

Unit 21

Popular Perception

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Learning Objectives

After going through this unit you will be able to know:

- The model minority of Indians in America;
- The Indian diasporic situations in the UK;
- The inter-racial divide of Indians in Caribbean and Africa; and
- The Indian State's view of Overseas Indians;

21.1 Introduction

The last two units of this block discussed the imagery of the Indian diaspora that is found in film and literature. In this unit we are going to talk about popular perception about the Indian diaspora. In a sense this unit is continuation and extension of the previous two units, which discuss the imagery exclusively in terms of literature and film. This unit takes you to a wider level where we try and put together images and perceptions of the diaspora, both in terms of the host country as well as the country of origin. In putting together we draw from various social spaces to get a sense of what Indians are thought of abroad and what immigrants are perceived back home.

As we know popular perception which border on stereotypes that type-cast a community or ethnic groups in certain terms draw their fodder for such imagery from many sources- word-of-mouth, every-day encounters, media which include print, film and television, as well as travel etc. In trying to talk about the way Indians are perceived we will try to draw from some of these sources.

21.2 Model Minority: Indians in America

Recently (October, 2006) the NASDAQ-a stock exchange - building in New York, towering over many stories, was draped in Indian tricolours, in celebration of the festival of *diwali*. Many Indians hope that the Empire State Building would be lit up for the festival of lights. The White House is slated to celebrate the Diwali festival, indicating that India has arrived in the US. "In the US, we are living in the 'India' moment. Everywhere you turn, there's another article about either successful Indian immigrants who have found the American dream, Bollywood film festivals, or the rise of

high-tech economic India, and the loss of American jobs to outsourcing. India - and South Asia - has never before made such an impression on the American psyche" (Budhos:2004).

The Indian images and people are now part of every-day life. Not just the convenient store owner and the gas station owner or the Patels who own most of the motel industry. Incidentally, Gujaratis, mainly Patels, now own 21, 000 of the 53, 000 hotels and motels in US, worth \$40 billion. Apart from this, Indians are seen on television not just as caricatures of Indianness but as part of mainstream America, whether it is the political analyst and journalist Farred Zakharia or the medical correspondent and war reporter Sanjay Gupta. Writers such as Salman Rushdie, V.S.Naipaul, Rohinton Mistry among others had put the Indian diaspora on the map of literature. Jhumpa Lahiri won the Pulitzer , the most coveted literary prize in America, for 'distinguished fiction by an American author, preferably dealing with American life.' The recent Booker Prize was won by America based Indian writer Kiran Desai, yet again bringing to the fore the achievements of the Indian diaspora. Film makers like Night Shyamalan of Sixth Sense fame, and Shekhar Kapoor who made the movie Elizebeth and scores of other successful Indians are making Indian Diaspora ever so much more visible. As New York magazine reported in one of its articles India has now acquired "cool quotient". "Indeed, America has become so South Asianized that *Newsweek* recently ran a cluster of articles under the rubric 'American Masala', declaring in the subtitle of the influence of the Subcontinent on the superpower: 'They've changed the way we eat, dress, work and play.' Most Americans take the presence of *chai* on the menu at Starbucks for granted (if in versions as alien to the Indian original as a vanilla-flavoured and iced). Many are becoming comfortable with Indian music, whether of the 'Asian dub' variety, remixed with hip-hop or listened to straight. 'Basement Bhangra' at SOB's in New York, presided over by disc-jockey queen DJ Rekha, just named the 'best DJ in New York' by *Time Out New York* magazine, has been dubbed 'the best party in NYC' by *New York* magazine. The latest fitness craze in California is the 'Masala Bhangra Workout'. Hindi film songs have begun to appear in the most unlikely venues, from the popular television series *The Sopranos* to Lata Mangeshkar singing on the soundtrack of *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind*, starring Jim Carrey and Kate Winslet" (ibid).

"Real-life films such as *Monsoon Wedding* and *Bend it Like Beckham* have been extraordinarily successful not only because each was, in its own right, simply a great film, but also because the Indians portrayed in these films are so much like, well, everyone else. These movies, both made by Indian diaspora women directors, depict Indians at home in the globalized world, whether it's the trials and tribulations of a young woman negotiating conflicting expectations between her Indian immigrant home and her British teen environment in *Bend it Like Beckham* or a young woman juggling the conflicting expectations of patriarchal family values under siege, an American *desi* husband-to-be and her own desires in *Monsoon Wedding*"(ibid).

Indians in the USA are one of the largest among the groups of Indian diaspora, numbering about 2.5 million, and probably the one of 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

(www.wikipedia.org). "Addressing the Indian American Forum of Political Education in September 1997, Jesse Helms, the senator from North Carolina, acclaimed: "Indian Americans represent the best and the brightest the United States has to offer." Over the last decade, such lavish praise has become commonplace as Indians shot to prominence in the U.S. If in India newspapers prominently featured Bill Clinton's visits, The New York Times carried a long story about Neera Tanden, a second generation Indian who managed Hillary Clinton's Senate campaign. Jhumpa Lahiri figured on the covers of literary magazines. And so on. All this cannot be explained merely by the 106 per cent growth in the Indian population since 1990. Much more important is the status afforded to Indians as a "model minority"(Ramana, 2001).

This presence of India in America's popular consciousness in a positive sense as successful immigrants and model minority is of recent origin. In early 1900s when Sikhs immigrated into US, they were thought to sully the white Anglo-Saxon culture. There was fear that they would steal their jobs. They could not buy any land and were virtually forced to leave; many left for Canada. Since this early migration things have changed. The working class population was replaced by educated professionals in the 1960s. The US immigration policy, Vijay Prasad argues, was deliberate in its choice with respect to immigrants from India. In his book *The Karma of Brown Folk*, Prashad points out "that the cross-section of Indians in the U.S. is not some random mixture of typical inhabitants of the sub-continent, nor chosen by a process of natural or cultural selection, but a sample carefully selected by immigration laws"(ibid). The educated upwardly mobile Indian emigrants Prashad says were apolitical and passive: "absorbed in the pursuit of pleasure and success without a developed social consciousness" (quoted in Ramna, 2001).

The successful Indian professional who is a bit of nerd and who is so brainy that he has to hold cup of coffee to his forehead to heat it up, is epitomized by characters such as Ashok in the cartoon strip *Dilbert*. The nerdy professional, who is sexless and is incapable of fun is partly demolished by the character Kumar in *Harold and Kumar Go To White Castle*. The movie has as its main leads a Chinese American and Indian American, Harold and Kumar respectively. Harold is bored with his job as investment banker while Kumar has little heart in pursuing a career in medicine, unlike his father who is a surgeon. While Kumar is not exactly your nerdy Indian geek he still fits in the stereotype that is played over and over again both in the imaginations of Indians and Americans at large where second generation Indians struggle between individual aspirations and family pressure. There are other images, and not so complimentary that dot the landscape of American popular consciousness. Apu, the character from the very popular animated series, *Simpsons*, fits the convenience store owner end of the spectrum. 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.

Things may have changed a bit from the highly orientalist perspective of India-of snake charmers, Maharajas, and of spirituality and Yoga. The spiritual element has contemporary twist, in this new age fondness for all things alternative and traditional, which can be seen in the success of modern gurus like Deepak Chopra and to some extent to previous ones like Rajneesh-the *Osho*. However, the general ignorance which stems from a largely

insular America, is still real and palatable. This can be seen in attacks on Indians in New Jersey (the dot busters) to the more recent post 9/11 attacks on turbaned Sikhs, who were apparently mistaken for Afghans. The fears that 'foreigners' will take away the American jobs has reentered the popular consciousness once again with the issue of outsourcing which has become much debated topic for the forthcoming elections. Commenting on how America is beginning to notice India, Mira Kamdar writes: "How could I have foreseen that the T-Shirts that said 'My parents went to Disneyland and all I got was this lousy T-Shirt' would be replaced some day by ones lamenting 'My job went to India and all I got was this lousy T-Shirt?' Suddenly, the tide of the Yellow Peril was reversed: instead of Asian workers pouring into the United States to work for slave wages (in their own country they had it even worse and they were used to sleeping ten to a bed anyway), now it looked like that 'giant sucking sound' that used to come from down Mexico way had been amplified about a thousand times and was coming from, of all places, India" (Kamdar, 2004: 65).

Reflection and Action 21.1

What are the varied images of Indians in America?

Indian diaspora is making a beginning to enter political arena too. The American Indians are organizing themselves into strong political lobbies. One of the most powerful one of these lobbies is USINPAC (Unites States India Political Action Committee).

21.3 The Curry Tide: Indians in UK

The Indian diaspora falls into the lose term of "British Asian", a term employed for immigrants from Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and India . Many Indians feel that there distinct differences between some of these south Asian communities in terms of religion, language, culture etc. There is debate whether the Indians should adopt a nomenclature or term for themselves based on nationality or religion such as British Indian or British Hindus.

The Indians are the largest in number among the British Asians. According to the 2001 UK Census there are 2.33 million British Asians, making up 4% of the population of the United Kingdom. This further subdivides to 1.05 million of Indian origin (1.8% of the population), 747,000 of Pakistani origin (1.3%), 283,000 of Bangladeshi origin (0.5%), and 247,000 from other Asian origins (0.4%) (largely of Sri Lankan origin). British Asians make up 50.2% of the UK's non-white population. British Indians tend to be religiously diverse, with 45% Hindu, 29% Sikh, and 13% per cent Muslim, while their counterparts of Pakistani and Bangladeshi origin are much more religiously homogeneous, with Muslims accounting for 92% of each group. British Indians tend to originate mainly from two Indian States, Sikhs are largely from the Punjab region whilst Hindus tend to originate from the Gujarat, Punjab and West Bengal regions.

Indian settlement in UK has a long history dating back, according to historians to some early migration during the East India Company contacts with India. People from South Asia have settled in Great Britain since the East India Company (EIC) recruited lascars to replace vacancies in their crews on East Indiamen whilst on voyages in India. Many were then refused passage back, and were marooned in London. There were also some Ahyas, domestic servants of wealthy British families, who accompanied their employers back to "Blighty" when their stay in Asia came to an end.

The Navigation Act of 1660 restricted the employment of non-English sailors to a quarter of the crew on returning East India Company ships. Baptism records in East Greenwich suggest that young Indians from the Malabar Coast were being recruited as servants at the end of the seventeenth century, and records of the EIC also suggest that Indo-Portuguese cooks from Goa were retained by Captains from voyage to voyage. In 1797, 13 were buried in the parish of St Nicholas at Deptford.

These immigrations were few and far between; a major wave of migration from India took place in post World War II period, when there was labour shortage. Thus a bulk of immigrants from India, especially Punjabis, formed the working class immigrants. Additionally there was demand for doctors and health professions for the expanding health care system of post World War II Britain. Indian doctors were recruited as they conformed to British standards of medicine. In 1970s there was another wave of immigration of Indians, who were settled in Africa but were forced to leave due to socio-political tensions and negative reaction towards Indians by the native Africans.

As we mentioned the migration to UK was spread over several decades and the profile of the migrants changed with times depending on circumstances and requirements in British society along with the push factors back home. The perceptions about these migrants too changed along the way. The image about the Indians and the Asian British, like in America, is a complex one; while there is large scale discrimination, along side is an orientalist fascination for all things Indian.

India was after all the Jewel in the imperial crown and there was a romantic fascination which basically essentialised India as a mystic, spiritual, mysterious magical land from whom the disenchanting West had much to learn or draw from. These images are seen not only in colonial literature such as E. M. Foster and Rudyard Kipling but continued to inform the way the West looked at the sepia tinted India. This spirituality and magic continued to inform the hippies' quest for the land of dharma and karma (a book that captures this fascination with India is captured by Anita Desai in *Karma Cola*). To this day, this spirituality that is associated with India continues to dominate many new age perceptions of India.

The majority of immigration has happened after 1950s but there is evidence of Indians going to Britain as early as 1688. The immigrant population was very scattered and small; it consisted of mostly lascars-sailors from Bengal and Goa -ayahs and nannies or *ayahs*. East India Company (EIC) recruited lascars to replace vacancies in their crews on East Indiamen whilst on voyages in India. Many were then refused passage back, and were marooned in London. There were also some Ayahs, domestic servants of wealthy British families, who accompanied their employers back to UK. "Indian lascars settled near the London docks from the eighteenth century onwards and many became a part of the multi-racial dock communities, cohabiting with and marrying local English women. In 1858 the Strangers Home was opened in London's West India Dock Road to provide accommodation for lascars and assist them to find employment on ships returning to India. In the 19th century individual cases of destitute South Asians requesting repatriation back to India appear sporadically in the records of the British Library. Nannies or ayahs lived with the British families that brought them to England. An institution known as the Ayahs' Home was established in 1897 in Aldgate to accommodate ayahs who were waiting for a return passage to India. It has been estimated that by 1932 approximately 7,000 South Asians lived in Britain" (source: www.movinghere.co.uk).

In the 19th century Indians were free to enter Britain as British subjects, though persons known to have political affiliations working towards India's freedom and who were considered anti-British were restricted entry into Britain. There was also restriction placed on those with "limited means" from early 1930s. "The control of passports was directed primarily at Indian peddlers from the Punjab who sought to bring family members to Britain to assist them with their businesses, selling goods door-to-door.

After the introduction of the 1948 British Nationality Act, guaranteeing free right of entry to British subjects and Commonwealth citizens, the numbers of South Asians arriving in Britain increased" (ibid).

Many of the immigrants stories talk about racial discrimination that was meted out to them. A majority of the immigrants in mid 1900s were from working class rural backgrounds from India who were not very conversant with English or Western ways unlike some of the professionals who went to UK around the same time. Those from working class backgrounds ended up doing menial and non-professional jobs. South Asian immigrants settling in post-war Britain established themselves, mainly in London, the Midlands and industrial areas in the north, taking up employment in factories and foundries. The stereotype of Indians was of workers, bus-conductors, waiters, and small shopkeepers. They faced lot of problems being accepted in to British society.

Many immigrants recount how difficult it was to rent apartments and find accommodation. Early post-war South Asian migrants faced prejudice in finding private rented accommodation and council housing. "A survey by Willesden Council of press advertisements for accommodation in the local press showed that 90 per cent of advertisements specifically discriminated against non-European. As early as 1957, a Home Office document provided evidence of white flight and future segregation, which would come to characterise some northern towns and cities: 'The Nottingham, Wolverhampton and Warwickshire police say that white house-holders in better class districts resent coloured people buying houses in these districts and when this happens, those who can, move.'

This was supported by a 1964 article in the *Daily Telegraph* in which an Estate Agent in Southall, London had agreed to sell houses owned by Southall Residents Association exclusively to white buyers. Many Indians sought to overcome these housing problems by buying old houses often in slum areas and letting them out to newcomers" (ibid). There were negative representations in media that black and coloured immigrants from the commonwealth were drain on public funds.

Since these early migrations things have changed considerably Indians in Britain are now the third generation. Despite some ethnic racial conflicts few of the stereotypes have changed to Indians being perceived as a successful immigrant community. They are considerable number of professionals and successful business men, media person, writers, actors, doctors and politicians who are now part of mainstream life of Britain, who have changed the way English think about the Indians.

Indian culture and Indianess has now after many years have now captured the imagination of the British. Indian cuisine now has become a part of the English landscape. The biggest influence of British Asians on popular culture has probably been the Indian restaurant, though the majority of these are run by people of Bangladeshi origin. A recent poll found that chicken tikka

masala has surpassed fish and chips in terms of popularity as the national dish. Chicken tikka masala, like the popular balti, is itself a British Asian invention. These dishes were unknown in the Indian sub-continent until requests from British holiday-makers led to their introduction

Since the 1970s, British Asian performers and writers have achieved significant mainstream cultural success. The first British Asian to gain wide popularity in the UK for being a mainstream celebrity in their own right and worldwide fame was the late Freddie Mercury, who led the rock band Queen. However, there had been others earlier such as Sabu Dastagir who had been famous for playing non-descript foreigners in British and Hollywood films. The comedians Sanjeev Bhaskar, Meera Syal and Shazia Mirza are all well-recognised figures in British popular culture. The actress Parminder Nagra has a prominent role in the US TV series ER, and played the lead role in the successful British film Bend It Like Beckham. The actor Naveen Andrews plays the role of Sayid Jarrah in the popular US TV series Lost, and also had a prominent role in the award-winning film The English Patient. The broadcaster Krishnan Guru-Murthy and Sameera Ahmed, meanwhile, present the respected Channel 4 News.

Box 21.1 Growing up in Britain

Gurinder Chadha could well be an example of a British-Asian woman who has bent rules to achieve her own success. Her family came to settle in Britain from East Africa in the seventies. Daughter of a small-time Indian grocery shop-keeper, she experienced, at first hand, the trauma and humiliation which Asians go through in Britain, when they don't have money or status. During her growing years, Chadha also observed the inhumanly trivial lives of women of the Punjabi community settled in Britain – especially in cities like Leicester where one-third of the population is Asian. Through the older generation – like Gurinder Chadha's father – which opened grocery shops or stationery corners and joined the huge lower middle class of the British population, she noticed how the racist Whites treated them. "My father was made to wait for hours for service in a bank because his depositing capacity was small. The early Asian settlers in Britain, like my parents, had little education and a huge complex about living in an alien society. The Punjabis especially stood together in their isolation and developed their own lifestyle of *bhangra* and family gatherings over tea and *bhajias*. They joined their compatriots in Southall for nostalgia meals or shopping and still felt lost between their Indo-African heritage and the strident call of the vibrant British culture they came to experience. I felt a part of this confusion; yet my generation thought differently and we were rebellious and unwilling to accept our second class status."

21.4 Inter-Racial Divide: Indians in Caribbean and Africa

In this section we will discuss how race was one of the main issues that was the basis of tension between Indian migrants and other communities. Many times it was Blacks versus Indians, whether they were natives or settlers. This situation of racial tension or a situation where natives were pitted against the Indian settlers was true of Fiji, Malaysia and even Mauritius, though the Indian community there was a minority. However, we are going to keep our discussion to Caribbean countries and Africa. We hope that these two cases will give you sense of a general scenario of how PIOs in general are perceived in their adopted countries.

People of Indian origin are variously known as Indo Caribbean or East Indians, though the term East Indian is used less and less to denote people of Indian origin. Indo-Caribbean people or Indo-Caribbeans (the colonial term “East Indian” is fading) are people with roots in India who live in the Caribbean region or are the descendants of such people. From 1838 to 1917, over half a million Indians from the former British Raj or British India, were brought to the Caribbean as indentured servants to address the demand for labour following the abolition of slavery. The first two shiploads arrived in British Guiana (now Guyana) on May 5, 1838 (see the unit 6 in Book 1).

The majority of the Indians living in the English-speaking Caribbean came from eastern Uttar Pradesh and western Bihar, while those brought to Guadeloupe and Martinique were mostly from, but not only, from Tamil Nadu. A minority emigrated from other parts of the Indian sub-continent, including present-day Pakistan and Bangladesh. Other Indo-Caribbean people descend from later migrants, including Indian doctors, Gujarati businessmen and migrants from Kenya and Uganda. A vague community of modern-day immigrants from India is to be found on Saint-Martin/Sint Maarten island or other islands with duty-free commercial capabilities, where they are active in business.

Today, Indo-Caribbeans are the largest ethnic group in Guyana, Suriname, and Trinidad. They are the second largest in Jamaica. Other Indo-Caribbeans live elsewhere in various Caribbean countries where they often form the second largest ethnic group. There are small Indian populations in Barbados, Grenada, St. Lucia, St. Vincent, Martinique and Guadeloupe (source: <http://en.wikipedia.org>).

The Indo-Caribbeans, unlike the recent Indian migrants to western countries, have moved out of home a few centuries ago. They have no contact with their homeland India and for all practical purposes derive their identity from the nations they inhabit. These Indians, having gone through history of adversity, clung to their culture and memories of their home to sustain themselves. Much of that culture was reinvented, sometimes duplicated and very often hybridized over long periods, drawing from other groups, which came to inhabit the Caribbean, mainly the African groups.

Box 21.2 Indian Elements in Caribbean Culture

In food and patterns of eating, as well, Indians were to show their capacity for adaptation. Those caste distinctions that made impossible commensality in India were, in the conditions of migration, broken down, and vegetarianism was to have little appeal among Indo-Trinidadians. Tandoori cooking remains unknown among Indians in Trinidad and the Caribbean, and curry is made with a curry powder, rather than by mixing a curry paste. But it is the prevalence of “curry” in Trinidadian food that impresses, and in most respects Indo-Trinidadian food bears an astonishing similarity to certain varieties of Indian food. As one author of a cookbook on Caribbean food was to note in 1974, “the Indians have had a deep effect upon the Caribbean Cuisine primarily through their enthusiasm for curry, which is becoming as much a part of Caribbean as of Indian cooking.” Trinidadian fast food, usually eaten with chutney, is mainly of Indian origin: their *saheena* is like *pakor*, “doubles” is a variation on the *channa batura*, though more in the form of a chick-peas sandwich, and their *kachowrie* has a marked similarity to its namesake in India. Though many Afro-Trinidadians will not admit it, even their own main meals are now predominantly Indian in origin, for alongside *callooloo* there is curried goat, and roti is easily the most popular food in

Trinidad. Indeed, to understand just how far roti has come to be a marker of 'Indianness', and the resentment felt by some Afro-Trinidadians, consider that in the 1961 election, the black party took up the slogan: "We don't want no roti government." Roti shops proliferate, and though in India the middle-classes have adopted a Western-style breakfast, complete with poor white bread and corn flakes, in Trinidad roti with *dhal* and *subzi* or *tarkari* constitutes the bread and butter of most people at breakfast and dinner and often at lunch as well. The prevalence of Indian food is reflected in calypso, and many songs sing, often with mockery, scorn, and disturbing caricature, of 'roti' and 'chutney'. (Vinay Lal in <http://www.sscnet.ucla.edu/southasia/Diaspora>)

Indian presence is not only numerically strong in these countries of the Caribbean but the Indian culture as well. The early migrant indentured labour or coolies, as they were referred to sometimes by the colonizers, lived in conditions of abject poverty but over the years through hard work, thrift, determination and seeking refuge in the culture, at the cost of insulating themselves from other native groups, have managed to capture trade and commerce of their new homelands.

Though a minuscule white population controls some of the resources and finance and trade in Caribbean it is the Indians who are pretty much the upwardly mobile middle and upper crust of the society. This relative success as compared to the Africans who were brought to the Caribbean as early as 17th century does not seem to sit very well with the African populations. The Indians are seen as avaricious and greedy and very clannish. The Indians think the Africans are lazy among other things.

"Racial stereotypes developed early in the two colonies. British planters characterized Africans as physically strong but lazy and irresponsible. East Indians were stereotyped as industrious but clannish and greedy. Views that are still present today. To feel sleepy after eating is referred to in and around the Caribbean as having "niggeritis", a direct allusion to the laziness of Africans. To some extent, these stereotypes were accepted by the immigrant groups themselves, each giving truths to positive stereotypes of itself and negative stereotypes of other groups. They believed what was said of the other group but none of what was said of them. The stereotypes provided a useable explanation of behavior and justified competition among groups. Africans were described as indolent when they refused to work for low wages or make long-term contracts with the plantations as the Indians had. East Indians were considered selfish when they minimized their expenses to acquire wealth" (Seenarine, 2000). The fact that there is hardly any intermingling among these two groups cements the perceptions they have of each other. Almost all neighbourhoods are segregated on racial lines. There was hardly any interracial marriages, as the Indians considered themselves not quite black but Caucasian and preferred that their offspring not have a "nappy hair" (curly hair) of the Africans. These stereotypes are perpetuated early on with continued socialization where perceptions of each other are woven in to everyday life like this song that school children have for the Indians: "Black man is falling. When the Black Man used to wear feathers in his cap, the coolie was eating water-rice. Black man used to say, "Go way, you water-rice coolie!" Today the coolie think they are big people. After one time will be a next. Today is time for coolie. I don't mind cause the Lord say, "In the last days, race will rise against race, and nation will rise against nation, and there will be wars and rumors of wars" (Horowitz 1971).

Though at the time of struggle that sought independence from the colonial rule, blacks and Indians have formed some solidarity, however it was short-lived. The racial divide has been a continuing undercurrent to not only the political scenario but in social and cultural life.

A situation very similar to the Caribbean is that of ethnic and racial tensions that exist in Africa between the blacks and Indians. In our next section we take a brief look at how interracial perceptions are between Indians and Africans.

Indians in Africa

There are 2.5 million Indians in Africa. The People of Indian Origin (PIO) form a majority in Mauritius at 68% numbering around 715,000. There are 1 Million Indians in South Africa, 100,000 in Kenya, 81,000 in Seychelles, 28,000 in Madagascar, 90,000 in Tanzania, 16,000 in Zimbabwe, 9,000 in Botswana, and around 20,000 in Mozambique. The majority of Indians are concentrated in East Africa and South Africa. The Indians in Francophone countries are a small percentage except in Mauritius.

Indians went to Africa as indentured labour. The white colonist had got them to Africa to build the Uganda Kenya railways in the late 1800s. Of the original 32,000 contract laborers, about 6,700 stayed on to work as “*dukawallas*,” the artisans, traders, clerks, and, finally, small administrators. Excluded from colonial government and farming, they straddled the middle economic ground above the native blacks. Some even became doctors and lawyers.

It was this entrepreneurial *dukawallas* who were willing to move to inland to explore more business opportunities. In fact the potential for trader had attracted many free-passengers to Africa around this time and even before that. Indian traders had followed the Arab trading routes inland on the coast of modern-day Kenya and Tanzania. Indians had a virtual lock on Zanzibar’s lucrative spice trade in the 19th century, working as the Sultan’s exclusive agents.

“Between the building of the railways and the end of World War II, the number of Indians in East Africa swelled to 320,000. By the 1940s, some colonial areas had already passed laws restricting the flow of immigrants, as did white-ruled Rhodesia in 1924. But by then, the Indians had firmly established control of commercial trade – some 80 to 90 percent in Kenya and Uganda – plus sections of industrial development. In 1948, all but 12 of Uganda’s 195 cotton ginneries were Indian run” (Brueggemann, 2000).

The success of Indians was resented by the native population of East Africa, be it in Uganda, Tanzania or Kenya. The insularity and lack of social interaction didn’t help in reducing the perceptions of mutual distrust between the black population and the Indians. Despite the fact that a good number of Indians fought along side the blacks in their struggle for freedom; these newly emergent nations sought to build nations that sought to Africanize their countries. In Kenya new laws were introduced which said that “‘Foreigners’ could only hold jobs until a Kenyan national could be found to replace them: and more and more cities, including Nairobi, were demanding that the government ban non-Kenyans from owning a shop or trading in municipal markets”(source: <http://www.wairua.co.nz/ruth/culture/africa>.) In Uganda the resentment had finally led to the expulsion of Indians. In 1972, Idi Amin gave the country’s 75,000 Asians 90 days to leave. In Tanzania, the people of Indian Origin constituted only one percent

of the total population, however their place in Tanganyikan political economy was bolstered by colonial policies that favored Indians over Africans in trade, commerce and property ownership; and encouraged segregation among races in all spheres. The backlash against Indians were felt strongest when Tanzania, under the leadership of President Nyerere issued the Arusha Declaration in 1967, which essentially called for indigenisation of economy and where People of Indian Origin were not considered outsiders despite them being in the scene for many decades or rather centuries. In the decade of the 1970s over 50,000 Asians left Tanzania, mainly for the UK and Canada.

The family seems to have been the fortress and haven that Indian families retreated in to, they also served as economic networks and a source of social capital. This aspect of Indian family is best captured in V.S. Naipaul's book *A Bend in the River*. The West Indies author's 1979 book remains the best-known literary work in English addressing the *Mhindi* (Swahili for Indian) experience in East and Central Africa. Mira Nair who spent much of her growing up years in Uganda brings out the racial tension between blacks and Indians in small town Southern America in her movie *Mississippi Masala*. The story of this movie concerns a Ugandan Indian family living in Mississippi whose adult daughter (Sarita Choudhury) becomes romantically involved with a Southern black man (Denzel Washington). The relationship potentially threatens to undo the family's ethnic solidarity and its economic vitality. The affair also ignites old racial fears of the woman's father, who experiences flashbacks to his Uganda youth and his family's sudden and violent exile in August 1972.

As in East Africa the Indians who are now settled in South Africa were brought as indentured labour or coolie labour as they were called. As else where native black population was pitted against relatively successful Indians, the reaction from the natives and other ethnicities have been negative. Very often the Indians, who are entrepreneurial and insular in their cultural practices and social interactions, have been dubbed as being Jewish or called Indian Jews. They were assumed by native populations and by nationalists to be akin to Jews, and were smeared with the purported Jewish tendencies of being "crafty, mendacious, and money-minded" (as an anti-Indian tract published in Johannesburg circa 1950 claimed). All over Africa the general impression was that the Indians gained as community at the expense of the native population. This perception was strongest in South Africa and to that extent Vinay Lal feels that the South African situation is very distinct. He writes: "it is here that the ideology of racial segregation received full-blown expression. Racism was no longer to be predicated on mere sentiment; on the contrary, racial discrimination was institutionalized. The African National Congress (ANC), the main organ of resistance to apartheid, had at one time been inspired by both the Natal Indian Congress and the Indian National Congress. In the apartheid era, Indians not only fought alongside black people, but came to occupy significant leadership positions in the ANC."

The end of apartheid should have been a signal to Indians that the disabilities under which they had suffered would be removed. As elsewhere around the world, the white race in South Africa had set itself up as a transcendent entity, representing itself as a people whose presence alone kept the country from disintegrating into racial and ethnic hostilities. The racialized hierarchies white South Africa brought into existence have prevailed. Thus, discrimination is no longer sanctioned by state policy, but black animosity has increasingly turned towards Indians. Matters came to the fore in mid-2002, when the

Kwa-Zulu writer and musician, Mbongeni Ngema, released a song entitled 'AmaNdiya', the Zulu word for 'Indians'. 'Oh brothers,/Oh, my fellow brothers,' begins the song:

We need strong and brave men
To face the Indians.
This situation is very difficult,
Indians do not want to change
Whites were far better than Indians
Even Mandela has failed to convince them to change,
Whites were far better than Indians.

Ngema then suggests that politicians, bribed by Indians, remain indifferent to the plight of Zulus. He invokes great figures from the Zulu past - just why he does so becomes clear from these lines:

Indians have conquered Durban.
We are poor because all things have been taken by Indians.
They are oppressing us.
Mkhize wants to open a business in West Street,
Indians say there is no place to open a business
Our people are busy buying from Indian shops...
They [the Indians] don't want to support a single black shop
(Vinay Lal, 2004:15)

Almost everywhere where Indians and blacks form part of the population, there is the perception that Indians are discriminatory towards the blacks, they have been found to be racist and insular shutting themselves away from any meaningful interactions with the black populations. An Indian marrying a black person would be much more of a taboo than if she/he were to marry a white person, for instance.

Vinay Lal while accounting for racist policies against the Indians in Africa, also points out to the insularity of Indians and the discriminatory attitude they have towards blacks. He writes; "the retreat into the family home, the concerted refusal to engage with a wider notion of the 'public', the general segregation from other communities, and the often mindless replication of 'timeless' Indian traditions have been among the more distressing characteristics of Indian existence abroad, particularly in the affluent West. We cannot but fail to recognize, when we keep vividly before our mind, the story of Indian indentured labour, that in the marginalization and pauperization of blacks and Hispanics there is also, however unwilling most Indians in the US may be to recognize it as such, their own humiliation. Or, to take another example, if Indians are all too often heard describing black people as 'lazy', they might be reminded that, for 200 years, the British were wont to use the same language for them" (ibid).

21.5 The Indian and State's Perception of Overseas Indians

The Indian diaspora is estimated to be over 20 million spread over different countries and regions of the globe. They constitute in official parlance NRIs

(Non Resident Indians, Indian residing in other countries) and PIOs (People of Indian Origin, basically citizens of other countries with Indian origins).

Box 21.3 NRI and PIO

A **non-resident Indian (NRI)** is an Indian citizen who has migrated to another country. Other terms with the same meaning are 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 183 days in a year an NRI. In common usage, this often includes Indian born individuals (and also people of other nations with Indian blood) 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.

(source:<http://en.wikipedia.org>)

It was only in 2000 the Government of India had taken concrete steps to look into the affairs of overseas Indians, by settling up High Level Committee and separate ministry-Ministry of Overseas Indian Affairs. Prior to that the state response to Indians who left home many years ago or the one who left recently was very lukewarm, especially with relation to PIOs. As our unit 15 describes in detail, the Indian State response, to various situations which involved the diaspora, can be generalised as being constrained by diplomacy and an unclear stand as to exactly how to deal with PIOs. This ambivalence soon gave way to realization that the people who have migrated to overseas are a valuable asset, especially those who have been successful and who have made mark in their host country. Soon the general perception that the flight of professionals to greener pastures of Western countries meant a brain drain gave way to realization that it is not at all a loss. This realization in part was largely due to the fact that the remittances made by many NRIs were recognized for their economic value. The Indian diaspora, who went to the Gulf region as semi-skilled and skilled labour increased substantially post oil boom of 1973. The remittances sent by these workers increased the foreign exchange reserves. The remittances from North America also added to the foreign exchange reserve (see unit 13 and unit 15 for more details on migration to these regions of the globe). "According to one estimate, whereas India's forex receipts totaled less than \$ 300 million in 1974-75, by 1984-85 this figures has increased to \$ 2, 500 million. In 2005, it has reached more than \$16 billion." (Jain, 2006).

Further when liberalisation started in early 1990s, government of India tried to rope in first NRIs and then Indian settlers abroad to attract foreign direct investment. It organised meetings for NRIs and promised many incentives to attract their investment. PIOs were an equally relevant overseas segment to rope them in India's new drive for globalisation.

Vijay Prashad feels that the Indian state was interested in the rich overseas Indians and that its interest in the Indian diaspora is mostly or mainly economic. He says: "What is important here is that the diaspora is being imagined now not so much as unfortunates who have to be championed (as in the 19th century), as the brain drain (in the 1960s and 1970s), or as cultural ambassadors (as in the 1980s). We now have the diaspora represented almost entirely by the very wealthy who reside mainly in the advanced industrial states and whose image is summoned by the term NRI. By 'NRI' we certainly don't mean the taxi drivers in New York City, the sugarcane

workers in Guyana or the domestic servants in the Gulf. 'NRI' now means the Hinduja clan, Sanjay Kumar and Kanwal Rekhi"(Prasad, 2004).

The ambit of this perception that Indians are not just citizens of the country but include the diaspora has now further expanded to include PIOs, especially by the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) government, who wanted to reach the global Hindu community through its offshore activities. Though People of Indian Origin have been recognized as members of larger community, the general perception among the PIOs is that they are the poor cousins in relation to the wealthy NRIs.

The recent Parvasi Bharatiya Diwas though espousing to embrace all the global Indian family, including what are known as the older diasporas, namely the PIOs, have conferred only politically correct platitudes and very little actual incentives. "But dishonesty cannot always dissimulate successfully: thus the stated intention of the Government of India to confer the privilege of dual citizenship upon the members of the newer, affluent diasporic communities of the north, while leaving Indian communities in the Caribbean, Fiji, South Africa, Malaysia and else-where out in the cold, and this on the pretence that the older diasporic communities have not maintained much of a living connection with the mother-land, comes as no surprise"(Lal, 2004).

Reflection and Action 21.2

Highlight the perception of the Indian State on the Overseas Indians.

The discussion above has been mainly on the official position and perception about the Indian diaspora. Let us see what the everyday popular perceptions about the Indian diaspora are in the following section.

21.6 What India Thinks of the Indians Abroad

"The desire of the Indian diaspora for India is mirrored by the desire of India for its diaspora population" (Kamdar, 2004). This fascination with the diaspora can be seen in the amount of news-space that the diaspora occupies, especially the NRI. Any news or event that relates to Indian abroad is highlighted and brought to notice to the ones back in India whether it is Kiran Desai winning the Booker Prize, or Lakshmi Mittal's daughter's lavish wedding or Bobby Jindal running for the elections in America. We are quick to bring this far away events in to the India where the NRI or PIOs identity as an Indian is reiterated. While India lauds the diaspora for their success it also has expectations and perceptions about them that are not always complimentary.

Ankur Bhal, a 22 year old, Fullbright student, in an interview on rediff.com says : Everyone has misconceptions about people they don't live with. People in India think Non-Resident Indians are promiscuous, parent-hating mongrels (<http://www.rediff.com/news/2005/jan>). If not parent hating, the general representation which comes out very strongly in movies, whether they are made by Indians or Indians who live abroad, is that there is constant struggle between the first generation Indians and their second generation children. Movies such as *Bend it like Beckham*, or even the earlier film *Bhaji on the Beach* are evocations of this theme. The tension in some sense represents so-called Indian values versus Western values. The Western value of individuality over community or family is what is supposed to guide the Indian abroad, particularly the second generation. If not for this outright westernization, than they are at best very confused, caught

between the West and India; and hence acronym such as ABCD, which stands for American Born Confused Desi.

Another perception about those who left India for greener pastures and to more affluent Western countries is that they have betrayed India and have not given back anything to India. Often the accusation is that those who have left never return back to India. An NRI therefore sometimes has been called a Nonreturning Indian. And that these NRIs then are out of tune with India and in their occasional trips in India they are seen as complaining, insulating, mineral-water-drinking-accented non resident, who has lost his/her Indianess. Writing about this stereotype a Non Resident Indian says; "Many desis, who are NRIs, suddenly find themselves having to defend their Indianness. Becoming an NRI, or being labelled as an NRI is somehow thought to be an overnight transformation and you are expected to have a different take, perception on everything, and your comments on India are no longer correct or valid. It is like some kind of switch is flipped and a whole version of software is downloaded into your OS when you move to another country" (<http://kamlabhatter.wordpress.com/2006/02/07>).

This caricature of the NRI as not Indian enough and therefore lacking in morals or of values of the right kind is stereotypically portrayed in many films made in India especially the Bollywood. In fact anyone who went abroad- *vilayat* (the word *vilyat* or *bilayat* is itself a corruption of Blighty which is England) came back to India corrupted. Some of the early films had these portrayal of *bilayati* returned Indian or foreign returned. Manoj Kumar's was famous for championing the Indian values as against the corrupt Western values, so much so that he is nicknamed Mr. Bharat, has the *vilayati* returned Indian who wears mini skirts , smokes and drinks regains her Indianess thanks to the hero of the movie and then seen sporting, *saree* and *binidi* and generally behaving like a *bharathiya nari* - a good Indian women- in his film - *Poorab aur Paschim*.

Many contemporary films too are mirroring a similar image of the NRI, starting from '*Pardes*', to '*Mujhse Dosti Karoge*', to '*Ramji Londonwaley*', have depicted most NRIs as not so good compared to Indians. Invariably, they are shown as people who get cleansed when they return to their roots and once here they never leave. New Yorker Anitha Venkataramani put it aptly in her observation that in Bollywood the Indian-American guy is always one of two types. Either the boy is a rich, amoral and a womaniser whose parents are looking for a girl from India to fix him - for instance Apurva Agnihotri's character in '*Pardes*', or a rich MBA who only wants a girl from India - like Hrithik Roshan's character in '*Mujhse Dosti Karoge*' or Abhishek Bachchan in '*Kuch Naa Kaho*'.

The Indian-American girl also comes in two types - rich and amoral with a serious alcohol problem - for instance Suman Ranganathan's character in '*Aa Ab Laut Chalen*' and skimpily-dressed Kareena Kapoor in '*Kabhi Khushi Kabhie Gham*' and Rani Mukerji in '*Kuch Kuch Hota Hai*' - or rich and beautiful with a wardrobe comprising entirely of *salwar-kameezes* and an affinity towards India - like Kajol's character in '*Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge*'.

Additionally, more often than not, it takes a hardcore character from India to teach 'these Americans' what the true values of life are and how only Indians understand them. In '*Pardes*,' the goody two-shoes character of Arjun, played by Shah Rukh Khan, is characterised as the 'pure desi' at heart who is so moral he does not smoke or drink like the other immoral

Indian-Americans around him. In 'Kal Ho Naa Ho,' we witness Aman Mathur (Shah Rukh again) coming from India and teaching Naina Kapur how to 'have fun' in her life. Which consists of drinking shot after shot of hard liquor, stripping her clothes off and dancing provocatively with several men at once (<http://www.mahiram.com>).

Reflection and Action 21.3

Write an essay on what the Indians think of the Indians abroad.

With more NRIs returning back to India and with greater interactions between home and abroad, it is possible that some of these perceptions may get more nuanced, as with most stereotypes which are based on partial truths.

Box 21.4 Returning NRIs

More and more medical professionals are giving up lucrative jobs in the USA and other adopted countries to return to India and join research institutes and hospitals, reveals the study by the Charities Aid Foundation of India (CAF). The statistics are revealing. Of some 250 research scientists working at Dr Reddy's Laboratories, 20 have returned from foreign shores. They are involved in new drug research. At Lupin Laboratories, four scientists came from the USA to join research in natural product chemistry. Ten of the 80 researchers in Nicholas Piramal have come from abroad and Wockhardt has weaned away 10 scientists for biotechnology, new drug research, chemistry and pharmacology.

According to CAF, a UK-based public trust that associates with corporate donors for social causes, this is proof of the "intensity of the reverse brain drain". The largest number of professionals is coming from the USA, where Indian doctors are the largest foreign health professional group. This inflow is aided by the powerful Association of American Physicians of Indian origin (AAPI) comprising 35,000 physicians that interacts regularly with the Medical Council of India. Non-resident Indian (NRI) doctors support various health facilities and drives in India, including Apollo Hospitals, L.V. Prasad Eye Institute, Etc.. Salaries offered to such NRI doctors in India have shot up, facilitating their return. Some large Indian corporate groups are hiring expatriates with packages ranging from \$250,000 to \$400,000 a year.

The study observes: "In India, they can afford luxuries they could not in the USA. The basic living conditions here are improving, research opportunities are opening up and drug companies are investing more in research." (<http://www.tribuneindia.com/2003/>)

21.7 Conclusion

In this unit we have talked about the perceptions and stereotypes about Indians in their host countries as well as what Indians who live abroad or thought of back in their home countries. We have not discussed every Indian settlement or community in detail as, it would be too voluminous and beyond the scope of this unit, however we tried to give you a comprehensive picture of some of the main images which seems to be created and perpetuated through film, literature and media, which incidentally is the theme of this block.

In trying to capture the images of Indians abroad a greater coverage has been given, not all inadvertently, to Indians settled in Western countries with its preponderance of media and hence great image producers. However we also wanted to bring to you the typical situations and problems and perceptions faced by Indians who went to Caribbean, Africa and Fiji and Malaysia to name a few. We encourage you to try and

take this unit further by exploring similar or different perceptions of Indians in other parts of the globe.

21.8 Further Reading

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