

Indian Diaspora in South and Southeast Asia

Contents

- 9.1 Introduction
- 9.2 Understanding Indian Diaspora
- 9.3 Categorising Indian Diaspora
- 9.4 The Problem about Indian Diaspora
- 9.5 Indian Diaspora in South Asia
- 9.6 Indian Diaspora in Southeast Asia
- 9.7 Evolving Perspective
- 9.8 Conclusion
- 9.9 Further Reading

Learning Objectives

After going through the Unit, you will be able to:

- comprehend the nuances of Indian diaspora in South and Southeast Asia;
- classify various types of Indian diaspora;
- discuss the emergence of Indian identity; and
- explain the evolving perspective of Indian diaspora.

9.1 Introduction

The Encyclopedia of Social Sciences defines that “diaspora is a Greek term for a nation separated from its own state or territory and dispersed among other nations but preserving its national culture”. In the idea of dispersal and fragmentation and in much of the presumed relationship between the diasporic community and the country (motherland), which they left, the possibility of return remains. This may be true in the context of Jews but the possibility of return is a complex issue in the context of Indian diaspora in South and Southeast Asia.

Indian diaspora is spread in different parts of the world and its number is around 20 million. It is the third largest in the world after the British and the Chinese diaspora. Such persons are prosperous in the US, Mauritius, Singapore and Thailand but struggling very hard in Myanmar, Fiji, Malaysia and Sri Lanka.

Indian diaspora became important for India when the policy of command economy was replaced by market economy. India became sensitive about the challenges of the new world order and evolved the policy of “Look East” to promote strategic and economic ties with Asia-Pacific. In that endeavour, it was found that Indian diaspora had immense potential to support Indian contacts with East Asian neighbours. As the Chinese diaspora greatly contributed to the development of new economic zones in China, so it can be similarly expected from the Indian diaspora if the necessary infrastructure

is evolved. Indian diaspora in the ASEAN region (a region of the “Association of South East Asian Nations”) is resourceful and capable of facilitating India’s connections with the countries of their adoption.

9.2 Understanding Indian Diaspora

Indians have gone overseas as travellers, labourers and businessmen in the past, but in the wake of partition of the country in 1947, millions went from one part of the subcontinent to another. There was exodus of Indian Muslims to Pakistan, where they are known as Mohajirs. Despite having a common religion, their integration with the native population remains a distant dream. There was exodus of Hindus from Pakistan to India and they also faced problems in adjusting with the new environment. India, which emerged as a secular state and stood against the “Two-Nation Theory” provided religious freedom to all its citizens and tried to rehabilitate displaced persons without discriminating against their ethnicity and religious affiliations. All those who migrated from India to settle elsewhere were projected as its diaspora.

Hindus who migrated from Pakistan to India and Muslims who migrated from India to Pakistan are nostalgic about their ethnicity and place of origin. Both of them are in the category of diaspora and it is a sensitive matter to project them whether they are Pakistani diaspora or Indian.

Dilemmas about Diaspora

There are outstanding issues and dilemmas about the diasporic community in the South Asian context. For instance, East Bengal became Pakistan after independence, and it emerged, as a new nation of Bangladesh in 1971. The people of Bangladesh are known as Bangladeshis but Bengalis in general parlance. They have migrated to Assam and other parts of India in recent years. It is debatable to project them Indian diaspora, but Bengalis are an essential part of Indian civilization. There has been exodus of Kashmiri Pandits from the Kashmir valley. They have been dispossessed of their properties and they are struggling for their shelter. Can they be projected as a diasporic community even if they inhabit the same country?

There are groups of Punjabis, Sikhs and Gujaratis who have migrated in different directions of the world more than once. Fijians of Indian origin have migrated to Australia and New Zealand after Lt. Col. Sitiveni Rabuka staged a coup d’etat in 1987. Sindh is an important part of Pakistan and Sindhis are proud of claiming their Indianess outside. A large Indian diaspora in the region emigrated from one country to another and they have forgotten their native language also. The section of Indian diaspora, which is “twice migrant” have lost touch with India. For the host country, they may be projected as Indians, but they are fragmented and have very little to share especially with those groups, who are “twice migrant” from two or three countries respectively.

They do not speak the same language, or visit the same temple and hardly intermarry. As a supporter of “Unity in diversity”, India may project them as Indian diaspora, but it is difficult to categorise them as an India-centric homogenous group.

Diaspora Affluence

The Indian diaspora is affluent not only in the US, Mauritius and the Caribbean,

but they are also influential in Singapore, Thailand and the Philippines. There are two types of diaspora in the ASEAN region of which one is affluent and another is striving to be affluent. They need interaction with the motherland for business, trade and religious purposes. It is also felt that if India has to play a constructive role at the international level, the feedback of the diasporic community and their support is solicited. Indian diaspora is playing an important role in the ASEAN economy and they are trusted by the local leaders. It was the Indian diaspora with whose mediation various indigenous groups in Southeast Asian region were supporting the Indian National Army (INA) of Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose. They had kept affiliation with Indian National Congress and supported the anti-colonial struggle. However when India became independent and pursued a non-alignment policy, it was not within their framework to support the diasporic community more openly. Its socialistic drives and nationalization policies deterred the investors, but the situation started changing in the post-liberalisation era. The influence of the diaspora on Indian decision-making could not be ignored and overseas Indians were ready to reciprocate. The Indian diaspora are applauded for developments in India for science, technology, human resources, and for extending support to bring together business network to forge closer linkages with the country of their adoption.

Diaspora Policy in the past

India had been very circumspect regarding its policies towards its diaspora in South and Southeast Asia. From Prime Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru to Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi, the advice to Indian diaspora was to integrate in the mainstream of national life of the countries of their adoption. It could not exercise its diplomatic influence to deter democratic Burma under U Nu from its anti-Indian crusades. The Citizenship Act (1948) was tailor-made to deprive Indians of Burmese citizenship. Naturally when General Ne win usurped power in 1962 and nationalized the properties of Indians, India was unable to restrain military rulers. There was turmoil and unrest in Bangladesh and Pakistan, but the Indian government viewed these developments as too sensitive to express its opinion. The political developments in Burma had wide-ranging repercussions. Indians, who were affluent in business and trade, were evicted and subsequently Burma turned from a rich to a poor country of Southeast Asia.

If Burma was compelled to embrace friendship with the Chinese, it was because of its poor economic situation. The Chinese have filled up the vacuum created after the eviction of Indians and today they are powerful element in the politics and economy of Burma.

India has overlooked the plight of the Indian diaspora in its neighbourhood in the post-independence era. As India's unity was challenged on regional, linguistic and religious considerations it was engaged in putting its own house in order. It believed that if it supports the integrative drives of its neighbours, others would also reciprocate the gesture. It was one of the reasons that India decided to support Singalese in Sri Lanka against militant Tamils in 1987. India dispatched its troops to fight against Tamils (LTTE). These steps proved counterproductive. It neither subdued the Tamils nor did it create any good will for India in the neighbourhood. Pakistan's crusade for Kashmir was intensified and external agents of destabilization became active against India.

India's "inaction" in Burma (1948-1962) and its "Pro-active" role in Sri Lanka (1987-88) vis-à-vis its diaspora lacked vision and rationality. India was criticized for its inaction in Burma and its was condemned for its action in Sri Lanka. These events gave wrong signals and complicated the process of conflict resolution.

India began to attach importance to its diasporic community with sensitivity and care in the era of liberalization. When India opened its markets and the economic situation and global competition became matters of concern, it became necessary to review its perspectives and policies in the light of new developments. India needed infrastructure and in that endeavour "Foreign Direct Investment" (FDI) was required. It was only thereafter that the importance of overseas Indians was emphasised and high-powered committee under L.M. Singhvi was established to understand the problems and perspectives of Indian diaspora.

India overhauled its economic policies to create an attractive economic environment. It offered tax holidays and removal of tariff barriers. It assured its support for free trade and promote economic integration with Asia-Pacific. Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee offered special incentives to the Indian diaspora and assured them he would create special economic zones for their project of dual citizenship facility and full solidarity. He gave the idea of celebrating Pravasi Bharatiya Diwas every year, which has proved useful in establishing rapport and understanding with the diasporic community.

The changes in the economic policies and friendly gestures for the diaspora were widely appreciated. India, which was welcomed as the dialogue partner of ASEAN, and partnership with ARF ("ASEAN Regional Forum") was happy to cultivate its diaspora. It was believed that with the assistance and support of NRIs in the ASEAN region, the objectives of Mekong-Ganga project and BIMST-EC ("Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Myanmar, Nepal, Srilanka, Thailand Economic Co-operation") would be achievable. In all those endeavours and to assure fruitful partnership, the feedback and support of diaspora are crucial.

9.3 Categorising Indian Diaspora

Indian diaspora is of different types. In order to understand it, we need to understand various categories of Indian diaspora. They are known as Non-Resident Indians (NRIs). Persons of Indian Origin (PIO), Persons Resident in India (PRI) and Overseas Indians and each term has a different legal connotation.

NRIs & PIOs

According to the Foreign Exchange Management Act (FEMA) 1999, which came into effect from 1 June 2000, an NRI is an Indian Passport holder who stays outside India on employment, business or vocation or for any other purpose for more than 182 days in a financial year. The 182 days need not be continuous. On the other hand, a PIO is a person, who while not being a citizen of Pakistan or Bangladesh, shall be deemed to be of Indian origin if he or either of his parents or any of his grand parents was a citizen of India by virtue of the Indian Constitution or Citizenship Act of 1955. Foreign wives of Indian citizens are treated as PIO, though they don't have Indian parentage. Indians who emigrated as indentured labourers during the British colonial period also come under this category. The concentration of PIOs is high in countries like Malaysia. An NRI will become a PIO if he acquires the citizenship of another country. Because there was no provision for dual

citizenship under the Indian Constitution before 2004, they were unable to get Indian citizenship. But now the situation has changed and the facility of dual citizenship can be attained.

PRI & overseas Indians

The next category is the PRI. Persons Resident in India are those Indian citizens who go to foreign countries for higher studies, educational training, medical treatment or any other purpose indicating their intention of not staying outside the country for an uncertain period. Indian students abroad who take up jobs on completion of their education abroad would attain the PRI status from the day of joining the employment.

The concept of Overseas Indians emerged during the 20th century when the plight of the Indian emigrants overseas kindled a strong political protest in India against the British Indian government's attitude towards them because India was then a part of the British empire and all in India and overseas were said to be the British subjects.

Generally speaking, the term PIO and NRI have been used interchangeably by the Government of India (GoI) in Parliamentary debates and other official literature as well as by the Indian Press. There are different categories of migrant Indians; this includes emigrants under the British colonial system including indentured labourers and free passage migrants to Southeast Asia and the Caribbean countries. Free passage/commercial emigrants are those who left India after independence for higher education and better jobs in the U.K., the U.S. and Australia and the labour migrants in the Gulf countries to this day.

9.4 The Problem about Indian Diaspora

The problem of the Government of India is that it tries to group the Indian diaspora under one definition. This is the principal reason why the debate on dual nationality has stagnated. If a PIO has the inherent right to apply for Indian citizenship and is allowed to maintain his or her other nationality, it would also by default allow Pakistanis or Bangladeshis to seek Indian citizenship.

From time immemorial, Indians have migrated from India to different parts of the world. Indian diaspora comprises persons who migrated both involuntarily and voluntarily, namely, the PIOs, NRIs and the stateless persons of Indian origin. The present government's classification of the Overseas Indian communities into Indian citizens, PIOs and stateless persons can be collectively referred to as the Indian diaspora. Therefore, a multi-layered, broad and all encompassing definition is required. An accurate definition or acronym for the Indian diaspora is difficult to come by.

In the Southeast Asian region, the Overseas Indians invited their families to their countries of settlement and started family-owned shops. They built railroads and involved in development of port facilities. PIO constituted a significant number in Burma where they were involved in money lending and bureaucracy. They also worked as watchmen, prison officers, school teachers, etc.

In South Asia, Sri Lanka accounts for a large number of PIO. Here, they are called Indian Tamils. In Nepal, the skilled and unskilled labourers are called *Madhesias*. In West Asia, Kuwait has a large number of Indian emigrants, who

are involved in skilled and unskilled labour. They also work as drivers, nurses, and housemaid. Bachelors alone can stay on temporary contracts. They cannot bring their family. They are not allowed to settle permanently.

9.5 Indian Diaspora in South Asia

India encompasses a vast territory inhabiting a large number of ethnic groups. The Punjabis, Nepalese, Gujaratis, Sindhis, Biharis and Marwaris are spread into different parts of South Asia. Their ethnicity and primordial loyalties are not monolithic, but they are Indians in temperament and outlook. The British colonial masters had facilitated the movement of Indian diaspora through indentured labour system, Kangani or Maistry system and finally when they transferred sovereignty to the natives, various nationalities took their shape in different countries. India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Bhutan, Nepal and Maldives emerged as separate independent nations. The regions of Bengal and Punjab, the main Centre of India's nationalist movement is divided and is the constituent units of Pakistan, India and Bangladesh. Though all the nations have tried to establish separate identities, it is difficult to bifurcate their culture from Indian civilization, if they are outside the sub-continent, they are an essential component of Indian diaspora. Although it is debatable but people of the subcontinent have similarities and the people of South Asia, outside the territory of India, may be called diasporic.

Burma had been a part of British India from 1824 to 1937 and ruled from Calcutta and New Delhi respectively. The Britishers encouraged Indian farmers and labourers to go to Burma for farming and trade. Indians found this venture profitable. There was large-scale emigration of Indians to Burma. Subsequently they ultimately preferred to settle down in that country. But when Burma became independent Indians were projected as foreigners and their properties and businesses were nationalized. Similarly Sri Lanka had been governed from Madras during the colonial period till 1802. There were frequent movement of the people from Madras to Colombo and a large section of Tamils stayed back in that country. Sri Lanka discriminated them from Sinhalese and projected them as illegal immigrants. Similarly a large number of population in the Tarai region of Nepal are considered alien. Indians treat Himalayan mountain ranges as sacred and sacrosanct on religious grounds and have been visiting Nepal from time immemorial. The socio-economic interaction with Nepal is so deep-rooted and overwhelming that isolation of Indians from Newaris or Gurkhas and vice versa is impossible. Moreover the Janakpur and Birat Nagar regions are inhabited by Madhesiyas and they play an important role in the national life of the country.

Indian diaspora in South Asia have been influenced by the Indian way of life and they are sensitive about their culture, religion and ethnic genealogy. Their marriages with other groups, especially of tribal descent, are abhorred. Indians endeavour to maintain their separate ethnic identity and therefore their patriotism towards the country of their adoption are questioned. Moreover, it has been a common trend in South Asia to criticize India at various forums to project their own separate identity. Indian diaspora in South Asia has suffered because of irrationality in nation building and integrationist drives pursued by the governments in Bangladesh, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka. In all those countries, a particular ethnic or religious group, which wants to establish their preponderance in the political system,

comes out with parochial ideas of discrimination, on religious, caste and ethnic considerations. The Sinhalese versus the Tamils, Hindus versus Muslims and Newaris versus Madhesias etc. are the endeavour of assertions of one community over another.

India has tried to convey that its diaspora should forge harmonious relations with natives of the country of their adoption, without demanding any special rights and privileges. It wanted that the Indian diaspora should evolve a practical approach to be integrated in the mainstream of national life. It never spoke about any guarantees of support if its diaspora was discriminated at the political and economic levels in the countries of their adoption. In fact, it remained silent when Indians faced discrimination vis-à-vis the natives in Burma, Malaysia and Fiji. This was in sharp contrast to the Chinese attitudes, which support their diaspora more openly. When Vietnam discriminated against and persecuted Hoas (ethnic Chinese in Vietnam), China displayed its disapproval by dispatching its troops, to teach a lesson to Vietnam. India has merely used its moral and diplomatic influence to support its diaspora, which is insufficient and too little to make any significant impact to address the problems of the diaspora.

The attitude of Indian government is changing in the post-cold war era. Indian diaspora is viewed as an important asset in enhancing its economic interests. A new policy towards Indian diaspora takes into account their economic contribution to India. According to the Economic Survey 2000-2001 and Reserve Bank of India's Annual Report 2000-2001, the NRI deposit during April-September 2000 in India was 1,362 million US dollars.

9.6 Indian Diaspora in Southeast Asia

Southeast Asia, known as 'Subarnabhumi' ('golden hand' or 'land of gold') in the ancient past was frequently visited by Indians for business, trade and missionary activities. Indian culture is prevalent in art and architecture, language and literature, religion, customs and traditions of most of the countries. The famous temples of Angkor Wat (Kampuchea), Borobudur (Indonesia), Emerald Buddha (Thailand) etc. prove our connections and the epic of Ramayana and Mahabharata in different versions in the region indicates our cultural influence and interaction from that region from time immemorial. Streams of Indians have been going to that area but some of those who went under indentured labour system or Kangani system, stayed back. These people played crucial role in the production of sugar, tea, coffee, cocoa, rice, tobacco and rubber. Since Southeast Asia is located at the doorstep and labourers were getting different types of incentives by the colonial rulers, Indians were very enthusiastic to go there for their bread and butter. During 1852 to 1937, about 2 million Indians went to Malaya and nearly 2.5 million went to Burma. Besides Malaya and Burma, thousands of Indians went to Siam, Sumatra, Java and the Philippines especially after the economic depression of 1929. A number of people from Uttar Pradesh, Punjab, Gujarat, Madras and Bombay transmigrated. The Marwaris from Rajputana, Chettiyars from Madras, the Punjabis from Gujranwala went towards Rangoon, Bangkok and Singapore respectively and they played important roles in the economic spheres of those countries. Although they faced stiff competition from the Chinese business circles the hurdles did not deter them. The bulk of Indian diaspora are located in Malaysia, Singapore and Thailand as their contribution in the national economy have been regarded positive by their political masters.

There are three types of Indian diaspora in Southeast Asia, namely NRIs, PIOs and state-less Indians. The largest number of NRIs are in Singapore (90 thousand), followed by Malaysia (15 thousand) Thailand (15 thousand), Brunei (7 thousand), Myanmar (2 thousand), the Philippines (2 thousand), Indonesia (500), Vietnam (320) Cambodia (150) and Laos (107). The number of PIOs is largest in Myanmar (25,00,000) followed by Malaysia (16,00,000) Singapore (2,17,000). Thailand (70,000) and Indonesia (50,000). The number of stateless Indians is largest in Myanmar (4,00,000) and Malaysia (50,000). The citizenship laws in Myanmar and Malaysia are difficult especially for Indians. The knowledge of language, customs, traditions and residential criteria are difficult to be fulfilled and there are ethnic lobbies to work against them.

As far as Indo-China is concerned, the number of Indian diaspora is small. Although India was very close to all the three countries, Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia during the cold war years, yet Indians did not prefer to stay there for long. The total number of NRIs and PIOs in Vietnam are 320, followed by Laos 115 and in Cambodia 300. In fact, that area was a battleground between communist and anti-communist forces. All the three had been supporting nationalization campaigns for decades and business opportunities were limited.

Singapore, Thailand, Malaysia and Indonesia on the other hand, offered business opportunities. Indians found it profitable to go there for trade, investments, and jobs. In Brunei, the number of Indian doctors, engineers and teachers is around 3000 and they are famous for their hard work and professionalism. On the other hand, Indians have been associated with textile industries in Indonesia. The bulk of investors in textile business is Sindhis whereas the Sikhs are engaged in the sports goods business. The contribution of Indians in IT, medical, accounting and law are appreciated and incentives are offered to take their services. Such professionals are also in demand in Malaysia, but a majority of the diaspora are engaged in rubber and palm plantations. Their economic situation and literacy rates are low compared to Indian diaspora in other parts of Southeast Asia.

The position of the Indian diaspora in the Philippines is encouraging. The Sindhi community is engaged in trade and manufacturing whereas Punjabis are dealing in money lending. Manila has been treated as an important conduit to immigrate to the United States and services of Indian professionals are appreciated. However, Singapore is the most favoured destination of the Indian diaspora despite Singapore's prohibitive immigration laws. Tamils, Malayalis, Sindhis, Gujaratis and Punjabis are the major components of the Indian diaspora and they are involved not only in business and trade but also in civil services, the judicial system and educational institutions. Besides traditional business, Indians are contributing in the advancement of knowledge in IT, medical sciences and pharmaceutical research. Their role in transforming Singapore, as the economic hub has been recognised and their professional inputs are widely appreciated.

Indian diaspora in Thailand is respected for its knowledge and skills. The largest number of Indian diaspora in Thailand is Sikhs followed by Sindhis, Punjabis, Tamils and Purabias. They have been traditionally engaged in textile business. Some of them are also dealing in real estates and jewellery sectors. On the other hand, the services of Indian professionals, IT experts and skilled personnel are in great demand in international financial institutions and MNCs based in Bangkok. Indian diaspora feel at home in that country and some of them have assumed Thai names and a Thai way of life. Inter-

marriage between Indian and Thai nationals, which was not allowed in the past, is permitted now. The level of socio-economic interaction with the natives is ideal.

9.7 Evolving Perspective

Indian diaspora has a mature perspective to co-exist in the countries of their adoption. If they had a weakness to look towards India in the past, it was because most of them had emigrated with the support of the Britishers and Britain was the common colonial master. The Congress Party was a nationalist party to act as a safety valve to articulate the grievances of the people and the diasporic community wanted to express their grievances through that party. The Congress party under Mahatma Gandhi had effectively argued the case of the Indian diaspora in South Africa, Fiji and Burma during the colonial era. Indian diaspora was indebted to Mahatma Gandhi for what he had done against apartheid in South Africa and indentured labour system in Fiji. It was for this reason that they were politically affiliated with developments in India. But when the Britishers transferred sovereignty to India and other countries in the region, the situation started changing. Although, it took some time, gradually they de-linked their political affiliation with the parties in the motherland.

When India became independent, it could not fulfill the expectations of Indians in Burma, Malaysia and Fiji. India advised its diaspora to adjust and co-exist with the natives and evolve indigenous solution to resolve their problems. It was made clear to the diaspora that Indian government will not mediate and if they have to survive in the countries of their adoption, they have to seek political and economic affiliation with the natives. This proved painful in some cases, but it also helped integrationist drives. Indian diaspora in the ASEAN region are thus changed their perspective and evolved professional values, to play a useful role in the culture and economic life of the countries of their adoption.

The post-independence era has witnessed the struggle for national identity and ethnic assertion. The nation building activity, which began with the dawn of freedom, is continuing. India with a plural society supported “Unity in diversity” and tolerated ethnic, religious and linguistic diversities. Its own problems were gigantic in proportion and its advice was not solicited in the politics of the region.

After 1947 Prime Minister Nehru suggested that the overseas Indians should identify themselves with the aspiration of the local population. The assumption was that such a course would facilitate the building of bonds between the overseas Indians and native population and contribute to healthy relations between the two. India’s policy since 1947 has been determined by this very assumption.

Presently the world is changing rapidly in view of globalisation. The countries of Asia-pacific have to evolve a common strategy and the diasporic community can act as a facilitator in that process. Indian diaspora in the ASEAN region is inadvertently endowed to play the diplomatic role of a facilitator so that the countries of Asia-Pacific comes closer to face the challenges of the new world order and contribute to the emergence of an “Asia Century” in the near future.

Box 9.1: Important Lessons

- The number of Indian diaspora in the ASEAN region are estimated about 2 million, but their figures for South Asia are difficult to be mentioned. Most of the new nations in South Asia are trying to carve out a separate identity for themselves, which may prove different from India.
- Indian diaspora is fragmented along caste, religion, region and ethnic lines. A Sikh in the ASEAN region or a Muslim or a Sindhi or Gujarati have their own separate cultural and political affiliations.
- Most of the Indian diasporic community is inhabited in the capital cities of ASEAN. Bangkok, Singapore, Manila, KLM Bandar Seri Begawan and Jakarta have been their favoured destination and they are connected with business and commerce.
- Indian diaspora have played important role in the ASEAN boom. Their contribution in IT sectors, construction business, textile industries and human resource developments are appreciated.
- The diasporic community has supported the transformation of India from command economy to market economy. It is in the economic area that they are willing to cooperate and coordinate contacts between India and the countries of their adoption.
- ASEAN region have proximity with India. We share common maritime borders with Indonesia, Thailand and Myanmar. We also share common land frontiers of 1600 kilometres with Myanmar. We are willing to establish growth areas on the common frontiers and develop Andamans as an important trading Centre. Indian diaspora can provide important input in those directions if the proposals are mutually beneficial.

9.8 Conclusion

In short, most of the Indian diaspora in the ASEAN region are skilled people, who are gradually integrating with the mainstream of national life. They are no longer disliked even in Myanmar and Malaysia now. Their role in the economic life of the countries of their adoption are substantial and they have proved themselves relevant for the countries in the region.

Indians remain a heterogeneous group with their loyalty and allegiance towards their own ethnic community, religious institutions, customs and traditions in conjunction with the customs and traditions of the countries of their adoption. They are no longer India-centric. Sikhs or Muslims or Buddhists identify themselves with their respective religions. On the other hand, Sindhi, Tamil, Bengali or Bhojpuri communities differ in their life style, culture and rituals. They have affiliation with their ethnic groups and they have proved themselves assimilative, permissive and accommodative in recent years.

9.9 Further Reading

Chakravarty, N.R. 1971. *The Indian Minority in Burma: The Rise and Decline of an Immigrant Community*. London: Oxford University Press.

Jain, R.K. 1970. *South Indians on the Plantation Frontier in Malaya*. New Haven: Yale University Press.

Kurian, George and Srivastava, Ram P. (eds.). 1983. *Overseas Indians: A Study in Adaptation*. New Delhi: Vikas.