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Re-reading the Banyan Tree Analogy: The Everyday Life of Indian Diaspora in Europe

Abstract

Indian diaspora figures the largest diaspora in the world with more than 16 million people of which a significant number is in Europe. What make their story unique from other immigrant communities are the distinct socio-cultural and ethnic practices they follow in their destination country which in itself is a kaleidoscopic representation of the culture and diversity of their home country, India. Indian population residing outside India stands out not only for their professional and economic accomplishments but also for their cultural bonding with India. However, retaining their *Indianness* in a foreign country involves skilful and often difficult negotiation of the contested social spaces of identity. Purpose of the present paper is to offer an in depth analysis of the diasporic life, dilemmas and practices of Indians in Europe, by taking the specific case study of Indian community in Britain for initiating a comparative study in this regard in the future. It is also the interest of this paper to problematize the processes of formation/construction, negotiation and manipulation of identity of immigrant communities particularly Indian diaspora using the social constructivist premise of ‘identities inform interests and in turn actions’. The paper argues that the livelihood strategies employed by the immigrants are a coping mechanism to the socio-cultural implications of uprooted from their native roots as a result of the process of migration as well as to deal with the issues of native hostility and larger integration efforts to the host society.

Keywords: Indian Diaspora, Europe, Britain, Identity, Integration

Introduction

“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 birthplace...India can live and grow by spreading abroad - not the political India, but the ideal India,” said Rabindranath Tagore, a great Indian poet (Tinker 1977: iii). This ‘ideal India’ or ‘the imagined community’ as Benedict Anderson (1983) puts it, is the realm of Indian diaspora that has spread far and wide all over the world. It would be difficult, if not impossible, to find a country with no Indians working or settled. The habit of Indians travelling to far off lands goes beyond the recorded history; however, the routes of current Indian diaspora can be traced back to the colonial times when India was under the rule of European powers, initially through trade and then conquest. Since seventeenth century, European imperialism took peoples of Indian origin to all over the Europe as well as the European colonies in Africa, Latin America and Asia-Pacific mostly as indentured labour. From these colonies they later migrated to European countries, a process commonly referred as ‘twice migration’ (Bhachu 1985), following the decolonisation and the establishment of aggressive nationalistic regimes there. Yet another significant movement of Indians to Europe was in response to the labour demand for post-war European reconstruction and also after the Indian independence and partition in 1947. A smaller amount of political asylum also marked the migration of Indians to Europe, the political disturbances in Punjab in the 1980s for instance. Currently, around 1.2 million Indians live in Europe.

Of all the Indian diaspora in Europe, two-thirds of them are found in the United Kingdom (the UK), this being the rationale of selecting Britain as the case study for this research. Britain has the largest number of Indian immigrants in the whole of Europe and second largest in the western world, next to the United States. They are widely dispersed throughout Britain contrary to the segregation of other South Asians and the reasons of migration, socio-economic background back in India, experiences and interactions with host society and such other factors defined their everyday life and social, economic and political practices in Britain. This paper is an attempt to outline the peculiarities of Indian diasporic life in Britain as well as their cultural bonding with India so as to understand the complexities of the social process of migration in general and the forging of identities, in this case British-Indian, in particular.

History of Indian Immigrants in Britain: 1600 to Present Day

The history of Indian immigration to Britain dates back to the seventeenth century and was mainly the result of the long established colonial connections between both the countries. Indian seamen/*lascars*, servants and ayahs were brought to Britain by their colonial masters – *sahibs* and *memsahibs* and some of them settled permanently comprising the first generation of Indians in Britain. Several others migrated at that time in the capacity of *munshi*/teachers, students, diplomats, barristers, doctors, literary figures, entertainers, businessmen, merchants, traders as well as Maharajas (the Gaekwar of Baroda, the Maharajas of Cooch Bihar, Gwalior and Bikaner, the Thakurs of Morvi and Gondal, the Rao of Cutch etc.) and members of the nobility (Duleep Singh and his wife Bamba, Princess Gouramma, Nawab Nazim of Bengal etc.) and nationalists (like Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Dwarkanath Tagore, Dadabhai Naoroji, Keshub Chunder Sen, Sisipada Banerjee, to name a few). 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. During the world war period, Indians showed their presence as soldiers who mainly belongs to the communities of Gurkhas, Dogras, Pathans, Garhwalis and Sikh Jats and as labourers to fill the vacancies of British men who had gone to war. Throughout this initial phase, their numbers remained insignificant and the nature of migration was largely temporary. Early Indian migrants to Britain were not exclusively males as ayahs and female students ensured the gender parity. They all experienced racial prejudice, indifference or at times grudging acceptance in the British society which has its roots in the treatment accorded to the later arrivals (Visram 1986: 70-75).

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 (Malik 1994: 36). In the immediate post war period, a number of Indian ex-servicemen decided to stay back in Britain. Anglo-Indians (born out of intermarriage by the British with Indians) came to Britain in the late 40s and 50s, taking advantage of the British Nationality Act of 1948. In the 1960s, families began to arrive in large numbers from former imperial territories, taking advantage of the citizenship rights they had. For instance, Indo-Caribbean were the descendants of Indian

colonial indentured labour migrants went to the Caribbean - Trinidad, Guyana and Surinam - during late 1980s and early 1900s; they came to fill the labour shortage in British post war economy (Ramnarine 1996: 147). The real increase in the number of people of Indian origin started with the arrival of ethnic East African Indian families fled from the regimes of Jomo Kenyatta in Kenya, Idi Amin in Uganda and Julius Nyerere in Tanzania during the late 1960s and 1970s, having been seriously affected by the post-independence Africanisation policies. They included mainly Punjabi Sikhs and Gujarati Hindu traders and merchants with British passports (Bhachu 1985: 3; Bal 2006: 191). Furthermore, appearances of large houses built with remittance of earlier migrants encouraged others to follow their path and their immigration was facilitated by the kinship networks (chain migration) as well as the business interests of travel agencies flourished by then in many of the Indian cities (Holmes 1988: 222-223). This phase of immigration not only resulted in the growth of Indian community in numbers but also in the establishment of the community with its own culture, identity and ethnic practices encouraged by the policy of Multiculturalism. They recreated the Indian religious and cultural life in Britain. Ethnic socio-economic institutions were established to cater for the community's needs and interests including grocery shops, textiles, cafes and clubs, film societies, banks, travel agencies and so on.

Since 1990, highly skilled Indian professionals to work especially in sectors such as IT and health (NHS) marked the migration trail as visa schemes changed making it increasingly difficult for low-skilled migrants to gain entry. Several asylum seekers and refugees, working holidaymakers plus a large number of students were also migrated. There are many reasons for the predominant position of Indians in the UK's IT labour market which include their proficiency in English, a relatively advanced higher education system in India and the connections with IT companies in the UK established by earlier migrant professionals. However, a more fundamental reason is that Indians form a cheap and flexible labour force. Their motivations to migrate were career prospects, money, personal growth and experience, travel and fun, enhanced quality of life and prestige attached to working in the UK than in Bangalore or Hyderabad. Most of them hailed from middle class families in India which is a trend different from the earlier immigrants (Biao 2005: 358-363; Meijering and van Hoven 2003: 177). Migration at this phase is gender balanced to an extent as young and mostly unmarried women migrate independently as IT professionals, though their number is still little.

Britain had seen four generations of Indians and the prominent feature of the Indian community is the ever presence of a first generation, as new immigrants, mostly young and skilled, are entering every day looking for better economic and personal life. According to the 2011 UK Census, Indians constitute the single largest ethnic minority population in Britain comprising of 2.5 percent (1.4 million) of the country's total population. General trend among Indian immigrants is to acquire citizenship in Britain which is generally considered as a positive response to the integration efforts and civic life of the country. Of the top 10 nations whose citizens acquired British citizenship in 2012, Indians amounted to 15 percent of the total number of people who became British citizens (Blinder 2013: 2). The prominent communities among the Indians are Punjabis and Gujaratis; the significance of others including Bengalis, Tamils, Keralites and Anglo-Indians are no little. 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 as per the 2011 Census (Evans 2013). The third most popular religion in Britain is Hinduism, with 1.5 percent of the population, while 0.8 percent was Sikhs.

They are the largest of the non-European minority; relatively well qualified, most dispersed all over the country taken up a wider range of professions, especially in IT jobs and the health sector. According to the Policy Exchange Report titled *Portrait of Modern Britain* (2014), Indians are the most prosperous among all minority groups with lowest poverty rates second only to white British (Palmer and Kenway 2007: 5) and lower unemployment rate of 8.1 percent. Three of Britain's four wealthiest are Indians, according to the Sunday Times Rich List 2017. Children of Indian background are performing particularly well in schools; 37% of Indian students attending university go to top third institutions, which would undoubtedly helped to consolidate the already good performance of their middle class Indian-born parents and grandparents in the labour market (IPPR 2007: 44). Prominent names in academic and art and literary field include Amartya Sen, Bhikhu Parekh, Salman Rushdie, V.S. Naipaul, Hanif Kureishi, Rohinton Mistry, Amitav Ghosh, Jhumpa Lahiri, Vikram Seth and Anish Kapoor. To Asaf Hussain (2005: 189), the Indian migrant community became one of the most prominent and established non-European groups to settle in Britain as they made significant contributions to British economy which provides them a visible influence and access in Britain socio-political spheres. They have a greater visibility in India as well, as

NRI/PIOs or *Pravasi* Indians due to their economic clout that they supposed to possess (Ahmed 2012: 10). State policies are being designed in the post-globalisation era in such a manner that a sizeable economic contribution is expected from the upper middle class Indian immigrants of Britain in particular and Europe in general. Government of India considered them as cultural ambassadors of India in Britain; Prime Minister Narendra Modi's address to the Indian diaspora at London's Wembley Stadium on 13 November 2015 was illustrative of the influence of the present day Indian diaspora in both Britain and India.

Socio-Cultural Peculiarities of Indian Diaspora in Everyday Britain

Indians in Britain are a uniquely heterogeneous community replicating the diversity of India in terms of religion, castes and sub-castes, region, and language. Hence, considering Indians in Britain as a single homogeneous community is problematic; instead they are a 'community of communities' (Parekh 2000). Despite the internal diversity, they share a fairly cohesive culture and identity, with distinctive socio-economic characteristics (Ram 1989). Alongside, as immigrants, they hold contradictory identities of being those directly from India or from East Africa, British-Indian (British-born-Indian-origin), non-White, female etc. Their exposure to the perceived racial/ethnic alienations shaped by the political, economic and social forces of colonialism, Indian nationalism, anti-immigrant sentiments and British immigration and integration policies shaped their daily experiences and lifestyle substantially.

It can be inferred from the literature studied that identity of Indians in Britain is unique and fluid as it functionally enables them to connect with both Britain and India, their 'imagined' home. Their identity reflects their understanding and imagination of who they are - 'Indians living in Britain'. Their relation with India is one of emotional attachment whereas, with Britain, it is business-like; they tend to make necessary adjustments and negotiations with British system for practical reasons. In this light, acquiring citizenship can be seen as a strategy to get benefits out of the British system rather than having devout loyalty or attachment to that country. However, some communities or some individuals in a particular community may develop, in the due course, a close affinity to the host society which then became their only identity. But, mostly Indians managed to retain their *Indianness*, above or equivalent with their newly-evolved *Britishness*, at all

odds. This could also be out of the realisation that British society would never treat them as equal but as second class citizens of colour and ethnicity.

Modern Indians see themselves as global citizens and they aspire to make use of the 'best of both worlds'. While they retain a sense of affiliation and companionship with India and Indians, they find no contradiction in being loyal citizens of the country they have emigrated (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, *Diwali*, *Navratri* and *Holi* had emerged as common Indian festivals despite Indians affiliate themselves with diverse religious and regional subgroups. Similarly, when it comes to private family life they preferred to uphold their Indian traditions and it is the Indian culture they are keen to transfer to their children. 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. As cultural exchanges between both countries are rampant it is possible for them to live their Indian lives in 'multicultural' Britain. It is of no doubt that Indians adjust and compromise to a great extent to settle in Britain resulting in some loss of or modification of Indian traditional practices to suit the British cultural settings. However, they negotiate with the host culture and society, sometimes aggressively, in such a manner that they evolve as British-Indian with *Indianness* at the core of their existence.

Upkeeping of *Indianness* is much profound in terms of the religious practices of Indians; major religious communities in Britain being Hindus, Sikhs, Muslims, Christians, Parses etc. In the multicultural Britain, religious identity enables the migrant communities to have a vital social space and forms the main point of reference for accomplishing various cultural rights and socio-political ends (Anwar 1998). Not just because of this but the general religiosity among the diaspora communities is on rise as a result of the larger discourses around migration targeting immigrants' ethnicity for the multitude of issues in the host society as well as the home country. Hindutva movement has made huge strong inroads into the Indian diaspora in Britain, for instance (Awaaz 2004a: 1-4). Despite the expectation that ethnic religious inclination would be weak among British born younger generations, who are socialised in the British cultural settings, they practice caste system, arranged marriages, dowry as well as believe in supernatural forces like laws of karma, fate, bad luck, evil eye, destiny or God's will in explaining life events, health and illness

causation (Jobanputra and Furnham 2005: 352-353). Yet another major feature of Indian community life is the existence of well-established *mandirs*, *gurdwaras*, *masjids* and such other religious institutions and active participation in community organisations, devotional groups and charitable trusts which are centres of social and cultural activities. It is through these activities and kinship networks that Indian religious and cultural values, traditional practices and behavioural norms are been transmitted to the British born generation.

It can be understood that chain migration is one of the chief modes of Indian emigration and hence the basis of organization of Indians in Britain is mostly on the lines of ‘village-kin networks’ which act as a support mechanism for new entrants in providing assistance for initial accommodation, food, information about vacancies affordable leisure and shopping activities when they arrive. Such networks shield them from hostility of sections of the host society and spare them from the immediate necessity of radical departures from their Indian way of life (Desai 1963). Indians maintain close links with other Indians dispersed throughout the UK and elsewhere usually via electronic communication facilities or through cultural associations to forge a kind of solidarity by relating ones to the symbolic resources of homeland like cuisines, arts, literature, films etc. Many a time, residential choices and friendships are determined by the regional-linguistic considerations and most of the cultural centres were formed on this basis, Confederation of Gujarati Organisations, Andhra Association, Kerala House, Bengali Association, Tamil Sangam etc., to name a few. The kinship networks, along with the regional associations play a major role in imparting the desired regional language proficiency to the British born Indians through the language classes and such other cultural activities. A fair command over the Indian languages, an important marker of ethnic identity, is also acquired through Bollywood movies, weekly/monthly get-togethers, parents’ conversations at home and their occasional visits to India for vacations. It is a matter pride for the parents if their children speaks and writes their regional language well, though there is a declining trend among the recent generations to use the ethnic language despite the parents’ insistence. Most British-born generation Indians are bi-lingual or multi-lingual with greater proficiency in English which is the communicative language with peers and younger folks (Robinson 2005: 188-189).

Indians are primarily family oriented and the number of people per household is higher among them than British average. They also have the greater tendency to purchase house, modern home appliances, vehicles and such other commodities of convenience due to their permanent nature of migration. Though many families were multi-generational with grandparents, parents and children live together, they are gravely concerned about the gradual erosion of joint family structure in favour of nuclear families (Parveen 2003: 3754). Family acts as a primary site for cultural learning for British born children through their socialisation with close and extended family members both in the UK and in India which they retain close contacts with. Within Indian families the relationship between parents and child is asymmetrical, with power and status determined hierarchically. Undermining parental authority is against the Indian cultural values and discipline is maintained through scolding and corporal punishment by parents which are considered maltreatment according to the British parental practices. Marriages are arranged through family and kinship networks or through marriage bureaus, Indian newspapers, and online matrimonial sites; the final decision is been taken by the parents, though children have enough say to express their opinion. The independence and such other liberal values in British culture and lifestyles internalised by the British born generations is a matter of concern as they are a deviation from the community and parental expectations (of continuing their cultural legacy and Indian traditions through their children), parents tolerate that to an extent as they are well aware of the reality that it is impractical to control children beyond a point in the British social setup. This could be one of the reasons behind their urge to return to India and in some cases, parents actually send their children to India to the guardianship of grandparents or other close relatives.

Inter-generational differences and conflicts are evident among Indians as each generation have critically different perceptions towards their experiences of migration. While the first and second generations were appeared to have straddled 'between cultures', British-born third and fourth generations have developed 'multiple cultural competencies' (Jackson and Nesbitt 1993: 175) as 'skilled cultural navigators' (Ballard 1994: 31) capable of moving with ease between home and school, east and west, and tradition and change to suit the particular social contexts in Britain (Blackledge and Creese 2009: 457). The later bore with much ease the hybridized-hyphenated identities of being British-Indian, British-Hindu or British-Muslim thus possess a growing sense of being part of a 'global identity'. Nevertheless, integration tendencies are more among the current

generations they had to follow at least a minimum of Indian ways (both in private and public) out of parental and community pressures.

Indian women experience migration differently from their male counterparts and with generations. The present profile of Indian women in Britain mainly comprises of first generation grandmothers, second generation mothers, and later generation daughters who have more acquaintance with the country. Since dependent migration is still a feature of Indian community, women following their fathers and husbands are common. Another channel is the arrival of women independently as students, medical professionals, nurses and others capacities with required skill sets including language to cope with the new situations. They are better positioned economically and socially compared to the early women immigrants from India. However, Indian women still suffer double discrimination of racism/ethnicity from British society and of sexism and patriarchal discrimination from within their own cultural community. As elsewhere, she is pressurised to represent Indian culture and traditional values and the responsibility to transmit Indian culture to the British born children is mainly upon her. Unequal codes of morality are imposed upon by idealising her as the symbolic bearers of community's identity and honour, both personally and collectively. Moral policing of her own community in the name of protecting her from a hostile and immoral society often restricts her personal, social and economic behaviour. Interesting fact is that British feminism calling for women solidarity and sisterhood largely neglected the ethnic minority women experiences of patriarchy and racism (Chakravarti 2008: 31-32).

Since most of the Indians migrated for economic betterment, they venture into self-business when unable to find satisfying British jobs, lower earnings or blocked mobility and experience of racial discrimination in paid-employment (Thompson et al. 2010: 150). Thus, ethnic entrepreneurship has been a significant form of economic activity among British Indian community which brought down the unemployment rate among them compared to other immigrant communities. The businesses that Indians mostly engaged in are manufacturing, construction, hotels and restaurants, catering, law firms, travel agency, transport, finance and wholesale and retail businesses, Indian grocery and corner shops selling ethnic products such as clothes, jewellery, religious items, newspapers, DVDs, books and magazines. High social capital available due to close kinship ties provides easy access to or pooling of capital, cheap labour and guarantee of customers

for ethnic products among the Indian community and other South Asian communities. However, rates of self-employment have fallen for British-born, English-educated Indians as they consider self-employment less attractive, an indication of their better integration to the education system, paid labour market and British society in general. Parents also wanted to see their children in high profile formal jobs than to inherit the retail business which face stiff competition from British stores like ASDA, TESCO etc. which cater ethnic products on their racks now (Hussain 2007; Neiyar 2013; The Guardian 2013; Clark and Drinkwater 2010: 136-144; Thompson et al. 2010: 156).

Coming to consumption and shopping as an ethnically bound social practice among Indians in Britain, they prefer to purchase from grocery and provisional shops owned and run by Indians. Indian-owned shops, beyond the basic supply of ethnic goods, often performed a social function of being the meeting place and the dissemination points of information related to the community activities. Both men and women go for shopping and it is more a matter of convenience than gender that decides who undertakes shopping for the month. Those women who are housewives and old rarely go for shopping alone as they have language difficulties because of their limited social interactions; hence education, age, religious and cultural preference and socio-economic background influence Indian women's shopping experiences (Hamlett et al. 2008: 91-111). Thus they use 'authentic' Indian ingredients for cooking which not only just reinforce their Indian identity but also satisfy their taste and sense of nostalgia of distant home. Food symbolises manifold identities and sectarian affiliations of immigrants such as their regional, religious and caste affiliations as well as socio-economic status, family structure and generational differences (Salih 2001: 667; Saunders 2007: 203-214). Older generation Indians sticks on to ethnic food practices whereas, British born generation prefers bacon, steak, sandwich, fish and chips, puddings and junk food items showing their greater integration to British taste. Likewise, convenience items, tinned, frozen and ready to cook products are more appealing to families where all the members go for work. There are also cultural (*vrat*/ritual fasts, vegetarianism), economic (as dining out is expensive) and nostalgic reasons associated with practicing Indian diet. Visiting Indian cookery sites and watching cookery shows in regional TV channels are frequent among Indian women. Whenever they go to India for vacation, they bring food items, cookery books and specialised utensils on return. They often visit the Indian restaurants and

hotels which have their presence all over the UK, Saravana Bhavan, Tattukada and Ananthapuri in Eastham, for instance.

Dressing pattern of Indians are a modification of Indian dresses blended with western style. Men are seen in westernised dresses than wearing traditional attires like *dhotis* or *kurtha-paijama* whereas; elder generation women wear mostly *salwar kameez*, long *kurti* with jeans. However British born younger generation are more neutral in their dressing taste and they wear western outfits except when they go to religious ceremonies. Mushrooming of huge number of ethnic clothing shops all over Britain illustrates this point further. Likewise, older generation prefer to watch ethnic media like Sunrise Radio, Zee TV, Asia 1 TV, MATV, Sabras Radio, Radio XL, Apna TV and Namaste TV which act not only as a tool of cultural transmission among Indian community in Britain but also as ‘a cultural medium of mass entertainment in the languages and forms of their everyday life’ (Whitaker 2004: 471). They read ethnic publications, both print and online, like India Weekly, Gurajat Samachar, Garavi Gujrat, India Home and Abroad, Amar Deep, Southall Gazette and Asian Affairs etc. and regularly watch Hindi films on TV as well as whenever releases on big screen in British cinemas. The box office success of so many Hindi films in the UK illustrative of the fact that its unique filmic language, styles and centrality of family stories provides India diaspora with a sense of homecoming and memories of their distant roots. There are British-Indian film makers like Gurinder Chadha (*Bend It like Beckham*, *Bhaji on the Beach*) and Indian theatre productions (*The Ramayana* (2001), *A Ramayan Odyssey* (1977), *Ramkatha* (1979), Rabindranath Tagore’s *Sacrifice* (1977), Jatinder Verma’s trilogy - *Genesis*, *Exodus*, *Revelations*) which are a prominent presence in the mainstream cultural space of British. Indian musical and dance programmes (like Annual *Raas Garba* Competition and Annual Asian Mela Festival in Leicester) are also popular among the Indian community; *Bhangra*, Indi-pop, Bollywood and classical song/dance performances, *Mehandi* competitions are all regular features of Indian diasporic life in Britain which often perceived as a tool for identity affirming/unifying for British born Indian youth . Huq 2003: 34-41; Rajgopal 2003: 49-63). Another feature of British Indian cultural life is the existence of the ‘daytimer’ discos that held in day-time hours to accommodate Asian parental strictness regarding their children going out in the evenings.

Yet another feature of the Indian diasporic life in Britain is the creative use of the technology offered virtual spaces to create a safe alternative living space within an increasingly anti-immigrant host society thus satisfying their nostalgia and affinity/loyalty for the lost or distant ancestral homeland. Indians, both older and newer generations, use blogs, discussion forums and such other social networking sites like Twitter, Facebook or WhatsApp and regularly visit a great number of sites related to India and contribute to charities online (Mitra 2005: 377; Mitra 2006: 251; Adams and Ghose 2003: 414-437). Indians in Britain are pioneer in charitable/philanthropic activities in both Britain and India. Diasporic philanthropy, mostly religious and caste based, is motivated not only by migrants' perceptions on ethical responsibility to assist the socio-economic development of both host and home countries but also as a strategy to receive respect and personal image building, demonstration of wealth, status competition with other migrants and rich people as well as by more practical political and economic incentives like tax exclusivity. Major contributions are provided to construct/re-construct religious centres, schools, hospitals and such other infrastructures like stadiums, roads, water supply and electricity as well as sponsoring poor students, donations to institutions and NGOs working for orphans, patients, differently-abled and palliative care and sponsoring arts and sports events as well as religious festivals. Internet is also used for political activities, the rise of Hindutva in the UK and the Modi phenomenon could be read together. Indian political developments have had its impact on the political activities of Indians in the UK. Indo-Pak relations in the context of Kashmir and *Babari Masjid* demolition and later Hindu-Muslim riot occurred in Gujarat in 2008 are some of the most contested issues between Hindu and Muslim communities in the UK. However, these issues do not constitute the social frame of interaction among these communities in their day to day life (Parveen 2003: 3753). Indians are active on British political front too, interestingly, higher than the participation of native British.

Thus, the significant feature of the Indian community in Britain is their strong sense of belongingness to India. As their material status and living standard has substantially improved after immigration, sending remittances is a strategy in maintaining active links with home (Ramji 2006: 650). This link provides them, especially the older generations, with confidence to plan their post-retirement life in India and save money for this fantasised return. It was this anticipated return in the future propels them to retain Indian culture and traditions and not to assimilate or integrate completely to the British society

and culture (Oonk 2007: 14). However, in most cases this desire to return remains a myth due to the continual delay of actual undertaking of the return journey due to the aspirations for more economic advancement and family obligations (Sinatti 2011: 154). The urge of return to India is less among the later/younger generations, however, their 'homeland attachment' is fabricated around the holidays spent in India, their participation in life-cycle rituals involving wider kinship network and older generation's promotion of the idea of 'ideal' India as the spiritual and cultural homeland. The undesirable attitudes of British not treating them as equal citizens further consolidate their ethnic affinities (Bolognani 2007: 63).

Concluding Analysis

An Indian identity is shaped by the self-perceptions of Indians and their current socio-political and economic status in Britain. As Amartya Sen (2005: xv) pointed out, the Western/European (mis)conceptions about India greatly impacted the self-perceptions of Indians in the colonial and post-colonial period alike and the internalised colonial syndrome largely shaped the cultural negotiations of Indians in British socio-cultural sphere and construction of their own unique identity in Britain. This could be further understood by the instance of huge popularity of the Hare Krishna sect in the UK which tactfully manipulated the mystic image of India in British mind set. This process of identity construction coincided with the perception of host society/external imaginary about them, often prejudiced and perceived different due to the notions of racial and colonial superiority of the past. Identity of Indians in Britain is one that is constantly negotiated and modified with respect to the socio-political developments in both Britain and India. The larger context of this could be the displacement that migrants encounter while adjusting to life in a new country, which is what prompts them to create a stronger bond and identification with their home country than they would have needed had they never emigrated (Saunders 2007: 204). Religious markers like turban or veil are not only obvious markers of difference but are crucial to the ways in which integration into a religious, cultural, and ethnic identity proceeds (Chanda and Ford 2009: 3). Identity assertion is also employed as a strategy by the immigrants to cope with the discrimination they face from the host society especially in the wake of rising right-wing anti-immigrant extremism. Many questions about fractured loyalties, multiple identities, deteriorating community relations, rising unemployment and failing social welfare

mechanisms, race riots and home-grown terrorism place immigrants responsible for all social problems in Britain. To confront the hostility, immigrants assert their ethnic identity at varying levels; identity assertion of Muslims especially in the post 9/11 discourse of stereotyping Muslims as terrorists and fundamentals illustrates this point.

To conclude, being the single largest ethnic minority with a migration history since 1600, Indian immigrants is an established community in Britain, many a time projected as a model minority. Majority of the Indian diaspora belong to the middle class families in India and for them, migration to Britain means enhancement of the financial position and income. They show a positive integration trend in the socio-cultural sphere of the country when compared to any other South Asian communities including Pakistanis and Bangladeshis. Level of integration is enhanced with subsequent generations and the young British-born Indians are capable of moving with ease between British culture and Indian culture in their daily life. The great Indian banyan tree is not only strong at its main stem in its own soil, but also the lush branches spread far and wide in the further lands. India is truly living and growing in both the political India as well as the 'ideal' imagined India abroad through its diaspora.

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