

DIASPORIC EXPERIENCES OF M.K. GANDHI: IN RELEVENCE TO ENGLAND & SOUTH AFRICA

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Abstract : Migration is a comprehensive and complex global issue which nowadays has become an issue of every country. It is the displacement of a person who leaves a mother land to move at another place. There have been various reasons for the human migration but the most common pattern in migration since decades has been labor migration but the patters always differ in every region. In the beginning it was due to Push and Pull factors but later on sometimes by voluntarily also. Human Migration has always given a significant effect on world geography. It has contributed to the evolution and development of separate cultures and the distribution of cultures by interchange and communication found in different regions of the world today. Generally, every migrant carry with them a socio-cultural baggage like predefined social identity, religious belief and practices, a framework of cultural norms, food habits and language. But somehow sometimes these cultural characteristics become the obstacles in adopting the new environment which lead a Diaspora feel the loss of identity. The central focus of this article is about the Diasporic experiences of Mahatma Gandhi which became the responsible factors to signify his personality from both from outer and inner side. However, his Diasporic experiences have played pivotal role in making Gandhi's strong political identity which transformed from Mohandas Gandhi to Mahatma

Keywords: Human Migration, Indian Diaspora, Migration Patterns, Racial discrimination, Indenture labour, Diasporic experiences

INTRODUCTION

Diaspora indicates a marked population whose origin lies in a separate geographic environment. According to the literary point of view Diaspora has come to refer to instinctive group distributions of a population from its indigenous territories. Mainly the term Diaspora is originated from an ancient Greek word 'dia' which means 'across' and 'speiro' means 'I scatter'. During the Ancient Greek time, this term initially meant of 'Scattering' or 'to scatter about which actually what the migrated people do; they scatter from their homeland and moved to the places across the whole globe and ere spreading their culture with their existence.¹

While discussing about Diaspora, generally the initial focus was with the Jewish background, where the discrimination and exile led to the scattering of Jews from their homeland. Despite of some limitations of specificity of the concept of Diaspora, it is usefully employed in the analysis of emigration and settlement of people beyond the boundaries of their homeland, the protection of the cultural identity in the host society was another important constraint of Diaspora. There have been so much writings available on various Diasporas like the Chinese, African and Caribbean besides the Jewish. Similarly, the study on Overseas Indians has also been brought out nowadays under the foundation of Diaspora Studies. It has been remarkable that most of the literature which is available on the Indian Diaspora is very much concern to Indian migration, their cultural habits, their social environment and their economic experiences. They also talk about the most distinguish factor of Diaspora people is about their experiences of adaptation and assimilation in the host societies.

The Glimpse of the Background of Indian Diaspora

Till the current century, almost approximately 30-35 millions of people have migrated across the whole world and have been settled in almost all continents. Overseas Indians live in different countries, speak different languages and engaged in different fields but there has been only one thing which connects them with each other is their Indian nationality, their Indian ethnicity and their love and affection to their homeland. If we look back to the history of the migration from India, it shows that it has started in the years back of 19th century driven by the economic compulsions created by the Colonialism. However, the history also shows that the emigration from India has much longer history than the Colonial period when we come across the Buddhist 'Bhikkhus' who travelled into remote corners of Central and Eastern Asia. The history of Pre-Colonial India gives the records of the evidence of continuous contact between the kingdoms of the Coromandel Coast and the islands of South East Asia. Basically there were two main phases of emigration from India. One was 'Overseas emigration in the 19th century' and the second, 20th century migration taken place to industrially developed countries.² For critical ease these terms were given the names as Colonial and Post Colonial Phases of Indian Diaspora.

The most crucial phase in Indian Diaspora was when the European Colonialism was marked by capitalism in Asia. By the first quarter of the 19th century, the demand of the labour was emphasized by the expanding colonial economy. The patterns during the Colonial Era were mainly of three types: First Indentured Labour where an employer was basically hired for five years of labourer contract and once it was completed, an employer becomes free to reindentured or to work at other place. Secondly, Kangani or Mistry System – this is the recruitment of labour for emigration to Ceylon and Malaya. Here the labourers were basically rooted from Tamil family to recruit at the tea plantations of Ceylon and the rubber plantations of Malaysia. And third, Free Passage System – this is one of the relaxing patterns during the colonial migration. The emigrants were not officially sponsored by any contract rather they themselves paid for their passages. Basically the emigrants were from the regions of Gujarat and Punjab migrated to South Africa and East Africa as a contractors, bankers, shopkeepers, merchants, clerks, entrepreneurs and professors. While on the other side the Post-Colonial migration started after India got independent in 1947 with three different patterns. In the initial first pattern was the emigration of Anglo-Indians to Australia and England. Second, the emigration of professionals and semi-professionals to the industrially advanced countries like US, Canada and England. And third, the emigrants of skilled and unskilled labourers to West Asia.³

As a mass leader, Gandhi's principles have always fostered communal harmony, international relations and understanding, and protest against colonial and racial discrimination. Diaspora too is yet another domain where Gandhi's contribution and relevance cannot be overlooked. Gandhi has been one of the key figures in the making of Indian diaspora and so also the diaspora in the making of Gandhi. Gandhi's major weapon of revolution "Satyagrah" was experimented in the diaspora and, at the same time, his satyagrah success story in India permeated to several diasporic countries across the globe. Ironically, however, Gandhi has not been emphasized sufficiently in the theory and praxis of Diaspora as compared to other areas of discourse. However, to understand the role of Mahatma Gandhi from diasporic perspective, we need to discuss various dimensions of his overseas life and contributions, majorly in context with England and South Africa.

Gandhi's Journey as a Diaspora

One of the most significant migrations during the Colonial Era was the most pioneering person of our country, Mohandas Gandhi. Gandhi's Diasporic life and experiences were the turning points of his life. After Gandhi had quit his college in Bhavnagar, he accepted the astonishing opportunity to study further in England. However, the struggle started at the moment of he took the decision. Initially his mother denied due to moral, emotional and financial aspects. He managed to convince his mother by taking a vow of abstaining from meat, alcohol and women during his stay in England. But the obstacles did not end there. The people from his caste took a strong opposition against Gandhi's departing to abroad due to religious customs. They thought it is not possible to live in abroad without compromising our religious principle. However, Gandhi abruptly replied,

"I do not think it is at all against our religion to go to England. I intend going there for further studies. And I have solemnly promised to my mother to abstain from three things you fear the most. I am sure the vow will keep me safe."⁴

Mohandas was sorrowful while leaving his family left behind at motherland. In September, 1888 Mohandas left Bombay to set sail for England. Gandhi was barely aware, on the embarkation, that his journey would be a small piece in the much larger jigsaw of bodies transported across the seas in the large scale migrations from Indian in the 19th century.

Settlement in the English Culture

Gandhi's voyages to London represent an early stage in his diasporic consciousness. However, his courage in crossing the sea in defiance of his community sets the forges an individual style of living. The sea journey to London was Gandhi's first cosmopolitan experience. Though he did not felt seasick but of course he felt shy to speak even to the steward. He hides from other passengers and is preoccupied with the strangeness of his clothes; his preoccupation on that trip seems to be his vegetarianism. However, he does connect with an empathetic Englishman. He was also having discomforts in speaking English language. He is encountering for the first time, a space where Indian and English passengers in the second salon conversed freely.⁵ In the case of Gandhi's diasporic experiences, language, diet and the clothes were the major problems to accustom in English society. While boarding to England, he used to stand on the deck wearing a black suit with shirt and tie - totally western outfit like an English man. But he could not ever forget his first morning on board. He was feeling quite discomfort in his western appearance. However, it was a very initial change to get acquainted to English culture and country. Gandhi realized that his Indian attire was more suitable which made him feel proud of being an Indian. Being a shy person, he avoided to leave his cabin. He was restricted to consume only dry snacks and sweets which he brought from home because he was not sure of all those unknown foods served on the ship. He thought they might contain meat and did not wish to break his vow to his mother never to eat meat.

On landing at Southampton, the journey of the exploring the different culture begins. Getting regulate and imbibe a new culture is always a difficult procedure. It is difficult for every migrant to compromise for their culture, ethics and religious customs. Gandhi was also became the victim of cultural hybridism. The very first experience of getting cross-culture connection was his Appearance. He looked around and saw that all the people were in dark clothes, wearing bowler hats and carrying overcoats. That made him feels self-conscious as he was the only who was wearing white flannels. While arriving at London, his first accommodation place was the Victoria Hotel and Dr. P. J. Mehta, a friend of the Gandhi family, was the first to meet him in London. Gandhi was very much impressed by Dr. Mehta's look especially his silk top hat. Being an unaware of European manners, he reached out and touched the pile of the silk. Dr. Mehta became very angry on Gandhi's mischief. He gave him his first lesson in European manners cautioning him not to touch other peoples' things. He advised Mohandas to never ask too many probing questions, and not to talk loudly. Young Gandhi found everything around him strange. He thought he was a complete apprentice in the matter of English etiquette. And apart from this, there was the additional inconvenience of the Vegetarian Vow. He started feeling homesickness. He almost

starved until he discovered a vegetarian restaurant. Even the Vegetarian dishes he found were tasteless and bland. He was struggling so much in learning the western manners and customs that he decided to take a room on a rental basis and tried his hand and mind in practicing the different things. To look like the local gentleman, he bought well-tailored clothes and started wearing a top hat. He spent a lot of time in front of the mirror for parting his straight hair and fixing his tie. Though he was not ever taken interest in music, still he took lessons in dancing, but in a short time he gave up as he had no sense of rhythm. However, he also tried his hand at playing the violin, but that too failed. He took lessons in French and elocution, but went to sleep. His attempt to be an Englishman lasted about three months. Then he gave up the idea. He converted himself into a serious student.

"I have changed my way of life," he told a friend. "All this foolishness is at an end. I am living in one room and cooking my own food. Hereafter I shall devote all my time to study," he said. His meals were simple. He avoided expenditure on transport and went on foot everywhere in London. He started to keep an account of every penny he spent. Mohandas joined the London Vegetarian Society and soon found himself in its executive council. He wrote articles for the magazine, *Vegetarian*.⁶

Meanwhile, he progressed in his study of law and in November 1888 he was admitted to the Inner Temple. There it was the tradition of the Inns of Court for the students to dine together at least six times each year. Gandhi got nervous on his first dine with the other fellow students as he was sure that the boys would tease him for refusing meat and alcohol. Even though when they offer him a glass of Wine, he refused to have any. He had neither tasted the meat nor even touched it. So he used to sit there with the content of his bread, boiled potatoes and cabbage. Apart from this though having some strange habits according to the European culture, he did not find himself being disliked by others.⁷ When next time he went for the dinner, he brought a pile of law books with him. He was taking the books to his room to study. The other students were amazed by his dedication to learning and very surprised to find him reading Roman law in Latin. Some friends suggested he read abbreviated versions of the law instead of bothering unduly over such times. Gandhi explained to his lighthearted friends that he worked so hard for sheer interest in the subject, and that he wanted to acquire knowledge for its own sake. Gandhi's experiments and his experiences in England were conducted from the point of view of economy and hygiene. The religious aspects of the question were not considered until he went to South Africa. Gandhi's diasporic experiences in South Africa led him to develop a view of Indianness that he later used in his nationalist campaign.

Social Adjustment in South Africa

Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi arrived in South Africa at the age of 24 and left at the age of 45. These 21 years were the crucial years in his life. It was during this time that Gandhiji began to crystallize a unique philosophy of life which entitled him as 'Mahatma'. When Gandhi arrived in 1893, the issue of Indian immigration was a hot topic, and from the outset he became aware of the racial discrimination directed at Indians living in Durban. When Gandhi arrived in South Africa, he thought of himself as a Briton first, and an Indian second. It was clear from many of his actions that he was class conscious, he would stay in the area where professionals of his stature lived, he would only travel first class as would any professional person, he would obtain services from service providers, such as grocers, hairdressers and hotels, who attended to professional people. Here again like in England, he was much conscious about his appearance. So he used to choose selected finest clothes, wearing tie and suit and spent time grooming his hair. This obsession with western fashion was again projected while having his second visit to South Africa and that too with his wife and children. However, he was insisting his wife and children also to dress up with wearing gloves and stockings, shoes and socks respectively. He decided to set up his hair by the hairdresser but when he realized that white hairdressers in South Africa refused to attend to non-white people, he felt so humiliated that his conscience would not allow him to go to another hairdresser. Instead he attempted to cut his own hair.⁸ At that stage his desire for self-respect and dignity superseded his wish to be well groomed.

Immediately on arriving in South Africa Gandhi had to face the racial discrimination due to his skin colour and heritage. The very first incident was taken place in the Durban court where the magistrate asked Gandhi to remove his Turban. Gandhi refused on the grounds that removing turban was a sign of disrespect in India, and left the court. However, he thought the other way to defend his respect by wearing an English hat. But Abdulla disapproved this suggestion as he explained him about the classification of Indentured Indians in Natal colony. He explained that the children of Indian indentured were converted into Christians who used to wear English costumes with a Hat while working as a waiter in a hotel. Thus, wearing a hat would become a symbol of waiters. Later on, this issue was published in a local newspaper. Gandhi received mix response from people as some agreed and some more criticized him. But due to this, Gandhi became the central attention for some time and his turban stayed with him practically until the end of his stay in South Africa.

Slowly and gradually, Gandhi came to know about the social status Indians. He found that Indians were divided into different groups such as Musalmans, Hindus and Parsis and were known as the 'coolies' and so as Gandhi as a 'coolie barrister'. One more noteworthy incident Gandhi had to come across while he was travelling to Pretoria by train for the court case. Although he had a first-class ticket, he was not allowed to sit with European passengers in the stagecoach and told to sit on the floor near the driver. While denying, he was badly beaten up and evicted from the train in Pietermaritzburg. Here he had to spend a freezing night in the waiting room at the station, brooding on what had just happened and whether he should return to India or should fight for his respect. Gandhi at that time was deeply bothered by observing and experiencing the prejudice against him the other Indians by the Britishers that his heart was shaken.⁹ He found it very humiliating, and was struggling to understand that how some people can feel honour or superiority or pleasure in such inhumane practices. Some of his incidents then after prepared Gandhi to raise a question about the dignity and respect of his people. Later he decided to stay there and fight for the rights of the Indians standing against the British Empire.

Conclusion

Gandhi's life shows that travelling across South Africa was a necessity for his understanding of the nation. His journeys taught him that he needed to travel and experience it geographically before he could see Indian nationality as a political reality. With his multifaceted life, Gandhi has highly influenced different diaspora communities worldwide. In such a context it will not be out of place to consider Mahatma Gandhi the first person to integrate the scattered Indians world-wide. In fact, Gandhi has made the 'Indian Diaspora' more prominently be part of public interest in India. Thus Gandhi has been one of the monumental figures who will be always be part of the foreign policy, community life, cultural and political activities in India and abroad. He is the most important link between the mother country and her diaspora.

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Analysis:

Analysis of the study shows that people are migrating towards e-communication rather face to face communication. However the mode and method of communication changes widely even for a single person as people use different ways for communicating with different people. Hence this study and analysis is only based on the preferences of people and frequency of the mode and method being used.

As we can see from the observation, Face-to-Face communication has decreased nearly by half with the evolution of technology. The other half prefers to use one or other e-communication over the ancient ways, either due to peer-pressure, either due to curiosity or due to the user friendliness have become addicted to using these applications for everything possible. Around 30% of the people now prefer using methods that which donot include meeting personally or using their voices for interaction rather than interacting directly. The maximum used method is Whatsapp. The most common messaging application. All you need to communicate here is a smart phone and your thumbs. People have migrated towards using methods that require minimum contact with the person. 20% use Video Calling to communicate. This can be the best substitute to Face-to-Face communication as ny this way, though you are geographically away, the communication that takes place is as effective as personally meeting. 13% people use audio calls to communicate. With this method, though the person is not visible to you but through your voice, its modulations, tone, pitch; the emotions get conveyed effectively. Also the grip over the language can be judged. 50% use messaging to communicate which neither requires the other person to neither hear the voice nor see the face. Yet the message gets communicated. This also depicts that the people avoid confronting others personally and can communicate only behind some kind of barrier such that the kinesics are not known by the recipient; which give a firm representation of the confidence, motives, transparency and values of the sender.

From the observation we can see that half the sample population prefers Whatapp over other means of communication. However, the other half prefers Face to face communication. Hence in order to reach out to maximum people the most effective way is to combine both the preferences and find a mid way; that is if they can see the sender but not be seen themselves and use one of the applications for it. The most effective way to do this is make videos/ GIFs and send it to people. In this way the recipient will not only notice the sender; the video will boost the confidence on the sender and hence the sender will be able to reach out in the most effective way.

Every revolution has two sides. The positive side of this is that it saves time, money and energy. With such rapidly changing trends, more people are able to get global exposure and reach out for help or advancement. Also, people can hide their weaknesses as the other person is not necessarily seen by the recipient. It helps widen networks and help create or find solutions for problems across the globe.

However, the negative side has a scarier picture. It is easy to get deceived as there is no or minimal direct contact with the sender. Again the confidence of people especially the new generation is decreasing due to minimal contact with people in the real world. In other ways it isolates the users. Endangered privacy of the individuals is also an outcome of using technology for communication. Cyber crimes are a new issue to this like cyber bullying, identity thefts, sorcery, etc. Excessive use of the technology has caused health issues in people like depression, anxiety, substance abuse, poor sleep, poor performance and even suicide. Last but not the least problem is Hate-speech. People can use hate speech or disrespectful behaviour which they would refrain in real life through social media. Also the content that people post cannot be censored and hence this inspires hate-speech.

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