Indian Communities Abroad: Globalisation, Adaptation and Renegotiation of Identity

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INTRODUCTION

Ever since the advent of the term "globalization" in the early 1990s, the movement of people across international boundaries spawned new concepts that forced new trends and paradigms into social sciences and humanities research. In Anthropology the best possible contemporary representation of the concept and its attendant corollaries appears in a book edited by Eriksen (2003) on Globalisation: Studies in Anthropology. Through this book and a range of other references at least two easily discernable trends about globalization have sprouted internationally over the last fifteen years. The first is to define it as a cultural process that revolves around homogenization and diversification where the local is seen as a microcosm of the global (see for instance Giddens, 1990; Appadurai, 1991, 1996; Featherstone, 1995; Robertson, 1995). In this literature adaptation and integration is viewed in ways that are articulated through acceptance of the host societies' value systems and through the renegotiations of socio-cultural expressions and identities that often involve convergence from varying settings in the world to produce a sense of unity through religion, place of origin or specialist work. The second is in Wallerstein's (1974) and others views (such as Rosenau, 1990; Held, 1995), conceptualized as an intensification of economic relations across national boundaries (see also Eriksen, 2003; Nustad, 2003). More specifically, globalization is viewed as an ongoing political and economic process that is shaped, determined and controlled by the G8 countries, with the United States of America (USA) as the controlling agent. Their purpose is to determine the nature of international aid and investment, the ideologies that countries adopt, and the types of productive activities that countries all over the world engage in – in order to create lucrative markets for their products. What is emerging from this process is a new value system that recognizes the USA and more broadly its G8 partners as virtually the sole innovators and custodians of technology improvement and as policy makers in emerging global relationships in which states, particularly in the developing world, are no longer seen as potential independent agents of development. There is a growing view however, that improved technological standards in developing countries is becoming increasingly reliant upon the migrant labour of professionals[1] that are increasingly contributing to the economies of the developed world.

Since globalization is now deemed as the major ideological force that is reshaping international relationships, community relations and the individual's place in them, a plethora of "new" keywords have emerged. Concepts such as "trans-national families", "knowledge workers", "renegotiation of identities", "hybridity of cultural identities", "balkanization" of states, among a range of others, accompanied globalization not only as a concept but as complementary armoury to support its value as an ideological tool of twenty-first century capitalism. It has also recalled concepts such as "cultural relativity" and "acculturation" which were recently deemed to have run their courses and which rendered themselves defunct by virtue of the successive discourses and debates that outwitted them. As people integrate into new host societies and renegotiate their identities in foreign environments, cultural relativism and acculturation have reemerged as analytical tools to understand recent processes of increasing flows of people across international boundaries. These movements, which are aided and abetted by the internet and wireless technology, are creating multitudes of new relationships and networks amidst expressions of cultural continuities that actually constitute subtle claims of puritanical identities. There is an ambiguity that is inherent in this situation. While people's trans-national movements are creating ever more complex relationships, they continue to regroup and converge towards others who share their same geographical, physical and religious characteristics, recreating the bounded cultures in which conventional structural-functional analyses

placed them. In this sense it calls for more research and for newer conceptualizations on how migrant groups relocate, integrate and renegotiate their identities in new host environments.

UNFOLDING SCENARIOS FOR THE 21ST CENTURY

The political scenario for the 21st century and the renewed global waves of migration were in numerous ways determined by the events of the last decade of the 20th century. In the early 1990s, since the collapse of socialism in Eastern Europe and the breakdown of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) into autonomous and independent states, the USA rapidly rose to even greater prominence. As part of the G8 nations and as a controlling force in this group it serves to uphold capitalism and "free-market" economics as the only sustainable ideology that is capable of productively serving super-structural mechanisms in national and international contexts. And as a group of nations with common goals and objectives, the G8 nations often work in tandem with each other to effectively control the global market. However, in the 21st century numerous developments that are emerging are already challenging the USA's claim of super-power status and the G8's hegemony in world trade. For instance, the rapid rise of funda-mentalist Islam, articulated especially in the Twin Towers attack on 11 September 2001, the war in Iraq, and the ongoing threats of North Korea's and Iran's nuclear capabilities are serving as formidable challenges. On another front, the astute build-up of knowledge workers, foreign currencies, trade surpluses and economic capacities in China and India are likely to challenge the size and might of the USA as having the biggest economy in the world and of the G8 nations' domination in world trade. Collectively China's and India's growing might serves as a new determining force in global politics and trade and provides new avenues and challenges for their citizens who are becoming the new adventurists and knowledge workers of the 21st century. Apart from the English speaking countries of the G8 nations, Australia and New Zealand are also becoming major beneficiaries of well trained and efficient knowledge workers from these countries. However, the demand for people of Indian origin presently enjoys hegemony over the Chinese knowledge workers in that their proficiency in English makes them the preferred option.

The movement among people of Indian origin from India and other ex-colonies to the industrialized countries over the last two decades is largely a result of the following issues viz. huge availability of "knowledge workers" but scarce opportunities within India, the uneven development in the now decolonized countries in which they were once settled, ongoing political and socio-economic turmoil in many of these developing countries such as Fiji and South Africa[ii], and more rewarding prospects for employment in environments that are deemed to be generally more conducive than their own. This movement represents two factors that are significant points of departure from the past in that it stretches from the time of colonialism when Indians were deemed to have been "conned, cajoled and coerced" into accepting indenture contracts in India in the 19th century (Sharma, n.d.), to the time when they were relatively free i.e. up to the mid-1960s, to take up British citizenship as citizens of the British Empire. Contemporary requirements for entry and work in Britain, as in other developed countries, are now contingent upon either how much money one has to support oneself in the period of visitation prior to an approval of a visa, or what qualification one has to contribute towards the required labour market in the respective countries.

Increased intercontinental travel as tourists and a commensurate transnational flow of people as knowledge workers across international boundaries poses a need to re-conceptualise and to re-determine our methodological approaches to the study of people of Indian origin. Classical monographs and published papers on indentured labourers and their descendants generally focused on the recreation of norms and traditions that amounted to almost self-imposed boundaries that were intended to serve as an invisible protective film that insulated them from outsider communities (see for instance Klass, 1961; Mayer, 1973; Drummond, 1980). During colonialism they were collectively housed in barracks type accommodation or put in close proximity to one another in selective localities to live as a community. Indians, like other indigenous groups, had to live relatively far away from the White colonist populations to preclude uninhibited socialization and from the benefits of White society, but near enough to ensure their presence when it was needed. This created an unhindered space for the anthropologists who wanted to use

the conventional anthropological method of participant observation. Their presence as 'a community' provisioned them with all their comforts of the anthropologists preferred set-up to implement a methodological framework that could be justified as authentically anthropological. None of these early analyses however embraced a critical historical perspective that reflected upon the Indian indentured populations within the context of their captive colonial masters. Krohn-Hansen (2003: 79) rightly asserts, after finding association with Gupta and Ferguson's (1997: 4) position about the need for history in anthropology, that "A strengthened anthropology about the present must acknowledge the need to work better on the past….this requires that we study global history far more seriously than mainstream anthropology in the twentieth century did."

But the emergence of the trans-national knowledge worker, and their families if they accompany them, is marked by relative affluence and the freedom to choose a site for habitation. Such choices are not always possible within a community setting that is predominantly of the same ethnic group or geographical origin. While in many of the host societies such as South Hall in London, The Punjabi Market in Vancouver, the Indian dominated districts in New Jersey and New York, the Tamil dominated suburbs in Sydney, among others, where Indians tended to gravitate towards each other and set up communities on the basis of their origins, equally large or greater numbers live in areas that isolate them from communities that are not of their origins. Their dispersion across areas that are dominated by groups other than their own poses a challenge on how to track their settlements, understand the ways in which they integrate into their host societies and what they do to maintain their identities – if they are still inclined to do so. These kinds of dispersions enforces a shift away from the conventional practice of participant observation towards related methods of interviewing through various established techniques, social networking, questionnaires (impersonal) followed by appropriate methods of personal contacts to build upon initial methods of data collection.

TRANSCENDING CONVENTIONAL BOUNDARIES IN RESEARCH

Upon insistence for a call to engage more extensively and intensively in historical analysis to explain the present in terms of its past, anthropologists are acknowledging the inter-disciplinary nature of their subject. History has been as much a handmaiden of colonialism as anthropology was. Both served to portray structures and processes over the last four centuries in ways that diverted attention from the real intentions and atrocities of colonialism. To this extent many of the social sciences and humanities research practices and conceptual approaches had in-built tendencies to ignore the harsh realities of the past. They used the structural-functional and cultural materialist paradigms as a means to justify their a-historical approach to populations such as indentured labourers in colonial settings. As people of European descent their points of entry into the research areas began by viewing their subjects as belonging to the world of the exotic and wrote about them as 'the other' in contexts that reflected upon their training and ideological purposes. Subsequent trends in post-graduate training, research and writing tended to embrace these positions but were only to the extent that they modified or improved these paradigms. Eriksen (2003: 5-6) for instance captures this trend in accurate terms: "To put it differently: quests for symbolic power and professional identity sometimes tempts academics to caricature the positions taken by their predecessors, so that their own contribution may shine with an exceptionally brilliant glow of originality and sophistication."

However, as accomplishments in post-graduate education ascends in the ex-colonies to levels that are comparable with research and writing from the previous colonial powers, ongoing attempts are being made to take the responsibility of rewriting their own histories, reinterpreting ethnographic research through self-engagement and writing in ways that is based on their own personal historical experiences. This edition of *The Anthropologist's* collection of papers is one such representation – by people of Indian origin who now find themselves in various socio-political settings in different parts of the world. They cover issues that are of contemporary ethnographic and theoretical relevance not only to people of the Indian diaspora but also to the wider discourses that have acquired currency in literature around trans-nationalism, increasing professional migration to the developed countries

and the resultant new adventurism, identity maintenance in processes of relocation and romanticized depictions of the imagined and distant homeland, to borrow from Benedict Anderson's (1991) analysis of diasporic communities.

The first paper after this introduction somewhat meets the call made by Thomas Eriksen (2003), although it is not necessarily based on conventional anthropological premises. Somadatta Mandal's paper: "Oh Calcutta: The New Bengal Movement in Diasporic Indian English Fiction" is an insightful reflection of the themes and styles of writing that are emerging from people of Bengali origin living overseas. In naming and analyzing the work of a range of such writers, Mandal (p1) emphasizes the point that in reading some of these writers work one can hardly "….escape the pleasures of acute Bengaliness in their writings, and in fact some of them are writing back with a vengeance to say." The choice of publications that came under her scrutiny are intended to divulge the persistent interest that Bengali writers still have - not only in their country of origin but also in their roots and identities that still convey a regionalism that is imbued with nostalgia and deep affection for Bengal – with Kolkatta at their helm. However, while their persuasive style of writing has appeared to have earned them a place in mainstream literature in the west, Mandal is forced to somewhat wearily conclude that they are still branded as ethnic writers. Although this distinction could serve to demarcate such writers from their western counterparts, whose writings too could often be caged into similar regional and nostalgic reflections, Mandal convincingly demonstrates that Bengali writers put pen-to-paper to assert the rising interest in the themes on migration research, homelessness, exile, loss of identity and a venturing towards rootlessness when confronted by the realities of isolation. Her paper though raises a crucial question: "Is it the writing style of the Bengalis that caricatures them as outsider 'ethnic writers' in the vision of their host societies or is it their hosts own myopic prisms that forces such a distinction?"

Gerelene Pattundeen's paper on professional South African Indian women's search for work overseas is also a similar break away from the common practice of participant observation in anthropological research. Confronted by the fact that her interest in such a topic was unlikely to produce a group of women who could be easily accessed through participant observation in a conventional village or small community setting, she was forced to adopt creative methods to track, interview and network with subjects in unconventional ways. Her material produces two important insights on professional Indian women from South Africa wanting to work overseas. First, it contributes towards literature that is increasingly revealing the strides that women of Indian origin are taking towards changing their statuses from the docile domesticated female to the adventurist, entrepreneurial and independent ambassador of transforming value systems. The ethnographic data that she presents is a focus on the radically restructuring Indian household that is not only giving their daughters added opportunities to empower themselves through education but also the leverage to set up home and thereby create trans-national households in their new countries of adoption. Second, her paper alludes to a significant point that ethno-graphic studies on trans-national movements of people are likely to impose unconventional methods in research to maintain anthropological interest in entrenched social relationships. Such subjects are generally dispersed over wide areas and are by no means easy to observe and engage with as participant observers do in either distinctly or arbitrarily bounded communities.

GLOBALISATION AND SETTLEMENT

Three of the papers in this edition shed new light on the settlement of people of Indian origin in Australia and the USA. Goolam Vahed's paper on re-establishing identities in Brisbane among people of Indian origin stems from a long history of his work on Indians and apartheid in South Africa. His paper focuses on how Indians from various ex-colonial backgrounds such as Fiji, South Africa, Sri Lanka and India as well, converge in various socio-cultural settings to find common ground in their status as a minority population group. While Australia's now relaxed policy on multi-culturalism accommodates and promotes practices in music and performing arts that perpetuate social distinctiveness, divisions still appear among migrants from India who prefer to distinguish themselves with migrants from other ex-colonies. Among the Hindus caste divisions still appear to prevail particularly among Indians from India, while Muslims tend to associate more

with people from the Middle East. Dress forms among Muslims, particularly the *burqa* (head to toe dress of women) has divided Australians on the limits to which their policies of multiculturalism should be understood by immigrant communities. However, very importantly, Vahed's research reveals that while their presence in Australia must be viewed against the background of trans-nationalism, there is still a nostalgic association among Indians with their places of origin through ongoing contact with people who are still in their respective "homelands" and through the formation of associations that reproduce those cultural preferences.

There is a very similar approach in Loshni Naidoo's paper on Indians in Sydney. Based upon a reflexive account of her relocation to Sydney from South Africa, she approaches the settlement of Indians there in the context of the acculturation model and explains their integration into Australian society through the context of hybridization. Her paper reaffirms the notion that Australia, like other developed countries, are selective about who they permit to settle there. However, Australia's focus on highly qualified professionals of Indian origin has not led to any radical compromises about respect and loyalty in family expectations as well as the persistence of patriarchal relations within the household. Naidoo's evidence demonstrates that the family remains the basic unit from which ritual and cultural observances continue to be practiced and in which educational achievements remain entrenched.

Rupam Saran's paper is also about the settlement of Indians in New York, through specific focus of the performances of second generation learners in high school. This paper is very much in line with the increasing interests in children rights and care, especially as articulated in the United Nations Charter for the Rights of the Child. Since this publication numerous international bodies and academics have responded to the call for more research on children. The International Union for Anthropological and Ethnological Sciences (IUAES) for instance has prompted the formation of a Commission on Childhood, Youth and Children through which anthropologists are increasingly participating in debates and discourses on the subject. Saran's discussion of the lives of second generation American children of Indian origin through the 'model minority image' perspective produces significant information on how they position themselves in schools to assert either their intellectuality or their prowess by rising to physical challenges that are essentially race based. However, model minority imaging, as her information amply demonstrates, is often dangerously used by American authorities to pit Asian migrants against Black American performances and official fiduciary expectations. The generally compliant Asian Indian population in America has recorded significant educational and economic achievements - but through comparatively low state inputs into their requirements. Indians, together with others of Asian origin, have produced almost 50% of the USA's graduates in engineering, science and commerce between 1998 and 2004. This has often been used to justify low-budget expenditure in impoverished Black dominated localities and regions by the American state. While her data suggests that there is significant diversity in the performances of Asian Indian children in secondary schools, there is still the tendency through hegemonic forces to depict them as largely high performers and successful achievers. This imposed unduly high expectations among secondary learners, especially when they were unable to cope and live up to expectations. She demonstrates that the personal costs for under-achievers among Indian learners are often racially based and severe.

Moving away from secondary learners in high America's high schools, Bandana Purkayastha's paper is about the problems that second generation students of Indian origin face with respect to remodeling their identities in American tertiary institutions. It discusses the compromises, ambiguities and challenges that they have to confront against the force of consumerist power-plays that have become so prevalent in North American society. From a negligible minority in the 1960s Indians in America have risen in numbers to become an increasingly visible minority not only through the cultural forms and expressions that they import from popular Indian attire, music and dance in urban Indian but also through the intellectual competition that they offer to the majority of White American students. However, the popular cultural forms that are discussed here comes are at a price and are mostly restricted to those who can afford to be expressive in their adapted cultural practices. The paper argues that both universities and wider American society is

tolerant of and encourages these cultural manifestations because it provides a positive image to their policy of multiculturalism, rooted in the civil rights movements of the 1960s.

GLOBALISATION AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP

Saran's focus on children in school in the USA is complimented by Vinodh Chandra's research on a similar group in Coventry, England. While Chandra also writes about children's schooling in Coventry, his focus is more about their contribution to family operated convenience stores. His paper is an important justification for the value and visibility of children's labour in family enterprises -an aspect that he rightly contends has been ignored by academics in favour of raising awareness about the value of women's labour, most especially in the domestic sphere. This paper highlights an important corollary of children's labour in similar situations and very competently illucidate the indispensable roles that they play in the context of family labour. The case studies in this paper show how their domestic work and work in their shops is given as much priority as their studies in school and university.

Kalpana Hiralal's paper is equally complimentary to Chandra's paper as a contribution to the entrepreneurial work for which people of Indian origin have become so renowned. Her information on business families in Durban, where the biggest concentration of the South African Indian diaspora resides, is a revealing account about the dynamics of restructuring business patterns and of inter-racial perceptions and relationships in post-apartheid South Africa. The people that she has ably researched and has written about are already several generations old in South Africa, where Indians first landed in 1860 as indentured labourers of the British Empire and since 1870 as 'passenger Indians' who paid their own way through to engage in the colonial economy as traders. Hiralal's personalized contact with her subjects and their willingness to permit the use of their names in her paper is a rare priviledge that academics have in capturing their data for publication. The advantage of this approach lies in the ability of readers to trust the veracity of the information and of the research subjects to verify what they themselves contributed to the process of information gathering for her research.

HOW IS THIS DIFFERENT FROM CONVENTIONAL ANTHROPOLOGY?

The forgoing discussion has focused on the rise and new waves of voluntary migration among people of Indian origin to destinations that are especially in the developed countries. It was accompanied by a call to re-conceptualise on methodological approaches so that we can adequately cover the growing interest that is shown in how Indians are becoming increasingly involved in globalization and transnational movements. In relation to this a fundamental question that emerges is: how are the earlier studies on people of Indian origin different from the contemporary studies? An answer to this question must be rooted in the methodological issues and contemporary social-political circumstances-though not necessarily in order of importance. The papers that appear in this edition show that apart from Mandal's assessment on the styles of writing that are adopted by writers of Bengali origin in India and its neighbourhood, the other papers are actually adaptations of the conventional approaches to ethnographic research-effectively re-conceptualisations. Justification for inclusion of Mandal's paper must rest on Eriksen's (2003: 15) convincing concluding statement in his introductory chapter: "Like the study of politics, the study of transnational processes or globalization is interdisciplinary, engaging academics from sociology, human geography, political science, cultural studies and many other disciplines. What anthropology has to bring to globalization studies is the recognition that social and cultural worlds, which are constituted from diverse materials of various origins, are always expressed through meaningful relationships."

While Mandal's paper is an interesting deviation from this norm, each of the remaining papers produced approaches and issues that are significant adaptations and contributions to contemporary currencies in methodological approaches. The case study methods, preceded and supported by historical methods are important in fusing techniques that are complimentary to each other and that help to produce a diachronic perspective that demonstrates the changes that take place over time and between places and people. Each of the successive papers are elaborations of this theme in research methods and their data emphasizes the point

about meaningful relationships, that Eriksen (2003) rightly emphasizes, in varying contexts viz. the household, the communities, and the host societies.

About the context of the socio-political circumstances, we cannot ignore the fact that during colonialism Indians avoided being shipped across the oceans because of the taboos associated with "kala pani", or black water-for fear of losing their caste purity and status (Jain, 1993: 3). They therefore had to be "conned, cajoled and coerced" into accepting British contracts for indentured labour (Sharma, n.d.). While many remained in the colonies after working as indentured labourers, their movements to these places were neither voluntary nor based on a choice to relocate at will. It was determined by the needs of colonial expansion and the requirement was mainly for labour that was not based on years of formal schooling and tertiary education. However, recent flows of people of Indian origin, within the context of globalization and trans-national movements, are voluntary, involves people that are highly educated with tertiary education, and who are deemed able to meet shortages in specialized skills as professional knowledge workers in developed countries. This represents a phase in history that is a significant shift away from the constrictive days of yore to active participation in structures and processes that is substantially more rewarding than work during the days of colonialism. Respect for knowledge workers of Indian origin is also commensurate with the positive perceptions that the world has developed over India's rapid rise in various forms of productivity. Their value is noted by the immense investments in American dollar terms that are made by companies such as Microsoft and by countries such as Australia to train information technology specialists and engineers and to draw from their labour. Such issues are of immense value to the social scientists and humanity specialists and will continue to influence their research for many more years to come.

NOTES

1. People who fit this category are being increasingly referred to in the literature on globalization and transnational communities as "knowledge workers"
2. While the recent coups in Fiji was perceived as a pronouncement to many people of Indian origin that their presence there is no longer welcome, in South Africa affirmative action policies in favour of Blacks and incessant violence has discouraged many from wanting to work or remain in the country.

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ABSTRACT This special edition of The Anthropologist is intended as an inaugural publication of the Commission

for Migrant and Diasporic Studies, recently established for the International Union of Anthropological and Ethnological Sciences (IUAES). The selected papers were inspired by the first set of sessions that were held in the IUAES Inter-Congress in Kolkatta, India, in December 2004 and the prodding by Indian anthropologist Prof Vinodh Chandra in the following year at a conference in Norway in June 2006. The call for papers was made to attract papers from a wide array of related disciplines to anthropology to reflect upon work that was both theoretical and ethnographic in nature.

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