
UNIT 62 MOBILITY

Structure

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62.0 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Dear Learner after reading this unit you will learn about:

- What is mobility?
- Mobility among Indian diaspora with regards to their social, economic and political life.
- How mobility occurred in various segments of Indian diaspora such as Old Indian diaspora and New Indian diaspora

62.1 INTRODUCTION

In simple term mobility refers to **the shift in an individual's social status from one status to another**. It can apply to any individual, community or the whole society or nation. Migration is itself a movement from one location to another that may result from aspiration or due to external push and pull factors. In this unit you will learn the mobility among the Indian diaspora in the context of their social, economic and political life.

Mobility can be upward as well as downward. It can happen when there is a shift in hierarchical position of an entire class of individuals over time in society. Before discussing about the mobility in Indian diaspora, let's discuss briefly about the patterns of Indian diaspora. The detail discussions on the formation of Indian diaspora have already been discussed in the earlier units.

Earlier in the course on Indian diaspora (Course 5) you have already read about various patterns of diaspora formation based on the political-economy and history of diaspora formation. Broadly they can be divided into two categories:

1. Old Indian diaspora that are formed during colonial era because of migration of labour during colonial times. (a) Ancient and Medieval Indian Diaspora (Bali, Malaya, Sri Lanka, West Africa etc... as a result of trade, religious activities etc.); (b) Colonial Diaspora (as a result of British, Dutch and French colonies and their labour employment in plantation economy)

2. New Indian Diaspora that formed after the independence till date: (a) Post-Independence Indian Diaspora (Free migration for employment and study etc.); (b) Migration to West Asia, especially GCC countries in 1970s; (c) Migration of Professional to Western Countries in recent times

As you already know, Indian diaspora is as diverse as India in terms of social and economic point of view. There is also diversity in terms of skills and education. Therefore, mobility varies across the strata. Therefore, it is better to discuss various types of mobilities in any community.

62.2 MOBILITY: SOCIAL, ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL

When we talk about mobility, we broadly think of the social, economic and political mobility of a person or community.

- (a) What is Social Mobility? In a very simple term social mobility is **the movement from one class or status to another**. It can be intragenerational or intergenerational mobility.

As S. Bogardu mentioned: “Social mobility is any change in social position, such as occupational changes where persons move up or down the occupational scale, or relation to office whereby a follower becomes a leader, or a leap from a low economic class to a high one, or vice-versa.”

According to P.A. Sorokin: “By social mobility is meant any transition of an individual from one position to another in a constellation of social group and strata.”

Social mobility can be categorized into two types: 1. Horizontal Social Mobility- When the movement of a person occurs from one situation to another at the same level i.e. within the single stratum, the process is called horizontal social mobility and 2. Vertical Social Mobility Vertical Social Mobility there is a change in the status of the individual. The individual attains high education and becomes rich, He moves upward in the social hierarchy. Vertical mobility can be either upward social mobility (Ascending Mobility) or downward social mobility (Descending mobility).

- (b) Economic Mobility: This type of mobility describes how someone’s economic well-being changes over time. For example the change of income which impact their life. Economic mobility often depends on opportunity in a neighborhood, city, or state. For example, due to historical policy decisions, some neighborhoods provide a higher rate of upward mobility. Economic mobility can also refer to the changes in economic outcomes for groups of people, or generations over time. Economic mobility is a measure of how much a person’s income changes over time.
- (c) Political Mobility: This means a community’s involvement in decision making process and representation. Many migrant minority communities have gained political assertiveness through representation over the period. Often the social and economic mobility helped them to gain the political mobility.

All these mobility is also directly or indirectly impacted by the migration. If people migrate to other places or country voluntarily due to career or for better opportunity it will in all likelihood promote social, economic and political mobility in long run.

62.3 MOBILITY AMONG OLD INDIAN DIASPORA

There is very little history about the ancient Indian diaspora those who are settled in various parts of the world such as the traders of Gujarat in West Africa, Hindus in Bali, Malaysia, Religious preachers in Sri Lanka and Myanmar (Burma) etc. In this section we will focus mainly on the colonial diaspora as it is the most important phase of mass migration in the history of India. This diaspora refers to the migration of people from India to Fiji, Mauritius, Guyana, Surinam, Malaysia, South Africa, Sri Lanka, the Caribbean, Trinidad, Tobago before independence. British colonial rule sent these laborers to another country in 1833 because the slave trade had been abolished and slaves were denied working at meager wages. British rule chose an indenture system for sending labor from India. This system did not come under slavery but it was a contract known as *Girmit* (contract for five years). Indian coolies and workers not only toiled on the plantation but cleared forests, built roads, and railways, worked on construction sites and industries. These sections of Indentured labour are mainly from poor and deprived communities such as untouchables, beggar etc. Though other communities have also small representations. Let's discuss about the mobility in the old Indian diaspora.

The Case of Indian Community in Fiji

There are various phases of Indian settlement in Fiji. The Indian immigrants or 'girmitiyas' under British indenture labour system have gradually settled and formed the Indian Diaspora. The 'girmitiyas' in Fiji that arrived between 1879-1916 have undergone generational changes, and gradually transformed to distinct Fijian-Indian Diaspora within Fiji and abroad. Many of the Indo-Fijian are also highly mobile and have transnational network with other diasporas. Many of them (Fijian-Indian diaspora) have a greater network in the Pacific- Rim metropolitan countries such as Australia, New Zealand, Canada, and USA. This helped them to have a better global network and upward looking.

The 'girmitiyas' that formed 'old' or 'primary' Indian diaspora in Fiji, rose from misery, poverty and exploitation as indentured labourers, and gradually transformed to an affluent community and through their secondary migration, formed a distinct 'new' Diaspora of Indian descent abroad. The trans-nationalisation of Fiji Indian diaspora is a rapid process in the last three decades. Fijian of Indian descents formed distinct 'transnational' diaspora abroad by the late 1990s through large-scale emigration of third and fourth generation girmitiya population especially in Australia, New Zealand, Canada and USA.

Transnational Network and Upward mobility

The mobility among the People of Indian Origin in Fiji have been remarkable. From contract labourer to small holding farmers, artisans, govt. officials, entrepreneurs and skilled professionals there has been remarkable upward mobility. Therefore, in the economic arena there are rapid transformation. Migration from Fiji to Australia, New Zealand and other places became significant in the late 1960s but increased rapidly after Fiji's independence in 1970.

Beside this, there are also large-scale outflow of Fijian- Indians mainly the skilled professional categories to the Pacific Rim metropolitan countries such as Australia, New Zealand, Canada, and USA (Mohanty, 2001; 2006). In the last 4 decades or so,

more than 122,000 Fijian-Indians have migrated abroad from Fiji i.e., more than one-third of Indian population in Fiji. The emigration trend accelerated due to the events of coups and political instabilities in 1987, 2000 and 2006 and the problem of non-renewal of land leases since 1997. The study by Mohanty (2018) found that “on an average, over 4,700 Fijian-Indian emigrated annually from Fiji between 1987 and 1999, most of them were skilled individuals.

The ‘girmityas’ that formed ‘old’ or ‘primary’ Indian diaspora in Fiji, rose from misery, poverty and exploitation as indentured labourers, and gradually transformed to an affluent community and through their secondary migration, formed a distinct ‘new’ Diaspora of Indian descent abroad. The trans-nationalisation of Fiji Indian diaspora is a rapid process in the last three decades. Fijian of Indian descents formed distinct ‘transnational’ diaspora abroad by the late 1990s through large-scale emigration of third and fourth generation girmitya population especially in Australia, New Zealand, Canada and USA. Lal (2017:8) noted that the Indo-Fijian “diaspora of the ‘Twice Banished’” is increasing daily as people leave Fiji for freedom and opportunity elsewhere...” Today, an estimated 158,000 Fijian-Indian transnational Diaspora live in Australia, New Zealand, USA, Canada and the United Kingdom (Table 2). Australia is home to the largest proportion of Fijian-Indian Diaspora accounting for little less than one-third of total diasporic population and followed by New Zealand (26 per cent), USA (21 per cent), Canada (17 per cent) and the UK (4 per cent) (Table 1).

Table 1: Fijian-Indian Transnational Diaspora Population

Country	Year	Total Fiji-born population	Estimated Fijian – Indian population	% Share to total Fiji-Indians
Australia	2011	56,979	49,572	31.4
New Zealand	2013	56,979	45,897	29.0
United States	2013	56,979	34,526	21.9
Canada	2011	24,925	22,000	13.9
United Kingdom	2015*	6,754	5,943	3.8
Total	-	180,648	157,938	100.0

Source: Mohanty, M collected from various sources including Country Census Population Reports, Australia (2011) and New Zealand (2013)

* UN estimated

The ‘twice migrants’ and ‘thrice migrants’ Fijian–Indians to another country from the country of residence or settlement (e.g., Australian Fijian- Indian to the UK or USA) and a ‘chain diaspora’ formation are on-going process. When the ‘chain diasporas’ are taken into account, the Fijian- Indian global diaspora population is estimated around 170,000. The Fijian-Indian students also constitute a significant number abroad including USA, Canada, UK, Australia, New Zealand, India and elsewhere. When the student diaspora is added, the Fijian-Indian global diaspora population will be higher than estimated value.

The Case of Indian in Mauritius

The Indian diaspora in Mauritius is considered unique and significant as they currently make up more than 68% of the Mauritius population. They have transitioned their identity from indentured to dominant diaspora community by dominating the social-political and cultural facets of the island over the years. Indians' festivals are famous not just for the congregations they inspire but for the collective celebration and festivities. To delve deeper into the Indian connection, Ganga talao or grand basin in the south of the island where a 108 ft. bronze statue of Shiva has been installed. Indian language especially Hindi and Bhojpuri have been a strong connector with Mauritius culture, literature, and value. Food is another distinct part of the culture and can be considered a requirement and amenity for human life. But apart from the taste and sense of belonging of food with the culture and community cannot be disregarded.

Case Study I:

Political Participation of People of Indian Origin in Mauritius

People of Indian Origin have influenced Mauritian culture, economy and politics. Mauritian politics have been historically dominated by the Indo-Mauritian community due to their majority as a whole on the electoral platform. All presidents except Karl Offmann and all prime ministers except for Paul Berenger have been members of the Indian community. In Mauritius, people of Indian descent have made up more than half the population. There are various forms of political as well as social organisations such as village level organisations, caste organisations etc to large political parties that are represented by Indians. At present Mr. Pravind Kumar Jugnauth is a Mauritian politician serving as the prime minister of Mauritius since January 2017 who is of Indian origin.

Some of the notable leaders of past and present in Mauritius includes: Sookdeo Bissoondoyal, politician and one of the three founding fathers of independent Mauritius; Dayendranath Burrenchobay – former Governor-General of Mauritius; Anerood Jugnauth – Former Prime Minister; Pravind Jugnauth – Current Prime Minister; Abdool Razack Mohamed – One of the three Founding Fathers of Independent Mauritius; Kailash Purryag – Former President of Mauritius; Navin Ramgoolam – Former Prime Minister; Seewoosagar Ramgoolam – Former Prime Minister and one of the three Founding Fathers of Independent Mauritius; Ameenah Gurib-Fakim – Former President; Prithvirajsing Roopun – Current President.

Malaysia

Malaysia has three main ethnic communities namely Malays, Chinese and Indians. As per the 2018 Ministry of External Affairs report, there are 2,987,950 (29.88 Lakhs) Indians residing in Malaysia that includes Persons of Indian Origin (PIOs) – 2,760,000 (27.60 Lakhs), Non-Resident Indians (NRIs) – 227,950 (2.28 Lakhs) which is roughly 9% of the total Malaysian population and third largest ethnic group after Malaysian and Chinese. Tamils constitute the largest ethnic Indian population among all.

Malaysia's 1.4 million-odd Indians find themselves in a paradoxical situation. Economically, they have been overtaken by the Malays and the Chinese. But politically, they have grown in importance. With the splintering of Malaysia's dominant political parties, Indians - who make up almost 9 per cent of the population - are being actively wooed by the ruling *bumiputras*.

In the Malaysian Constitution, Article 153 provides “special rights” to Malays in education, business, and the public service as a part of Bhumiputra policy of the Government. However, over the time there has been new migration of professionals who are economically better off and have a better income owing to their professional education and skills.

Since last three decades there is increasing presence of skilled migrants from India. They are spread across sectors such as IT, Banking, Education etc. and contributing to the economic progress of Malaysia. In last few decades, there has been migration of Indian communities from rural Malaysia to urban Malaysia which helped them to tap new opportunities in economy, education and other areas.

Check Your Progress 1

- 1. What is social mobility?

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- 2. Write note on the economic mobility of the Indian community in Fiji

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62.4 MOBILITY AMONG INDIAN DIASPORA POST-INDEPENDENCE

The post-independence period also witnessed Indians from different social strata moving to countries like the United Kingdom, the United States, and the Gulf countries. The Indian diaspora has been classified into three categories after independence in 1947. First, the emigration of Indian diaspora in industrially advanced countries like the United States of America, England, and Canada. Second, the emigration of skilled and unskilled laborers to west Asia and Third, recent migration to various new destinations including advanced countries of Europe, USA, Australia.

The large scale of Indian people who migrated in 1960 and 1970 for posts of engineers, scientists, and teachers to the industrially advanced countries of the west is essentially a post-independence phenomenon. The trend continues to raise the mass of people

migration data for many years. The pattern of emigration often described as brain drain is essentially voluntary and mostly individual. The second and subsequent generations having emerged and the emigrant population enjoying economic prosperity and socio-cultural rights, this stream of emigration has resulted in vibrant Indian communities abroad.

The emigration of skilled and unskilled laborers to west Asia in the wake of the oil boom. This emigration is voluntary, but its trends and conditions are determined by the labor market. It is predominantly male migration, characterized by uninterrupted ties with the families and communities back in India. Let us look at the immigration patterns of Indians to the U.S.A and Canada.

The recent migration to various new destinations including advanced countries of Europe, USA, Australia constitutes students, professionals and workers in the service sectors such as information technology healthcare etc.

Mobility among Indians in the US

The large-scale Indian migration started after the repeal of the immigration and nationality act in 1965. In 1970 Indian immigrants to the United States had arrived, close to 10,000 came in 1970. The reasons for the Indian emigration of the past 1965 have more to do with the American “pull” than with the Indian “push” factor. Their lifestyle and aspirations are similar to the general Americans. The U.S economy witnessed a massive surge in information and other technology since 1990.

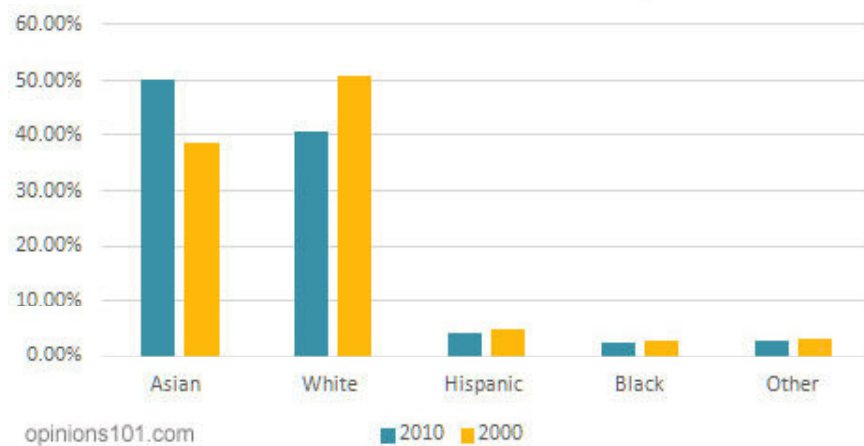
The U.S. Census Bureau estimates that there are **4.2 million people** of Indian origin residing in the United State as of 2018 which is considered to be the second-largest immigrant group after Mexicans. It is also the most successful, with the median household income at \$107,000 – almost twice that of American-born households. Indian immigrants are more likely to be enrolled in higher education, to participate in the labour force and twice as likely to be employed in management, business, science and the arts as the overall population.

November 2016 saw 5 Indian American candidates Ro Khanna, Raja Krishnamoorthi, Pramila Jayapal and Kamala Harris scripting the history by being elected into the US Congress with Ami Bera being re-elected. After attaining victory in 2016 US Presidential elections, Donald Trump highlighted the Indian American’s political participation by praising the Hindus by thanking them. **60 ID** candidates are running for federal elections, state legislature and local office seats in America in 2018. Around 9 Indian Americans were in charge of senior public positions in the Trump administration which included Mrs Nikki Haley - US Ambassador to The United Nations, Krishna R Urs — US Ambassador to Peru, Manisha Singh — Assistant Secretary of State For Economic Affairs, Neil Chatterjee — Member of the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission, Raj Shah — Deputy Assistant to The President and Principal Deputy Press Secretary, Vishal Amin — Intellectual Property (IP) Enforcement Coordinator, Neomi Rao — Administrator of the Office Of Information and Regulatory Affairs (OIRA), Ajit V Pai — Chairman of the Federal Communications Commission and Seema Verma — Administrator of the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services. This clearly shows that American Politics is undergoing a transformation with more Indian Americans conquering political heights through their hard work and determination

Case Study II: Silicon Valley Entrepreneurs

Named after the core material in computer microprocessors, Silicon Valley is **home to dozens of major technology and IT companies. It is one** of the wealthiest areas in the world. Many notable companies such as Google, Apple, Meta, Chevron, Cisco, Visa etc have appointed Indians at the top posts. The region is unique in attracting many venture capitalists mostly from immigrant communities. According to a report by BBC (2021), only 1% of USA population belong to the people of Indian-origin. However, they constitute 6% of Silicon Valley’s workforce. Not only that they also constitute some of the top entrepreneurs of the valley. Most of them are first generation entrepreneurs who have no family link in the business. There are many reasons for the progress of the Indian community in Silicon Valley. This great mobility is a result of their skills, education, English language and finally the opportunity that the Silicon Valley provides.

Asian Workers Dominate Silicon Valley Tech Jobs



Source: silicon-valley-news.com

The economic mobility of Indian community in USA is quite noticeable due to their presence in almost every sector including IT, healthcare, Research and Development and other professional areas.

CEOs and Top positions occupied by Indian in USA



Source: Indiatimes

(From L to R) Arvind Krishna is the Chairman and CEO of the **popular tech firm IBM**, Google’s parent company Alphabet is in the reigns of Sundar Pichai, Microsoft is being headed by Satya Nadella, whereas Adobe is being led by Shantanu Narayen.

Indians in Canada

Indians are the largest component of South Asian origin in Canada. Most of the people migrated during the post-1947 period to Canada. Sikh communities are living in Canada. 1981 data there are 1 lakh 10 thousand Indians living in Canada. 2001 census show that the population of Canada was 3 crore and 3 percent of Indians of the total population live there. Among the Indian population half of the population is Sikh, and one-fourth Hindus. As a consequence of the 1969 immigration policy of Canada, the flow of Indian immigrants has been highly selective. About three-fourths of the immigrants are educated and highly skilled. Indians going to Canada have three classes. First Punjabi being refugee, second skilled artisans, engineer, doctor as non-Punjabi. The third class belongs to the family, which people are going there in the form of family unification.

The Sikh community may comprise just 1 per cent of Canada’s population, but they have come to wield more power than most of their immigrant counterparts.

Case Study III:

Sikhs in Canadian Politics

Sikhs are represented across party in Canada though large number of them are from Liberal party, followed by Conservative party and NDP. Sikhs are the dominant ethnic group in eight federal seats and have a substantial presence in 15 other seats important enough to tilt the balance in favour of a party. Recent Canadian election results have shown that MPs from ethnic minorities often win constituencies where their community doesn’t form the majority. Some of the notable Members of the parliamentarians are: Harjit Singh Sajjan – British Columbia; Randeep Singh Sarai , British Columbia; Sukh Dhaliwal – British Columbia; Navdeep Singh Bains – Ontario; Gagan Sikand – Ontario; Rameshwar Singh Sangha – Ontario; Maninder Singh Sidhu – Ontario; Jagmeet Singh – British Columbia; Tim Singh Uppal – Alberta;

Jasraj Singh Hallan – Alberta by representing all parties and deeply engaging in social and economic activities of Canada, Sikh Canadians have shown that they are an integral part of Canada’s socio-political fabric. The credit goes to their engagement in grassroots politics, organisational skills and fundraising capabilities



Source: <https://www.sikh24.com/> (2019)

Indians in Gulf countries

About half of India’s 17.9 million emigrants in 2020 lived in GCC Countries. They constitute low- and semi-skilled workers, as well as professionals in the health-care and science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) fields. The large scale migration of these categories to GCC countries are partly due to lack of employment opportunity in the home country. Unlike Indian diasporas in many other countries, the Indians living in GCC countries cannot get permanent citizenship and hence they send back all their earnings to the country of origin in the form of remittances. They not only play a very significant role in the host countries (GCCs) but also have a major developmental contribution to the place of origin. The development impact of remittance is covered in the Unit 48 and Unit 74.

The economic and social mobility back home in many rural families are visible. However, there are also human rights violation and health risks due to the condition of work in GCC countries.

Caste Structure at home and host

Caste is an inherited system of social hierarchy that is pervasive throughout South Asia, particularly in India. Caste system considered to be one of the strong barriers to the socio-economic progress of the individual and community especially those are belong to lower caste group known as Dalits. There are occupational rigidity and other discriminatory practices that are prevalent in the caste-based society. Practices of Caste is still prevalent in many countries wherever Indian communities live. However, it is negligible among Indian diaspora settled in colonies. This is mainly due to the intermarriages between various groups. Often discriminating practices are prevalent in the newly migrant communities to USA and UK. However, overall, the host societies provide alternative avenues for mobility. Indian diaspora has progressed better than their counterparts in India.

The second and third generation of people of Indian origin belong to lower strata of societies in countries like Fiji, Malaysia, Mauritius etc. have undergone not just occupational change, but played important role in the political area too. Besides, the transnational mobility of the Indian communities in Trinidad and Tobago, Fiji, Malaysia have further helped them to gain upward mobility in social-economic arena.

Check Your Progress 2

Note : a) Write your answer in about 50 words.

b) Check your answer with possible answers given at the end of the unit.

1. Describe the rote of Indians in Silicon Valley

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2. Does caste hinders social progress?

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62.5 LET US SUM UP

In this unit you learned about the different types of mobility that any individual or community experience while migrating to another country. Mobility can be vertical or horizontal. As Indian diaspora is diverse representing different social, economic, educational and regional background, the progress and mobility also depend on their social, cultural and political capital.

62.6 KEY WORDS

Girmitiyas: They were indentured laborers from British India transported to work on plantations in their colonies as part of the Indian indenture system.

62.7 REFERENCES AND SELECT READINGS

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62.8 CHECK YOUR PROGRESS- POSSIBLE ANSWERS

Check Your Progress 1

1: In a very simple term social mobility is **the movement from one class or status to another**. It can be intragenerational or intergenerational mobility.

As S. Bogardu mentioned: “Social mobility is any change in social position, such as occupational changes where persons move up or down the occupational scale, or relation to office whereby a follower becomes a leader, or a leap from a low economic class to a high one, or vice-versa.”.

- 2:** The mobility among the People of Indian Origin in Fiji have been remarkable. From contract labourer to small holding farmers, artisans, govt. officials, entrepreneurs and skilled professionals there has been remarkable upward mobility. Therefore, in the economic arena there are rapid transformation. Migration from Fiji to Australia, New Zealand and other places became significant in the late 1960s but increased rapidly after Fiji's independence in 1970. The migration of Indo-Fijians to many advanced countries helped them to have a transnational network which further enhanced their professional upward mobility.

Check Your Progress 2

- 1:** People of Indian Origin constitute 6% of Silicon Valley's workforce. Not only that they also constitute some of the top entrepreneurs of the valley. Most of them are first generation entrepreneurs who have no family link in the business. There are many reasons for the progress of the Indian community in Silicon Valley. This great mobility is a result of their skills, education, English language and finally the opportunity that the Silicon Valley provides.
- 2:** Lack of Caste system or less impact of caste outside India allowed individual to choose their own occupation, marriage partner and other social communication freely. This is more applicable among the indentured labour who migrated to former colonies. Most of them are from lower caste from India they had very little chance in the home country to choose good occupation.