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**INDIAN IMMIGRANTS IN BRITAIN:**

**FEATURES OF DIASPORIC LIFE POST 2000s**

**DIVYA BALAN**



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## **Abstract**

Being the single largest ethnic minority with a migration history since 1600, Indian immigrants are an established community in Britain, many a time projected as a model minority. It is an internally diverse community with differences in religion, caste, language, and cultural practices shape their identity and diasporic experiences in British society. Their migration to Britain was a part of the larger colonial movement in the earliest phase; however economic motives perpetuated the post-Independence and current phase. Studies explain that they show a positive integration trend towards the social and economic spheres of their destination country. At the same time, they devised necessary cultural negotiations within the British system to recreate and retain Indian cultural practices and traditions and to transmit them to the subsequent British-born generations. This research paper is an attempt to comprehend the major features of Indian diasporic life in Britain at present. Based on field research, this paper deals with several of the significant aspects of their pre and post migration process and how they strategized methods to negotiate their Indianness and cope with the largely intolerant native society without losing their rather emotional and material links with their home country, India. This study asserts the fact that Indians could never give up India especially at a time when British society perceives migration as an unavoidable but socially disintegrative process.

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**Keywords: Indian Immigrants, Britain, Eastham, Culture, Identity, Diasporic Experiences**

## **About Author**

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**Statement: All the views expressed in the paper are of the author(s).**

# INDIAN IMMIGRANTS IN BRITAIN: FEATURES OF DIASPORIC LIFE POST 2000s

**Divya Balan**

*"To study a banyan tree, you not only must know its main stem in its own soil, but also must trace the growth of its greatness in the further soil, for then you can know the true nature of its vitality. The civilization of India, like the banyan tree, has shed its beneficent shade away from its own birth-place...India can live and grow by spreading abroad - not the political India, but the ideal India."*

- Rabindranath Tagore (cited in Tinker 1977: iii)

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Indian community is the largest ethnic minority immigrant group in Britain. It is a uniquely heterogeneous community replicating the diversity of India itself. Differences in terms of religion, castes and sub-castes, region, language, culture and identity are all well reflected in the Indian community in Britain. In fact, calling Indians in Britain as a community itself is problematic as Indian community there is a 'community of communities' (Parekh, 2000). Broadly speaking, the Indians in Britain comprise mainly of those who came directly from India at various points of time since colonial period and those from the former British colonies popularly known as twice migrants for instance, Indo-Caribbean, East Africans Indians etc. Indians arrived in the United Kingdom (hereinafter UK) for reasons applicable to the rest of the immigrant communities in Britain. But what makes their story unique is the way they established themselves in the country more or less amicably and at times belligerently. They are highly developed culturally to satisfy the needs of their community; at the same time, relatively better integrated to British society than any other South Asian communities including Pakistanis and Bangladeshis.

By providing a comprehensive account of the arrival of Indians to Britain at various times of the history, this paper features various aspects of Indian diasporic life in the post 2000 period including the pattern of their migration process and settlement, socio-cultural, ethnic and religious peculiarities, their professional and internal economic activities, community solidarity, recon-

struction of community life through associations around religious/regional affiliations and transnational networks, maintenance of links with India, interaction between immigrants and the host community and their overall position in British society. This paper is largely based on the findings of the empirical research conducted by the author in Eastham between 16 March 2013 and 7 April 2013 and later by regular communications with the respondents through email and telephone. Before getting into the details of the features of diasporic life, a brief history of Indian immigration to Britain has been attempted herein, this would provide a comprehensive account of the multidimensional and complex aspects of the settlement and subsistence of Indian immigrants in Britain.

## 2. HISTORY OF INDIAN IMMIGRANTS IN BRITAIN: 1600 TO 2015

The Indian immigration to Britain was mainly the result of the long established colonial connections between both the countries. With the establishment of the East India Company in England in the year 1600 by a group of London merchants for trade and commerce with India, the likely history of Indian immigration to Britain started but in a very slow and unnoticeable pace. However, references from Fisher et al. (2007) suggest that Indians were seen in Britain probably even before the establishment of the Company as the first trade ship from Britain to India was already loaded by a group of four Indian seamen from Gujarat. No evidence was available about their arrival to Britain; it was assumed that they might have reached Britain via Portuguese who had established trade relations with India even prior to British.

Though India was directly under the British administration for nearly two centuries there was very little migration to Britain happened during the pre-independence period. The imperial tone and the racial prejudices of the Britishers together with the religious taboos prevalent among several Indian communities stood in the way for any kind of migration from India. Indian seamen (known as lascars), servants and ayahs were brought to Britain and some of them settled

permanently comprising the first generation of Indians in Britain. Their migration was largely not of voluntary nature but decided by their colonial masters – *sahibs* and *memsahibs*. With Industrial Revolution and the subsequent growth of British economy and trade, labour was needed and the economic migration of Indians flourished to work in British dockyards, warehouses, foundries, saw mills, cordage and even in the slaughterhouses for cattle (Visram 1986: 2-9). Other pioneering Indian immigrants came to Britain during the nineteenth century were diplomats, barristers, doctors, teachers, literary figures, businessmen, merchants and traders, all offering something unique to the British way of life. Some members of the nobility, exiled from India as the Raj conquered their kingdoms, lived in Britain. Some small entrepreneurs from India came to seek their fortunes in Britain against all odds like racial prejudice. Visitors and exhibitors of Indian arts and crafts and entertainers like street musicians, snake charmers, magicians etc. were also spotted at the initial period of the immigration history. The largest group during the middle of nineteenth century was Indian students, as a result of the Macaulay's education policy, to study law or medicine or to prepare for other professions or to take Indian Civil Service (ICS) examination. During the world war period, Indians showed their presence as soldiers and labourers to fill the vacancies of British men gone to war. Throughout this initial stage of immigration their number remained small and the nature of migration was largely temporary. Also, this early migration was not exclusively of males since ayahs and female students ensured the gender parity.

It was in the post 1950s the largest wave of Indians arrived in Britain as a result of the Partition of India in 1947 and also due to the pull factor of labour demand in British economy for post war reconstruction, taking advantage of the citizenship rights provided by Britain. The links established during the long years of colonial rule acted as a catalyst together with the portrayal of Britain as the land of opportunity by the already existed Indian community in Britain (Malik 1994: 36). Anglo-Indians came to Britain in the late 1940s and 1950s, taking advantage of the British Nationality Act of 1948. Families began to arrive in large numbers in the 1960s to beat the ban of 1962 Act. This process of family reunion provides a permanent nature of Indian settlement in Britain and the resultant re-creation of the culture generated hostility towards their increasing immigration. The real increase in the number of people of Indian origin started with the arrival of ethnic Indians from East Africa, referred mostly as twice migrants, during 1960s and 1970s having been seriously affected by the post-independence Africanisation policies of the regimes of Jomo Kenyatta in Kenya, Idi Amin in Uganda and Julius Nyerere in Tanzania (Bhachu 1985: 3). They include mainly Punjabi Sikhs and Gujarati Hindu traders and merchants.

Since 1990, highly skilled Indian professionals marked the migration trail as visa schemes changed making it

increasingly difficult for low-skilled migrants to gain entry. According to the National Statistics UK (based on the 1991 Census), Indians form the biggest Asian community, i.e., 21.7 percent, Pakistan and Bangladeshis constitute 16.7 percent and 6.1 percent respectively of total minority ethnic population of the UK. Britain had seen four settled generations of Indians and the prominent feature of the Indian community is the ever presence of a first generation, as new immigrants are arriving every day looking for better economic and personal life.

Presently, Indians constitute the single largest ethnic minority population in Britain comprising of 2.7% of the country's total population. They are the largest of the non-European minority, relatively well qualified, dispersed all over the country taken up a wider range of professions. Until 2004, India was consistently the country with the highest number of overseas nationals allocated a National Insurance Number (NINo), which enabled them to work. Between 2000 and 2004 an estimated 29,261 Indian migrants entered the labour force and the employment rate among Indians are, on average, most like those of white Britons (Simpson et al. 2006 and Batnitzky et al. 2008: 55), for instance, noted that over 35 percent of all work permits issued for employees in the hospitality sector in 2005 went to Indians as chefs, waiters and restaurant supervisors. In the case of Indian doctors in Britain, the movement is economically driven as the wage differentials are substantial and also in response to the demand for trainee doctors in the National Health Service (Robinson and Carey 2000: 89). Likewise, Indians constituted 78 percent of all foreign IT professionals entering the country in 2002 as they constitute a cheap and flexible labour force with better proficiency in English. Their migration is gender balanced to an extent as women migrate independently as IT professionals.

General trend among Indian immigrants was to acquire citizenship in Britain which was generally considered as a positive response to the integration efforts and civic life of the country. Of the top 10 nationalities whose citizens acquired British citizenship in 2009, Indians numbered 26,535 which amounted to 13 percent of the total number of people who became British citizens (The Indian Express, 28 May 2010). The prominent communities among the Indians are Punjabis and Gujaratis; the significance of others including Bengalis, Tamils, Keralites and Anglo-Indians are no little. According to the 2011 Census, of the main languages speaking in Britain other than English, Indian languages – Punjabi, Urdu, Bengali, Gujarati and Tamil - comes in the first twelve positions, i.e., almost 2 percent of the population (Evans, 2013). Present Indian immigrant community in Britain have a greater visibility as NRIs/PIOs or *Pravasi* Indians due to their economic clout that they supposed to possess (Ahmed 2012: 10). Government of India (GoI) considered them as cultural ambassadors of India in Britain which illustrate the influence of present day Indian community in both Britain and India.

### 3. SOCIO-CULTURAL FEATURES OF INDIAN DI-ASPORIC LIFE IN POST 2000 BRITAIN

This section of the paper is largely based on empirical work intended to offer a detailed analysis of the Indian community in Britain in the present time. Eastham was chosen as the field and multiple research techniques such as structured and unstructured/informal interviews with Indian immigrants and association leaders as well as participant observation were used to generate data. Of all, participant observation and informal/friendly conversations that adopted a narrative approach focussing on the events that structured immigrants' lives came out as the more practical techniques for this particular field research. Afterwards, returned back to India, more respondents were contacted by the researcher for the constant updating and this paper is the product of a still continuing research in this study area.

#### 3.1. Selection of Sample and Community Profile of the Respondents

The sample comprised of people from four Indian immigrant communities in Britain - Gujaratis, Punjabis, Tamils and Keralites. The principal basis of the selection of the sample was that they were representative of broadly both the northern and southern parts of India in geographical terms. Moreover, the majority of migrants from India continue to originate from Punjab and Gujarat and they are well-studied whereas, Keralites and Tamils are the least represented in academic researches.

**Table 1 Community Distribution of Respondents**

Community	No. of Respondents	Percentage
Gujarati	7	17.5
Punjabi	9	22.5
Tamil	10	25
Keralite	14	35
Total	40	100

The duration of stay in Britain varies between respondents and the study reveals a pattern of constant presence of a first generation of Indians in Britain at all phases of the migration stream which is evident from the still continuing arrival of primary immigrants from India, mostly young and skilled. Their experiences are more or less similar to that of the first generation post-colonial Indian immigrants of the 1950s and 1960s in terms of social interface with the host society and the cultural conflict they experience between both British and Indian cultures. Once in Britain, Indians are the largest community to apply for Permanent Residence (PR) and later Citizenship, despite the rule that they would lose their Indian citizenship. Out of the 40 respondents, 62.5 percent acquired British citizenship, 17.5 are PR now and waiting to apply for citizenship after the stipulated time and 20 percent are Indian citizens, all of whom are students. This trend among the

Indians is generally considered as an indicator of their better integration to the British civic life. However, it can also be interpreted as a practical strategy by most Indians for the sake of their job prospects, promotion and other living and travel benefits.

Similarly, the gender pattern of the study is illustrative to the fact that the current migration flow from India is more gender balanced; both male and female arrive as primary immigrants to work in the IT and health sector. Dependent migration is still a feature of Indian community; most Indian women with children follow their husbands to the UK; the decision to emigrate is usually made by the husband or elder male member of the family in that case. An exception to this trend is the migration of female nurses, especially from the Christian community of Kerala who emigrate either as single or as married women, and by and large their husbands follow them, a phenomenon derogatorily referred among the migration circles as 'saree visa', as informed by one of the respondents. The female respondents of this study are better positioned in the case of economic contribution, shopping, decision-making and life choices compared to the early women immigrants from India.

#### 3.2. Reasons for Emigration

Work, study and joining the family are cited as the most common purposes of arrival by the respondents. Inferences drawn from the study demonstrate that income differentials between India and Britain and the global monetary inequality are obviously a pull factor, though none of the respondents belongs to the lower class strata back in India. All of them, irrespective of the regional and community differences belong to the middle class families in India and for them, migration to Britain means enhancement of the financial position and income. Students consider their degree from the UK as most sought qualification and a guarantee for better-profile jobs in India. As Tremblay (2005: 197) puts it, "study abroad is part of a deliberate immigration strategy from the perspective of students as it offers them with opportunities of training in centres of excellence outside of their country". In the case of health sector professionals, both female and male, there may have a range of personal, career and financial reasons for migrating to the UK; the financial security and opportunities presented by working in the UK carried significant weight in their decision to migrate.

The professional composition of the sample varied from solicitors specialising in immigration law, nursing, taxi driving, travel agency to businessmen dealing in running corner shops, grocery shops, textile shops, hotel and take away etc. in the Eastham area as well as Indian association leaders, students and dependent Indian women. Since most of the Indian immigrants were migrated for economic reasons, if they did not get British jobs, they ventured into self-business/ethnic entrepreneurship. 37.5 percent of the respondents were self-employed, mainly in the business sector, which could be one reason why the unemployment rate is

comparatively less among Indians. The businesses that Indians engaged in were mainly wholesale and retail business, corner shops, Indian grocery shops, shops selling ethnic items etc. However, they wanted to see their children in high profile formal jobs rather than to inherit the retail business of the parents. Hence the parental generation gave high importance to their children's education as they thought that university education increases the potential opportunities that are accessible and emphasised education as a way to overcome societal racism. Newcomers from India since came as part of the skill-selective policies of Britain was professional-educated and comprised majorly of people from the skilled worker category. On being asked about their experiences at work the respondents mentioned the difference in the work culture of Britain and India. It was also observed that those who are in formal jobs did overtime and also worked on public holidays as the pay is double on holidays. Many both-parents-working migrants send back their children to India entrusting them with grandparents since they don't have much time to spend with the family.

### **3.3. Economic Position and Remittance Pattern**

As mentioned earlier, economic betterment and standard of living were the prime motive of migration among respondents along with other reasons. On being asked about their present economic position, all the respondents agreed that their material status and living standard had substantially improved after immigration. For all of them, material life in Britain was much more easier compared to India with all the life style facilities available; but emotionally, they were more connected to India than Britain. Hence they lived a modified Indian life with British standards. Their savings as immigrant workers provide a substantial financial security in their home back in India as most migrants send a part of their savings as remittances. Majority of the respondents, i.e. 65 percent, mostly families, had savings both in the UK and India. A critical minority, students and unmarried nurses, had savings only in India as they send back money to pay back the loans taken for their emigration. Western Union Money Transfer, Muthoot Money Transfer and banks (only to remit huge amounts) were cited as the most common modes of remittance. It is the parents or in-laws of the migrants or close relatives who utilised the remittance for family matters back home. The remittances that they sent home to their families constituted the most tangible material link between both and they would invest it for post-return building of house, for land and real estate, family business, gold, bank accounts and in mutual funds and shares and stocks. They also contributed to philanthropy and social services and also to the renovation of religious centres.

### **3.4. Family Status**

It can be deduced from study that most of the respondents, i.e. 70 percent, had nuclear families but they also

had extended families or friends in Britain whom they would visit as and when possible or on specific occasions. The average number of children in all the respondents' with families is two or three. One of the important reasons for having a small family is the practical difficulty of bringing up more children in Britain as both parents work and no extended family support available to them as is in India. Availing the service of a housemaid in Britain is a costly affair too.

All those interviewed, except newcomers and students, owned houses and cars bought within some years of their immigration. Students usually live in rented housing often shared with friends, also from India. No residential segregation was noticed among the respondents as against the popular academic studies and when asked about the preferences of the residential location they mentioned practical reasons like proximity to school or work place etc. The interiors of the houses owned by all the Indians visited were typically Indian-style with ethnic decorations and like. On being asked about the food preferences of the respondents, most of them said they preferred to cook Indian foods like roti, rice, dhal or sabzi etc. at home as it was more economical as well as satisfied their Indian taste buds. Availability of ethnic food items and provisions in British stores and the presence of Indian grocery shops everywhere made cooking of Indian food lot easier. However, their ways of lives and daily routines had substantially changed in accordance with British settings. Childrearing attitudes of Indian parents are observed typically Indian in pattern. Generational difference is evident in families investigated.

British-born generations of Indians are already exposed to the British way of life as they have native friends and affinity to it, though they are socialised into an Indian way of life at home. They, rather than experiencing the stress of 'caught between' two conflicting cultures and national identifications of parental generations, appear to have developed 'multiple cultural competencies' (Jackson and Nesbitt 1993: 175) which made Ballard calls them as 'skilled cultural navigators', enabling them to create new hybridized identity in hyphenated terms as British-Indian, British-Hindu or British-Muslim and to move with ease between home and school, east and west, and tradition and change (Ballard 1994: 31; Blackledge and Creese 2009: 457). They are frequently more successful than British students in school and universities as Indians tend to see the acquisition of academic learning and skills as an added advantage in the majority culture. The younger generation has have less reservations about breaking the boundaries of tradition as they do not believe in an idealised 'imagined home' in the same degree as the parental generation which was reflected in the change in the remittance practices, for instance. The impact of globalisation, with its increased ease of travel and communication influences their cultural and social lives, and hence there is a growing sense among the young of participating in a global youth culture and of having a



global identity rather than simply being individuals bound to their own or their ancestors' identity. Integration tendencies are more among the current generations for economic and material reasons; modes of behaviour are modified with relative ease to suit the particular context in Britain. Nevertheless, they had to follow at least a minimum of Indian ways out of parental and community pressures.

Present British born generation of Indians have good language fluency in English where as the first generation post-colonial migrants of the 1950s and 1960s and the dependents came in at all times have had language difficulty. Newcomers also have fair command over the English language as they are educated but with Indian accent and mostly came for skilled work and study. An interesting feature observed is that British-born Indians have a considerable proficiency in their ethnic language, be it Punjabi, Gujarati, Malayalam or Tamil. All of the respondents informed that they spoke their ethnic language at home and insisted that children should have at least fair knowledge of it. Ethnic language classes are arranged by respective Indian cultural associations which are mostly region-based and a fair command over the Indian language is acquired through Bollywood movies, parents' conversations and occasional visits to India.

### 3.5. Myth of Return

It is a feature of Indian immigrants elsewhere to hope to return to India after sometime, on acquiring enough savings. When asked *whether they would consider returning to India*, all the respondents replied that they cherished their times in India and still retained strong links with families and friends there, but going back to India for settling in the near future was not at all an option for them because of the obvious economic reasons in the first instance. Also, it was observed from their response that many found it difficult or imagined difficulties in coping with the situations in India upon return. Respondents who belonged to the second and subsequent generation mentioned that their elders/parents wait for a more appropriate time to return, though, in reality, it is more likely to be a myth in the end. Mothers worried about their children internalising British life styles and choices like dating and pubbing and aspire to go back to India. However, most people stay back against all odds to establish a stable financial position in the UK. 7.5 percent of the respondents, all nurses, were planning to eventually move to the USA, Canada or Australia for a number of reasons; again both professional and personal. Nostalgia regarding the home country is yet another feature of the Indian community in Britain, especially among the elder generations. Even the younger British-born generations consider going to India for vacation as some kind of adventure but for settling is unthinkable for them as they relate more with Britain than with their imagined homeland.

The availability of comparatively cheap tickets and the

ease of travel as a result of globalisation aid immigrants to travel to and fro often when necessary. Immigrants who are single visit India regularly for vacation but families return to India once in two/three years or so due to the expenses associated. Usually, they would arrange their trips around some family functions like marriages or some devotional or community activities in their hometowns and actively participate in it. Instead of visiting India, some would bring over parents and relatives from India to Britain as it is more economical for them. This would also raise the prestige of the family back home as well as cause them to be the envy of relatives based in India.

### 3.6. Kinship and Religious Practices

It can be understood from the study that community and kinship networking is the practice through which many of the newcomers secure job, manage their initial stay and other personal needs in the new unfamiliar environment. They have closely connected community and family ties in both Britain and India and occasionally visit friends' or families' houses or arrange get-togethers on events of importance in their life like birthdays, marriage, promotion in job or on auspicious days concerning their religion/caste. This suggests the fact that even though each migrant has his or her individual purpose and unique trajectory of migration, the commonalities of experience after their migration bind them. Community ties acts as a coping mechanism to escape from the loneliness most migrants experience in Britain and also to socialise children into Indian culture and ways of life. It was found that Indian parents generally preferred arranged marriages, though younger generation does not fancy for it much. Community-based marriage *mela* organised by religious, caste or cultural organisations were a feature of Indian community in Britain, where would-be brides and bride grooms met and marriages were fixed by the families. Family and community get-togethers and religious and cultural festivals are all potential sites for marriage fixing, as informed by one respondent. Once fixed, marriage ceremonies are arranged in more or less Indian ways and even relatives from India are invited to bless the couples.

On being questioned about the religious belief of the respondents, all of them irrespective of their religious affiliation expressed that they were believers and practiced religious observances and rituals, especially those associated with the auspicious days of respective religions like observing *vrat* on Navratri, *roza* (fasting during Ramadan) etc. They also conducted visits to nearby temples, gurudwaras, churches etc. as and when possible. Such visits are noticed most common among Punjabis, Gujaratis and Tamil Hindus whereas least among Kerala Hindus and Christians. They also agreed that their way of practicing religion had changed/been modified after coming to Britain because of having to adapt to a dissimilar cultural setting than India, the non-availability of many traditional and authentic items as well as their living circumstances. There is a

a generational difference in terms of beliefs as younger generation is interested more in the peripheral and colourful elements of the religion like celebrations and mythical stories. One respondent mentioned that the best way to manage children at home on vacations was to make them watch religious serials like *Kailasnath* or *Balganesh*.

It can be inferred from the study that discrimination based on caste is not absent, but it is present in subtle ways among Indians in Britain. All kinship networks among them were necessarily caste specific. It was also noted that among the communities studied, Punjabis and Gujaratis observe caste more rigidly than Tamils in Britain. Keralites are the ones who observe it least explicitly. Majority of the respondents agreed that caste practices were devotedly followed even in Britain, especially at the time of arranging marriage, a child is born or a new professional or business opportunity emerges. Most Gujarati and Punjabi organisations in Britain are either caste or religious based. Dalits in Britain - the Ravidassia, Valmiki, Ramdasis or Ambedkarite Buddhists – even though no longer pursue the culture-specific menial ('polluting') occupations traditionally associated with their caste status in the UK, the 'untouchability mindset' persists and they face direct and indirect caste discrimination like name calling or denying in temples run by high castes, reports the Dalit Solidarity Network (DSN 2006; DSN and IDSN 2011).

Another feature of the Indian community is the intra-ethnic cleavages they are involved, which is an extension of conflicts from their homeland occur along the lines of religion (Hindu vs. Muslims), caste (Jats vs. Ravidasis), language (Hindi vs. Others), region (North vs. South) and such other diverse internal identities. The study revealed that the pan-Indian identity and cohesiveness is invoked only when dealing with non-Indians otherwise religion, language and caste offer grounds for articulation of divisive identities and intra-ethnic conflicts. Each community is largely confined to itself and hence intermingling between them is less which results in the alienation of 'communities within communities'.

### **3.7. Indian Association and Political Activities**

Indians have maintained a strong sense of regional identity through various organisations, including cultural and religious ones, and celebrate Indian and regional festivals such as *Holi*, *Pongal*, *Navratri*, *Onam* etc. with much gaiety. 65 percent of the respondents informed that they were very active in Indian Association activities like Confederation of Gujarati Organisations, Andhra Association, Kerala House, Tamil Sangham, Bengali Association etc. Membership and participation in these associations were considered as status symbols to show off, both in Britain and back home. It can be interpreted as a psychological coping mechanism for status enhancement in British society where they were treated as second class citizens with no social acceptability. Active participation in these associations also soothes the

nostalgia of a once active social and cultural life in India and the continuation of such activities in their migrant lives offered many a sense of existence as well.

The Indian community has always been active on British political front. The presence of political elites like Dadabhai Naoroji, Gopal Krishna Gokhale and the like ensured Indian participation in British political processes from the early stages of Indian independent movement. Interestingly, the political participation among Indians is comparatively higher than native British. Currently, in politics Labour MP from Leicester East Keith Vaz, Baroness Sayeeda Warsi, Minister of State in the Foreign Office, Sadiq Khan, Shadow Justice Minister and Lord Navnit Dholakia, Deputy Leader of the Liberal Democrats in the House of Lords are influential. When asked about the political participation of the respondents, 64.5 percent stated that they followed political developments in both Britain and India. Those respondents who had voting rights said that they went for British local elections to vote and that the Indian association leaders were active in campaigning for the candidate they thought would do good for the community. Some mentioned the emerging trend of shifting faith from the Labour Party and also expressed their concerns about the extreme right wing factions advocating anti-immigrant stances. Their voting preferences were influenced as well by their affiliation with other ethnic associations, the views of Indian leaders, their village and kinship ties etc. Some of the respondents said that they did not follow the political developments in Britain much unless it was something related to immigration that affected their lives directly. The political and social participation of respondents from Kerala is much less when compared to Gujaratis or Punjabis. The reason could be that communities like Punjabis and Gujaratis are more influential socially and politically than other Indian communities in Britain because of their economic affluence as businessmen and professionals. They contribute hugely to party funds and this ensures their entry into politics, as evident from their greater representation in British local councils and Parliament. Those respondents who are students also seemed less interested in politics generally. Importantly, Indian political developments have had its impact on the political activities of Indians in the UK. There is also the recent phenomenon of the support provided by Indian immigrants to various community based political movements back at home, of Hindus, Sikhs and Muslims (Sen 2005: 301).

### **3.8. Experiences in Britain**

All respondents mentioned the cultural shock and social difference they experienced at the time of their arrival to Britain. Confusion regarding British rules and regulations, language problems, especially in understanding the British accent, the anxiety and uncertainty about the future, homesickness etc. were commonly quoted by all. They regarded their life and work in a culture other than their own as a challenging one. The chal

allenges of living between two cultures and countries are most common among the narratives of the parental/older generation of immigrants. It can be also assumed that Indians in the UK are quite dissatisfied with the tax system in the UK as they have to pay a huge amount as tax. They consider it a waste and a hole in their investment plans for their future in their home country.

However, it is surprising to note that on being asked whether they experienced any instances of racial discrimination, 72.5 percent of respondents in the sample expressed that they never faced any sort of racism in British society. Out of this, especially those engaged in business (32.5 percent) were very much vocal about the rule-abiding nature of the British, their professionalism, cleanliness, attitude to life and the infrastructural facilities in Britain like roads etc. This came as a surprise, as their narration contradicted the usual branding of the UK as a racist country in most academic literatures and media. However, what could be inferred from the analysis is that the fear of an imminent future racial abuse/attack always exists deep inside their mind, a fear often shaped by the popular discourses on racism in media. The solicitors observed that incidents of racism is less in the post-2000 era though the 7/7 incident perpetuated much hostility towards Muslims. That, however, is now a fading tendency. To them, immigration laws were especially restrictive along racial lines and there existed institutional and policy level racism in Britain. It may be in such a way that Indians were treated *differently* as people of colour, especially at times of promotion or other junctures in career, for instance. However, they saw day-to-day life as devoid of racism.

**Table 2 Experiences of Racism in Britain**

Experience of Racism	No. of Respondents	Percentage
Direct	0	0
Indirect	11	27.5
Not At All	29	72.5
Total	40	100

Yet another striking feature noticed during the field work is the harmonious coexistence among South Asians, especially between Indians, Pakistanis and Bangladeshis despite the presence of numerous political issues between these countries.

### 3.9. Role of the Indian High Commission

On being questioned about *how helpful the Indian High Commission (IHC) is in resolving Indian immigrants' grievances*, 85 percent of the respondents stated that IHC was not at all helpful in solving their problems in the UK. Many of them were cynical about the IHC as a

responsible agency and they mentioned that they rarely went to the Commission for assistance. Instead they relied on community associations for getting their grievances resolved. To them, IHC officials could not relate to the real issues of Indians in the UK and hence did not represent all Indians there. It can be presumed that Indian cultural diplomacy is a top-level affair in Britain as elsewhere with very less participation of the common immigrants. Even the Nehru Centre, the cultural wing of the IHC, is an elite establishment and many common Indian immigrants are not even aware of its existence. Likewise, not all Indians in Britain are aware about MOIA schemes; almost 76 percent of the respondents are completely ignorant about the policies of the Indian government and the schemes for emigrants' welfare. Those who know about such schemes are Indian businessmen in Britain.

**Table 3 Assistance from the Indian High Commission**

Assistance from IHC	No. of Respondents	Percentage
Very Much	0	0
Fairly	6	15
Not At All	34	85
Total	40	100

## 4. CONCLUSION

Britain's Indian diaspora is the result of the legacy of its colonial past with their lives shaped by the political, economic and social forces of colonialism, Indian nationalism and their exposure to British culture and day-to-day experiences with regard to the perceived racial alienations. Indian immigrants in Britain are internally diverse in a multitude of ways possessing often contradictory identities, as being immigrants directly from India or from East Africa, British-Indian (British-born-Indian-origin), non-White, Hindu/Muslim/Sikh, female etc. The timing, nature and reasons for migration have varied – migration during the 1950s and 1960s was of unskilled/semi-skilled Indians from rural background largely for economic reasons, while that from East Africa in the 1970s was majorly of the business/entrepreneurial class largely for political reasons and the post 1990s arrivals was mainly of skilled migrants responding to the globalisation of the economy and labour and an affinity towards transnational lifestyles. Yet the Indian community shares a fairly cohesive culture and identity, with distinctive socio-economic characteristics (Ram 1989).

Conclusions drawn from the field research reveal the various aspects of diasporic life of Indians in Britain. This study particularly infers that identity of Indian immigrants in Britain is unique, complex and fluid as it functionally enables them to connect with both Britain and India. One of the difficulties respondents faced was how to articulate their identity as immigrants.

When asked about how they identify themselves, all of them upheld their identity as 'Indians living in Britain'. They stated with much bewilderment that they cared for this country as it is their home now and that Britain was far better to live in than India. However, it can be inferred that India, being their imagined home, is where they emotionally belong. They did not find much conflict between the identities in their public and professional life, but when it comes to private family life they preferred to uphold their Indian identity and it was Indian culture that they are keen to transfer to their children. They make negotiations with the British system for reasons more material and practical. Their relation with India is one of emotional attachment whereas, with Britain, it is more business-like. One reason why they always maintain their Indianness could be out of the realisation that British society would never treat them as equal but as second class citizens of colour and a divergent ethnicity and culture.

Modern Indians see themselves as global citizens and they aspire to make use of the 'best of both worlds'. This study asserts the fact that while Indians could never give up India, and that, Indian immigrants mostly see no contradiction between being loyal citizens of the country in which they are settled and socially and politically integrated, and still retaining a sense of affiliation and companionship with India and Indians (Sen 2005: 73). They are keen on taking pride in the culture and traditions of their homeland which is evident in the increasing tendency of celebrating Indian festivals in Britain. Transnational living is easier now than it used to be because of the forces of globalisation providing enhanced travel facilities with reasonable fares, internet and mobile facilities and money transfer mechanisms. All these offer greater opportunities to connect with India. Cultural exchanges between both countries are rampant through electronic media and hence in this era of globalisation it is easy for them to live their Indian lives in 'multicultural' Britain.

### End Notes

1. Eastham is a province in East London, which has a large Indian community, especially South Indians and Gujaratis. It is an Asian shopping hub where all the shops are owned or run by Asians. The area is unbelievably Indian in appearances with all the shops' boards in Indian languages, familiar Indian smells, streets crowded with people with Indian looks and dressing styles and the presence of three temples – one of Goddess Mahalakshmi, another of Sai Baba and a third of Lord Muruka largely worshipped by Tamilians.

The Boleyn Cinema in the Barking Road Eastham, which claims to be the second largest Bollywood screen in the UK, shows Hindi, Malayalam, Telugu, Tamil and Punjabi movies regularly. The area is also a residential hub of Indians, Pakistanis, Bangladeshis, and most noticeably, Sri Lankan Tamils. Considering all this, Eastham became an obvious choice for conducting this field survey.

2. In the wake of strong pressures, Britain's traditional open-door policy on immigration was significantly amended. The Commonwealth Immigration Act, 1962 for the first time initiated restrictions on the Commonwealth citizens' right to enter and abode.
3. With the independence of East African countries policies of Africanisation were implemented by the native governments forced the Asians settled there as part of colonial indentured labour system to vacate the country. Most of them were British passport holders and pressure was mounted upon the Britain to protect its earlier imperial subjects. When the Kenyan Crisis broke out in 1968 it was decided that, after the passage of a stipulated time period, the Asians in these former British territories would be allowed to choose between citizenship of the new African states they were resident in, or of Britain. A large number of the Asians involved began to make a choice in favour of movement to Britain due to the harsh attitude of African governments and natives (Gish 1968: 32). The exodus of people of Indian sub-continental origin from Uganda which happened in 1972 had followed the same pattern as the movement from Kenya. As the crisis deepened, around 29,000 Ugandan Asians arrived in Britain, the majority of whom were people who held British passports issued by the colonial government of Uganda (Spencer 1997: 145).
4. The Anglo-Indian community is one of many Indian cultural communities characterised by a shared religion of Christianity, English language, and historical origin of their mixed Indian and British ancestry. Until the end of the eighteenth century intermarriage by the British with Indians was common, though declined in the later centuries. Legally, any Indian with European lineage on the male side is an Anglo-Indian. They were generally viewed with social resentment as inferior humans by British and Indians alike. Indian Independence and the departure of the British further jeopardized their situation. They were faced with the difficult choice of either leaving together with the British, or staying on and many chose to leave; those who remain exist as a marginalized community in India (Coelho 1997: 564-566).
5. NRI and PIO are the official terms used by the

- GoI, distinguishing those living abroad who maintain their Indian citizenship (NRIs) from others of Indian origin who have taken up their host country citizenship (PIOs). In common parlance, the term NRI is interchangeably used for both.
6. Field research was started with questionnaire method but it was soon realised that most respondents were not adequately interested in reading the questions properly. Instead, they would just randomly tick a YES or NO. The spaces provided to elaborate their comments/experiences were unattended; students and solicitors were exceptions. An interesting fact noted was the reluctance of many to mention their name, address, caste and immigration status even though they were legal migrants, most with PR status. Hence, informal conversations with questionnaire proved as a better method, still with difficulties. The unstructured, individual in-depth interview format enabled them to talk freely about their lives before and after migration and the challenges of living and working in England. Initially they did not open up much but a rapport was made with them after sometime.
  7. Though the initial intention was to study five Indian communities – Punjabis, Gujaratis, Bengalis, Keralites and Tamils – the researcher could concentrate on only four, Punjabis, Gujaratis, Keralites and Tamils. Among them, because of the researcher's own identity as a Keralite, from the southernmost state of India, the Keralite community offered an obvious comparative advantage over others. The researcher's fair command over the Tamil language and the regional affinity of Kerala to the neighbouring state of Tamilnadu worked out with Tamils. In the context of present study, the experiences and multiple identities of the researcher as a Keralite, a South Indian, an internal student immigrant to a North Indian state Delhi, a female and a first time researcher and a short term student visitor to Britain is crucial in her understandings of the Indian communities in Britain. Because of only a minimal knowledge about the Punjabi and Gujarati communities, it was difficult for the researcher to comprehend fully their experiences as cultural communities in Britain. This aspect demonstrates the significance of the identity of any researcher in social researches and also questions the practicality of value neutrality argument of any social science research. This study is premised on the theoretical framework of social constructivism. As Maso (2003) stated, the social constructionist approach sees the researcher not as a discoverer but part of the process of the creation of knowledge (Paiva 2008: 202). This study, however, strives for maximum value neutrality and is hence objective in its interpretations and findings.
  8. PR is given after five years of residence in the UK and then after another one year of residence in the country citizenship is granted on application.
  9. The dominance of nurses from Kerala in the migration channel has social, economic and historic roots and it is traditionally perceived in India as the most appropriate job for women just like teaching. Keralite nurses were predominantly females and Christians and now the trend is changing as more males and Hindus are joining the profession because of its economic value overseas.
  10. Once in the UK, husbands have to wait for sometimes to find an appropriate job and till then they babysit and do such other household chores that they don't even imagine doing in 'patriarchal' India. In the wake of losing their dominant personal position, they became very active in many community activities and Indian associations as a strategy to pass time and enhance their social status.
  11. Some came for study or visit and overstay after their visa expired, with the intention of making a better living by finding a job and thus becoming legal. But that period is often traumatic for illegal Indian immigrants though people from their community often accommodate them by providing stay, finding them some temporary arrangements for job in their own grocery shops etc. Many of the Eastham Indian shops have illegal immigrant Indians working in them. The salary is paid as 'cash-in-hand'. They, meanwhile, would consult Indian solicitors for turning their illegal status to legal. The researcher met one such illegal Indian, who was a student earlier, working as an office assistant in a prominent Indian association. Finding that I was a researcher, he was reluctant to talk anything about his migration status.
  12. Though the legal and institutional framework was characterised by an efficient racial equality and anti-discrimination legislation and a strong tradition of civil rights emphasised by human rights legislations, caste discriminations was not addressed in British laws till 2010. The Equality Act 2010 included 'caste' as an aspect of race in the definition of 'Race' and made caste discrimination illegal in the UK.
  13. DiCicco-Bloom, for instance, states that Indians are socially constructed as people of colour, and they are vulnerable to ethnic discrimination (DiCicco-Bloom 2004: 27). A Zee News (2010) report of a study claims that forty-five percent of the victims of racial attacks in Britain are Indians and such violence is spreading in the country due to the government's approach towards racism. An important point to note here is that the respondents who run their own business tend to

have greater control of their work environment and can avoid discrimination in the mainstream British labour market, as argued by Rahsaan Maxwell (2012). Yet another possibility could be that most of the respondents were largely concentrated in a predominantly Asian area of Eastham; hence their social interaction with the native Britons is minimal for any unpleasant interaction.

14. Many a time during conducting field interviews the researcher started interviewing someone from Pakistan or Bangladesh mistakenly thinking that they were Indians. And such occasions they helped the researcher to get out of her embarrassment saying that, in Britain, they were all the same. Both Pakistanis and Bangladeshis said there was no enmity between them in Britain because of the commonality of migration experiences.

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