



Mumbai Münster Institute of Advanced Studies – MMIAS

University of Mumbai & University of Münster

and

Indian Council of Social Science Research – ICSSR

Western Regional Centre, Mumbai

Present

A Joint International Interdisciplinary Online Conference

India 75: Reflections On and From the Indian Diaspora

24th - 26th August 2022

India and her Diaspora have a very long history that goes back thousands of years. Indian merchants, sailors, travellers, monks, teachers and scholars have traversed the globe over land and sea for eons. They have from the earliest recorded history established 'Little Indias' in central Asia, the Arab peninsula, on the East African coast, in South and South East Asia. These early diasporas had spread Indian religions, culture and even participated in the setting up of kingdoms with ties to the Indian subcontinent in these spaces. In the European colonial period Indians had been taken as indentured labour to distant British and French colonies spread across the planet, from Fiji in the East to the Caribbean islands in the West. Free Indian traders and professionals had followed in the wake of the indentured labour to almost all these locations. In the postcolonial period the Indian diaspora has been augmented in these old and newer spaces by students, academics and now transnationals.

Almost all these diasporas have close cultural, emotional and social ties with India. During India's struggle for independence from the British, nationalist leaders such as Gopal Krishna Gokhale who had championed the cause of the Indian Diaspora and waged a relentless battle for the end of the insidious indentured labour system. Gokhale had visited South Africa in 1912 at Gandhi's request. Gandhi had been in South Africa from 1893 onwards, first as a lawyer and then an activist who led the struggle for legal rights and human dignity for the Indians there. He evolved the concept of *Satyagraha* while in South Africa. It was at Gokhale's repeated urging that the diasporic Gandhi had returned to India in 1915 to ultimately lead India's freedom struggle. In the Canadian space, April

1914 was the point in time when the Japanese ship Komagata Maru carrying passengers from British India who were trying to migrate to Canada. The vast majority of the Sikh, Muslim and Hindu passengers were not allowed to disembark in spite of having followed the Canadian authority rule of 'continuous journey'. Only 20 passengers were ultimately allowed to enter Canada and the ship was forced to leave on July 23, 1914. This racist discrimination in Canada's immigration laws is still remembered by the Indo-Canadian diasporics today. When the ship finally returned to India and docked at the Budge Budge harbor near Calcutta, the British Indian police stopped the passengers from disembarking and leaving for their home in Punjab or elsewhere in India, leading to a riot and the death of several passengers. The independent Indian government in 1952 set up a memorial at Budge Budge and it was inaugurated by the then Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru, in Canada too ultimately the Provincial British Columbian and Federal Canadian governments have offered full apologies for this incident and memorials have been set up by the state as well as the diasporics.

So the diasporic connection with nationalist India was very strong. When India became independent of British colonial rule on 15th August 1947, it was a time of rejoicing for the Indian diaspora spread around the globe. However, in the early years of India's independence while the Indian government spoke against apartheid in South Africa and was one of the few countries that broke off ties with the apartheid government, there was no particular connect with the diaspora. The immediate postcolonial period in India saw migration of Indian doctors and nurses to Britain. They were invited by the British government to augment the newly introduced National Health Service. This first wave of postcolonial diasporics to the U.K. was swelled by the arrival of Indian diasporics from newly independent African states who were either forced out as in Uganda or chose to leave due to feelings of insecurity resulting from the Africanisation policies of these countries. Some of them then further migrated to Canada, USA or Australia from Britain. These are the double and even triple Indian diasporics.

When the first groups of postcolonial Indian students left for academic studies in the UK and USA, they were dubbed as the 'brain drain' and strongly criticized for turning their backs on a developing India to cast in their lot with the rich Western world. It needs to be said here that the majority of these members of the 'brain drain' continued to hold onto their Indian passports and became the NRI (Non-Resident Indian) brigade. Their ties with India were usually very regular and strong. Their children and grandchildren are the second and third generation diasporics with different affiliations both national as well as cultural with India.

The way in which independent India looked at her diasporics/NRIs, changed dramatically in the 1990s and gained a new fillip with the arrival of the new millennium, when India became a part of the global economy. By the early 1990's it must be noted the nature of the diaspora had changed. From the doctors and engineers, through scientists both physical and social, the new millennium diasporics were now mainly computer hardware and software specialists. These were the new 'cyber coolies' who might or might not have stayed on in their new countries to become diasporics. The majority of the cyber migrants are transnationals who stay for limited periods in the new lands and return to India after completion of their contracts.

The role of the Overseas Indian community, the older colonial period diasporics, as well as the newer postcolonial diasporics was highlighted in a positive fashion. The diaspora was now seen as politically, socially and economically beneficial to India. In 2003 the Government of India instituted the Pravasi Bhartiya Divas (PBD) which is celebrated every year on 15 January, this being the date in 1915 when India's most celebrated diasporic, Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, had returned to India. The PBD is now an occasion for India to recognize its overseas citizens and award them for their

achievements. While still stopping short at dual citizenships, India now has the upgraded convenient Overseas Citizen of India (OCI) card that enables diasporics to travel to and fro from their new countries to India without having to each time get a visa. The OCIs also have economic benefits such as ownership of property and foreign direct investments in India.

The Indian Diaspora which includes not just the OCIs but also the Non-Resident Indians NRIs who have permanent residence in foreign countries but retain their Indian passports, is second in sheer numbers only to the Chinese diaspora. More than 25 million Indians live in diaspora in over a 100 countries around the world. Global India recognizes the political and economic value of its huge diaspora to its own development, ties with trading partners and its standing in world bodies.

Yet another strand in the narrative of the Indian Diaspora and its old Homeland is the relationship between the Diaspora the Indian Navy. Independent India has through the outreach of its Navy reached out in different ways to the Indian Diaspora, especially in the littoral states of the Indian Ocean. The Indian Navy's diplomatic and security initiatives and disaster relief operations have benefitted not just the Indian diaspora but all the citizens of these states. This is as yet another aspect of independent India and its diaspora which needs focus and celebration in the 75th year of India's independence.

Independent from 15 August 1947, India is now in the 75th year of its free existence. This Jubilee of India's independence is being celebrated in various ways to mark its journey across 7.5 decades. These 75 years have seen India develop from a country impoverished by colonisation to one that is today a regional power and forays into space.

This conference seeks to explore what this 75th anniversary of independent India means to her diaspora and also how the academic discipline of diaspora studies considers the role of the diaspora over the 75 years of India's existence as a free country.

Presentations with a focus on 75 years of Indian freedom could be in the following areas:

- Socio-cultural, Economic, Political, Historical Overviews on India at 75
- Responses of the First/Second/later generation Diasporas to India at 75
- Responses of the double and triple Indian diasporics to India at 75
- Diaspora and Global India
- Economic Impact of the Diaspora on India
- The Influence of the Indian Diaspora on the Global Image of India
- Scientific Contributions of the Diaspora
- Literary and Cinematic Contributions of the Diaspora
- Diaspora and International and Indian Laws
- Sociological Aspects of the Diaspora
- The Indian Diaspora and the Indian Navy
- The Indian Diaspora in Africa
- The Postcolonial Indian Diaspora in the USA
- The Indian Diaspora in Europe
- Colonial and Postcolonial Indian Diaspora in Canada
- Postcolonial Indian Diaspora in Australia and New Zealand
- The Indian Diaspora in the Caribbean Islands
- The Diaspora in South East Asia

Senior academics, critics and theorists from around the world have been Invited to make Keynote presentations of 20 minutes plus time for combined discussion at the end of each session.

Through this 'Call for Papers' we invite younger academics and research scholars to send us your proposals for papers in the areas listed above. If your abstract is selected you shall have 10 minutes to make a presentation in our "Rapid-Fire-Rounds", plus time for combined discussion at the end of each session. You could also submit detailed versions of your papers (approximately 4000-5000 words) for consideration in our conference publication. E-certificates will be provided upon request.

Send your abstracts to Kirti Risbud, Research Associate, MMIAS on office.mmias@mu.ac.in latest by 1st July 2022. Final decision on acceptance of papers would be conveyed by 15th July 2022.

You could make your presentation online or offline but we shall not be in a position to reimburse your travel expenses nor shall we be able to provide you with accommodation. However, we do not charge any registration fees and shall be happy to provide hospitality on the days of the conference.

For updates on the conference see the MMIAS and ICSSR (WRC) websites –

<https://mu.ac.in/mumbai-munster-institute-of-advanced-studies>

<https://mu.ac.in/department-of-icssr-wrc#>

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