item on British business buffet lunches” (Cheesman and Khanum 2007: 624) and curry seems to be a favourite among children. “South Asian food is now so thoroughly naturalised as British that ready-made meals are sold in supermarkets” (Cheesman and Khanum 2007: 624). It is very much revealing that such a tiny per cent of diasporic population can “have such a profound impact on so intimate a feature of the mainstream culture of a nation” (Cheesman and Khanum 2007: 624).

The Bangladeshi Restaurants are now also playing a significant role in the British economy. The annual turnover of these restaurants is nearly 320 million pounds and accounts for about ten per cent of the nation’s restaurant trade. It is estimated that about 70000 people are directly employed by the restaurants and as much as 50000 people are indirectly engaged as suppliers and other service providers. It is not only this; the Bangladeshis in London are also contributing to the global importance of the city of London through economic activities by providing South Asian cuisine.

Conclusion

The diasporic culture of South Asian countries within and outside the SAARC region may vary much. The Bangladeshi diaspora is only settling down, hence it will take some time to fully develop its cultural implications. Even in the United Kingdom, where there is a long tradition and largest concentration of population, the second generation of Bangladeshis are only in their twenties or early thirties. In other places the second generation is mere school going children.

However, there is another aspect of this diasporic movement in certain parts of the world especially in the Middle East where the status of this population is that of guest workers or impermanent communities of short visitors. The Bangladeshi workers in the Middle East have so far experienced a mixed fortune. Some have successful stories of their journey, others have tragic experiences but most of them are now becoming conscious of their rights. They wish to have a peaceful existence while engaged in their activities. They earn money and remit some of it to help relations or to invest for their own sake back at home. It is this peaceful existence which they wish to be ensured as their human rights and for which they seek protection from the Bangladeshi Embassies. They are now asserting that as they have become an integral part of the host country's economic life they should be allowed to live permanently, finalise their married life and bring families from home. These guest workers have started demanding their full rights as guest workers and probably in the future would become a settler community. When that happens, the face of the Middle East would greatly change. But the diaspora of Bangladeshis would continue perhaps in new directions as in South East Asia, East Asia and Japan and also in the newly found destination, Italy.

Whatever happens in the future, and wherever they go, the Bangladeshis would definitely take their culture with them and spread them among the host community. There are two areas in which the diasporic Bangladeshis would have a huge impact on the host society. First, in the food sector and second the language. Bangladeshis are very good in marketing Bangladeshi cuisine, and they soon would open outlets for it by establishing restaurants which would be visited by both the host as well as settler communities. Next, relates to the survival of the Bangladeshi language. They have already shown that they have history, the tradition and skills to show others how they can preserve their own language and traditions in a multi-lingual environment. Thus there are many ways in which the Bangladeshis can take leading roles in the societies where they have settled.

As the subject of diaspora is very important and has global implications involving community relationships, peace and harmony, there is a need to carry out extensive research. Researches can be undertaken on various subjects like cultural evolution, family relationships, the position and role of women, new attitudes on religion, approaches to politics, the environment and entrepreneurship, changes in aspirations of specific communities which develop migrant traditions and removal of legal barriers for settlers for establishing a happy and peaceful new home.

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Diasporic Cultures of South Asia: Bangladesh Perspective

Shamsuzzaman Khan

Abstract

This paper looks at the concept, 'diaspora' as has been conceived by the academic circle in recent times. With a view to understanding the role of multilayered and multidimensional meanings of context-specific diasporas, it also discusses the form or types of diaspora identified by the academics in the contemporary literature.

Next, the paper explores the historical roots of the South Asian migration or movement of people from their respective home countries to the host countries or regions and the cultural assimilation process of diaspora formation in their resident countries will also be investigated.

Finally this paper discusses the Bangladeshi diaspora around the world a little extensively keeping in mind the historical depth and geographical spread of the subject.

The term, 'diaspora' has multiple meanings and various usages. In recent years, over-use and under-theorisation of the concept has made it a loose reference category such as, immigrants, ethnic minorities, expatriate, contractual workers, refugees, exiles and so on. Considering many conceptual and analytical descriptions one finds Gabriel Sheffer's formulation quite useful. According to Sheffer (1994: 60) "a fundamental characteristic of diasporas is that they maintain their ethno-national identities, which are strongly and directly derived from their homelands and related to them." One important fact is that, though the members of a diaspora do not know each other back-

home they regroup themselves as an active and cohesive identity group in their host-lands.

Ours is a globalised world. People are moving faster than ever before. In this fast moving world the role of diaspora is very significant in many ways. According to Adelman (2003: Online), diaspora remittances are the “major flow of economic resources from the developed to the developing world dwarfing aid moneys and potentially being much targeted and effective.”

Migration is an essential part of human existence. This world is not static but dynamic in nature. This dynamism works better when a society opens its door for others. In many cases these ‘Others’ come with new skills and innovative ideas and experiences. They perform hard labour and their capacity to do odd jobs is commendable. The arrival of migrants has benefitted many developed and economically well-off societies immensely. On the other hand, countries of origin are also benefitted from the remittances of their migrant workers or expatriates. Recent studies suggest that migration is a two-way beneficial affair. Both the sending and receiving countries are benefitted economically, socially and culturally from the migration of people. This is, in fact, the most positive side of globalisation and integration of world economy.

Following is a discussion of the benefits of both the receiving affluent societies and sending developing or less developed ones. Several studies show that the economic, human and infrastructural and even technological and scientific advancement of many highly developed countries have been closely linked with the migration of people over the centuries. Industrial growth of Europe had been possible due to forced or natural migration or colonisation. The United States and Australia are heavily indebted to migration for the founding of

their nation-states. Recent massive infrastructural growth and development of oil-rich Middle Eastern countries have been possible due to the migration of a skilled and un-skilled labour force from South Asian countries, Philippines, Indonesia, etc.

When evaluating the gains and losses of migration in relation to developing countries, some analysts view it positively, while others negatively. Those who see it positively say that, migration of a considerable number of people from the over-populated country is a great relief. It reduces the burden on the economy and helps solve the unemployment problem quite significantly. It also reduces health, sanitation and housing problems and at the same time the regular flow of their remittances boosts the national economy of their respective countries. On the other hand, the critics of migration say that migration of skilled professionals is a great loss to the country of origin because they have been raised and nurtured with valuable national wealth. So their migration is a national loss and a clear case of brain-drain.

South Asian Diaspora

Following is a brief discussion on the South Asian diaspora. South Asia consists of Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Pakistan, Nepal and Sri Lanka. Regionally they are working under the umbrella banner of South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC). The concept of South Asian diaspora emanates from the historical roots of movement of people from our regions to other areas for fortune building, preaching, exchanging knowledge or ideas and for education or business. So South Asian diaspora was formed very early to circulate knowledge, cultural values and ideas and to preach religions. This is how similar values, pluralistic world views,

behavioural patterns and taste have developed in South Asia. For this reason scholars and historians of South Asian and beyond have called this region an extended cultural zone.

The South Asian diaspora around the globe has been formed by movement and migration of people, ideas, technical skills, exotic experiences and goods and commodities that flowed from South Asian countries. Incidentally, the South Asian region comprising Afghanistan, India, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Nepal, Pakistan, Maldives and Bhutan is now widely known as the place of origin of the world's largest diaspora. This diaspora has raised a great hope for migrants who have moved outside their regions over the centuries because they have already created a space for favourable livelihoods in their host countries and in most cases have been sending remittances to their home countries to uplift the conditions of their near and dear ones. Thus they have been contributing immensely towards the economic development of their respective countries.

It is estimated that the South Asian diaspora consists of nearly 30 million people worldwide and currently they are perhaps the largest diaspora in the globe. Their number has immensely increased during the last fifty years and today they are playing a very significant role in building their host countries and home countries as well. This new era of migration during the late twentieth and early twenty-first century is remarkable.

Bangladesh Diaspora

Historically Bangalese are a very dominant ethnic community in South Asia. They speak Bangla – a language of Indo-European language group. Bangla language has evolved from the Magdhi Prakrit language of Eastern-Indian subcontinent. The people of

Bengal are known in their language as ‘Bangalee.’ They belong to Indo-Aryan and Mongolo-Dravidian stock, and are closely related to Austro-Asiatic, Dravidian, Assamese, Munda, Tibeto-Burman linguistic and ethnic stocks. Bangla is considered now as the fifth largest language group in the world. Besides, the Austric, Dravidian, Munda and Tibeto Burman languages, Bangla has, over the centuries, assimilated words, phrases and grammatical terms from Latin, English, Turkish, Portuguese, Arabic, Parthian and even Japanese languages to enrich itself. This shows the interplay of cultural circulation and circulation of culture in South Asian regions and beyond.

Bangladesh is a recently independent country, but its history is many centuries old. The history of its peoples’ migration dates back to several hundred years ago. It is said that, the ancestors of the Sinhala population of Sri Lanka are believed to have migrated there from the geographical area of present day Bangladesh. Atish Dipankar Srigyan the great Buddhist scholar of the then Bengal (present Bangladesh) visited Nepal, Tibet and China to teach and participate in philosophical, religious and academic discourses. It is said that, he also carried the knowledge of earth dam-construction to the Chinese Emperor in the tenth century CE. During the British period many Bangalees worked in Burma and formed a distinctive Bangalese diaspora there. Many of the Bangalees, particularly from adjacent Sylhet district, moved to Assam during eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries and occupied a very powerful position in the Assamese art, culture, society and politics. This is the reason for the spread of Bangla language and literature in Assam. Incidentally, like the Bangalees of Bangladesh the Bangalese of Assam also shed their blood for the right of their mother-tongue. During the British period the colonial rulers imported migratory labourers from different parts of India to develop their tea-industry in

Sylhet. Bangalese sailors of Chittagong and Noakhali districts had also migrated to different port areas of England to work as sailors under the patronage of British merchant navy and business houses. After destroying the Cotton and Textile Industries of Bengal the British colonial rurals imported their own goods to the Indian subcontinent. They carried goods from different ports of England to Calcutta, Diamond harbour and Bombay ports.

A section of the population of Sylhet migrated to England during late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. They have formed a very vibrant diaspora in London and other cities of the UK. The Towerhamlet area of London city has been dominated by the expatriate community from Sylhet District of Bangladesh. They have kept their home dialect intact and interact in that dialect. They are famous for catering businesses and own over 15000 Bangla or Indian restaurants all over the UK. They have in fact, introduced Biriani, Chicken Tikka Kabab and Masala Curry in their restaurants in Great Britain. It is now very popular in UK. They have, in fact, transformed the culinary system there introducing subcontinental dishes. This Bangladeshi Diaspora has contributed significantly to popularise Bangladesh's independence movement in the UK in 1971. Bangladesh officials and the media now refer to these workers as the nation's unofficial ambassadors and unsung heroes.

One also finds Bangalese diaspora in New York, USA, Canada, Australia, Japan and some other developed countries. Most of them are immigrants and expatriate Bangladeshis. They work in different professions and conduct businesses in New York, Canada and some other cities. Middle-East, East Asia and Asia Pacific regions too have massive Bangalee communities. Most of them are seasonal workers or contractual service

holders. Some of them are engaged in businesses. They send substantial amounts of remittances to Bangladesh which contributes significantly to uplift Bangladesh's economy.

The Bangalese living in the United States, Canada, Europe, Japan and Australia regularly celebrate cultural events and national days of their home country. They have even constructed monuments in memory of the Bangalee martyrs in their host countries. They regularly organise literary and cultural festivals to preserve and expose their cultural traditions and have introduced their cultural and daily essential goods in the host countries.

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Diasporic Cultures from the 18th-20th Centuries in Bhutan

Harka B. Gurung and Tshering Choki

Abstract

Like any other country in South Asia, the Himalayan Buddhist Kingdom of Bhutan too accommodated diasporas at different periods of time in the annals of its history. Bhutan's recorded history that dates back from approximately the fifth century to the twentieth century shows that the country's diaspora came into being mainly because of wars, political turmoil and labour migration. Other pull factors were the serene environment of Bhutan then considered the perfect setting for Buddhist missionary activities and political asylum granted to people from neighbouring countries. Over very long periods, the migrants assimilated into Bhutan so completely that it became their new homeland. The migrants before 19th century assimilated into the main population and they did not feel that they belonged to a diasporic community. The twentieth century saw population mobilisation on a large scale. Some instances were prompted by individual choice. Others occurred to avoid conflict and warfare. The largest Bhutanese diaspora consists of the Tibetan and the ethnic Nepalese communities. The Nepalese community is spread across many regions in southern Bhutan, whereas Tibetan community is concentrated in western and central Bhutan. These two communities, especially the Nepalese community, form part of the larger Bhutanese population that consists of a diverse, heterogeneous and inclusive community representing different languages, cultures, and faiths. This paper explores the nature of diasporas that existed over the centuries in Bhutan with a special focus on the Nepalese

and Tibetan communities. It further seeks to analyse the impact of the cultural traditions of the Nepalese and Tibetan communities on the domestic populace of Bhutan within the larger framework of identity construction.

Introduction

Bhutan lies in the eastern Himalayas at an altitude of 162 meters to 7554 meters above sea level. The population is estimated to be approximately 700,000 and the area of the country is approximately 39000 km². Thimphu is the capital of Bhutan. There are three main ethnic groups in Bhutan. Tibeto-Mongoloids live mainly in the North and West while Burmo-Mongoloids populate the East, and Indo-Aryan (Nepalese) the South. The two major religions prevalent in Bhutan are Buddhism and Hinduism (75 per cent Buddhism and 25 per cent Hinduism). Buddhism which was introduced in the seventh century, is the state religion of Bhutan. There are some 14 languages spoken. Dzongkha is the national language. English is also very widely spoken and is the medium of instruction at educational institutes.

Diasporas

Bhutan has remained independent throughout its history and has preserved its unique cultural identity. Yet as time passed by, Bhutan began to experience an influx of immigrants from neighbouring countries like Tibet, Nepal and India in gradual phases.

The First phase (5th - 8th Centuries): Exiled Indian Princes

Historical texts say that Indian princes like Gyalpo Ukton (fifth - sixth century), Drimi Kuenden (prior to the birth of Lord Buddha), and Sindhu Raja (eighth century), were banished to

Bhutan due to political issues at home. They were likely accompanied by a fleet of attendants and since history does not specifically state that they returned to their country, it could be reasonably deduced that they got assimilated into the Bhutanese population.

Second Phase (8th - 9th Centuries): Exiled Tibetan Princes

Historical records from the fifth – twentieth centuries show that diasporas in Bhutan came into being mainly because of wars, political turmoil and labour migration. Other probable factors that attracted migrants to Bhutan were the serene environment of Bhutan then considered the perfect place for Buddhist missionary activities and political asylum granted to people from neighbouring countries. The earliest surviving records of Bhutan's history show that Tibetan influence existed from the 6th century during the reign of King Songtsen Gempo, who ruled Tibet from 627 to 649 CE. Settlements in Bhutan by people of Tibetan origin happened during this time.

Third phase (10th - 16th Centuries): Buddhist Mission by Tibetan and Nepalese Artisans

Due to its geographical proximity to Tibet, Bhutan was visited by Buddhist missionaries from Tibet, especially from the tenth to the sixteenth centuries, which has left a strong cultural connection between the two countries. Zhabdrung Ngawang Namgyal, the spiritual leader responsible in creating a unique identity and artistic tradition of Bhutan, invited many master artists and craftsmen from Tibet, Nepal, Ladakh and Cooch Bihar to pass on their skills to the local inhabitants.

Fourth Phase (18th - 20th Centuries): Tibetan and Nepalese Diaspora

This period saw population mobilisation on a large scale. Some instances were prompted by individual choice. Others occurred to avoid conflict and warfare. The largest Bhutanese diaspora comprises the Tibetan and ethnic Nepalese communities. The Nepalese community is spread across many regions in southern Bhutan, whereas Tibetan community is concentrated in western and central Bhutan.

The Tibetan Diaspora

Tibetans came to Bhutan much earlier than the 9th century but in small numbers. A remarkable flow of Tibetan immigrants started in the twentieth century, as a result of the aftermath of the Chinese occupation of Tibet. Many of them who were from the Southern part of Tibet came across Bhutan when fleeing to India and some chose to remain in Bhutan. The people of Bhutan sympathised with the refugees and extended assistance in all possible ways. Those who renounced the right to return to Tibet were granted Bhutanese citizenship. However, the majority of these Tibetans requested Bhutanese authorities that they would like to return to Tibet one day. As a result, this category remained as refugees. According to a survey done by the Central Tibetan Administration (CTA) in 2009, there are 1298 Tibetans who form the Tibetan diasporic community in Bhutan.

Culture and Tradition

Culture and tradition of a race or a nation is bound to be strongly influenced by the religion that is followed by its people. The Bhutanese culture and tradition are shaped by Buddhism which is predominantly followed in Bhutan as the state religion.

Broadly, there seems to be a similarity between Tibetans and Bhutanese as Buddhism is the main religion of both. But the Bhutanese culture and tradition are unique in their own way. One of the most prominent similarities of traditions between Tibetans and Bhutanese is their festivals. Tibet has various festivals which are associated with Buddhism. Similar traditions are practiced in Bhutan but with some uniqueness.

Religion

Bhutan had its own indigenous religion known as 'Bon' which is a Pre-Buddhist religion. People of this faith worshipped the sun, moon, stars and gods of earth, gods of mountains, gods of the sky and gods of under water. Then during 500 to 600 BCE, Bonism infiltrated into Bhutan gradually from the snowy ranges of Tibet. Bonpo priests invoked benign spirits using chants, spells and magic formulas. We see some of the practices of Bonism infiltrated into the tantric core of Buddhism. Tibetan influence is largely visible in Buddhism and its practices since both Tibetans and Bhutanese practice the Vajrayana form of Buddhism. Buddhism followed and practiced by the Bhutanese, though it belongs to the larger family of the Tibetan Buddhist tradition differs slightly from it.

Language

Some similarities can be found in both written scriptures and spoken languages of Tibet and Bhutan. Similarly, Tibetan literature has a strong bearing on Bhutanese Buddhist literature. Both share the same classical form of writing.

Food

Rice is the staple diet usually consumed with meat and vegetables but there are many other dishes influenced by the Tibetans, Nepalese and Indians. Among the most famous

Tibetan influenced cuisines are *Momo*, (flour dumpling with meat stuffed inside) *Suja* (butter tea) and *Thukpa* (noodles).

The Nepalese Diaspora

The first migration of the people of Nepalese origin in Bhutan occurred around 1620 CE when Zhabdrung Ngawang Namgyal (a prominent figure in Bhutan) commissioned a few Newar craftsmen from the Kathmandu valley in Nepal to make a silver stupa to contain the ashes of the body of his deceased father. He also invited many master artists and craftsmen from Tibet, Nepal, Ladakh and Cooch Bihar in India to pass on their skills to the local Bhutanese. During the late nineteenth Century, contractors working for the Bhutanese government began to organise the settlement of Nepali-speaking people in uninhabited areas of southern Bhutan in order to open up those areas for cultivation. Settlement of large numbers of people from Nepal happened for the first time in the early twentieth century. This settlement was encouraged by the Bhutan House in Kalimpong. The Nepalese settled in the southern region and constitute roughly one-third of the country's total population. They are commonly known as Lhotsampa (Southerners) in Bhutan.

Tradition

The Nepalese diaspora typically lives in extended families like the majority of the Bhutanese. The younger generation still possesses the traditional value system of caring and respecting elderly relatives.

Marriage

Traditionally, marriages of this ethnic group take place between members of the same caste which are arranged by the parents of

the bride and groom. However, there are also instances of marriages of choice. Wedding celebrations last for almost a week. The larger Bhutanese population usually does not celebrate marriage but now they solemnise and celebrate at least for a day which is perhaps an influence of the culture of the diasporic Nepalese. Nowadays marriage between the Lhotsampas and other Bhutanese is also prevalent.

Religion

Most of the Southern Bhutanese follow Hinduism. Hindus and Buddhists share similarities in their beliefs such as after life, worship of many Gods and Goddesses, etc. The Nepalese community in Bhutan has a practice of celebrating different ceremonies and festivals like Dasain, Biswakarma, Bai Tika, Dushire and so on. The whole nation takes part in such festivals and the day on which the celebration of Dassain falls is declared as a government holiday.

Food Habits

Rice is the staple food of the Lhotsampas as well. Staunch Hindus among them do not eat beef while some are totally vegetarian for whom rice and vegetable dishes are common. They have a very different way of preparing those dishes which has now been assimilated into the country's palatable cuisines such as Alu Dam, Chicken Curry, Shel Roti etc.

Language

Most of the Lhotshampas are multilingual. They speak Nepali (a language derived from Sanskrit) at home as their vernacular but most of them also speak Dzongkha, the national language. Likewise, the larger population of Bhutan can also speak and understand the Nepali language.

Conclusion

Historically, there have been at least four distinct waves of human migration into Bhutan, two ancient and two since the nineteenth century. These migrant groups have, in varying degrees, shaped Bhutanese society, culture, and politics. Simultaneously, they have in varying degrees assimilated into the Bhutanese culture as well.

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Assessing South Asian Internal Diasporas in the Twentieth Century: Identifying Transnationalism, Cultural Exchanges and Newer Cultural Hubs in India

M. Waseem Raja

Abstract

This paper focuses not on the traditional study of diaspora but rather on the consequences of various flawed colonial policies of erstwhile British government of India as well as successive governments of India in the post-independence period that forced different segments of Indian population to move from their original home to faraway lands. The vastness of the Indian sub-continent also created a trend for the local populace to shift to different locations inside the Indian sub-continent itself with similar motives on mind. The internal shifting of a particular segment of the Indian society within the Indian sub-continent also created a diasporic feeling. This study focuses on the Bhojpuri speaking community from the Eastern part of India and Bengali, Sindhi, Parsis, and other communities. In this regard the focus is also on the driving forces that led to such a situation. Citing a few instances of transnational networking among diaspora communities, the paper analyses the nature and functioning of such networks among Indians.

Diaspora: Meaning of the Concept

According to the *Merriam Webster Dictionary*, a diaspora is ‘the movement, migration, or scattering of people away from an established or ancestral homeland’ or ‘people dispersed by whatever cause to more than one location’, or ‘people settled far

from their ancestral homelands.’ Recent writings on diaspora convey at least three discernible meanings (Liddell and Scott 1996; Ember et al. 2004). They are diaspora as a social form, diaspora as a type of consciousness, and diaspora as a mode of cultural production. It also refers to any people or ethnic population forced or induced to leave its traditional homeland, as well as the dispersal of such people and the ensuing developments in their culture. By way of a few examples, it is further suggested that these rather different meanings, have a certain use in conceptualising, interpreting and theorising processes and developments affecting the South Asian region and its diaspora that lives extra-regionally (Vertovec 1997).

Migration causes the formation of diaspora and it generates the concept of ‘Home away from Home.’ It is ubiquitous in nature as a large number of people are eternally on the move for a variety of reasons. Consequently, national boundaries have become more difficult to define in terms of identity. This however, does not negate the desire for connection and belonging with home. ‘Diaspora’ by definition returns us to an origin, a homeland, from which the communities in question have been dislocated (Das Gupta et al. 2007: 125).

Studies on diaspora help us understand, how migrants constantly invent ways to find space for liberation, along with opportunities to construct memorable or forgettable pasts. Diasporic communities carry with them rituals, customs, and their popular culture, and seem to accord central significance in their lives to religion which in some cases is even more vigorous than in ‘original home’ situations. They constantly seek a process of adjustment to make the foreign land the prototype of their own ‘homeland’, a process through which migrants claim rights, assert themselves in public spaces, move from the

margins to the centre, form kinship, establish 'authenticity', remember the past, and counter the feelings of betrayal and loss altogether.

Historical Diasporas in the Indian Context

The foundation of our present Indian-ness comes from the Aryan diaspora. According to Max Muller theory, Aryans moved from various places in the German plains which include present-day Turkey, Iran and Central Asia and were instrumental in forming the Indian ethnicity (Orsucci 1998).

Mauryan Emperor Asoka was also responsible for creating cultural diasporas. After the Kalinga war, Emperor Asoka converted to Buddhism and took up the cause of *Dhamma* (Buddhist moral code) by sending missionaries across the Indian sub-continent to countries like Sri Lanka, China and other far off areas (Thapar 1973). During Chola rule in India by Chola Kings Rajaraja I and Rajendra Chola, we find a vested interest in South East Asian countries as proven by their occupation of Java and Sumatra by crossing the Bay of Bengal (Farooqui 2011: 25). Due to such occupations, Indian diasporas took root and Hindu culture and institutions flourished in these lands.

With the introduction of Islam to India during the twelfth century, India witnessed a variety of ideas, institutions, men and material crossing the famous Khyber and Bolan passes, thus creating a huge Muslim diaspora in northern India. There were however, Muslim settlements on the coastal areas in the Malabar region, just around the period of the advent of Islam. Along with Islam, India was introduced to the Persian wheel, iron stirrup, Islamic mysticism (Sufism), Islamic form of architecture, new concepts of laying gardens (*Hasht-o Bihisht* or *Chaharbagh*), new varieties of flowers and trees (pomegranate), new skills for

artisans, new styles of Central Asian and Persian paintings and many more (Khanna 2007). With the downfall of the Mughal Empire Mughal cuisine and culture found a new abode in areas such as Hyderabad and Lucknow. Delhi was converted to a cosmopolitan city. Bengal turned English when it was under British siege. A new class of ‘Nabobs’ (White Mughals) emerged who took pride in replacing the Mughals as the ruling class and declaring themselves as the White Mughals. They separated Urdu and Persian from Sanskrit and other Indian vernacular languages.

Traditional Diaspora

Displacements of Indian communities began in the eighteenth century when mass immigration happened as part of colonial policies which created huge diasporas of South Asian nationalities across the globe. But the recent trend is different since it suggests strong undercurrents of ‘Internal Diaspora.’ This leads us to a study of Trans-nationalism, its occurrence in twentieth century South Asia beyond the conventional understanding of centre and periphery, coloniser and colonised. Twentieth century experienced mass scale migration of South Asians to far off lands, of which some were forced ones as a result of colonial policies and some were of their own choices to find greener pastures. With a population of around twenty million spread across hundred and ten countries, Indians are serving their host nations with distinction as entrepreneurs, workers, teachers, researchers, innovators, doctors, lawyers, engineers, managers and even political leaders. What gives a common identity to all members of the Indian diaspora is their Indian origin, consciousness of their cultural heritage and their deep attachment to India.

Partition Diasporas and the 1947 Saga (Indo-Pak-Bangladesh)

Based on the assumption of a deeply rooted animosity between Muslims and Hindus, the last British Viceroy Lord Mountbatten in 1947 in a hasty decision pushed for the separation of India and her population according to religion. Muhammad Ali Jinnah and Jawaharlal Nehru, the leaders of the Muslim League and of the Indian National Congress respectively, took advantage of Britain's precipitous and ill-planned disengagement from India. In this respect, the partition of British India was a prerequisite for each politician to realise his dreams: for Jinnah the dream of a separate Muslim state in order not be dominated by the Hindu majority, and for Nehru that of India's independence from British colonial rule, which he would proudly proclaim on 15 August 1947.¹

According to estimates, between half-a-million and one million South Asian men, women and children lost their lives, over 70000 women were raped and about 12 million people fled their homes.² This paper explores the centuries-old cultural bonds and interconnections (the roots and routes) between people of India and Pakistan as well as their potentially explosive future. The focus will be on the ambivalence about their shared past, the often uncanny connections in their histories and the terrifying strains of the present that are all represented in various social memories. Documentary cinematic depictions of the Partition include Amar Kanwar's *A Season Outside* (1998); Yousuf Saeed's *A Mirror of Imagination* (2006); Sarah Singh's *The Sky Below* (2007); and Ajay Bhardwaj's *Thus Departed our Neighbours* (2007) (Athique 2008).³ This paper deploys transnational syntaxes such as literature, cinema, dance, dress codes, customary rites, religious

symbolism and reflects on social, technological, and political changes. The literary publications with a focus on the Partition that have been written in English are numerous.⁴ Among the first works written in English is Kushwant Singh's famous and highly popular novel *Train to Pakistan*, which was published in 1956.⁵ The best-known novels are Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* (1991), for which he received the Booker Prize, and Jhumpa Lahiri's *Interpreter of Maladies* (2001), for which she was awarded the Pulitzer Prize for fiction.⁶

Internal Displacement in South Asia (Indian Sub-continent)

In South Asia, internal migration flows are considered to be significantly larger than international migration (Deshingkar 2005). The internal migration of people within a country's borders is of four types; rural-to-rural migration, rural-to-urban migration, urban-to-urban migration and urban-to-rural migration.

In Bangladesh, nearly two thirds of the migrations were from rural areas to urban areas. Rural-to-rural migration was 10 percent compared to the overseas migration of 24 per cent and estimates indicate a 6.3 per cent annual increase in migrations to the capital city of Dhaka (Deshingkar 2005). Since independence in 1971, two thirds of the urban growth could be attributed to internal migration, with 25 percent of the population living in urban areas in 2000 (Afsar 2003).

In India, an estimated 20 million people annually migrate temporarily (Deshingkar 2005). During the period 1999-2000, internal migration dominated all other forms of movements and accounted for about 62 per cent of all movements (Afsar 2003). During the same period, rural-to-urban and urban-to-urban

migration stood at 24.5 and 24.4 per cent respectively (Skeldon 2003).

According to the 2001 census in Nepal, the total number of internal migrants stood at 2,929,062 constituting 13.2 per cent of the population (KC 2003). This shows an increase of 3.6 per cent from 9.6 per cent reported in 1991. Out of the total internal migration, 68.2 per cent was rural-to-rural with people moving to agriculturally sustainable areas, while rural-to-urban migration accounted for 25.5 per cent (KC 2003). Internal migration in Nepal was also heavily influenced by the Maoist insurgency.

The current urban migration rate is high in Pakistan. According to the 1998 Population Census, rural-to-urban migrants accounted for 8.2 per cent of the total population (Menon 2005). One major characteristic of internal migration in the country is the significant movements related to marriage and family (Gazdar 2003). Economic migrants account for 20 per cent of the total migrants (Menon 2005).

According to the 1994 Demographic Survey in Sri Lanka, 14.45 per cent of the population migrated internally. This figure showed an increase of 0.95 per cent from the 1981 Census figures which recorded 13.5 per cent. The high proportion of female migration, both internal and overseas, is a major characteristic in migration in Sri Lanka. In 1994, 13.3 percent (a decrease from 13.8 per cent in 1981) of the male population were migrants compared to 15.6 per cent of the female population (increase from 12.5 in 1981) (Ukwatta 2005).

In Afghanistan, some recent studies have suggested a growing increase in internal migration for economic purposes. Approximately 22 per cent of rural households in Afghanistan

have at least one member who has migrated over the past five years (Opel 2005). In a recent survey in three major cities; Kabul, Herat and Jalalabad, it was found that out of the sample size of 997, nearly half had migrated within the last year from a rural area and most of them were either planning to (nearly 50 per cent) or had already settled (13.4 per cent) in urban areas (Opel 2005).

Internal migration in South Asia could be long-term or even permanent. Seasonal migration prevalent in South Asia is circular in nature with agricultural labour migrants migrating from rural-to-rural and urban-to-rural areas, as well as across-borders during harvest seasons (Afsar 2003).

Internal Displacement in India

Although India has been prone to violence, it has generated only a few refugees. However, war, conflict, human rights abuses and forced relocation have created a high level of internal displacement. It is hard to provide an exact figure of the number of IDPs (Internally Displaced Persons) in India. Regular monitoring is not possible in such a huge country which lacks a central authority responsible for coordinating data from central and state governments. The nature, frequency and extent of the causes of internal displacement in India vary to such an extent that it would be a herculean task to monitor and record them. In India, an estimated 20 million people annually migrate on a temporary basis. There is, thus huge variations in estimates of the numbers of IDPs in India. The latest report of the World Refugee Survey place the total number of IDPs in India at 507000 while the Indian Social Institute in Delhi and the Global IDP Project place it at 21.3 million (World Refugee Survey 2000; Hampton 1998).

Reasons for Recent Trends in Internal Displacements and the Diasporas

I. Political Secessionist Movements: Conflict Induced Internal Migration

- i. North Eastern India: Ethnic violence, which has become endemic to the states of post-colonial Northeast India, has often targeted migrant populations as foreigners or illegal immigrants to be sent back to their lands of origin. Since independence, North-East India has witnessed two major armed conflicts: the Naga movement primarily led by the National Socialist Council of Nagaland, and the Assam movement led by the All Assam Students Union and now largely taken over by the extremist United Liberation Front of Assam. The violence and retaliatory responses from the government and other forces that are opposed to the secessionists continue to generate a steady flow of displaced people. Like other IDPs such as the Rohingyas moving from Mizoram to Tripura and the Kukis and Nagas into Manipur and Nagaland respectively, the case of the Nepalīs too has a ‘spillover’ impact on every state of the Northeast. Similar to the patterns observed in Meghalaya by the Khasi students, in Arunachal Pradesh against the Chakmas and in Assam by Bodos against Muslims of Bangladesh origins, violent movements deprive the victim of his home, thus causing displacement.
- ii. Kashmir: In Kashmir’s war between state forces and militants, the killing of Kashmiri Pundits by fundamentalist secessionist groups, the persistent anarchy created by political instability, and the continuous violation of fundamental human rights by both the state and militant groups, have led to large-scale displacements, mainly of Kashmiri Pundits (estimated at 250000) to Jammu and cities like Delhi.

Although conditions are miserable, the displaced find camps offering better employment opportunities, education and security.

- iii. The Nepalis: The Nepalis from neighbouring Nepal, who have been migrating to Northeast India since the colonial times have long been integrated into the multi-ethnic and multi-cultural society of the region. Settled in almost all the states of the region they have, in recent times, been frequently identified as foreigners as their growing numbers have caused worry in backward regions of India. Ethnic movements in the region, thus, loosely define the term 'foreigner' which has resulted in Nepalis suffering large-scale evictions and internal displacement and being scattered all over India.

II. Identity-based Autonomy Movements

Identity-based autonomy movements have also led to violence and displacement. This has happened in Punjab and more recently in the Bodo Autonomous Council Area of western Assam. 'Cleansing' of non-Bodo communities by the Bodos through plunder, arson, massacre and persecution, has forced a large number of non-Bodos to flee. They now live in camps. The Gorkhaland Movement has been creating a huge ruckus in the hill tracts of Darjeeling and has also caused considerable displacement of people.

III. Forced Migration (Localised Violence)

Internal displacement has also arisen from caste disputes (as in Bihar and Uttar Pradesh) and religious fundamentalism (as in the case of the Mosque–Temple controversy). During the last two decades India has experienced the worst kind of communal clashes leading to displacement of populations

internally. For instance urban riots in Bombay, Coimbatore, Bhagalpur, Aligarh, and many such towns caused migrations due to fear for life and property. The state of Gujarat in recent years has become almost synonymous for victimisation of Muslim minorities by the state machinery, causing a very disturbing trend of internal displacements and forcing the residents to flee their ancestral homes and take refuge in other localities. Aggressive denial of residency, employment rights and similar other acts have led to people fleeing the area. More recently the concept of 'son-of-the soil' has caused huge problems to those who had migrated to states and have successfully become part and parcel of those states. For instance in Mumbai, Shiv Sena and other parties of similar ideology created huge problems for North Indians (mostly from UP and Bihar). The fear stems from the possibility of being sent back to the original localities in future, a reversal in the formation of an internal diaspora.

IV. Environmental and Development-induced Displacement

In order to achieve rapid economic growth, India has invested in industrial projects, dams, roads, mines, power plants and new cities, the construction of which is possible only through massive acquisition of land and subsequent displacement of people. According to the figures provided by the Indian Social Institute, estimates of national resettlement forced by development projects shows that during 1950-90, 18.5 million people were affected (As quoted in Asthana 1996: 1469). The 21.3 million development-induced IDPs include those displaced by projects for dams (16.4 million), mines (2.55 million), industrial development (1.25 million), wild life sanctuaries, and national parks (0.6 million) (Singh and Ganguli 2011: 6). Development projects, particularly dams,

have always generated serious controversy in India as they have tended to be a major source of displacement-related conflicts. According to the Central Water Commission, over 3300 dams have been built since independence and some 1000 more are under construction. Another study of 54 large dams done by the Indian Institute of Public Administration concluded that the average number of people displaced by a large dam is 44182 (As quoted in Roy 1999). Over 21,000 families were uprooted and ousted when the Pong Dam was constructed nearly 25 years ago and they have still not received benefits of any formal rehabilitation measures. The World Bank's 'Project Completion Report' for the controversial Sardar Sarovar dam on the Narmada which is likely to displace 0.2 million people has cast a shadow over the project's future.⁷

V. Newer Cultural Hubs within the Indian Sub-continent

The Indian sub-continent has witnessed huge displacements over the last one hundred years. Colonial policies may have caused great displacements during the British rule in India but surprisingly independent India continued to suffer internal displacements, some in visible form and some invisible, over a span of 50 years. In some cases the displacements left deep scars on the psyche of those displaced as in the case of the partition diaspora where a huge chunk of Biharis were sandwiched between two governments, Pakistan and Bangladesh. The internal displacements or migrations created newer cultural hubs in different locations of India which were not the original homes of the migrated populations. The communities of Tamils, Sindhis, Parsis, Bengalis, and Biharis are studied below in this regard:

- i. Tamils: The displaced Tamils from Sri Lanka reside in Tamil Nadu and other parts of India. The Sri Lankan refugees arrived in Tamil Nadu in four waves. The first wave came on 24 July 1983, and persisted till 29 July 1987 when the Indo-Sri Lanka Accord was signed. An estimated 134053 Sri Lankan Tamils arrived in India. The first repatriation took place after the signing of the Indo-Sri Lanka Accord in 1987 and between 24 December 1987 and 31 August 1989, 25585 refugees and non-camp Sri Lankan nationals returned to Sri Lanka. The second wave began with the start of the second phase of the Eelam War on 25 August 1989, when 122000 Sri Lankan Tamils came to Tamil Nadu. On 20 January 1992, after the assassination of Rajiv Gandhi, 54188 refugees were voluntarily repatriated to Sri Lanka, a phenomenon that prevailed till March 1995. Eelam War III commenced in April 1995 resulting in the third wave of refugees. By 12 April 2002, nearly 23356 refugees had come to Tamil Nadu. The flow of refugees stopped in 2002 because of the ceasefire agreement (Suryanarayan 2009).
- ii. Sindhis: Hindu Sindhis were expected to stay in Sindh following the Partition, as there were good relations between Hindu and Muslim Sindhis. At the time of the Partition there were 1,400,000 Hindu Sindhis, though most were concentrated in cities such as Hyderabad, Karachi, Shikarpur, and Sukkur. However, because of an uncertain future in a Muslim country coupled with a sense of better opportunities in India, Hindus decided to leave for India. Added to that, was the sudden influx of Muslim refugees from Gujarat, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Rajputana (Rajasthan) and other parts of India, which fuelled their desire to return to India for they feared the situation might further strain relations between India and Pakistan. Problems were further aggravated when

incidents of violence instigated by Indian Muslim refugees broke out in Karachi and Hyderabad. According to the Census of India in 1951, nearly 776,000 Sindhi Hindus moved back to India. Unlike the Punjabi Hindus and Sikhs, Sindhi Hindus did not witness any massive scale riots. However, their entire province had gone to Pakistan and thus they felt like a homeless community. As per Pakistan's 1998 census, despite this migration, a significant Sindhi Hindu population still resides in Pakistan's Sindh Province with a number of around 2.28 million while the Sindhi Hindus in India as per the 2001 census of India were at 2.57 million (See Kesavapany 2008).

- iii. Parsis: Indian census data has established that the number of Parsis has been steadily declining for several decades. The highest census count was of 114,890 individuals in 1940–41, which included the crown colony populations of present-day India, Pakistan and Bangladesh (Census of India 1931). Post-independence census data is only available for India and reveal a decline of approximately 9 percent per decade. According to the National Commission for Minorities, there are a “variety of causes that are responsible for this steady decline in the population of the community,” the most significant of which are childlessness and migration (Roy and Unisa 2004: 8 and 21). Demographic trends project that by the year 2020 the Parsis will number only 23000 (less than 0.002 per cent of the 2001 population of India). The Parsis will then cease to be called a community and will be labelled a ‘tribe’ (Taraporevala 2000: 9, Karkal 1982; Singh and Gowri 2000). One-fifth of the decrease in population is attributed to migration (Roy and Unisa 2004: 21). A slower birth-rate than the death rate accounts for the rest. As of 2001, Parsis over the age of 60 make up 31 per cent of the

community. Only 4.7 per cent of the Parsi community is under 6 years of age, which translates to 7 births per year per 1000 individuals (Roy and Unisa 2004: 14).

- iv. **Bengalis:** Bengalis are mostly concentrated in Bangladesh and the states of West Bengal and Tripura in India. There are also a number of Bengali communities scattered across North-East India, New Delhi, and the Indian states of Assam, Jharkhand, Bihar, Maharashtra, Karnataka, Kerala, Andhra Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh and Orissa. In addition, there are significant Bengali communities beyond South Asia. Some of the most well established Bengali communities are in the United Kingdom and United States. Large numbers of Bengalis (mainly from Sylhet) have settled in Britain, mainly living in the East boroughs of London, numbering around 300,000 (Office of National Statistics 2001). In the USA there are about 150,000 Bengalis living across the country, mainly in New York (Census Profile 2005). There are also millions of them living across the Gulf States, the majority of whom are living as foreign workers. There are also many Bengalis in Pakistan, Malaysia, South Korea, Canada, Japan and Australia.
- v. **Marwaris:** Marwaris comprise the people who originally belonged to Rajasthan, particularly areas in and around Jodhpur, Jaipur, Sikar, Jhunjhunu, Bikaner, Pali, Jalore, Churu, Nagaur and Alwar. There is a sizeable population of Marwaris in present-day Myanmar and Bangladesh who control major trading and commercial activities of the regions. They currently reside in the Indian states of West Bengal, Bihar, Orissa, Assam, Jharkhand, Rajasthan and parts of Maharashtra, Chattisgarh, Tamil Nadu and Gujarat. They also have almost complete control of indigenous banking,

finance and *hundi*.⁸ They introduced the *hundi* business to areas where the system was unknown, which included Chittagong, Khulna, Naogaon, Mymensingh and Arakan. The *hundi* business was introduced not only to neighbouring countries but also to those around the globe, parallel to the expansion of their business and trade networks. In many locales, Marwari immigrants over time (usually involving many generations), adopted or blended into the regional culture. For example, in Punjab, Marwaris adopted Punjabi, and in Gujarat, Gujarati. Significant concentrations of Marwari populations especially of traders are found in Kolkata in the Burrabazar area where they are leading businessmen. A large number of Marwaris are also in Mumbai, Bangalore, Pune, Chennai, Kochi and Hyderabad. In Pakistan, the largest numbers are found in Karachi, from where Pakistan's Marwari cricketer Danish Kaneria hails. Marwaris have founded businesses in neighbouring Nepal, especially in Birganj, Biratnagar and Kathmandu. Marwaris with their business acumen have migrated to many different parts of the country and to other countries of the world. In the eastern part of India, they are found in Kolkata, Cuttack, Midnapore, Asansol, Raniganj, Bankura, Siliguri, Malda, Assam, Meghalaya and Manipur and are among the most prominent businessmen (Kudaisya 2009: 87, Tripathi 1996).

- vi. Punjabis: The Punjab community is scattered over almost all states in India and they, mostly do businesses and contribute to the prosperity of their community and India.
- vii. Biharis/ Bhojpuri/ Eastern people (Purabiya): Bhojpuris are part of the traditional diaspora that was formed during colonial times. Presently, they are part of the huge migrant population which migrates within India itself. During the

colonial period, they were sent off to far off lands such as Surinam, Fiji and Mauritius as indentured labourers and at present these countries host around 45 per cent of the Bhojpuri speaking populace. They established their diasporic culture in the form of literature, folklores, folk songs and dance. *Virha/virah* songs that are sung during Holi or harvest season are for ones who had gone to far off lands to earn their livelihood, and express sorrow for their parting. The second phase of Bhojpuri migration happened internally when Calcutta emerged as the capital of British India. With the creation of job opportunities afforded by the opening of jute mills etc., the Bhojpuri speaking populace from the Eastern part of India thronged those mills and other industrial units. Thus in Bengal a sizeable population of the Bhojpuri populace got settled and a newer cultural hub was created. The third phase of Bhojpuri migration (and in this case more Biharis) took place during the Partition when they found themselves sandwiched between East and West Pakistan. This plight of the Bihari populace was termed as 'stranded Biharis.' In western Pakistan the Mohajir Qaumi Movement was a by product of their failed assimilation into the local elite culture. How they fared, is, altogether a different story. The Fourth wave of Bhojpuri migration (including Magahi speaking people who formed both the Bihari language and cultural milieu) came up during the 1971 Indo-Pakistan War for the liberation of Bangladesh. It was again Urdu (Bhojpuri being their first or second language) speaking Biharis who were targeted in Bangladesh and thus some were left in Bangladesh while some others migrated to Pakistan, but their suffering did not end there. The search for greener pastures, employment, education and various other reasons have

resulted in about 8 million Bhojpuris migrating internally in contemporary times (Bihari Muslims of Bangladesh: Online).

Dealing with IDPs in the Indian Context

It is important to identify and classify IDPs in order to assist relevant agencies to take care of their needs and aspirations. Following are a few suggestions to mitigate crises related to IDPs:

- Reducing the level of violence against non-combatants irrespective of the nature of the conflict,
- Dealing with potential and ongoing ethnic conflicts in a less harmful manner,
- Minimising communal riots,
- Executing development projects giving due consideration to the larger perspective of sustainable development and human needs, and
- Ensuring rapid resettlement and rehabilitation of displaced people.

A micro-level study of Indian IDPs by the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (2010) shows how it is possible to create a better situation by identifying the pockets of such migrations and IDPs (National and State Authorities failing to Protect IDPs: Online). Preparing a diasporic lexicon of the entire SAARC region would assist researches on diasporic studies that in turn would enable better understanding of the whole phenomenon.

Conclusion

Unlike the global scenario during the Cold War where population displacements were most frequently caused by armed

conflicts fuelled by big power rivalry, in South Asia 'low intensity wars' have generated displacement for a long time. Apart from those wars or conflicts, human rights abuses and forced relocation have also created a high level of internal dislodgments in various countries around the world. Although India has been prone to vicious cycles of violence time and again, it has generated relatively few refugees compared to other countries which have seen violence induced displacements. Estimating the number of IDPs in India is a challenging task as India lacks systematic monitoring due to the sheer magnitude of the country. The nature, frequency and extent of the causes of internal displacement in India vary and thus, it is a herculean task to monitor and record them all. Political sensitivities at state level prevent the release of data on the exact nature and extent of displacement. One suggestion to tackle the growing issue of IDPs in the Indian context, would be removing regional economic imbalances. It would automatically reduce the influx of populations towards the urban areas. Areas such as Orissa, Bihar, Andhra Pradesh and North Eastern hill tracts, have largely been left neglected and thus internal outflow of population from those areas towards more developed regions is a natural occurrence. They make a move generally towards metropolis to find livelihoods in order to provide for the sustenance of those back home who are on a meagre rural income.

In majority of cases, people have been forced to flee their homes due to political agendas and inconsistent development objectives. Development-induced displacement has overwhelmingly dominated the IDP scenario in India. Pattern of regionalisation, the nature of regional imbalances and their changing structure over time have to be identified when carrying out development projects so as to make dawn a new era of

economic development. Attitudes of decision-makers should change in order to avoid lopsided development of rural areas. Furthermore, policy work, training and careful designing and planning are desired, so that all issues related to IDPs can be properly addressed in the Indian context.

Lastly, to harmonise the diverse Indian society, displaced populations like Bhojpuri, Bengalis, Punjabis, Tamils and various other caste communities and ethnicities should be given due attention so as to preserve their cultural milieu and distinct identities.

End Notes

¹ See Jalal (1994), Talbot and Singh (1999), Settari and Gupta (2002), Jaffrelot (2004), Khan (2007), Wolpert (2007), Tan and Kudaisya (2008), and Zamindar (2008) for research on the Partition.

² See Bourke-White (1949) for images of the treks of refugees to India/Pakistan during the Partition.

³ For a comprehensive overview of the topic see Viswanath and Malik (2009) and Sarkar (2009).

⁴ These include among others, works by Sahni (1988), Sidhwa (1992), Bhalla (1994), Cowasjee (1995), Devi (1995), Hasan (1995), Memon (1998), Chughtai (2001), Saint (2001). For an overview of novels on or about the Partition see Zaman (2001), Fraser (2006), and Jain (2007).

⁵ Singh is one of India's leading journalists and a great writer. He is, however, criticised for depicting Muslims and women in a stereotypical way.

⁶ See Rushdie (1991), Lahiri (2001), Seth (1993), and Khanna (2004) for highly popular novels on the Partition.

⁷ If past displacement caused by dams or irrigation projects is examined, all estimates should be drastically revised upward. According to Arundhati Roy (1999: 12), author and member of the Narmada Bachao Andolan (Save Narmada Movement) lobbying group, the Andhra Pradesh Irrigation Q scheme displaced 150,000 people as opposed to its estimate of 63000 people while the Gujarat medium irrigation K scheme displaced 140,000 people instead of 63,600. The revised estimate of the number of people to be displaced by the Upper Krishna irrigation project in Karnataka is 240,000 against its initial claims of displacing only 20,000.

⁸ A *hundi* is a financial instrument that developed in Medieval India for the use in trade and credit transactions.

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The Changing Pattern of Pakhtun Culture under the Influence of Diaspora

Syed Minhaj ul Hassan

Abstract

The Pakhtuns love their homeland and culture and for centuries they have preserved their culture, which is known as Pakhtunwali. However, for economic reasons, throughout their history they have been working around the world as their homeland does not produce enough to sustain them. Around 1970s a large number of Pakhtuns moved to the Gulf countries as these countries due to newfound petro dollars wanted to improve their infrastructure for which they needed a workforce. Though the Pakhtuns earned a good amount of money, it affected their centuries' old traditions and lifestyle as well. This impact was quite widespread as it changed their tangible as well as intangible culture. This paper discusses those changes which have taken place primarily due to diaspora remittances and expatriate life.

Introduction

The Pakhtun society of Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan is a tribal society with little sources of local income. This is the reason why Pakhtuns are spread all over Pakistan and the world in search of jobs and livelihood. The early 1970s saw a Pakhtun influx in the Gulf States. Though the early migrants faced a lot of difficulties, they were able to earn huge amounts of money, which they sent to their families in Pakistan. This money from the Gulf States brought a lot of cultural changes in the Pakhtuns' society.

The foremost change which one can easily observe is the influence on the structure of the tribal society. The traditional leaders of the society slowly and gradually lost power to the emerging wealthy class who in many cases belonged to the lower strata of the society. This change also brought many problems; particularly it disturbed law and order in the Pakhtun society.

Another important change that affected the Pakhtuns' society was their way of living. Earlier most of the Pakhtuns lived very simple lives. They used to live in muddy houses and most of the Pakhtuns did not have their private guest rooms. With the Diaspora money the Pakhtuns started constructing brick houses. They also constructed their private guest houses which negatively affected the *Hujra* (common community guest house as well as social club for men) culture. They used to celebrate their festivals in a very simple manner but with the arrival of new wealth, the Pakhtuns changed their simple living to a more cosmopolitan lifestyle.

The Diaspora money also brought some positive changes in the lives of the Pakhtuns. With the availability of resources, more Pakhtun children were able to go to better schools and also were able to get higher education. With education their behaviour towards women had also dramatically changed. Further, the economic betterment also reduced the hardships of the Pakhtun women. The availability of economic resources also changed the Pakhtuns' attitude towards girls' education. More and more girls went to schools, colleges and universities. However, this new economic prosperity also saw some hindrances on the free movement of the lower class women. These women who used to freely walk around in the fields,

streets and other places were no more allowed to move out of the houses.

Culture and Sources Responsible for the Change

Culture is defined by different scholars in different ways. Some call it ‘an appreciation of good literature, music, art, and food,’ while others would define it as ‘the full range of learned human behaviour pattern.’ Edward B. Taylor (1832-1917) in his book *Primitive Culture* (1871) defined culture as a “complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, law, morals, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society.” (As quoted in O’Neil 2006a: Online). It is also believed that though through culture human beings survive, it is ‘a fragile phenomenon’ and is prone to constant change as it exists only in our minds.

What are the factors which force a culture to change? According to O’Neil (2006b: Online) “there are three general sources of influence or pressure that are responsible for both change and resistance to it: forces at work within a society, contact between societies, and changes in the natural environment” (See **Table 1**).

In order to make diffusion, acculturation, and transculturation easier for understanding they are defined in the following manner:

1. Diffusion is the movement of things and ideas from one culture to another. When diffusion occurs, the form of a trait may move from one society to another but not its original cultural meaning.

2. Acculturation is what happens to an entire culture when alien traits diffuse in on a large scale and substantially replace traditional cultural patterns.
3. Transculturation is what happens to an individual when he or she moves to another society and adopts its culture. Immigrants who successfully learn the language and accept as their own the cultural patterns of their adopted country have transcultured (O'Neil 2006a: Online).

	Within society	Between societies
Processes leading to change	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ invention ▶ culture loss 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ diffusion ▶ acculturation ▶ transculturation
	stimulus diffusion	
Processes resulting in resistance to change	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ habit ▶ integration of existing culture traits 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ ingroup-outgroup dynamics
Table 1: Relationship between all of the different mechanisms of change operating within and between societies. Courtesy: O'Neil 2006a.		

Last but not the least, there is another very powerful impetus for change, which is globalisation. According to Naz *et al.* (2011: Online):

Through globalization the entire world is changing into a single place, single culture and single identity. Individual distinctions of culture and society are nurturing towards a homogenous global culture, which will redefine the cultural contexts.

After discussing the broad aspects of culture and the reasons for change, now the writer would like to concentrate on the changes

in Pakhtuns' culture which have occurred due to the Pakhtun Diaspora.

Pakistani and Pakhtun Diaspora

Pakhtuns are one of the primitive cultures of the Central Asian peninsula. Though, some parts of the land of Pakhtuns are now administratively under the jurisdiction of the Government of Pakistan, historically and geographically the land inhabited by the Pakhtuns has been part of Central Asia. Presently Pakhtuns are mainly spread over in Afghanistan and Pakistan's two provinces viz. Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan (Khattak 1984: 130-5).

Culturally and religiously Pakhtuns' are believed to be very orthodox and are considered hard to change. However, economic migration of Pakhtuns to different parts of the world in the twentieth century has brought changes to their culture. Pakhtuns are around thirty-five per cent of the total emigrant population of Pakistan, who are spread over different countries of the world. According to 2010 estimate of the Ministry of Overseas Pakistanis, the total Pakistani emigrant population is 6.3 million. **Table 2** shows the top four countries where Pakistani Diaspora is working.

Country	Numbers
1. Saudi Arabia	1,500,000
2. United Kingdom	1,200,000
3. United Arab Emirates	1,014,082
4. United States of America	900,000
Table 2: Number of overseas Pakistanis living/ working/ studying in different regions/ countries of the world up to 31-12-2010, Region wise distribution. Courtesy: Ministry of Overseas Pakistanis, Government of Pakistan.	

According to Akbar (2011) the total number of Pakistani Diaspora is 7 million. We can find different figures about the strength of Pakistani Diaspora but one fact is evident that whatever number of Pakistani Diaspora is working abroad, they are even bigger in size than the diaspora of other large countries. S.J. Burki, former Vice-President of the World Bank, newspaper columnist, and a prominent member of the Pakistani community in the United States, points out:

It is much greater in size, for instance, than the Indian and Chinese diaspora. Even six million Pakistanis – averaging the lowest estimates of 3.9 million and the highest of 8 million – would mean that 3.75 % of current Pakistani population of 160 million is living overseas. (As quoted in Bhatti 2008: Online)

The Pakhtun culture is known as *Pakhtunwali* (The Pakhtun Code of Life). According to scholars *Pakhtunwali* is as old as Pakhtuns themselves and it is this code that governed their lives even before accepting Islam. Even after the acceptance of Islam, Pakhtuns did not forget their culture rather sometimes they followed their culture than their religion (Khattak 1984: 135-40 and Personal Communication: Khan 2010). However, the twentieth century economic migrations had an impact on their culture and traditions. In the following pages the author discusses those wide ranging changes that have taken place in *Pakhtunwali* or generally, in the lives of the Pakhtuns.

Important Changes in Pakhtun Culture

One of the basic cultural traits of the Pakhtuns was/is the tribal structure of the society. In this tribal setup there were traditional chiefs of the tribes like Maliks, Khans, Syeds, etc. They were the ones who also had bigger chunks of the land. Few decades

back the Pakhtun society was mostly agricultural and the landless depended upon the landed class. Thus the Pakhtun Chiefs were not only tribal chiefs but the economic patrons of the landless as well. When the migrations for greener pastures started, initially those were the poorer classes of the rural areas that started migrating under difficult circumstances. However, since their lives at their ancestral lands were also not very promising so they took the risks, which paid off. According to Siegmann (2010), Pakhtuns of the rural areas went overwhelmingly abroad and are now dependent more and more on the remittances. She believes that "... a tenth of average monthly incomes [of the rural areas] consist of remittances flows" (Siegmann 2010: Online). After initial difficulties, they started earning money which attracted more and more migrants.

These emigrants mostly worked hard but spent almost nothing on themselves rather they steadily sent home more and more money. With the availability of large amounts of money, the lifestyles of the families of the expatriates started to change. With this the dependence on the landed classes also reduced. Slowly and gradually the landed class found it difficult to find farmers for their agricultural lands, which also affected their income negatively. Thus while on the one hand the expatriates were getting richer and richer, the landed classes/chiefs were becoming poorer by the day. This resulted in the selling of their ancestral lands in order to keep intact their middle or upper class status. Ironically the purchasers of these lands were the former peasants or economic dependents. This new development also changed the tribal setup of the Pakhtuns. The former chiefs of the tribes slowly and gradually started losing hold on their tribes/villages as the newly rich started challenging the traditional chiefs of the society due to their newly acquired

wealth (Nichols 2009: 160 and Personal Communication: Khan 2012).

This is also evident from the political situation of Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa. There are quite a number of expatriates or their family members who have contested elections for national, provincial and senate constituencies. Few of them have won the elections as well. For example Abdul Nabi Bangash (Senator), Syed Haider Ali Shah (Member of National Assembly), Farid Mufakir (former Member of Provincial Assembly), etc. (Personal Communication: Bangash 2010). This situation negatively affected the influence of the traditional Pakhtun Chiefs. Though immediately its negative effects were not known, in the aftermath of the rise of religious extremism it became evident that these traditional chiefs were no more influential enough to control the situation (Personal Communication: Khan 2012).

Another important feature of the Diaspora riches was its impact on the simple lifestyle of the Pakhtuns. Generally the Pakhtun houses were made of mud with few large rooms which were mostly shared by the family members. Even such houses did not have washrooms and lavatories. Men and women both would go out to fulfil the call of nature or to take a bath. The male members of the Pakhtuns would go to the natural springs or other fresh water sources to take a bath, while the females would go to their own specified areas, known as *Gudar*. They would wash the clothes of the family members, take baths and also bring water for drinking from the *Gudar*. Traditionally *Gudar* areas were out of bound for the male members of the tribe. With the availability of large amounts of money from their expatriate family members, the people in the villages and towns started constructing cemented houses with modern amenities of

living. Instead of large rooms they started constructing medium or small size rooms so that each individual, at least the male members, got a separate room with attached bath and lavatory facilities. With the availability of these facilities, the traditional places of bath and other necessities started crumbling down. The traditional *Gudars* were abandoned due to the availability of piped or well-water at home. The vanishing of *Gudar* is emotionally lamented by a poet in his poetry which is sung by the well-known singer Haroon Badshah in the following manner:

Khalq Badal shu ka Badal shwaloo wakhtoonā
Jeenakai na razee Gudar ta jeenakai na razee Gudar
ta (Pashto)

(Badshah: You Tube 2006)

(Trans. People have changed or the times have changed,
 Girls are no more coming to *Gudar*, Girls are no more coming to *Gudar*).

The traditional Pakhtun houses also used to have a central fire-place in a large room. With the construction of new houses these gave way to modern kitchens. It had a side effect on the family system as well. Previously the family members would sit around the fire-place, women would cook and the rest of the family members would eat. During winters' long nights the older women and men would tell stories or their past life experiences to the younger generation. The story telling culture was so widespread and popular among the Pakhtuns that one of the famous bazars of Peshawar (The capital of Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa) is known as Qissa Khwani Bazar (the bazar of story-tellers). It is recorded that during the traditional Pakhtun era people used to sit on both sides of the bazar on *charpais* (traditional Pakhtun's

bed), sip tea and narrate and listen to stories. That is how the bazar came to be known as Qissa Khwani Bazar. With the introduction of kitchens, individualism started spreading. With diaspora remittances, modern audio-visual equipment like tape-recorders, televisions, VCRs or CD players replaced the story-telling culture and one no more sees older people telling stories. With the presence of these modern equipment no one is interested in story-telling (Personal Communication: Badshah 2010).

An important pillar of the Pakhtun culture was *Hujra*, which was used as a common guest house of the tribe, *mohallah* or village. Except rich Pakhtuns, who were very few, normally the joint *Hujras* were used as guest rooms/houses as well as meeting places for discussions on important issues. With diaspora remittances, the families in villages and towns not only constructed cemented houses for themselves but also constructed their individual guest rooms/houses. Thus, a basic cultural characteristic of the Pakhtuns disappeared. In the old days *Hujras* were not only used as guest rooms/houses but were training places for the young Pakhtuns. The young Pakhtuns used to listen to stories from their elders and would observe their etiquettes/styles/actions, which would be generally imitated/followed by the younger generation. Thus these were the training centres for young Pakhtuns which is also evident from an often quoted sentence when someone acts in a different way than the Pakhtuns would normally do: for example, on such occasions it is commonly remarked – *jor hujra jumaat ye na de leedali* (Pashto) - ‘the person has not seen *hujra* and mosque.’ Due to diaspora riches now the culture of *hujra* has almost disappeared or is at the verge of disappearance (Personal Communication: Ghulam 2011).

Before diaspora remittances, the Pakhtun society was primarily agricultural and was thus having many traditions which were closely associated with the agricultural lifestyle. For example during the corn growing season, the young Pakhtuns would go to the fields and would pluck the corn-sticks and cook on fire in the fields and eat on the spot. This was known as *Daaza* (which literally means the sound of corn peas blasting). But with the disappearance of agriculture from many of the Pakhtun areas this tradition has also vanished.

Another tradition associated with the agricultural economy was the barter-trade. The Pakhtun landed classes used to have stores of grain in their houses. When the children would ask for money to buy something at the *mohallah* shop, the ladies would generally give them some grain to go to the shop and exchange it with whatever they desired. With abundance of money, initially due to diaspora remittances, this barter-trade system also vanished (Personal Communication: Ayub 2012).

Another tradition of the agricultural society of Pakhtuns that has disappeared due to diaspora remittances is the water-mills. In the pre-Gulf diaspora period, since modern agricultural equipment were not available, traditional water-mills were used for grinding grains. The operator of the water-mill, who in Pashto was known as *Zhrandeegarai*, used to visit the *mohallahs* and collect the grain for grinding or deliver the flour (grinded grain). But with the availability of modern agricultural equipment, which people bought using diaspora remittances, these water-mills and *Zhrandeegarai* have largely disappeared (Personal Communication: Raza 2009).

Another cultural aspect of the Pakhtuns that disappeared is the *Kasabgars*' [skilled craftsmen like carpenter, mason, *mohallah* traditional *damaan* (minstrels)] seasonal share in the

agricultural products. At that time whenever the grain was brought to the landed families, the *Kasabgars* would come to get their small amount of share as they depended on the landed families. With the disappearance of agricultural economy and the newly acquired wealth of the poorer classes through foreign emigration, this traditional aspect has also disappeared (Personal Communication: Raza 2009).

Another important cultural tradition that has disappeared in many of the Pakhtun villages and towns is the tradition of *Balandra/ Ashar*. This was the tradition of collective work without any charges. Normally whenever an individual Pakhtun or a family wanted to do some work which required large scale labour, he would ask his co-tribesmen to help him in the job. The one who was asking for help was required to prepare food and traditional drinks for the helpers and there was no payment for the labour they would provide to the one who needed it. Such help could be provided for harvesting and thrashing of the crops or construction of a small room or a wall etc. With diaspora remittances this tradition has died giving way either to paid labour or mechanised agriculture (Personal Communication: Raza 2009).

With mechanised agriculture, another change has occurred in the lives of women. Traditionally, working class Pakhtun women used to help their menfolk in agricultural work. With diaspora money, these people have bought either tractors, thrashers or they simply hire agricultural machinery. They also hire paid labourers and thus the role of women in agriculture has almost come to an end (Personal Communication: Raza 2009).

Few decades back the Pakhtuns traditionally used to have goats, sheep, cows and buffalos. In order to take them to the pastures for grazing there used to be shepherds in every village

who were known as *Gadba/ Shpoon/ Shpoonkai* in Pashto. Every morning, the animals of a *mohallah* or a small village were driven to a common place, from where they were taken to the pastures by the shepherds. These animals used to remain in pastures till afternoon, and then were driven back by the shepherds to the villages. This setup used to make the Pakhtun families self-sufficient in dairy products. When the economic migrations started, either the shepherds left for greener pastures or the Pakhtun families stopped breeding the animals as it required hard labour. Now Pakhtun families seldom have such animals and mostly depend on commercial dairy products for consumption. Thus a drastic change has taken place in the lifestyle of the Pakhtuns (Personal Communication: Hussain 2011).

A positive change due to newly acquired money is the replacement of the cooking style of women. In the traditional culture of the Pakhtuns, women used to cook their food with the firewood and during winters they would light a bonfire for heating. The firewood was either collected by women themselves (Siegmann 2010: 354) or their men folk from nearby mountains. With the increase in income due to diaspora remittances, this also slowly and gradually changed. Now most of the families have the Liquefied Petroleum Gas (LPG) or in large towns the natural gas through pipe connections which the women use for cooking. The same is also used for heating during the winters. Some times when it is not available, even electricity is used for heating. This change has improved the living standards of the Pakhtun women which were traditionally very harsh (Personal Communication: Ghulam 2010).

A tradition of Pakhtuns known as *Tarboorwali* has also witnessed new dimensions. This tradition generally carries

negative connotations and encourages competition between relatives or others in the village or tribe. Seldom is it used for positive purposes, like if one is getting education, the other is also motivated to do the same. However, as previously mentioned, mostly it is used negatively. With diaspora remittances, (they spent nothing outside but spent lavishly at home, which is evident from a statement recorded by Nichols (2009: 148), “Save there, eat here”), the poorer classes started to have better standards of living which affected the previous elites of society. In order to keep their elitist standards of living, they needed money which was shrinking due to non-availability of farmers or due to higher demands for ploughing their lands coupled with higher inflation. The money they had was not sufficient to match the diaspora remittances, which compelled the landed class to sell their lands to the diaspora or their families (Siegmann 2010: 354). Such practices also disturbed the balance of power in the traditional Pakhtun society. However, initially the sense of *tarboorwali* made them short-sighted. In this new situation the traditional class setup of the Pakhtun society also shattered. The previous low classes started exerting their newly earned influence and in some cases they even became the leaders of the tribe, *mohallah* or village (Nichols 2009: 160).

The Diaspora money also brought some positive changes in the Pakhtun society. For example earlier, majority of the Pakhtuns were poor and could not afford a good education for their children, and also needed their children for helping in the hard labour, and thus, could not spare them for education. In this situation they would make their children do physical work at an earlier age at the cost of their education. Thanks to diaspora remittances, more and more Pakhtun children were able to go to schools and higher education centres. It also changed the

traditional job scenario. Previously the illiterate Pakhtuns could only get jobs in defense forces as foot soldiers or lower grade jobs in civil departments; but now with higher education, they have started to get professional and higher grade jobs which were earlier in the control of the traditional Pakhtun elites (Personal Communication: Rahmatullah 2008).

The diaspora money also encouraged the Pakhtuns to give education to their females. Earlier it was not a priority for a Pakhtun to educate a girl but with the economic affordability they were able to send their girls to schools. With more and more females getting higher education, the traditional culture of 'women for home' (Proverb) is also changing. Traditionally, Pakhtuns considered women engaging in a job as shameful but with their education and competitive and improved lifestyles they needed more earning hands, which has removed the taboo of female employment. Now we can see more and more women working outside the four walls of their homes. This has also improved their status in the families as they contribute in the family maintenance. Thus the traditional Pakhtun culture of men earning, women staying and working at home, changed due to new trends in the society under the influence of diaspora remittances (Personal Communication: Raza 2010).

Female education is not only the result of financial improvement of people but also the result of another reason. Siegmann (2010: 348) believes that "Male out-migration in the period before the advent of modern information and communication technologies has resulted in the need for correspondence which in turn aroused women's interest in literacy."

The Pakhtun diaspora has also influenced the religious life and thinking of people at home. The religious influence of the

diaspora is of double nature. On the one hand it has brought with itself liberalism and secularisation (Naz 2011: Online) while on the other hand it has brought in its fold religious bigotry and extremism. These two trends can be found among the diaspora depending on the country they work/live. Those who are working and living in Western countries have been influenced by liberal, secular, and westernised thinking. So they have brought with them the same ideas. However, this group is not very strong because since 1979 when the Russian troops entered Afghanistan, religious groups were officially supported at the expense of liberal and secular forces (Personal Communication: Khan 2011). The second group is those who work and live in Saudi Arabia and other Gulf Cooperation Council countries. Among them particularly those who are living in Saudi Arabia have been influenced by the extremist *Salafi* ideas. They are the ones who sponsor religious *madrassas*, extremist groups and other extremist religious activities. These people also get the support of rich Arabs and are mostly responsible for religious extremism at home (Farhat 2012).

Such religious extremism was unknown to Pakhtuns in their traditional Pakhtun culture. Side by side with Pakhtuns, non-Muslims have been living for centuries in most parts of Pakhtun territory but of special significance is their concentration in Orakzai Agency, Khyber-Agency, Swat, Buner, etc. (Spain 1985: 60). These non-Muslims were generally engaged in businesses and used to travel the width and breadth of Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa without any fear or intimidation. They had a special relationship with the host Pakhtuns who were responsible for their protection. The protector of the non-Muslims for them was known as Naik, which literally means the boss. With the import of religious bigotry from Gulf States in general and Saudi Arabia in particular, non-Muslims no longer

considered themselves to be safe as they used to do in the traditional Pakhtun culture. The tolerance in the Pakhtun culture towards non-Muslims was even more than what they had for other sects within Islam. There is a famous story/ joke regarding the matter. Once, a Hindu sweet-maker developed some problem with the *Mullah* (the Priest of Pakhtuns) which made him angry with the sweet-maker. The *Mullah* in anger announced from the pulpit of the mosque that the Hindu has converted to *Wahabism*, and as a result the villagers stopped buying sweets from the Hindu. When the Hindu realised the reason, he went to the *Mullah* and apologised and made him a friend by giving him some gifts. After that the *Mullah* again announced from the pulpit that the Hindu sweet-maker has rescinded his decision and has converted back to Hinduism. With this announcement the villagers once again started purchasing sweets from him (Personal Communication: Khattak 1992). This speaks volumes about the tolerance of other faiths in the traditional Pakhtun society.

The diaspora also has its bearings on the dress, language and folk songs of Pakhtuns. The diaspora of Gulf States and Saudi Arabia has especially brought such influences back to their ancestral villages. For example the traditional Pakhtun dress was of dark colours as they were mostly involved in physical labour. Living in the Gulf States where Arabs mostly wear white dresses, the diaspora also adopted the white dress. Another impact on the dress is the use of slippers by the diaspora instead of their traditional shoes. They also started using *Qatra*, a special small piece of cloth used by Arabs for head-gear. The Pakhtuns started using *Qatra* not necessarily as head gear but as a drape around the shoulders. Sometimes in hot sun they used it to cover their heads. Pakhtuns have also started naming their male children with well-known Arab names, such

as Shah Faisal, Yasser Arafat, Saddam Hussain, Osama, etc. They also use Arabic words for modern household appliances. For example *Salaja* for fridge, *Iqama* for resident card or visa, *Qandoora* for long Arabic shirt, *Kafeel* for visa sponsor etc. From these examples it is obvious that the diaspora in Arab countries have even influenced the language of the Pakhtuns (Personal Communication: Qasim Jan 2011). The Pakhtun diaspora especially in the Western countries have started using a Romanised Pashto script for communication with each other because they do not understand and write the Persian-Arabic script because their mother tongue is Pashto. To standardise it and make it more widespread, some Pakhtun information technology wizards have launched a Romanised Pashto Wikipedia Project, which aims:

... to develop Wikipedia in Romanized Pashto. Romanized Pashto is the writing system based on roman alphabets for Pashto language. The roman alphabets proposed for Pashto language is based on phonetic alphabets for Pashto language used in the dictionaries of Pashto language. Romanized Pashto is also used by the Pashtun diaspora living outside their ancestral region of central and south Asia (Wikimedia 2012).

Like Pashto language, Pashto poetry has also been influenced by the diaspora syndrome. The following few songs, sung by the well-known Pashto singer Naghma, show how the expatriates have influenced the thinking of modern Pashto poets:

1. *Yaara Musafara bas dai Kalee ta raaza*
Khatma ka Visa Sabr mai Tamaam sho (Pashto)

(Naghma: You Tube 2011)

(Trans. Enough is enough my beloved traveler, come back to the village and cancel your visa as I have lost my patience).

2. *Da maa da lairai Watan Yaara*
Khwdai dai Naseeb da Khpal Watan waka Mayana
Yaa Janana Khpal Watan Ta Rasha Wai
Ka Khalq Dher Dee Pre Abaad dee Khpal Koroona
Pa Pukhtano Kooso Kai Khwand na Kawi
Dera Kalara Kalara Janana
Ta Cherta Laarai che da zana Sara
Yauwra dai tola zindagee janaana (Pashto)

(Naghma: You Tube 2010)

(Trans. O my dear beloved faraway country,
May God bless you to come to your own country
O my beloved come back to your own country,
Even if there are multitudes of people, they are in their
own houses,
Quiet and calm does not look nice my dear beloved in
the Pakhtuns' streets,
Where have you gone my beloved? You took away
with you my whole life).

Another Pashto singer Musharaf Bangash has also sung a song of similar meaning.

Dher raata yadegi kor na rana heraigi mor
Ya malgaro owayai kali ta ba kala zoo

(Bangash: You Tube 2010)

(Trans. I recall my home quite often and cannot forget
my mother
O friends tell me when we'll go home).

Like language, the diaspora has also influenced traditional Pakhtun games. Earlier when diaspora money was not available, the Pakhtun children used to play cost effective games, which did not cost them a lot of money. Those games mostly involved physical exertion. Some of the games which gave way to expensive and modern games that came with diaspora influence and money are *Skhi Skhi Loba*, *Peetu Garam*, *Aandi Kwatak*, and *Cheendro* etc.

Skhi Skhi Loba was a form of game in which a participant would hold one foot above ground with his hand and would push his opponents with his elbow. The participant who fails to hold his foot high above ground would be considered the loser. The one who would survive to the end was the winner.

In *Peetu Garam* children would collect some small flat stones or broken earthen pots and would draw a small circle within which they would mount those flat stones or earthen pots on each other. This involves two teams. The game would start with a team hitting the mound with a tennis ball. The other team would try to catch the ball if the mound was hit, and such a catch would make them win. If the mound was hit and the ball was not caught, then the struggle between the two teams would start. The one who had hit the mound would try to remake it, while the opposition team would try to hit them with the tennis ball. If the former succeeded in remaking the mound without a ball-hit they were the winners, if the latter succeeded in hitting them all with the ball before the making of the mound then they were the winners.

Another popular game of Pakhtun children was *Aandi Kwatak*. This game requires one long stick and a smaller stick of around 6 to 7 inches, cone-shaped on both sides. With the long stick the player would hit the cone-shaped small stick lying on

soil to make it fly. When it flies in the air, the player would try to hit it hard to drive it to as long a distance as possible. The opposite team would try to catch the small flying stick in the air. If they succeeded in catching it in the air then the player who had hit the small stick in the air would lose his turn to play but his co-players would continue till the end. In this process those who would make more successful hits will be declared the winner.

Among girls there was a popular game known as *Cheendro*. In this game the girls would draw on the soil a diagram with a single column and six or seven rows. The girl whose turn was to play the game is required to throw a round shaped material (like a CD disk) made of earthen pot or even stone, towards this diagram without looking at it. If the material would land on a line she will lose her turn but if it lands in the middle of the box then she is required to push it with her foot in order to successfully cross all boxes one by one while keeping one foot above soil. Again the rule was to keep the material away from the lines otherwise she would lose her turn. The one who would successfully cross the boxes one by one emerged successful.

These traditional games have been replaced by modern, sophisticated, and costly games such as cricket, video games etc. due to the availability of money by the diaspora (Personal Communication: Ali 2012).

Another very dangerous and damaging impact of diaspora remittances is the introduction and spread of Kalashnikov culture. Pakhtuns are famous for keeping and loving weapons but earlier only rich people could afford sophisticated and lethal weapons which could cause immense and widespread damage. The common Pakhtuns had few weapons of limited lethal effect. But with diaspora earnings, the Pakhtuns' love for weapons saw

new dimensions and they started purchasing modern, more lethal and automatic weapons especially Kalashnikov. Those tribes and families who were involved in feuds even purchased heavy weapons such as rocket-launchers, grenades, anti-aircraft guns etc. This trend militarised and equipped Pakhtuns for more deadly fighting. However, this phenomenon was not just the result of diaspora money but was also the result of the Afghan crisis because it flooded Pakhtun territories with modern and sophisticated weapons. To put in a nutshell, diaspora remittances had made money available, and the Pakhtuns' purchasing power coupled with love for weapons flooded the society with modern weapons. Thus it is correct to say that the remittances and the Afghan crisis spread the Kalashnikov culture in Pakhtun territories (Personal Communication: Wazir 2011).

Conclusion

In conclusion it could be said that the diaspora has introduced many a change in the traditional Pakhtun society including both positive and negative ones. While the changes in the standards of living, status and economic structure can be viewed as positive signs, the prevalence of the weapons culture diaspora remittances introduced is in fact a negative aspect. However, it is important to bear in mind that the phenomenon of diaspora does not have any clear-cut negativities and/or positivities. It is in fact a combination of both as explained in the paper and an interesting field to research on.

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The Evolution of Culture in Maldives (18th to 20th Centuries)

Asiyath Mohamed and Ali Waheed

Abstract

Maldives, situated in the central Indian Ocean, some 2500 miles north-east of Mombasa and some 400 miles south-west of Sri Lanka, is both geographically and culturally closer to South and Southeast Asia than it is to Africa. Nevertheless, despite the vast distances involved, commercial and cultural links between the Maldives and the Swahili Coast have existed for many centuries.

From the 18th century till the twentieth century Maldives is known to have experienced considerable changes in its historical and traditional culture. The reason for these changes to occur is believed to be the ease of travelling experienced across the world during the time. Many people travelled abroad in order to gain their higher education which in some cases required that they spend years on foreign land. On their return, these people often brought with them the culture of these countries to some extent. Likewise they shared the Maldivian culture with foreigners during their stay in that country. This resulted in some of the practices learned abroad becoming popular and accepted among the domestic community thus paving way for a permanent change in the local culture.

The Evolution of Culture in Maldives

The island nation of Maldives consists of thousands of small islands scattered along the equator in the middle of the Indian Ocean, southwest of Sri Lanka and India. The gem like islands of the Maldives portrays the rare vision of a tropical paradise.

Palm fringed islands with sparkling white beaches, turquoise lagoons, clear warm waters and coral reefs teeming with abundant varieties of marine flora and fauna continue to fascinate tourists, as it has fascinated others in the past for thousands of years. Marco Polo referred to the Maldives as the 'Flower of the Indies', and Ibn Batuta the famous Arab traveller called her in his chronicles 'one of the wonders of the world.' The 1190 islands, geographically consisting of 26 atoll formations, are spread over an area about 1,000,000 km². Measuring 820 km north to south and 120 km east to west at its greatest width, the closest neighbours of Maldives are India and Sri Lanka.

Despite the vast distances involved, commercial and cultural links between the Maldives and the Swahili Coast have existed for many centuries. The origins of the Maldivians are lost in ancient history. There are historical and archaeological records which indicate the islands to have been inhabited for over 5000 years. There are also indications that the Maldives, positioned along an important trade route, was inhabited by people from all over the world. This leaves the origins of the people enshrined in mystery. The first settlers may well have been from Sri Lanka and southern India. However, the main stock of the Maldivian people, as seen from physical features and supported by historical evidence of migration, is predominantly Aryan or Dravidian. Archaeological evidence suggests the existence of Hinduism and Buddhism before the country embraced Islam in 1153 CE. The faces of today's Maldivians resemble the features of various races that inhabit the lands along the Indian Ocean's shipping and maritime routes.

The earliest known history of the Maldives is recorded in copper plates known as *loamaafaanu*, according to which it seems that the islands of Maldives were first settled by Aryan immigrants who are believed to have colonised Sri Lanka at the same time (around 500 BCE). Further migration from South India, as well as Sri Lanka followed. The latest archaeological findings suggest the islands were inhabited as early as 1500 BCE. The culture of Maldives is influenced by the cultures of the surrounding countries, the most prominent of which are those of India and Sri Lanka. But after Maldives embraced Islam, several changes took place in the culture in the process of adapting to the new religion. Due to this reason, even though Maldives was inhabited by people of different races some of their practices were abandoned while others were continued. Hence the culture of Maldives today is based on the practices of the original inhabitants which have been adjusted according to the changes that took place gradually. *Dhivehi*, a language which belongs to the Indo-Iranian group is spoken throughout the Maldives. It has a strong Arabic influence. *Dhivehi*, written from right to left, is the official language of the country. As a second working language, English is widely used. The origin of the Maldivian language is a mixture of languages from the first inhabitants. Some of the earliest texts found in Maldives include *southern brahmi* and *nagaari* scripts. These are languages that are still used in some of the surrounding countries on a spoken basis. Some of the ancient writings in Maldives have letters of Tamil and Sinhalese script. Apart from the scripts mentioned before, there are three main scripts used in Maldives referred to as *eveyla*, *dhives* and *gabulhi thaana*. These scripts are endemic to Maldives. The *eveyla* script is known to include *nagaari*, *eylu*, *granthaa* and *vetteluttu*, scripts from South India and Sri Lanka. The *dhives* script is said to have evolved from *eveyla*.

The *gabulhi thaana* script is believed to have evolved from Arabic numerals by using vowels on them.

From the eighteenth to twentieth centuries, Maldives is known to have experienced considerable changes in its traditional culture. The reason for these changes to occur is believed to be the ease of travelling experienced over the world during that time. Many people travelled abroad in order to gain higher education which in some cases required they spend years on foreign land. When returning, these people often brought with them the culture of these countries to some extent. Likewise they shared the Maldivian culture with foreigners during their stay in that country. This resulted in some of the practices learned becoming popular and accepted among the domestic community thus bringing permanent changes to the local culture.

Historically Maldivians used a variety of foods and it is observed that between the eighteenth century and twentieth century, many changes had taken place that slowly replaced commonly used staple foods with those used in the surrounding countries. Foods like yam, pumpkin, bread fruit etc., which were used as staple food are now prepared only for special occasions and imported food such as rice, wheat and flour became staple food of Maldivians. Though the traditional foods are not commonly consumed now, they are delicacies for travellers and tourists. Packed and freshly made varieties of such foods are sold while some products are shipped abroad. Fried yam and bread fruit chips are famous delicacies among tourists.

During the past three decades or so, significant changes in the attire of both genders in Maldives can be observed. Unique *Feyli*, *Kasabu Boavalhu Libaas* with *Bolurumaa* worn by women along with *Feyli*, *Bolufeyli* and *Bolurumaa* worn by men

have become attires only used on special occasions. One can find some similarities between attire used in the Maldives and Africa which shows the exchange of culture between the two places. Maldivians who go abroad for higher studies and other purposes bring with them cultural changes which have resulted in Maldivians developing a liking to modern 'fashionable attires' like shirts, blouses, long sleeved dresses and jeans.

Traditional performing arts practiced in Maldives also share similar characteristics with other South Asian countries, particularly India and Sri Lanka. Cinema movies, stage dramas and music styles are also of the same origin. Traditional poems, folk songs and other forms of oral and written literature have been slowly erased and are now a thing of the past. It must be brought to attention that many of these practices are endemic to Maldives. Some of the performing arts on the verge of been lost are *dhan dijehun* (stick dance), and *Boduberu* and *Thaara jehun* (tambourine dance).

In the eighteenth century, Maldivians used *Bokkura* (a small rowing boat) as a vessel to transport goods and people within short distances such as from the land to ship or from one ship to another. These types of travelling vessels are also seen in Africa. Maldivians started using the *Riyalu dhoani* (sailing boat), an improved version of the Bokkura. These have similarities with the vessels used in Swahili coast during that period. This is evidence for the fact that people from Africa also migrated to Maldives and shared their way of life with the Maldivians. With advances in technology, the mechanised *dhoni* came into existence which made travelling much easier.

In the early eighteenth century people of Maldives used to live in thatched houses. These thatched roofs were made locally with the coconut palm leaves that were freely available.

However, due to growing foreign presence in the country that owed much to increased trade relations and cultural exchanges, Maldivian living standards changed and people in Maldives also started to build their houses with coral stone which was of a higher quality than the thatched roof houses.

A study of the changes in culture and traditions during this time period reveals that many of the practices seen in Maldives today reflect Indian and Sri Lankan influence. Maldivian families living in Sri Lanka and India are the driving force behind such influence. In the same way Maldivians change, so do people of the surrounding countries as communities from neighbouring countries also live in the Maldives. Any new culture and tradition formed in Maldives within this time period was due to modernisation and technological developments throughout the world which linked countries together paving way for the sharing of likes and dislikes. This can especially be observed in twentieth century Maldives, where there is documentary evidence to prove the diasporic influence on changing life styles, architecture and education.

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Cultural Identity of Indian Tamils in Sri Lanka: A Measurement of Multi-dimensional Status of the Indian Tamil Society in Sri Lanka

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Abstract

The plantation system was a new economic activity when compared to the traditional agricultural occupations of those Tamils who migrated from South India. The politically motivated citizenship issues imposed on the migrant Indian Tamils in Sri Lanka and the thirty years of ethnic conflict had a considerable impact on the cultural identity of Indian Tamils. The business community of Indian Tamils is mainly concentrated in the capital city of Colombo and a few other urban and rural areas in the country. A considerable number of children of the plantation workers have also emerged as members of the business community in the cities in recent years. Ironically, they did not have any type or associational relationship with the traditional upper caste business community in the cities until now. Certainly the social recognition of the Indian Tamils who obtained the status of 'citizen by descent' and 'citizen by registration' is much better than the 'stateless person' status of Indian Tamils. They were declared as Sri Lankan Tamils in order to make a distinction between them and the historic stateless persons of Indian Tamil origin in the country. The Indian Tamils living in the Southern Province are mostly concentrated in tea smallholdings and the rubber plantation sector in the country. Several development programmes like the distribution of land to landless communities for the growing of tea and housing programmes have been implemented during the last two decades by successive governments but

the benefits have not reached significantly, the Indian Tamil tea estate workers in these districts. The study also highlights the hardships which are affecting the cultural identity of Indian Tamils living in the Southern province and their adaptation to the Sinhalese culture. It seems that them becoming part of the existing Sinhalese society is inevitable.

Introduction

Indian Tamils are the descendants of emigrants from South Indian districts who became engaged in the plantation economy in Sri Lanka. The plantation system was a new economic activity when compared to the traditional agricultural occupations of those Tamils who migrated from South India. Around sixty per cent of the Indian Tamil migrants from South India were able to cope with the new system of the plantation economy with its special characteristics such as its regimented type of work, 'wages for work', 'work on all six days' 'living in line rooms' 'carrying out tasks dictated by the planter' and so on. The others went back to their original destination in South India.¹ Nevertheless, certain traditional practices have continued among the social organisation of Indian Tamils (See Balasundaram et al. 2009). Politically motivated citizenship issues imposed on migrant Indian Tamils in Sri Lanka and the thirty years of ethnic conflict had a considerable impact on the cultural identity of Indian Tamils. The main objective of this study is to discuss the context in which the cultural identity of Indian Tamils has transformed in Sri Lanka.

Indian Tamils in Sri Lanka

The migration of Indian Tamils to Sri Lanka was unique and in contrast to the indentured labour migration in most countries.

The migrant labourers were free to move between their homeland in South India and the work place in the Sri Lanka from the 1830s up to 1923. In 1871 there were around 123000 Indian Tamils involved in the plantation sector and this increased to 235000 by 1891. The term 'Indian Tamils' was first used officially in the census of 1911 to distinguish the immigrant Indian Tamil population from the indigenous Sri Lankan Tamils. The population of Indian Tamils was 531000, a 12.9 per cent of the total population of the country and its counterpart of Sri Lankan Tamils was 13.2 per cent. It should be noted that the total number of Indian Tamils in the subsequent censuses in 1921, 1931, 1946, 1953 and 1963 was nearly equivalent to their corresponding population of Sri Lankan Tamils (See Mookiah 1995). However, the population of Indian Tamils has not been accurately enumerated in the last two censuses (1981 and 2001). In these censuses many Indian Tamils had declared themselves as 'Sri Lankan Tamils' instead of the census category 'Indian Tamils' (Department of Census and Statistics 1986: 117-8). The estimated number of Indian Tamils in Sri Lanka is 1.3 million or roughly 6.4 per cent of the total population in the country in contrast to five per cent according to official census figures.² When Indian Tamils came to Sri Lanka they had to shape their own culture according to the needs of the new situation. In other words, the culture which is seen among Indian Tamil plantation workers in Sri Lanka today is a transformed version of the original Indian culture. Many things have been added and some elements of the original culture were given up leading to the formation of a distinct culture (Suryanarayan 2001).

The distribution of the Indian Tamil population in Sri Lanka could be put in two categories, viz. district-based distribution, and sector-based distribution (urban, rural and

estate). As far as the share of Indian Tamils in the district population is concerned, the district of Nuwara Eliya, which is the prime tea planting district in the country, has more than fifty per cent of Indian Tamils (**Table 1**).

Plantation Districts	Percentage
Nuwaraeliya	51.3
Badulla	18.2
Kandy	8.45
Ratnapura	7.8
Kegalle	5.9
Matale	5.3
Kalutara	2.7
Matara	2.2

Table 1: Distribution of Indian Tamil Population in Sri Lanka. Courtesy: Preliminary Report of Census and Statistics, 2001.

As far as sector wise distribution is concerned a total of 883232 Indian Tamils are living in the estate sector, which is around 76 per cent of the total Indian Tamil population in the country. The rest is distributed between urban and rural areas as 6 per cent and 18 per cent respectively.

Majority of Indian Tamils concentrated in the urban sector are involved mainly in trade related livelihood activities. Most of the trading activities are inherited from parents. The inherited trading communities are largely upper caste groups such as *Vellelas*, *Kallans*, *Agamudaiyans* and other non-Brahmin caste groups. A part of the generation of the plantation workers also emerged recently as a trading community in the cities and they belong to *Adi Dravida* caste groups which collectively form the majority of the Indian Tamil population in the country.

It should be noted that the movement of Indian Tamils into the rural sector is a recent phenomenon. The reasons for the migration of Indian Tamils from the estate sector to the rural sector can be one or many of the following:

- a. implementation of land reforms;³
- b. requirement of manual labour for the expansion of farming activities in the Northern region; and
- c. racial violence by the native villagers against Indian Tamil plantation workers.

The lands vested under land reforms were distributed among the village community and ironically Indian Tamils were left out. There were also frequent attacks by the villagers who forced these Tamils to move to different locations. Those who had discontinued estate occupations due to the impact of land reforms and violence had moved either to settle in the nearest village or migrated to the northern region particularly to the districts of Kilinochchi, Mullaitivu and Vavuniya between 1975 and 1985. In addition to the impact of land reforms, racial violence and the shortage of food supply in the 1970s also made life difficult for estate workers, since the plantation sector does not have consumable products and solely depends on the supply of food from village farmers. Thus the only alternative was to leave the estates for other parts of the country. Many of them left the estates and settled in the Wanni District which is mainly involved in subsistence agriculture and is inhabited mainly by Sri Lankan Tamils. The estimated population figures shows that the total population of Indian Tamils living in the Wanni District is around 135000 which is roughly 35 per cent of the total population in the district. The distribution of estimated population of Indian Tamils in other districts of the Northern

province is as follows: Kilinochichi 2.4 per cent, Mannar 13.3 per cent, Vavuniya 19.4 per cent and Mullaitivu 13.9 per cent (Devaraj 2006).

The Indian Tamils who moved from the estate sector to the rural sector have a better social status than the Indian Tamils in the plantation sector. The Indian Tamils who moved to villages had the privilege to construct their own houses. They also have their personal addresses along with street names etc. something which their predecessors did not possess. Moreover, by being in a village community Indian Tamils also have gained access to benefits given by the local government that are not available through the management of the estate sector.

Thus it is clear from the above facts that Indian Tamils living in the country could be divided into three groups, viz.:

- a. The business community which continued their traditional cultural characteristics along with a strong relationship with their ancestral villages in Tamil Nadu,
- b. Plantation workers who continued their traditional cultural characteristics with very little or no relationship with their ancestral villages in Tamil Nadu, and
- c. Indian Tamils who adapted to the Sinhalese identity.

The Indian Tamil Business Community

The business community of Indian Tamils is mainly concentrated in the capital city of Colombo and a few other urban and rural areas in the country. The large majority of the business community of Indian Tamils is concentrated in Colombo and Kandy and distributed also in urban centres like Hatton-Dickoya, Nuwara-Eliya, Matale, Maskeliya, Nawalapitiya, Badulla, and Bandarwella, which are located in

the middle of the plantation areas. Most of the businesses of Indian Tamils have been inherited from their parents or relatives. They have a distinct identity as a major group of Indian Tamils. Various castes belong to this group like *Vellelas*, *Kallans*, *Kowndan*, *Chettyar*, *Nadar*, *Agamudaiyans*, *Naidus* and other non-Brahmin caste groups in Sri Lanka. The major business of the upper caste Indian Tamils are confined to sale of clothes, groceries, jewellery, pharmacies, hardware and the supply of stationery in cities. A considerable number of them are running vegetarian restaurants elsewhere in the country. Most of the upper caste businessmen play a very important role in temple trusts in the cities notably contributing to retain the cultural values of Hindus in the country. The establishment of the Hindu Cultural Centre in Kandy and a Hindu temple in Matale town are few examples of land mark achievements of the business community of Indian Tamils in Sri Lanka.

A few businessmen of the upper caste Indian Tamils also invest in garment factories and import cinema films particularly of the Indian film industry. However, many of them could not continue these investments after ethnic violence erupted in 1983. In the past, caste has been a determining factor in the recruitment of workers of estate origin for positions such as sales assistants in Indian Tamil owned businesses in Colombo and other cities (Jayaraman 1975 and Hollup 1994).

The rituals and practices of this upper caste community still continue as is done by their predecessors in South India. Among the upper castes the *Vellelas* caste of the Indian Tamils is prominent in continuing the South Indian culture. Most of the *Vellelas* are from the district of Trichy and constantly go to their ancestral village not only for matrimonial purposes but also to attend funerals. They have formed an organisation called *Aru*

Nadu Vellalar Sangam (AVS) in order to secure their caste unity. AVS carries out a number of promotional activities to increase their membership. One of the major activities is to give financial assistance to promote education of the poor families of *Vellelas*. Financial assistance is also extended to aspiring poor *Vellelas* children to pursue their higher education in both local and international universities. The organisation also facilitates counselling for fixing marriages, etc. The *Vellelas* accept only intra-caste marriages and they have strong objections to inter-caste and inter-religious marriages. *Vellalas* are considered as a high caste group as that of Indian Brahmins.

The hold that this upper caste had over the business centre has now changed. A considerable number of children of the plantation workers have also emerged as the business community in the cities in recent years. Surprisingly, some of the new businessmen are also actively involved in various promotional activities for the estate workers. Ironically, they did not have any type of associational relationship with the traditional upper caste business community in the cities until now.

Indian Tamil Plantation Workers

Indian Tamils engaged in large scale tea estates also continue their cultural identity within the country. Indian Tamils living in large scale estates are either third or the fourth generation of migrant workers from South India. The plantation system was a structure as far as the early migrant Indian Tamil workers are concerned. Much of the migrant workers did not have any experience in living in the cool climate in the hills of Sri Lanka. The families were compelled to live in 'line rooms' which were non-existent in their ancestral villages in India. The leadership

given by the chieftain call *Kangany* who had facilitated the migration in the early days was a new experience for the migrant Indian Tamils. Moreover, work for wages that linked them to a labour ordinance was also a completely new phenomenon of the life in the plantation sector. They had to work six days a week and the involvement of not only both male and female workforce but also the recruitment of children for the estate work also introduced them to a new world of work in the plantation sector.

However, the workers continued their cultural traits in the plantation sector. Most of their cultural activities are similar to those within the subsistence agricultural system of their ancestral villages in Tamil Nadu. The major festivals begin with the celebration of *Thai Pongal* in the month of January every year which is a major festival of Tamils.⁴ Other festivals include the popularly known *Sami Kumpudu* which is the annual temple festival of plantation workers that is celebrated during the month of March or April. The *Sami Kumudu* is an appeal to the Goddess *Amman*, for sufficient rain and the elimination of diseases. Apart from the annual *Sami Kumpudu* the *Margali Bajan* from the middle of December up to day of *Thai Pongal* in January is also celebrated in the estates. Indian Tamil plantation workers continue to perform certain folk arts like *Kaman Koothu*, *Ponnar Sangar*, and *Arjunana Thavas* in the estates. *Deepawali* is popularly known as the festival of lights. This is also celebrated on a day which falls in the month of October or the beginning of November every year. However, several aspects influenced the cultural identity of Indian Tamils. Among them were the repatriation scheme implemented under the Sirimavo-Shastri Pact in 1964 and ethnic violence which began in 1978 and was widely executed in July 1983. These were the major reasons which disturbed the continuity of their traditional

culture. Indeed, the distribution of various castes is quite typical and persisted for a long time as analysed by R. Jayaraman (1975) and Hollup (1994). Accordingly, around 23 per cent of Indian Tamils of the plantation sector consisted of upper lower caste Indian Tamils. Tamils and Sinhalese were represented by 65 per cent and 2 per cent respectively in the plantation sector.

Upper caste Indian Tamils mainly belonged to *Mottai Vellalas*, *Reddiyar*, *Ahamudiyar*, *Muthuraj*, *Ambalakkaran*, *Kallan*, *Naidu*, *Mudaliyar*, *Udaiyar*, *Padaiyachi* and *Kavundar* castes. The upper caste estate workers played a prominent role in the estates. Apart from the *Kangany*, the trade union representatives of the estate committee were mainly from the upper caste community. The temple ceremonies were managed by them, and the night schools popularly known as *Irravu Palli*⁵ both for school going children and the adults were conducted by the upper caste people. There was a practice of reading the great epics of Ramayana and *Mahahaparatham* in the night school for adults. Major events like *Kamankkothu*, *Ponnasangar*, *Archunanathavas*, and *Margali Bajan* were mostly patronised by the upper caste workers in the estates. Most of the school going children who continued to follow secondary education were either from the children of the upper caste community or the children of Christian parents among the Indian Tamil estate community until the middle of the 1980s. The upper caste estate workers were also heavily involved in the circulation of money among estate workers. The monthly *Seetu* system that was widely spread among Indian Tamil workers in the estates which involved lending money with collateral valuable items like copper, silver and jewellery was also handled by the upper caste estate workers.

Interestingly, the involvement of the *Kangany* (chieftain) in the process of early migration and his later role in the plantation system occupies a distinct place among the Indian Tamils in Sri Lanka. The *Kanganies* have played a dual role among the Indian Tamils in Sri Lanka. They not only supplied workers to the plantations, but also possessed the leadership elements necessary to run the operation. The *Kanganies* also thought of themselves as playing ‘half the role of the British planter’ amongst the plantation workers. They also wore different kinds of clothes to distinguish them from the workers. They wore a coat with a long white sheet (*Vellai Vetti*), white shirt, and turban. The *Kanagnies* wore the coat as part of the ceremonial dress of British planters. The style of wearing a coat has been harmonised with the traditional Tamil attire by *Kanganies* to project themselves as ‘the other half of the British planter’ while dealing with workers. Indeed, the action of wearing the coat like a British man was initiated during the migration of Indian Tamils from Tamil Nadu and continued by the *Kanganies* until the British left the estates during 1970s and 1980s. Later the dress code of the *Kanganies* became the symbol of the Indian Tamil plantation workers in the country.

However, the continuity of cultural practices of Indian Tamil plantation workers suffered a significant drawback during the implementation of the repatriation scheme of the Sirima-Shastri pact of 1964.⁶ Under this pact a large scale reverse migration took place from Sri Lanka to South India. Most of the repatriates of the Indian Tamil plantation population belonged to the upper caste community. As mentioned before, the upper caste Tamils who lived in the estates had been an integral part of the plantation system and represented the elite group within the social system. The upper caste estate workers took the lead in cultural activities in the estates despite the fact that the majority

population consisted of low caste estate workers such as *Pallar*, *Parayar* and *Chakkiliyra*. Thus repatriation of those elites created a gap in terms of continuity of several cultural practices in the estates. For example, many temples in the estates could not perform the annual festival because suitable persons were not available to perform the traditional rituals. Likewise, there was stagnation in many other activities as well, and a lull persisted until the 1990s. Some of the traditional cultural activities have now been rejuvenated and are handled by the educated new generation of the Indian Tamil plantation community. The role of the upper caste in performing such events has been transferred to the educated children of the estate workers in the plantation sector.

Further, the Sirima-Shastri Pact in 1964 also made a considerable impact on the identity of Indian Tamils in Sri Lanka. Paradoxically the 1964 pact divided the Indian Tamils into four categories:

- a. Indian Tamils with a document to prove the category of 'citizen by descent',
- b. people with relevant documents offered by the Indian mission for repatriation,
- c. people who had received Sri Lankan citizenship through registration, and
- d. stateless persons.

Most of the repatriates moved back to Tamil Nadu and were identified as Indians. However, other categories of 'citizen by descent', 'citizen by registration' and 'stateless persons' have caused distress. The classification of 'stateless persons' led to a new definition of the status of citizenship of Indian Tamils in Sri Lanka. Indeed, stateless persons of Indian Tamils were

humiliated on several occasions and even denied school education and housing.

Certainly, social recognition of Indian Tamils who obtained the status of 'citizen by descent' and 'citizen by registration' is much better than that of the 'stateless person.' They were declared as Sri Lankan Tamils in order to make a distinction between them and the historic stateless persons of Indian Tamils in the country. This was also reflected in the national censuses particularly the census reports of 1981 and 2001. In fact, the two censuses failed to give the actual number of Indian Tamils living in the country.

Indian Tamils who Adapted to Other Cultures

Apart from Indian Tamils of the business community and those in the plantation sector, Indian Tamils also live in other parts of the country and are in the process of adapting to other cultures in the country. Indian Tamils who are living in the Southern province constitute around 20 per cent of the total Indian Tamil population while in the North and the Eastern provinces they constitute roughly 10 per cent and 4 per cent respectively. The concentration of Indian Tamils in the North and Eastern provinces is a new phenomenon whereas the concentration of them in the Southern province dates back to the inception of the tea industry in the country. The distribution of Indian Tamils in Southern districts is shown in **Table 2**. A total of 67000 are living in the districts of the Southern Province.

Indian Tamils living in the Southern province are mostly concentrated in tea smallholdings and the rubber plantation sector in the country. Several development programmes like the distribution of land to landless communities for growing of tea and housing programmes have been implemented during the last

two decades by successive governments. But the benefits have not reached the Indian Tamil tea estate workers in these districts. Many of them are living in very old line rooms which were constructed during the British times. At present the line rooms are owned by the privatised tea estate owners and labour is provided for the tasks performed on a daily basis. The wage rate per day in the tea smallholding is Rs. 380/= and work is offered roughly 8 to 10 days a month.

Districts	Numbers	Percentage
Kalutara	30000	2.8
Galle	18000	2
Matara	19000	2.3
Total	67000	
Table 2: Distribution of Indian Tamils in the Southern Province. Courtesy: Chandrabose, 2004.		

The maximum wage that could be earned at tea smallholdings is Rs.3800/= from 10 days of work. Therefore, workers are forced to find jobs elsewhere for the remaining days. It is a daunting task to find jobs for their survival and as a result they are compelled to be a poor community among the tea small-holding sector in the country. It is clear from this fact that Indian Tamils have been sidelined from the development projects implemented in these districts and they are placed in an economically vulnerable situation.

Apart from the economic vulnerability Indian Tamils who are living in the Southern province were also severely affected by the ethnic conflict that was between the government of Sri Lanka and the Sri Lankan Tamil separatists of the North and the East. Undoubtedly, Indian Tamils are not part of these separatist movements. But many people living in the South cannot

distinguish them from those living in the North and East. On several occasions Indian Tamils were suspected for causalities that occurred in the armed forces in the war front. This situation prevailed for thirty years beginning from the 1980s.

The distrust of certain Sinhalese towards Indian Tamil workers in the south has led to differential treatment of the latter in the Southern province. The Indian Tamil is not on par with the majority community in the allocation of resources in the fields of education, employment and infrastructure. Therefore, schools for Tamils are not maintained with sufficient resources. This situation has forced Tamil students to study in Sinhala medium or at Muslim schools for their basic education. Ultimately, the children of Indian Tamils become competent in the Sinhala language rather than their mother tongue which is Tamil. Moreover, a number of projects for housing were implemented but none of the Tamil estate workers were given such facilities. Many villages have obtained basic facilities like renovation of roads and supply of drinking water and electricity, but these have not reached Indian Tamils significantly. Moreover, Indian Tamils are not in a situation to promote their cultural activities in these areas.

Several of the Indian Tamils living in these districts are fluent in the Sinhala language and fascinatingly they use the language even among their own family members. Indeed, the orientation of Sinhala was heavily instigated during the crucial North and East war in order to conceal their identity as Tamils in public places. Moreover, they also ascertain to follow several customs that are connected to Sinhalese rituals in these districts. For example in the Southern province the *Devasam* ritual in the Hindu religion has been converted to *Dhana Gethra* of Buddhism and all associated Buddhist rituals are followed. An

interesting observation is that the language the Indian Tamils commonly used for calling their children in the south is different from that of the Indian Tamils living elsewhere. Indian Tamils in the South call a son *Putha* instead of *Magan*. Likewise the daughter is called *Duwa* instead of *Makal*. Several of the Tamil women wear Sinhalese dresses for their ceremonies like weddings etc. It should be noted that there is no evidence to prove any institutional arrangements or announcements on converting Indian Tamils in to the Sinhalese culture and Buddhism even during the crucial war.

Conclusion

The study highlights the multidimensional status of the Indian Tamils in Sri Lanka. The Indian Tamils who migrated have adjusted to a new economic activity i.e. the plantation system in Sri Lanka. Large numbers of the Indian Tamils are still living in the large scale housing schemes of the plantation sector in the country. The rest are living in cities as a business community and in the rural sector elsewhere in the island. Among them the people who are living in the tea smallholding sector in the Southern province are the most vulnerable community. The business community of Indian Tamils relatively continue their strong relationship with their ancestral villages in South India. But it is not the case with Indian Tamils living in the plantation sector. Studies show that they have preserved most of their cultural identity as Indian Tamils. However, the Pact of 1964 and ethnic violence made a significant impact on their cultural identity. The study also highlighted the hardships faced by Indian Tamils that affect their cultural identity especially of those living in the Southern province where they adapt to the Sinhalese culture for survival. It seems that their absorption into the existing Sinhalese society is inevitable. Hence, Indian

Tamils need a very strong institutional support to retain their traditional culture and their identity as Indian Tamils in Sri Lanka.

End Notes

¹ Not all of Indian Tamils who migrated were compelled to stay in Sri Lanka (then Ceylon). For example in 1839 the number arrived from India was 2719 but 2202 returned to India in the same year. However, the arrival and departure pattern had changed subsequently over a period of time and more people tend to return to India than arriving in Ceylon. For instance, the number of Indian Tamils that arrived towards the end of 1951 was 54721 but return was 58794. This number includes persons who arrived on previous occasions (See Sandirasegaran 1989: Table 1-77-80).

² For details of estimated population of Indian Tamils see Chandrabose (Colombo, 2004), pp. 31-42.

³ For a detailed study of the process of land reforms and its impact on the plantation agriculture see Peiris (1984).

⁴ *Thai Pongal* is celebrated on the first day of the month Thai (January) of the Tamil calendar. *Pongal* is the preparation of sweet rice and is a thanksgiving ceremony in which farmers thank nature, the Sun and farm animals for their assistance in providing a successful harvest.

⁵ *Irra Palli* (in Tamil) is a night school that was popular in many estates until the estate schools were nationalised in 1989.

⁶ The 1964 Pact stated that there were 9.75 lakhs of stateless persons in Sri Lanka. It was agreed that Sri Lanka would accept 3 lakhs of people while India agreed to accept repatriation of 5.25 lakhs of people. The remaining 1.5 lakhs of persons were

shared in equal numbers by both countries under the 1974 Srimalinda Pact. It should be noted that until 1983 only 360000 people obtained Indian Citizenship and were actually repatriated.

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Dress Code of Indian Plantation Labourers in South Asia

Ramesha Jayaneththi

Abstract

Diasporic culture survives as a result of the spread of communities in the South Asian region that resulted in many economic and social mobilisations. Diasporas symbolise and preserve a culture different from their home countries and they often maintain strong ties with their mother country and its original culture.

Indian Tamil plantation labourers are a widespread diaspora that is present in many Asian countries, especially Sri Lanka. These labourers are considered as a minority group in the ethnic hierarchy of these countries. The social structure of the plantations resembles the South Indian rural social structure that is generally bound by the caste system. Especially they were identified as a subaltern group with subaltern cultural values and rituals in their own estates. This research attempts to find the uniqueness of the dress code of Indian Tamil plantation labourers and the cultural background that caused the emergence and evolution of that.

Dress and ornaments possess considerable value in society. Especially when comparing the dress code and ornament styles in the past and present, scholars attempt to recognise the uniqueness of dress codes which have social and cultural features. Especially in modern historiography there is a new trend to rewrite history by considering uncommon aspects of human history. In the social sciences, the themes of kinship, polity, economy, society and religion are more popular researches. But some valuable fields related to socio-cultural

themes such as clothes are usually ignored and rarely given any systematic consideration. However, these fields are now drawing attention and thus significant historical facts are being revealed. According to Cordwell and Schwarz:

Clothing and adornment are universal features of human behavior and an examination of what they reveal and attempt to conceal, contributes to our knowledge about the fabric of cultures and to our understanding of the threads of human nature. (1979: 1)

Therefore studying the dress code of an isolated community like the Indian plantation labourers in South Asia in terms of the evolution of their dress styles is also related to the study of subaltern communities. Wickramasinghe (2003: 5) notes:

Dress is the language of the non-literate, the mute and the lair. If people cannot or do not speak, their bodies always do. But their bodies can also lie or dissimulate ... Material culture is produced by human agency in the process of social interaction in many contexts.

It is, therefore, clear that dress helps to understand and recognise contextual limitations of some subaltern diasporic communities in Asian countries. Especially when popular historical sources were silent about these communities, dress was a significant source to identify the reality of their life. Some scholars have interpreted clothes as a symbol of inequality. According to Cordwell and Schwarz (1979: 13) “cloth and clothing constitute an illuminating lens through which to consider the historical inequality—that is social relations of unequal wealth, status and power.”

There are many interpretations about the importance of dress code as a source of cultural and social values. Dress shows creativity and limitations of these social values. From raw

material to production, from weaving to adornment, it touches a range of social facets. According to Barnes and Eicher (1993: 1):

Textiles or skins as dress may be fundamentally protective, but they also have social meaning. Decorative ornaments that are added to the body ... show a person's position within the society. A cultural identity is thus expressed and visual communication is established before verbal interaction even transmits whether such a verbal exchange is possible or desirable.

Several attributes of dress can be identified as ones with cultural value. It helps to define personal identity in terms of geography and history. It also stands for symbolic social positions like caste, class, age, political, spiritual and economic powers. Dress earns social and cultural power with time, space and structure. In some eras the society considered the fully clothed style as a privilege of the elite. Sometimes fully clothed pattern is considered a symbol of virtue. But during certain periods, less clothed and simple dress patterns stood as symbols of the elite. Sigiria frescos of Sri Lanka clearly show that the topless pattern was a symbol of elite during the Anuradhapura era. Such patterns were followed by elite women in contemporary harems. It could be assumed that the servants covered their busts. Therefore, dressing style was very important even in ancient societies to reflect the social position.

Dress patterns were primarily shaped by the climate. But after the evolution of socio-cultural norms, those patterns were established as reflections of social positions. Also it was required of a dress to establish convenience in daily activities and occupations. In some societies gender inequality was the most effective divider that defined the dress code. Women in

some communities were forced to wear fully covered and less stylish patterns due to patriarchal beliefs. Men manipulated religious beliefs and didactic literature to make women adopt these kinds of styles. The dress is, therefore, always combined with power and authority of the society.

Generally dress codes of tropical countries were different from those of the Western civilisations. The main differences were in material used and dressing styles. In many Asian countries the most popular material was cotton and the dressing style was wrapping the whole cloth around the body. Majority of Asians generally used less stylish designs. In European countries and America, perfect dressing meant sewing which involved a complex process of designing. Thus, the dress code involved a broad theme, including raw material, various clothing patterns, ornaments and jewellery, head dresses and body paintings.

This research mainly focuses on the Tamil diasporic community in Sri Lanka and, their dress code is analysed in the Sri Lankan context. The culture of estate Tamil communities in Sri Lanka is similar to other Tamil diasporic communities in Fiji, Mauritius, Malaysia and Trinidad. Estate Tamils constitute a distinct ethnic group different from indigenous Sri Lankan Tamils who live in the Northern and Eastern provinces. They live mainly in the Central province and are separated by caste, culture and occupation. Certain castes which existed in South India were important in their social organisation. Caste identity played a huge role in forming part of the ideology and values of labourers (Hollup 1994: xvi). The Sri Lankan community of Indian Tamil plantation labourers were recruited and organised by high caste South Indian Tamils called 'Head *Kanganis*.' These plantation units were isolated and therefore the labourers were forced to experience the same practices that prevailed in

South India. A few legal restrictions prevented them from moving and mobilising within the larger society. The lack of integration and the resultant isolation encouraged them to continue their traditional socio-cultural and religious institutes. As Hollup (1994: xvii) notes:

The plantation is both a territorial and socio-economic unit where the Tamil estate workers are born, breed and die, buried in the land (under the Tea bushes) ... The plantation provide rent free housing, free medicines from its dispensary, a maternity ward and midwife, estate school, nursery (crèche) for children, some food rations from its rice store, temples and church, kitchen gardens, washerman and barber, tools and transport.

Their dressing was also an isolated practice which was affected by South Indian memories. The dress code was a reflection of the cultural and social background of Tamil plantation labourers. Especially when considering the Sri Lankan community of Indian plantation labourers, their dress code obviously shows their poor living condition, low cost lifestyles and the impact of inner social hierarchies like the caste structure. Especially during the British period, they were a very much isolated community practicing their own agamic beliefs and rituals. They were neglected and inhumanly. They worked in tea or rubber factories and plantation fields. Contemporary evidence show their living conditions were similar to those of slaves and as wage labourers they provided their maximum working capacity to estate owners in exchange for minimum primary facilities and salary (Steuart 1905: 17). The dress code was thus suitable for their hard work in the fields. There are some impressive features of this dress code.

From the British period to modern day, estate women use a cloth to wrap the body. Clearly they use unsewn clothes instead of sewn ones. This is an easy and cheap style and it agrees with common traditional dressing patterns in South Asia. As per historical evidence, the wrapping style was a common pattern among contemporary South Indian ladies too (Wickramasinghe 2003: 57).

According to oral evidence, variety among their dress patterns was scarce. Normally dressing is a complex practice which involves many patterns and styles to reflect various social functions. There are symbolic social meanings to colour, elaboration and style of the dress code. But low caste labourers in plantation communities used a single dress pattern without variations for many occasions, such as daily in-door activities, work in the plantation fields, factories and other special activities in their community life. Even during major functions like ritual ceremonies, weddings and funerals, participants rarely considered elaborate patterns for their dress in early periods (Personal Communication: Viramma).

Since the British period, the major dressing pattern of plantation women in Sri Lanka has been the traditional Indian Saree or *Selei*. In order to show the social position of low caste women labourers, they wore sarees without jackets. Rough and raw material were commonly used and they were mostly hard cottons like Indian handlooms. The designs of these materials were simple. Embroideries or material with borders were used rarely. Women of low castes commonly used low quality material. Once or twice a month the administration provided them with dressing material and other daily necessities (Personal Communication: Muniaya). This measure prevented this community from adopting other cultures. The saree draping

style was simple and untidy. That was exactly the same as the Tamil Nadu style in South India. First it was wrapped around the waist and then draped around the jacketless top. They did not use pleats in the *pallu* or the rest of the saree. Finally they wrapped the *pallu* around the waist. The pattern was suitable for their field work which involved hard labour and the restless daily life.

Women of high castes like in *Kangani* families used to wear sarees with simple jackets of the back covering style. Photographic evidence clearly shows that in the British period sewing methods were practiced by some of these ladies. Industrial revolution in Britain and the transfer of cultural ideology popularised the sewing machine among Sri Lankans (Wickramasinghe 2003: 57). That jacket also helped to show social dignity of *Kangani* families in these isolated estates which were a great distance away from their motherland. Some *Kangani* women used elaborated sarees which were made by soft material with borders (**Fig. 1**).



Figure1: The dress pattern of Plantation women during the British period. Image Courtesy: Census of Ceylon, 1921 and Lankapura.com

Many Tamil plantation women wore dark colour sarees (**Fig. 2c**). Oral evidence shows that popular colours were red, green and blue. The rarest colour among ladies was white. Black was also less used. They did not have any symbolic colour for funerals like black or white as other Asians did (Personal Communication: Viramma). After their husband's death, however, the widows give up every ornament including the bridal necklace and wear white colour only. Also colours for jackets and under garments of sarees are different from each other. Even now, Indian Tamil plantation women do not pay attention to matching of colours. Another notable feature of their dress code was slippers. Most of the labourers never used slippers for any occasion.

Most of the brides had a simple dress pattern as their wedding attire. It is remarkable to note that brides always used heavy head dresses which were adorned with natural flowers like jasmines. Similar to the practice of Indian Hindus, plantation Tamils too liked to select red, green or blue colours for wedding sarees. Today, some women use sarees made out of rich material called *Pattu Selei* as their bridal dress. They host their wedding ceremonies in Hindu shrines like Mari Amma Kovil (Pattini Kovil). As in all other Indian weddings they use heavy flower garlands for both the bride and bride groom. They normally use natural flowers to adorn their dress in agamic ceremonies.

Ornaments are a remarkable and essential feature in the dress code of women. Whether they are poor or rich, old or young they use only a few basic ornaments in their daily life. For ears they use earrings. *Thodu*, a popular simple earring and *Thandatti*, a common earring pattern worn on the edge of the ear lobe by old ladies, are two popular types of earrings used by

women in the plantation sector. *Koppu*, *Lolakki*, *Onappu thattu* are some uncommon patterns worn on the ears in modern days. *Walappu simiki* or *Thea karambu* was another notable feature in their dress code. According to oral evidence, the previous generation had used some external ornament to enlarge the hole of the ears and they were proud about that abnormal change in their physical body. But the young generation does not like to continue that style and thus it can only be seen among old women (Personal Communication: Arumudawalli). They continue to use an ornament called *Mukuththi* on the nose. It is a symbol of their Indian origin. There is another rare ornament for the nostrils called *Pellakki* (Personal Communication: Sundaram).

Using bangles is a popular style among many Asian women. Plantation women also like to use bangles. *Walayal* means normal bangles. *Kettikappu* is another type of bangles which is worn between the shoulders and elbows. Photographic evidence shows that whether poor or rich, using necklaces is a common pattern among women. Normally simple and cheap necklaces are used for every occasion. There is a heavy necklace called *Atiyal padakkam* which shows the amount of gold they had. *Thali* is the traditional bridal necklace which every married woman uses. *Thali* is a gold pendent which shows some agamic symbols of Hindu deities like Shiva. Normally they use a special cord to wear that. Many of them use anklets in normal daily life. Heavy anklets which are called *Kolusa* are very rarely used today. They also use normal rings for fingers and *Minji* for toes. *Minji* is used by married women and is a symbol of their marital status. In the British period it was made of metals like silver or gold. Now they use thin bangles which are made of either gold, cheap metals or plastic. Interestingly, even though, their salaries were less during the colonial period, they were able to purchase

more gold than now. This fact challenges the common discourse on the history of plantation labourers. On the contrary to the common view of scholars about the poor living conditions of these labourers, they were able to purchase enough gold jewellery to give as dowry for their daughters. They probably considered gold to be their wealth as they did not have any money invested in banks. Modern plantation women explain this phenomenon as a result of the low cost of living and low prices of gold during the British era (Personal Communication: Jagajodi). During the British period there were South Indian jewellery makers living close to large estates like Gikiyanakanda Estate in Kalutara. They made any jewellery pattern requested by Tamil labourers. Their children wore minimum clothes and some silver ornament around their waists. The chain hanged around boys' waist was called *Arunukodi* and that around girls' waists was called *Aramusi* (Personal Communication: Muniaiya).

Dress patterns of men also showcased unique cultural values of the plantation sector. During the British period *Kanganis* used to wear the Western coat and the traditional Indian sarong called *Wetti* (**Fig. 2a & 2b**). They also used a walking stick to show their social and official position. That was a combined pattern of Western and Eastern cultural identities. Most of these *wettis* were white in colour. But in their daily life they used dark colour sarongs. For their weddings they used a special sarong called *Saraga weitti* which had a gold border and the same border was used on the handkerchief which was worn on the shoulder and was called *thundu*. For weddings and other occasions they used *Talappa* or turbans but it is being discontinued by young men. In funerals men used to stay topless. They played *thappu* or traditional drums at funerals. Both men and women used *Vibudi* or the holy ash mark on their

foreheads as a religious symbol (Personal Communication: Kanapathi).

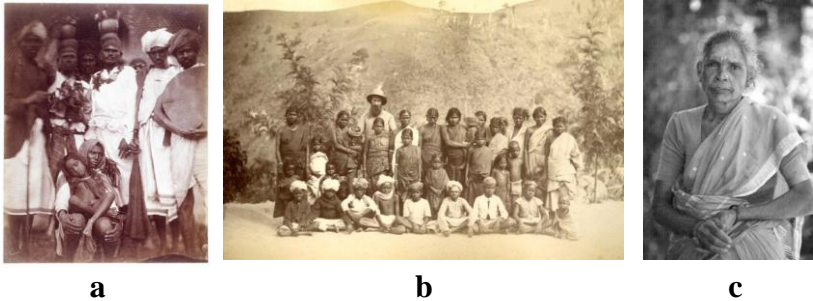


Figure 2: Dress Patterns of Men used by Tamil Plantation Labourers and Modern Saree Pattern of Ladies. Image Courtesy: Census of Ceylon, 1921 and Lankapura.com

This dress code is similar to that worn by natives in the Sri Lankan society especially during the British period. Among many Sinhalese there was the topless dress pattern. That dress code showed the cultural uniqueness and the position of the individual in the social hierarchy. Robert Knox clearly stated in his book which was written in 1681 that Kandyan women practiced the topless simple dress pattern for indoor activities and used heavy attire for other functions in outdoor life (Knox 1911: 87). Also some low caste Kandyan people were not allowed to use jackets and thus they had topless dress patterns. Especially low castes like *Rodi* and *Kinnara* were compelled to stay topless (Pieris 1956: 181-90). The majority of Sinhalese were not in favour of using a lot of golden jewellery in their attire. The Ceylon Tamil community is very different from their Indian plantation counterparts. They did not include those migrants in their social group and also dressed differently to demonstrate some difference. Ceylon Tamils used heavily

designed material, dress patterns and heavy jewellery as South Indian Tamils did.

After decolonisation, many Asians experienced various phases of modernity. Sri Lankans also changed their dress codes. Dress is an obvious exhibit of cultural changes. When considering the Tamil plantation labourers in Sri Lanka their dress code is different from what they had during the British period. There are some remaining which are reflective of previous patterns. First remarkable change is that ladies now use jackets without any consideration about caste hierarchy. But the older generation still does not accord any importance to the matching of colours. Young people admire Western dress patterns. University students and other government employees in this community stick to their traditional dress to a minimum and dress similar to other Tamil communities in Sri Lanka. They wear elaborate wedding and ceremonial dresses as other Hindus. These differences occurred due to the expansion of the local market, spreading of towns and changing consumer behaviour in rural areas. Education, various forms of employment, mobilisation of population, the open economy, mass media and new concepts of ethics, globalisation and urbanisation all resulted in blending these isolated communities with other natives. Unfortunately many plantation labourers in Sri Lanka still live in poor economic conditions and that has limited them spending on elaborate dresses. Some ornaments like *Kaippatti*, *Thea Karambu* and *Pellakki* are slowly disappearing. The use of turbans is also vanishing. There are remarkable changes in their dress code compared to the colonial era due to a combination of social, religious and cultural factors.

Glossary

<i>Aramusi</i>	Ornament used on little girls' waist
<i>Arunukodi</i>	Ornament used on little boys' waist
<i>Atiyal padakkam</i>	Heavy necklace with a pendent
<i>Kangani</i>	Indian Tamil recruiter and supervisor of British plantation fields
<i>Kettikappu</i>	Type of bangles used between shoulders and elbows
<i>Kinnara</i>	Low caste among Kandyan Sinhalese
<i>Kolusa</i>	Anklet
<i>Koppu</i>	A unique style of earrings
<i>Lolakki</i>	A unique style of earrings
<i>Minji</i>	Ring for toes
<i>Mukuththi</i>	Ornament on top of the nose
<i>Onappu thattu</i>	Elaborated earring used from top to bottom of the ears
<i>Pattu Selei</i>	Wedding saree
<i>Pellakki</i>	Ornament for the nostril
<i>Rodi</i>	Low caste among Kandyan Sinhalese
<i>Selei</i>	Saree
<i>Thali</i>	Traditional bridal necklace
<i>Thandatti</i>	Earring pattern used on top of the ears
<i>Thea karambu</i>	External ornaments that enlarge the hole of ears
<i>Thodu</i>	Simple common earrings
<i>Thundu</i>	Handkerchief
<i>Walappu simiki</i>	External ornaments that enlarge the hole of ears
<i>Walayal</i>	Normal bangles

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Influence of European Diaspora on Sri Lankan Buddhist Art¹

Bindu Urugodawatte

Abstract

Buddhism and Buddhist art in Sri Lanka, which is the backbone of the Sri Lankan culture, is believed to be a Sri Lankan manifestation with a strong influence from India. The role of the British diaspora in Sri Lanka which gradually changed the face of Buddhist art is not given much attention. This is a study on Sri Lankan Buddhist art between the eighteenth to the twentieth centuries to identify the influence of the British diaspora. This paper studies the diaspora influence on architecture, paintings styles and clothing styles and the reasons for such absorption by the Sri Lankan society.

Introduction

The circulation of cultural expression as reflected in the eighteenth to twentieth century Buddhist art of Sri Lanka portrays a tapestry of contemporary culture. This was explained by Prof. Senake Bandaranayake (2006: 105) while discussing the Late Period Murals:

Relationships between artistic traditions or other cultural phenomena have in the past been rather simplistically explained in terms of diffusion from common source of origin and influence from a 'parent' culture, with the latter role often being attributed to the oldest or grandest tradition. Accordingly, historical or artistic development was seen as a unilinear process, moving in a chronological

hierarchy. While such ideas are still deeply ingrained in contemporary thinking, modern scholarship has begun to treat historical development as a far more complex and essentially a multilinear and multicentral process, in which the internal dynamics and resources of a given society or culture form the principal sources of its historical evolution. Thus, the distinctive character and attributes of a localized tradition and the processes that have given rise to that distinctiveness – i.e. the history of its internal development – are now seen to be the most important focus of historical investigation.

The distinctive features of the localised traditions, reflecting the internal historical and cultural changes brought forth due to centuries of European rule are reflected most distinctively in Buddhist art works of Sri Lanka between eighteenth and twentieth centuries. The European influence on Buddhist art predates eighteenth century CE in Sri Lanka. However, as the existing examples mostly date from post eighteenth century CE, this paper will highlight the influence between the eighteenth to twentieth centuries CE.

Early studies on Buddhist art carried out by erudite scholars such as T.W. Rhys Davids, Ananda Coomaraswamy, Stella Kramrisch, Senrath Paranavitana, Siri Gunasinghe, Nandadeva Wijesekara, L.T.P. Manjusri, etc., show the eighteenth to twentieth century Buddhist art of Sri Lanka as part of the Kandyan tradition and the obvious European influence on culture reflected on the paintings was ignored. The more recent detailed studies on Kandyan art by Senaka Bandaranayake, M. Somathilake, etc., too only refer very vaguely to the prevalence of European influence. Senake Bandaranayake has analysed the Buddhist mural paintings of Kataluwa Poorvarama (**Fig. 1**), an ancient temple, abundant with paintings reflecting European

cultural traits that fall into 4 stylistic categories. The style he refers to as D contains European clothing, jewellery, etc. However, other than discussing the overall composition and other stylistic details, no reference to European traits is made (Bandaranayake 2006: 204-13).



Figure 1: The Story of Mahadhana Sitano, Kataluwa Poorvarama Ancient Temple

M. Somathilake (2002: 142-66) refers to the European cultural traits discovered among the Buddhist art of the Southern coastal region of Sri Lanka. Somathilake too does not refer to the European cultural characteristics which are abundant in paintings of the Ratnapura district which was part of the Kandyan kingdom, and the minor details of European origin identified in Kandyan temples such as Lankathilake have been disregarded.² Leena Seneheweera (2011), another proponent of a Southern sub school of paintings in Sri Lanka states that British rulers of Sri Lanka promoted the inclusion of their cultural traits in Sri Lankan Buddhist art and architecture.³

Sri Lankan maritime regions were ruled initially by the Portuguese (1505 to 1656 CE) and subsequently by the Dutch (1656 to 1798 CE) and the British (1798 Maritime Regions and

1815 Kandyan Kingdom to 1948 CE). The European cultural traits were strongly absorbed into the maritime regions by the eighteenth century with Sri Lankans adopting European architecture, clothing, words, food and other cultural traits. The Portuguese, the earliest Europeans to rule the maritime areas were instrumental in introducing European art, architecture, clothing, food, music, etc., to Sri Lanka. Portuguese officials, soldiers, crafts people, etc., who came to Sri Lanka and married Sri Lankans initiated the construction of churches, fortifications, etc., and worked with local crafts people in the construction of buildings. The introduction of *Pise de Terre*,⁴ use of terracotta floor bricks, half round tiles, etc., were a part of the Portuguese influence on architecture (De Vos 2002: 399-437). The Portuguese also introduced the *Cabaya* or coat to males, *Juan hatte* (a jacket with long sleeves) for women, *saya* (skirt), *kabakurruttu* (a short, long sleeved cotton jacket edged at the side with dainty pillow lace), shoes and sandals, etc., all of which have now become a part of Sri Lankan culture and considered Sri Lankan rather than European (Wimalaratne 2002: 543). The Dutch East India Company which took over from the Portuguese was more interested in trading and profit making rather than colonising. However, the Dutch East India Company had a Department of Artisans where master craftsmen were sent to Dutch colonies to train local craftsmen and create European style goods including furniture for the European market (Silva 2002: 343-67). These Portuguese and Dutch craftsmen along with local craftsmen designed and created architecture replicating European architectural styles with slight modifications in Sri Lanka. By early eighteenth century European art, architecture, sculpture, clothing, foot ware, food and many other aspects had penetrated the Sri Lankan culture. The absorption was gradual and became so deeply embedded

that Sri Lankans accepted it as a part of culture rather than something forced by the colonial rulers (Kelegama and Madawela: 2002). This paper is an endeavour to portray the circulation of European cultural traits in Buddhist art.

Buddhist Architecture of Sri Lanka

Sri Lankan Buddhist architecture had evolved for more than a millennium by the time the first Europeans arrived in the island in early sixteenth century CE. The architectural design of Buddhist *stupa* and *Bodhighara* continued to flourish with very few structural or ornamental changes despite the European influence. However, the Image Houses, Preaching Halls, Residence of the monks etc., absorbed many European cultural traits. A new and significant introduction to Buddhist architecture was the Bell Tower, hitherto an unknown element in Sri Lanka.

Architectural Details

The Image Houses were created to house a figure of Lord Buddha in a seated, standing or recumbent posture. The early Anuradhapura period's rectangular shaped simple Image House of the Samadhi statue (**Fig. 2**) evolved into an intricately decorated building with stucco on the outside as proved by the Tivanka Image House of Polonnaruwa period and Lankathilaka Image House of Gampola Period (**Fig. 3**).

The traditional Buddhist Image House of Sri Lanka had evolved into 3 distinctive architectural designs by the eighteenth century. These are (1) Cave Temple Image Houses which is the continuation of the ancient cave temple tradition in Sri Lanka, (2) Temple on Pillars and (3) Solitary Image House with an

inner chamber for the main statue of Buddha and an outer chamber surrounding it (**Fig. 4**).



Figure 2: Samadhi Statue



Figure 3: Lankathilake Image House

By early eighteenth century while these traditional types were still existing and being constructed, a new facade for the temples gradually started evolving. This facade was in many aspects similar to the facade of churches in Sri Lanka which were created with arches and gables very similar in style to European churches (**Fig. 5**).

It is interesting to note that these eighteenth century church facades in Sri Lanka, although European in style and design, were of a simpler design than their European counterparts. These churches predate the facades of the Buddhist temples and were created by local craftsmen under the instructions of Europeans.⁵

**a****a****b****b****c****c**

Figure 4: a. Dambulla Cave Temple, b. Pelmadulla Temple on Pillars, and c. Kathaluwa Solitary Image House with Inner Chamber for the Main Statue and a Circumambulatory Outer Chamber

Figure 5: a. Dutch Reformed Church inside the Galle Fort, b. Wolfendhal Church in Pettah, and c. A Church in Torino, Italy

The stucco designs on the churches, albeit simple, were the precursor to the elaborate designs which adorned the facades of Buddhist temples. It should be noted that these Buddhist temples added an elaborate facade but the interior design remained unchanged with an inner main chamber surrounded by a circumambulatory outer chamber. The earliest European style Buddhist temple facades date back to the nineteenth century and it is probable that creation of these facades was initiated earlier. However, these early facades no longer survive or have changed their appearance and hence cannot be properly dated. These Buddhist temple facades have gables, arches and elaborate stucco designs creating a complex design of the facade (**Fig. 6**).

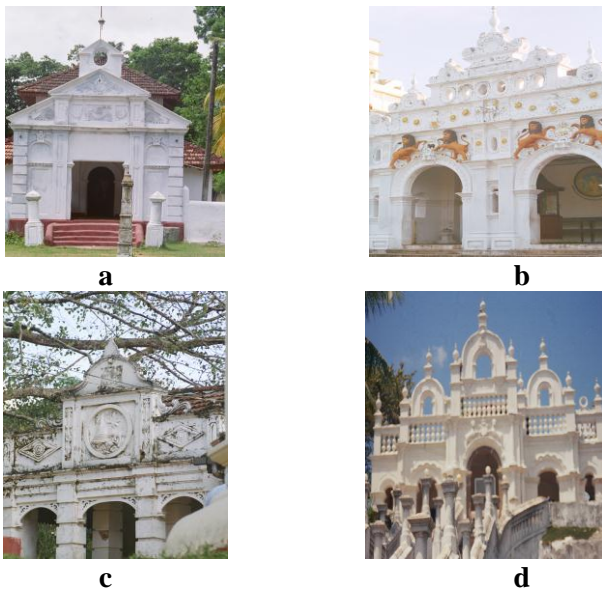


Figure 6: Facades of: a. Weragampita Ancient Temple Matara, b. Wevurukannala Ancient Temple near Matara, c. Delgamuwa Ancient Temple near Ratnapura, and d. Dondanduwa Temple near Galle

The early European facade temples were probably created along the coast which had absorbed European cultural traits; gradually the style penetrated interior parts of the island. There are also instances where actual churches have been converted into Buddhist temples as in the case of Balapitiya Ancient Temple⁶ (**Fig. 7**).



Figure 7: Balapitiya Ancient Temple where a church has been converted to an Image House and Preaching Hall

Bell Towers

The Bell Tower which has become an integral part of Sri Lankan Buddhist temples was introduced by Europeans. Bell Towers have not been discovered or identified in Sri Lanka during the pre-colonial times in association with Buddhist temples. These Bell Towers are not replicas of European Bell Towers but have similar architectural details (**Fig. 8**).

The Bell Towers associated with churches in Sri Lanka were constructed by indigenous craftsmen following European styles as portrayed by the Bell Tower of the Dutch Reformed Church in Galle (**Fig. 9**).



Figure 8: Bell Towers from Europe



Figure 9: Bell Tower of Dutch Reformed Church in Galle

With the introduction of Bell Towers to churches, Buddhist temples too adapted it as an integral part of Buddhist culture (Fig. 10).

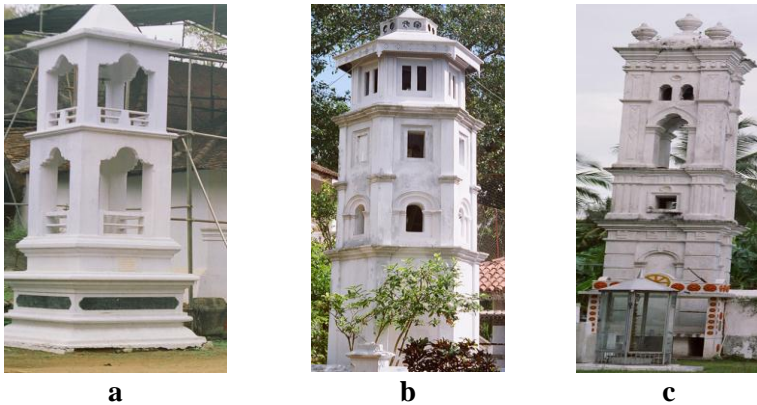


Figure 10: Bell Towers of: a. Degaldoruwa Cave Temple near Kandy, b. Gandara Ancient Temple near Matara, and c. Hittetiya Ancient Temple in Galle

It is interesting to note that these Bell Towers which served dual purposes as Clock Towers in Europe gradually changed their tower like appearances and evolved into a Sri Lankan Buddhist architectural design by the twentieth century (**Fig. 11**).



Figure 11: Twentieth Century Bell Tower from Galpoththawela Ancient Temple in Pelmadulla

European Divinity: Angels in Buddhist Art

Angles adorned Christian churches for centuries in Europe. The image of angels predates Christianity and early angels are derived from Assyrian images of ‘Winged Genies’, the *daimons*, divinities associated with ancestors, the deceased and the protector of the dead. During the Renaissance period artists started using the image of Eros or Cupid of Greek and Roman mythology to represent angels (Frongia 2005: 280). These two types of angels continued harmoniously to adorn the walls, ceilings, pillars and other architectural details of churches in Europe during the last millennium (**Fig. 12**).

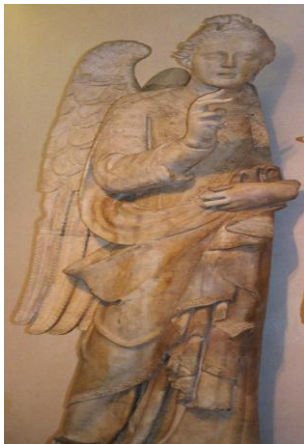
**a****b**

Figure 12: a. Assyrian Winged Genie type Angel from Florence in Italy, and b. Cupid type Angel of Greek and Roman mythology from Torino in Italy

The Cupid like angel can be identified due to its cherubic face, curly hair, fluttering wings on its back, and mostly bare genitals or genitals covered with a shawl or a scarf, playing musical

instruments, holding a garland of flowers, etc. It is this type of angels which became popular in Sri Lankan Buddhist art.

The Christian churches in Sri Lanka too featured these angels on walls, on stained glass windows, tombstones, etc. These were created by local craftsmen who copied these figures from sketches, books or other portable art material. Some of these angels lack the fluidity and the elegance of their European counterparts but they can be identified very distinctively as angels (**Fig. 13**).



Figure 13: a. Angels carved on a Tomb stone at the Dutch Reformed Church in Galle, b. Stucco Angels at the Dutch Reformed Church in Galle and c. Angel carved on a Tombstone at the Wolfendhaal Church in Colombo

Sri Lankan Buddhist art has its own pantheon which has developed over the centuries. This pantheon includes Hindu gods as well as other divine beings such as *Naga Raja* (or the 'King of Snakes') often depicted in Buddhist art belonging to the Anuradhapura period (**Fig. 14**).

Sri Lankan divine beings can be identified by their elaborate headdress, numerous necklaces and other jewellery, etc. The iconography of Sri Lankan Buddhist divine beings adheres to this basic concept as seen by the *Bodhisattva* figures at Buduruwagala, divine beings in Polonnaruwa Tivanka Image House and Galvihara Temple as well as in the post-sixteenth

century paintings of the divine beings at the Temple of the sacred Tooth Relic in Kandy.



a



b

Figure 14: a. Naga Raja Guardstone at Sri Maha Bodhiya in Anuradhapura, and b. A divine being at the Temple of the Sacred Tooth Relic in Kandy

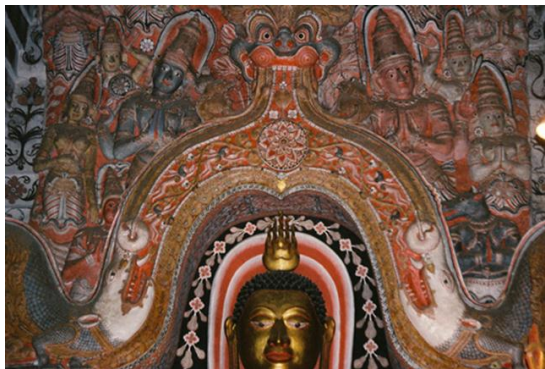


Figure 15: Makara Torana surrounded by guardian divine beings at Lankathilake Temple near Kandy

These divine beings were always portrayed as protectors or guardians of Buddhist sites. Hence they were placed at the entrance of the temple, etc. During the Polonnaruwa period the Hindu pantheon of gods or divine beings were gradually absorbed into Buddhist art and during the post Polonnaruwa period this pantheon of divine beings were mostly found decorating entrances adorned by the *Makara Torana* (or the 'Dragon Archway') (**Fig. 15**).

However, since the European colonial era, angels have claimed a unique place in Sri Lankan Buddhist art. The angels with wings have evolved into a Buddhist divine beings and have developed their own iconography. The Mirissa Veheragalle Samudragiri ancient temple is a treasure trove of paintings where the changing appearance of the angels can be studied in detail. Most of these angel figures appear on the circumambulatory outer chamber which has sculptures of Buddha who preceded the *Sakyamuni* Buddha, predicting the person who will be the next Buddha (**Fig. 16**).

Most of these angel figures appear between the statues of Buddha and above the head of the next predicted Buddha. These angels have somewhat cherubic faces with puffed cheeks, always holding a musical instrument or a flower garland. However, unlike their European counterparts, Buddhist angels are all wearing short pants which end above their knee and appear to be more robust. It is interesting to note that not all figures have wings but they share enough characteristics to be identified as angels. Thus, a Buddhist angel has evolved to a figure which has curly hair, puffed cheeks or a cherubic face, wearing short pants above the knee and holding a flower garland or a musical instrument (**Fig. 17**).



Figure 16: Angels in the Mirissa Veheragalla Samudragiri Ancient Temple

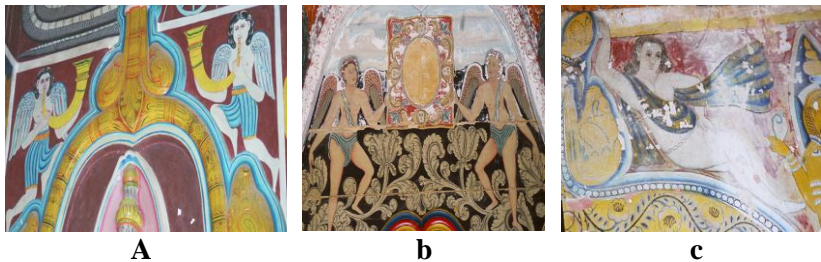


Figure 17: Angels in: a. Meegahagoda Ancient Temple, b. Pelmadulla Ancient Temple, and c. Nakandawala Ancient Temple

The shawl which appeared on the angels of Europe to cover their genitals have evolved into a shawl covering the upper body. The Sri Lankan style Angels appear on doors, doorways, entrances, on either side and below the *Makara Torana* (Dragon archway), etc. (**Fig. 18**).

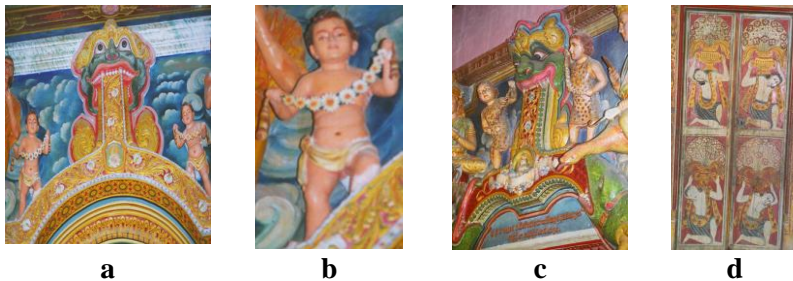


Figure 18: a. Balapitiya Ancient Temple Sri Lankan style Angels with Flower Garlands on either side of the Dragon Archway, b. Details of the Angel, c. Hellala Ancient Temple, and d. Mirissa Veheragalla Samudragiri Ancient Temple Door with Angels

These are typical places where Sri Lankan Buddhist divine beings, garbed in traditional attire are depicted. These Angels appear together with other divine beings of the Buddhist Pantheon.

Furniture in Buddhist Paintings

Very little is known about pre-colonial furniture of Sri Lanka. The large stone seat at the Audience Hall Rock in Sigiriya Terrace Garden and the stone carved seat on top of the Sigiriya rock provide evidence of traditional seats of Sri Lanka which were probably made comfortable with woven mats and cushions. The ordinary homes of Sri Lanka used different types of mats to sit. As the Sinhalese words for *Almairah* (cupboard),

Lachchuwa (drawer), *Kanappuwa* (Stool), etc., were derived from Portuguese and Dutch, it can be assumed that these items were not a part of Sri Lankan furniture. The semi-circular burgomaster chair, hat stands, book cabinets, writing desks, etc., were also items introduced to Sri Lankan craftsmen by the Europeans (Silva 2002: 343-67). By the eighteenth century, this type of European furniture with Sri Lankan traditional motifs or European motifs such as grape vines, etc., was found among wealthy families and temples. This changing style of furniture too is reflected in Buddhist Art (**Fig. 19**).

Clothes and Accessories

The most significant influence of the European diaspora on Sri Lankan culture was the introduction of different types of clothing which became a part of Sri Lankan culture as described in the introduction of this paper. The Portuguese introduced the coat to male attire, and a jacket with long sleeves, a short jacket with long sleeves edged with pillow lace, skirts, etc., to women's attire. Shoes, sandals, hats, fans, etc., all gradually became a part of Sri Lankan culture. As culture is reflected on art, craftsmen of Buddhist temples incorporated changing cultural ideas and details into temple frescos. The most interesting characteristic of paintings with European clothes is that they are always a part of a general scene where there are other figures wearing traditional clothes (**Fig. 20**).

The only exception discovered so far is the narrative scenes from *Mahadhana Sitano Jataka* story at the Kataluwa temple where a few scenes depict all figures in European clothing as shown in **Fig. 1**. In many scenes minor details such as a fan held by a woman in traditional clothing, a man in traditional local clothing but with a European hat or shoes, etc., have been

artistically mingled creating a harmonious painting with both local and European characteristics.

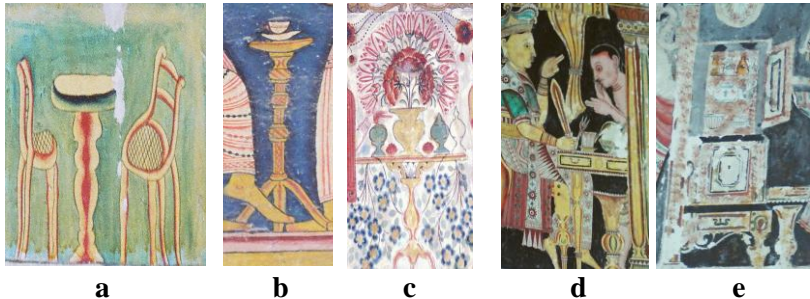


Figure 19: Kanappuwa or stools from a. Gandara Ancient Temple, b. Kotikagoda Ancient Temple and c. Mulkirigala Ancient Temple; d. Table with Drawers from Kathaluwa Ancient Temple, and e. Almairah from Kataluwa Ancient Temple

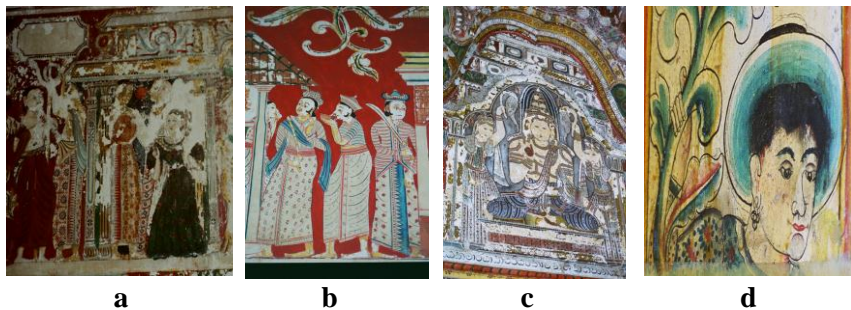


Figure 20: a. A Woman in European Clothes with Two Women in Traditional Attire from Kataluwa Ancient Temple, b. A Man in a Jacket with Two Other Men in Traditional Attire from Kotte Raja Maha Viharaya, c. Prince Saddhatissa of Sri Lankan History accompanied by Divine beings in Western Dresses from Mirissa Veheragalle Samudragiri Ancient Temple, and d. A Woman in a Hat and European Clothing from Gandara Ancient Temple

A New Art Tradition

By the dawn of the twentieth century the influence of the European diaspora changed the outlook of Buddhist art in Sri Lanka. The Kandyan tradition of paintings was two dimensional with the use of red and sometimes black or dark blue in the background to contrast and to provide depth to the paintings. Another characteristic of Kandyan paintings was the use of floral and geometric designs on clothing which were very intricately detailed. Kandyan painters used natural pigments created of floral and mineral raw material. Europeans introduced oil paints and other paints used by European artists. The use of European paints meant that artisans and craftsmen had to use bigger brushes where the creation of intricately detailed floral and geometric designs on clothing became extra difficult. This change is most significant on paintings of Buddha and *arahats* where Kandyan artists used a very close wave design on the robes while the early twentieth century artists painted lines (**Fig. 21**).

The natural colour palette used by Kandyan artists was limited to available resources but the European colour palette provided the artists with an array of colours hitherto unknown in Sri Lanka. Thus the delicate floral and geometric designs gave way to bold and bright colours and shades and were widely used by twentieth century Buddhist painters (**Fig. 22**). Among these painters who were exposed to Christian and European art is Richard Henricus⁷ who is a descendent of the Dutch and a background painter for theatricals. He created the temple murals of the Jayathilakaramaya in Grandpass. M. Sarlis who worked as the assistant of Richard Henricus became a well-known painter of Buddhist temple murals and was a key figure of the Buddhist revival movement with his lithographs of Buddhist content.

These painters used an abundance of colour and paid more attention to physical form the culmination of which can be seen in the Gotami Vihara paintings by George Keyt.

**a****b**

Figure 21: a. Kandyan Style Painting of Buddha with Waves on the Robe from Mirissa Veheragalla Samudragiri Ancient Temple, and b. European Influenced Painting of Buddha with Lines on the Robe from Katuwana Nakandawala Ancient

**a****b**

Figure 22: a. Sculpture of Kandyan style Gurdian from Kataluwa Ancient Temple, and b. Guardian from Dowra Ancient Temple – in Bold Colours and Texture

Conclusion

The Buddhist art of Sri Lanka from eighteenth to twentieth centuries was notably enriched by European cultural traits which gradually became part of Sri Lankan Buddhist art through the centuries. Contrary to popular belief the European culture was not enforced upon the Sri Lankan population but rather there was a gradual transition to include changing cultural aspects. By early eighteenth century the craftsmen who worked in temples were also involved in creating churches under European specifications and by early twentieth century, artists who were creating church paintings were invited to create murals in Buddhist temples. The research sample used in this paper is predominantly from the Southern province and the Ratnapura district. However, European characteristics are not reserved only to the maritime areas where the European influence lasted the longest time span, but discovered in more interior temples.

The frequency of occurrence of European cultural traits among local traditional paintings remains the same whether it is interior Sri Lanka or maritime areas with the exception of the Kataluwa Ancient Temple which contains a rather extensive amount of European traits. This does not mean that Sri Lankan artists completely accepted the European diaspora or its rule, nor does it mean that there was no persecution of Buddhism, but rather that cultural acceptance of European traits had become a part of the culture to such lengths that it was no longer considered as European but as a part of Sri Lankan culture. However, there are instances in which political and social turbulences prevailing in the country influenced the content of the paintings. A prime example would be the painting of a European as the King of Hell at the Kottimbulwela Ancient Temple (**Fig. 23**).



Figure 23: King of Hell portrayed as a European at the Kottimbulwela Ancient Temple

Buddhist paintings of Sri Lanka from eighteenth to twentieth century are indeed a reflection of the society, culture and even political turbulence. It indicates a harmonious existence between the ruling European diaspora and local ethnicities despite the problems and turbulences which prevailed during this era of discord.

End Notes

¹ This paper is based mainly on field work I have carried out in the Southern province and the Ratnapura district and a few temples in Kandy. Further research is needed to have a better understanding of the absorption of European cultural traits in Buddhist art on an island wide basis.

² Senake Bandaranayake and M. Somathilake are both proponents of the Southern School of paintings in Sri Lanka during 18th to 20th century. I believe that it is still the Kandyan School of paintings with European cultural traits more prominent and accepted in the coastal region after centuries of European rule in the area and absorbed in other areas in temples which did not receive consistent royal patronage.

³ Seneheweera does not provide any textual evidence to state how the British promoted their cultural traits into these temple paintings. Her research only includes 3 temples in the Southern province and completely disregards the strong European influence which was prominent along the coastal areas of Sri Lanka becoming absorbed to Sri Lankan culture through the centuries.

⁴ Building material made by compacting and drying a stiff mixture of clay, sand or other aggregate and water. The Pre-Colonial era architecture of Sri Lanka used bricks and stone in construction of large and important edifices and clay and wattle was used in ordinary construction.

⁵ I have used the term 'Europeans' as there were many European nationalities who were recruited by the ruling colonial powers as sailors, soldiers and for other tasks (See Kelegama and Madawela: 2002).

⁶ The locals of this temple do not accept that it was a church before. According to them, the temple was built in the shape of a church to avoid persecution from the British colonial rulers. However, there is no documentary evidence to support this theory. Structurally not only the exterior but the interior also provides evidence that this was used as a church with a wooden balcony to house the church organ which has later being converted to an Image House with a Buddha Image and other paintings, the pulpit used as a chair for the Buddhist monks to address the lay people. The Portuguese destroyed many Buddhist temples and constructed churches on its place and it is possible that Buddhists reclaimed the original temple. Regardless of its origin it is interesting to note that architecture has been absorbed without any structural changes.

⁷ George Henricus who was trained in Italy was the brother of Richard Henricus who influenced the development of the artistic styles of Richard Henricus who created murals both in Christian and Buddhist contexts as well as in the theatre (See Bandaranayake and Dharmasiri, 2009: 21).

Illustrations

All Photo Images by: Bindu Urugodawatte.

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