

Non-resident Indian and Persons of Indian Origin

A non-resident Indian (NRI) is an Indian citizen who has migrated to another country. Other terms with the same meaning are (somewhat self-deprecating in context) desis, overseas Indian and expatriate Indian. For tax and other official purpose the government of India considers any Indian national away from India for more than 180 days in a year an NRI. In common usage, this often includes Indian born individuals who have taken the citizenship of other countries.

A Person of Indian Origin (PIO) is literally, simply a person of Indian origin who is not a citizen of India. For the purposes of issuing a PIO Card, the Indian government considers anyone of Indian origins up to four generations removed, to be a PIO [1]. There is a huge NRI and PIO population across the world, estimated at around 25 million.

Moving on out

The most significant historical emigration from India was that of the Roma. Around the 10th century A.D, Muslim invaders tore through what is modern-day Afghanistan, destroying ancient Hindu and Buddhist communities. The Hindu Kush is where thousands of Indians were slaughtered wholesale. The remnants of the Indian community left to Europe, where they were ridiculed and persecuted as the Gypsies, (based on an account of their origins lying in Egypt). They adopted local religions such as Christianity and Islam, but combined some of their Hindu practices with the new faiths. It is possible that the Gypsy Christian saint Black Sarah may have been a Christianization of the Hindu goddess Kali. They also speak a distinct Indo-Aryan language of their own, Romany. Another major emigration from the subcontinent was to South East Asia. It started as a military expedition by Hindu, and later Buddhist, kings of South India and resulted in the settlers' merging with the local society. The influence of Indian culture is still strongly felt in South East Asia, especially in places like Bali (in Indonesia). However, in such cases, it is not reasonable to apply the label 'PIO' to the descendants of emigrants from several centuries back, especially since intermixture is so great as to negate the value of such nomenclature in this context.

During the nineteenth century and until the end of the Raj, much of the migration that happened was of a forced nature - export of (thinly disguised) slave labor to other colonies under the indenture system. The major destinations, in chronological order, were Mauritius, British Guyana, the West Indies (Trinidad and Jamaica), Fiji and East Africa. There was also a small amount of free emigration of skilled laborers and professionals to some of these countries in the twentieth century. The event that triggered this diaspora was the Slavery Abolition Act passed by the British Parliament on August 1, 1834, which freed the slave labour force throughout the British colonies. This left many of the plantations devoid of adequate work force as the newly freed slaves left to take advantage of their

newly found freedom. This resulted in an extreme shortage of labour throughout many of the British colonies which was resolved by massive importation of workers engaged under contracts of indentured servitude.

An unrelated system involved recruitment of workers for the tea plantations of the neighboring British colonies of Sri Lanka and Burma and the rubber plantations of British Malaya (now Malaysia and Singapore).

During the Partition of India, there was a great deal of migration between India and Pakistan, primarily of Muslims relocating to West Pakistan and Hindus and Sikhs relocating to India. A similar migration took place on the East side of India in the Bengal region between East Pakistan (since 1971 the nation of Bangladesh) and the Indian state of West Bengal. In total, about 7 million Muslims shifted to Pakistan, 10 million Hindus and Sikhs went to India, and anywhere from 500,000 to 1 million people died in riots and religious strife. Government policy, especially in lieu of India's reaching out to expatriates for investment (and extending, in some cases, offers of dual-citizenship), has refused to recognize Pakistanis and Bangladeshis as, officially, Persons of Indian Origin. This interesting situation is not, of course, a denial of recent history, but a result of the divisive nationalism that exists between India and Pakistan and, to a lesser extent, Bangladesh.

After independence in 1947, the pattern of emigration naturally changed. At first Indians sought better fortune mainly in the United Kingdom, but later North America, especially the USA (with 1.7 million Indians in total), became the favored destination after change in Indian emigration law that made this possible. Some displaced PIOs in Africa (especially under Idi Amin in Uganda) and the Caribbean also reached the UK. Smaller numbers of Indians have also emigrated to the English-speaking countries like Australia and New Zealand.

After the 1970s oil boom in the Middle East, a large number of Indians emigrated to the Gulf countries. However, this was on a contractual basis rather than permanent as in the other cases.

PIOs today

Indians in the US

Indians in the USA are one of the largest among the groups of Indian diaspora, numbering about 1.7 million, and probably the most well off - their median income is 1.5 times that of the host country. They are well represented in all walks of life, but particularly so in academia, information technology and medicine. There were over 4,000 PIO professors and 33,000 Indian-born students in American universities in 1997-98. The American Association of the Physicians of Indian Origin boasts a

membership of 35,000. In 2000, Fortune magazine estimated the wealth generated by Indian Silicon Valley entrepreneurs at around \$250 billion.

There appear to be class differences within the Indian American community, with earlier professional immigrants looking down upon working-class communities who are later first generation immigrants. Gujarati shopkeepers and Punjabi cab drivers are common stereotypes of the latter community. Most older generation Andhra and Tamilians are doctors or people who came to do their masters and settled down. While a significant proportion of the current-generation Andhra and Tamilians are doctors, the vast majority are involved in the IT industry in one way or the other.

Americans of Indian descent have, in the past, been targets of racism by members of all ethnic groups--though it has dissipated substantially. Some of it is overt, perhaps the worst example being the New Jersey dot busters - groups of thugs who sought ethnic Indians and mugged them or attacked their property in the late 80s and early 90s, the "dot" referring to the bindi worn traditionally by Hindu women on their forehead. These attacks were racially motivated, and alienated the Indian population from the American mainstream. This lack of assimilation has created many problems for both ethnic Indians as well as non Indians.

Another peculiarity are most children of these immigrants - also called as "ABCD" - American Born Confused Desi. This term (usually used as something of an insult) reflects the fact that these first generation Americans find themselves stuck between traditional parents and upbringing at home and the more liberal and open community outside. This "in-between-ness" can leave them with uncertainty about their own role in society - neither Indian nor American.

Statistics on Indians in the US

In the year 2002, of the entire total 1,063,732 immigrants to USA from all the countries, as many as 66,864 were from India. According to the US census, the overall growth rate for Indians from 1990 to 2000 was 105.87 per cent. The average growth rate for the whole of USA was only 7.6 per cent.

Indians comprise 16.4 per cent of the Asian-American community. They are the third largest in the Asian American population. In 2000, of all the foreign born population in USA, Indians were 1.007 million. Their percentage was 3.5 per cent. From 2000 onwards the growth rate and the per cent rate of Indians amongst all the immigrants has increased by over 100 times.

Between 1990 and 2000, the Indian population in the US grew 113% - 10 times the national average of 13%. Source: US Census Bureau

Today, Asian Indians are the second largest Asian group (2,226,585) in the US, behind only the Chinese (2,762,524). Source: 2003 American Community Survey

Indians own 50% of all economy lodges and 35% of all hotels in the US, which have a combined market value of almost \$40 billion. Source: Little India Magazine. One in every nine Indians in the US is a millionaire, comprising 10% of US millionaires. Source: 2003 Merrill Lynch SA Market Study. A University of California, Berkeley, study reported that one-third of the engineers in Silicon Valley are of Indian descent, while 7% of valley hi-tech firms are led by Indian CEOs. Source: Silicon India Readership Survey

Indians have the highest educational qualifications of all ethnic groups in the US. Almost 67% of all Indians have a bachelor's or high degree (compared to 28% nationally). Almost 40% of all Indians have a master's, doctorate or other professional degree, which is five times the national average. Source: The Indian American Centre for Political Awareness.

Indians in the UK

Bollywood movies are released commercially in the United Kingdom. The Indian emigrant community in the United Kingdom is now in its third generation. As an immigrant group, people of Indian origin have been remarkably successful.

A remarkable collection of the oral history of the British NRIs is available on Britain's leading NRI website History Talking.com. It's a web radio where you can listen to some of the leading NRIs living in the UK.

Stereotypes about Indians have now moved from their being bus-conductors, waiters, and small shopkeepers to their being doctors, lawyers, accountants and successful businesspeople. Increasingly, the second and third generation of Indians has started inter-marrying with the rest of the population, to the point where this has in itself become a stereotype.

In a few local areas, ethnic tension has resulted in ill-feeling and racist violence against immigrants, and groups such as the British National Party have exploited this. However, in general, racism towards people of Indian origin has greatly reduced from the early days of mass immigration after Partition and the expulsion of the Ugandan Indians. Indian culture has been constantly referenced within wider British culture, at first as an "exotic" influence in films like *My Beautiful Laundrette*, but now increasingly as a familiar feature in films like *Bend It Like Beckham*. Indian food is now regarded as part of the British cuisine.

According to the April 2001 UK National Census [2], 4.37% of the population of England and Wales identified themselves as "Asian" or "Asian British", and 0.36% as "Mixed: White and Asian", making a total of 4.73% of the population, or 2.46 million people, identifying themselves as of "Asian" descent. (Note: in the UK context, "Asian" means Indian, Pakistani and Bangladeshi).

Indians in Malaysia

Most Indians migrated to Malaysia as plantation laborers under British rule. They are a significant minority ethnic group, making up 7% of the Malaysian population. Most of these are Tamil but some Malayalam- and Telugu- speaking people are also present. They have retained their languages and religion -- 80% of ethnic Indians in Malaysia identify as Hindus. Hinduism in Malaysia diverges from mainstream (post-Vedantic) Hinduism: its main feature is Mother-goddess (Amman) worship; caste deities, tantric rituals, folk beliefs, non-Agamic temples, and animal sacrifice are its other characteristics. Deepavali and Thaipusam are the main festivals. However, there is an increase in agamic worship in Malaysia, due to the efforts of the Malaysian Hindu Sangam and several notable Hindu leaders such as Subhramanya Swami of Hinduism Today.

There is also a small community of Indian origin, the Chitty, who are the descendants of Tamil traders who had emigrated before 1500 AD, and Chinese and Malay women. Considering themselves Tamil, speaking Malay, and practicing Hinduism, they number about 2,000 today.

Indians in the Middle East

There is a huge population of Indians in the Middle East, especially in the oil rich monarchies neighboring the Persian Gulf. Most moved to the Gulf after the oil boom to work as labourers and for clerical jobs. However, a significant minority are either employed in the highest echelons of major banks and corporations or have prospered greatly through conducting business in the region. Indians in the Gulf do not normally become citizens however. They retain their Indian passports since most of the countries in the Gulf do not provide citizenship or permanent residency. However, the United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia now allow limited forms of naturalization to persons who have stayed in the country for twenty years. One of the major reasons Indians still like to work in the Gulf is because of the tax-free income it provides and its proximity to India.

Indians in South Africa

Most Asians in South Africa are descended from indentured Indian labourers who were brought by the British from India in the 19th century, mostly to work in what is now the province of KwaZulu-Natal (KZN). The rest are descended from Indian traders who migrated to South Africa at around the same

time, many from the Gujarat area. The city of Durban, has the largest Asian population in sub-Saharan Africa, and the Indian independence leader Mahatma Gandhi worked as a lawyer in the city in the early 1900s.

Indians in Canada

According to Statistics Canada, in 2001 there were 713, 330 people who classified themselves as being of Indian origin. The term “East Indian” or Indo-Canadian is most commonly associated with people of Indian origin, since the term Indian in Canada has commonly been used to refer to the Aboriginal Canadians and still continues to be used to describe them, causing much confusion. In addition, the term Indian is also occasionally applied to people from the Caribbean (West Indians). Out of this population, 42% are Hindu, 39% are Sikh, and the remainder are Muslim, Christian, Jain, Buddhist, or no religious affiliation. The main Indian ethnic communities are Punjabis (which account for more than half of population) as well Gujratis, Tamils, Keralites, Bengalis, Sindhis and others.

The first Indians began moving to Canada in small numbers to British Columbia, and were mainly male Sikh Punjabis who were seeking work opportunities abroad. These first immigrants faced widespread racism by the local white Canadians. There were race riots that targeted these immigrants, as well as new Chinese immigrants as well. Most decided to return back to India, while a few stayed behind. The Canadian government prevented these men from bringing their wives and children until 1919, which was the main reason why they decided to leave. Quotas were established to prevent many Indians from moving to Canada in the early 20th century. These quotas allowed less than 100 people from India a year until 1957, when it was increased to 300 people a year. In 1967, all quotas were scrapped in Canada, and immigration was based on a point system, thus allowing many more Indians to immigrate in large numbers. Since this open door policy was adopted, Indians continue to come in large numbers, and roughly 25 000- 30 000 arrive each year (which is now the second highest group immigrating to Canada each year, behind Chinese immigrants who are the highest group).

Most Indians choose to immigrate to larger urban centers like Toronto and Vancouver, where more than 70% live. Smaller communities are also growing in Calgary, Montreal, Edmonton and Winnipeg. Indians in Toronto are from diverse locations in India, such as Punjab, Gujarat, Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh and Kerala. Brampton, a suburb of Toronto has many Indian residents, and the town of Springdale in Brampton is commonly referred to as “Singhdale” because of the many Sikhs that live there. Indians in Vancouver mainly live in the suburb of Surrey, but can also be found throughout Vancouver. The vast majority of Vancouver Indians are of Sikh Punjabi origin.

Major Indian Populations Outside Indian Community (1985-2000)

Country	Total Indian population in 2000	Percentage of total national population in 2000
Arabia	1 400 000	61
East African Community	380 000	1
England	2 850 000	7
Fiji	470 000	63
Kwazulu	850 000	19
Mauritius	700 000	52
Réunion	240 000	47
Surinam	950 000	58
Trinidad	270 000	43
Rest of European Confederation	3 450 000	0.5

The Indian diaspora today constitutes an important, and in some respects unique, force in world culture. The origins of the modern Indian diaspora lie mainly in the subjugation of India by the British and its incorporation into the British empire. Indians were taken over as indentured labor to far-flung parts of the empire in the nineteenth-century, a circumstance to which the modern Indian populations of Fiji, Mauritius, Guyana, Trinidad, Surinam, Malaysia, South Africa, Sri Lanka, and other places attest in their own peculiar ways. Over two million Indian men fought on behalf of the empire in numerous wars, including the Boer War and the two World Wars, and some remained behind to claim the land on which they had fought as their own. As if in emulation of their ancestors, many Gujarati traders once again left for East Africa in large numbers in the early part of the twentieth century. Finally, in the post-World War II period, the dispersal of Indian labor and professionals has been a nearly world-wide phenomenon. Indians, and other South Asians, provided the labor that helped in the reconstruction of war-torn Europe, particularly the United Kingdom and the Netherlands, and in more recent years unskilled labor from South Asia has been the main force in the

transformation of the physical landscape of much of the Middle East. Meanwhile, in countries such as the United States, Canada, and Australia, Indians have made their presence visibly felt in the professions.

Who and what is an Indian? How we are to characterize the Indian diasporic community as 'Indian' given that it is constituted of such diverse elements as South Asian Hong Kong Muslims, Canadian Sikhs (or shall we say Sikh Canadians?), Punjabi Mexican Californians, Gujarati East Africans now settled in the U.S. by way of England, South African Hindus, and so forth? In the United States, at least, the Indian community has occupied a place of considerable privilege, and many Indians could deflect the moment of recognition that 'Indianness' and being 'American' do not always happily coincide. In recent years, with a declining economy on the one hand, and the congregation of Indians in clusters that visibly put them apart on the other hand, Indians have for the first time become the targets of racial attacks. The Indian woman in her 'native dress', with the vermillion dot on her forehead, is easily seen as an embodiment of sheer otherness, and so she has been perceived by the so-called "dot-busters", a gang of white teenagers operating in New Jersey who have already been responsible for several violent crimes against Indians.

In North America and the U.K., the native Indian costume has come up for public scrutiny and discussion in an altogether different respect: Sikhs have insisted that they be exempt from the law that compels bicyclists and motorcyclists to wear helmets, for such helmets cannot be worn over turbans, and their religious faith requires Sikhs to wear turbans. The kirpan has been an issue of contention in California schools. The 'corner shop', a hallowed symbol (if we could recall our Dickens) of English life, is now mainly in the hands of Indians. The obvious question is not only, 'What do the English think of that', but also: 'If the English landscape has been so altered, what is English about England'? The diaspora, in short, affects the center as well.

However unlike Indian communities across the world might be, they all maintain some sort of tenuous link with the motherland. The most likely candidate for a force of bonding would be, of all things, the Hindi feature film, a phenomenon unique to the Indian diaspora: what Hollywood is to Western Europe, the Bombay Hollywood ("Bollywood") is to the Middle East and East Africa.

The modesty, not to mention puritanism, of the the Hindi film is said to explain its appeal to the Islamic world; and though we may well contest that interpretation, it is worthy of note that Hindi films found in grocery and video stores across the U.S. often carry subtitles in Arabic, one language which is indubitably not spoken by any Indian community in the U.S.! The Indian 'arranged marriage' might furnish another such facet of a 'common culture'. Newspapers published by Indian communities flourish everywhere, and they invariably carry a section with matrimonial ads. Though these very ads help Indians to 'locate' one another, they pose difficult questions about 'otherness', both the otherness' of Indians in relation to 'Americans', and the internal 'otherness' of certain Indians in relation to other Indians.

The religious practices of Hindus, Sikhs, and Muslims in the U.S. and other overseas communities might be assisting in transforming the nature of religious faiths in India itself. Hindus all over the world are showing alarming signs of susceptibility to a resurgent and militant Hinduism; indeed, it is even arguable that they seem to know the meaning of Hinduism better than do Hindus in the 'motherland'. Why do overseas Hindus, particularly in the North American diaspora, appear always to out-Hindu the Hindu? In thinking of the Indian diaspora, other questions that come to the fore include: relations between parents and children; race relations between Indians, blacks, and whites; the place of Indian food and music in the preservation of Indian communities; the responsibility, if any, of the Indian Government to overseas Indians; and the future prospects of the Indian community in the U.S.