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Gujarati Diaspora at Extremes: Australia and Kuwait

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Abstract

Migrants and their families have to go through lot of socio-psychological pressure and cultural changes always bring more confusion in the role set which in turn produces the role-conflicts. The ties between the relations of husband- wife, brother-sister and peer groups keep on experience the changes. Problem of settlement and social adjustment during their initial stay, unemployment or underemployment, economic exploitation and social discrimination by local people, cultural conflict, confusion, dilemma, shock, feeling of alienation, preservation of separate ethnic identity and generation gap between first and second generation immigrants etc. These problems are to be studied in terms of causes and consequences and explained specifically within socio-cultural context. Most important is to observe the comparative adjustments in the socio-cultural & socio-psychological aspects faced by Gujarati Diaspora in two different countries of destination.

Keywords: diaspora, migration, adaptation, adjustment, role- conflict

1. Introduction

The word 'diaspora' has been taken from Greek meaning 'to disperse'. It means movement of people from one place to another, whereby they shift their residence.

Human society is large populous group which possesses definite territory, culture and sovereignty. Society is studied generally in terms of member people residing in it. But, during recent time, a new trend of studying society in terms of native people residing presently in foreign country has developed. This trend is called as Diasporic Studies. Study of Indian society in terms of Indian natives living in foreign countries is called 'Indian Diaspora Studies'. Significant migrant Gujarati communities exist around the world. Diaspora is a multifaceted social phenomenon which has attracted the attention of Social Scientists, Government, NGOs and policy makers. Research in the field of diaspora particularly in Indian studied only after independence and got momentum with globalization process. The word diaspora is analyzed in terms of immigration of people to alien lands. Many studies on Indian diaspora have focused on migrant or indentured laborers to various countries. The diasporic study incorporates aspects of identity, culture, conflicts, multiculturalism, power, ethnicity etc. These include emigration to and settlement in foreign countries, their socio- economic profile, position in host and home countries, organization of socio-cultural life in host country, problem of socio- cultural adjustment and preservation of separate socio-cultural identity, relation with home country and impact on home country in terms of bringing of socio-economic development and changes.

Diaspora has great bearing upon the economy, social structure, culture and play significant role in socio-economic development and socio- cultural changes in area of origin at local, regional and national level. These immigrants also act as ambassador in the country of their immigration by representing culture and society of origin. In view of such numerical and functional significance, several Diasporic studies have been conducted on Gujarati Diaspora. In the absence of sufficient socio- cultural study on Gujarati diaspora, the present research is an effort to achieve a broader understanding of the socio-cultural study of Gujarati diaspora with special reference to Australia and Kuwait.

Objective of Study

The present study is focused on the traumatic and double folded facts of the Diaspora by focusing on the following issues:

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- 1) The socio-cultural and economic background of Gujarati Indians who have migrated to Australia and Kuwait.
- 2) To analyze socio-economic factors responsible for emigration
- 3) Position of Migrants in countries of destination
- 4) Comparative position of Gujarati in different countries of destination

Research Methodology: Used for present Study

This study in the field of Gujarati Diaspora focuses on Socio-cultural aspect of migrants whose homeland is in Baroda, Anand, Kheda, Surat, Bharuch and Ahmadabad and has migrated to Australia and Kuwait. The sample size of the present study consisted of 100 respondents (50 migrant each for Australia and Kuwait). Snowball- sampling technique was used to identify respondents. The data was collected through "interview schedule" coupled with observation technique.

2. Data Analysis

Profile of the Respondents

It is noted that majority of them are having higher education (83%) and doing jobs in chemical Industries and banking in case of Kuwait and lower level white collar jobs or as labor in Stores etc. in case of Australia. 32% of respondents are living in nuclear families in Kuwait whereas it is 69% for Australia. All 100 respondents in the study were found to be Hindus to belonging to Patidars, Patels, Baniya and Brahmins. Majority of the respondents (88%) were found in their young and working age group of 20-40 years. Only 44% have their own properties there and are living in their own houses, others 66% were capable or become capable enough to purchase property by are less interested in settling there especially in case of Kuwait and about 72% of respondents are married males.

Gujarati Diasporic Communities: Socio-Cultural Dimensions

Present study shows that there is complete change in educational and occupational spheres of their life as all of them have taken up modern education and occupation. Again most of them have adapted themselves to the mode of living which implies change in their work habits as well as life-style. However so far as their attitudes and practices regarding major social institutional spheres like marriage, family, kinship, caste and religion are concerned, continuity (tradition) is observed in case of most of these respondents. This is validated by the facts that majority of them not only believe in traditional conception of marriage as sacrament and unbreakable social bond but also follow religious rites and rituals during marriage. It has been noticed that respondents favored the tradition of joint family. Many of them have not only kept their ancestral property in their native village but have also purchased properties in nearby urban regions. To maintain the existence of family name and presence in natal society they visit their natal region on the social occasions like marriage, festivals, death etc at least once a year. Again majority of them also reported about sending of remittance to their family member and occasional financial help to Indian relative or caste fellow in the time of need and crisis. Similarly majority of them reported about giving substantial donation to the religious institutions, caste association for religious, educational and social purpose and village panchayat for the development work in their village

or home region. Despite having these emotional bonds and socio- economic ties, most of them (82%) that migrated to Australia, reported their unwillingness to return back to India for resettlement due to their children's unwillingness for the same and physical discomfort in India. Whereas all the 100% of Gujarati's who migrated to Kuwait have no plan to settle there.

Families in India feel safe to settle in Australia and are having no negative socio- psychological impact with regards to concern for migrants but in case of Gujarati Diaspora in Kuwait, families in India want them to come back.

Life in host country

Social position of migrants is considered to be lower in host country and is being compared at the levels of black population but as compared to other migrants from Asian country, their position is better in case of Gujarati migrants in Australia. Whereas in Kuwait, socially they are not considered important and are completely adjusted, following social practices as per country of destination. In case of both they are still considered to be the outsiders and are not getting the status as one among. Because of not major notable contribution, in general they are considered to be the 'receivers' and not the 'contributor'. Migrants are watched as population visiting the host country for earning and spending less there and saving the major earned portions. Their perception of such lower position is getting compensated partly by their satisfaction over higher income as counted in Indian currency value and partly by their higher position in India, particularly their home region where they are regarded as successful, rich and well-off person commanding great respect.

It is observed that majority of migrant's feel comfortable living and celebrating festivals in narrowed circle of relatives, caste fellows, regional and religious groups of Indian origin. The group celebration of religious festivals like Holi, Navratri, Diwali, Janmashtmi and National festivals like India's Independence Day with relatives' friends, caste fellows of their home region is another common patter of their socio-cultural life for Gujarati Diaspora in Australia but migrants in Kuwait do not have such celebration in general. Courtesy home visits to their relatives and friend belonging to above groups as well as weekly or fortnightly group meeting or get together in public place like gardens, restaurants is common feature of their social life of Gujarati migrants in Australia and Kuwait.

Summary and conclusion

- (1) Lot of studies done on Gujarati diaspora but not much is done on comparative socio-cultural dimensions of life in host country and its impact in country of origin.
- (2) Most migrants wanted to permanently settle in Australia whereas no one agreed in case of Kuwait.
- (3) Primary cause of immigration and settlement in host country is by economic reasons like economic inconvenience and less employment opportunities with low job securities. However it does not imply their dislike for their tradition, social structure and culture of natal community, which they still preserving in host countries.
- (4) Encouraging factor for immigration and settlement of respondents was due to supporting family, kinship and caste networks in host countries. And their (NRGs) status of being successful in country of origin.

- (5) Gujarati migrants in Australia are comfortable in both respect of economic and social life and wants to bring their families with them but in case of Gujarati migrants in Kuwait, migrants are comfortable with economic aspect but social life get compromised as they do not feel safe settling in Kuwait with family.

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