
UNIT 78 PRE-COLONIAL DIASPORAS

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78.0 INTRODUCTION

In this unit of the Block-2: Immigration, Settlements and Diasporic Formation, we will study some pre-colonial Diaspora groups in India. The objective of this reading is to bring together immigration and settlement experience of global diaspora in general and pre-colonial diaspora in India particular. The study of global diaspora has significant importance for this course, considering these experiences will help learners in understanding some of the major routes and their impact in the formation of world society. The historical experience of pre-colonial diaspora goes to early movement of Jews and their dispersal in different parts of the world including India. Other pre-colonial diaspora groups in India such as Sindhi, Nepali, African, and Parsi also makes an important case of discussion. These early recorded dispersals were mostly based on shared experience of traumatization as a group or historical experience of victimhood. The first part of the unit will primarily discuss some of the classical experience of dispersal raised out of victimhood. In the second part of this reading, we will look into some of the voluntary and trade movements. These include pre-colonial silk route movements such as making of Sindhi diaspora, movement of Chinese diaspora, and others.

78.1 OBJECTIVES

After studying this unit, you will be able to:

- Understand the global pre-colonial diasporic movements.
- Understand the different phases of pre-colonial movements to India.
- Understand the key elements defining the pre-colonial diaspora in India.
- Expand the term ‘diaspora’ beyond its common original reference to Jews, to other major pre-colonial diasporic experiences.
- Understand the major pre-colonial Indian diasporic experiences.

78.2 PRE-COLONIAL DIASPORAS

The immigration, settlement, and formation of diaspora in pre-colonial period include experiences of many diasporic groups starting from Jew’s dispersal during fifth century BC. The entire pre-colonial diaspora era can be majorly divided into two categories: the classical diasporas. According to Cohen (2008: 4), this classic diaspora includes, “Babylon for the Jews, slavery for the Africans, massacres and forced displacement for the Armenians, famine for the Irish and the formation of the state of Israel for the Palestinians”. These are considered as classical diaspora by Cohen (2008), considering their long history of traumatization and victimhood. Apart from these classical diasporas, many other diasporic movements were also observed. William Safran (1991) lists Cubans, Mexicans, Turks, Ukrainians, Italians, Afghans, Lebanese, Vietnamese, Iranians, Tibetans, Russians, Germans, Tamils, Sikhs, Hindus, Somalis or Kurds as other major diasporic experience observed during pre-colonial era.

The existence of Diasporic is primarily driven with the concept of homeland. The homeland need to be geographically existent, rather an imaginary homeland plays an equally important relatedness. The sense of belongingness and maintenance of dual residence often gives a sense of emotional support and results in formation of ethno-cultural space. In present era, the number of ethnic or religious living outside homeland is endless and seems endless.

Safran (1991) provides a list of characteristics to identify a diaspora community:

1. They, or their ancestors, have been dispersed from a specific original “centre” to two or more peripheral, or foreign, regions.
2. They retain a collective memory, vision, or myth about their original homeland-its physical location, history, achievements, and, often enough, sufferings.
3. Their relationship with the dominant element of society in the host land is complicated and often uneasy. They believe that they are not, and perhaps cannot be, fully accepted by their host society and therefore felt partly alienated and insulated from it.
4. They regard their ancestral homeland as their true, ideal home and as the place to which they or their descendants would (or should) eventually return-if and when conditions are appropriate.

5. They continue to relate, personally or vicariously, to that homeland in one way or another, and their ethnocommunal consciousness and solidarity, which reach across political boundaries, are importantly defined in terms of the existence of such a relationship. That relationship may include a collective commitment to the maintenance or restoration of their original homeland and to its independence, safety, and prosperity. The absence of such a relationship makes it difficult to speak of transnationalism.
6. They wish to survive as a distinct community-in most instances as a minority--by maintaining and transmitting a cultural and/or religious heritage derived from their ancestral home and the symbols based on it. In so doing, they adapt to host land conditions and experiences to become themselves centers of cultural creation and elaboration.
7. Their cultural, religious, economic, and/or political relationships with the homeland are reflected in a significant way in their communal institutions.

Looking into typology generated by Robin Cohen (2008), this module will cover some of the major pre-colonial diaspora groups:

Table 1: Major typology of pre-colonial diasporic movement to India

Type of Human Movement	Example
Victims Diaspora	Jews, African
Trade/Business/Professional	Chinese, Sindhis, and Parsis
Other Pre-Colonial Diaspora	Nepalis

78.3 VICTIM DIASPORAS

Jews have been primarily considered as classic case of victim diaspora, but many other diaspora groups also had long history of sufferings and victimisations. This section discusses two important diaspora such as Jewish and the African diaspora under the broader term of 'victim' diaspora.

78.3.1 Jewish Diaspora

The Jews community has long history of settlement and resettlement. The initial movement was recorded in 586 BC, when Jews leader Zedekiah lost a war against the Babylon kingdom. After loss, the Jews leader along with other community members were exiled. The Jews community was forced to desert the "land promised to them by God to Moses and thereafter, the tradition suggests, forever became dispersed" (Cohen, 2008:22). The dispersal created a notion of suffering, separation, and insecurity of living in a foreign country, a feeling of separation from origins and a sense of identity crisis among Jews living in alien lands. Since this initial dispersal from 'promised land' Jews maintained the homeland identity with their art, culture, and prayer. The songs and stories from Jews folklore strongly repeatedly maintained the pain and sufferings of their historical experience. In fact, among Jews community, the mere use of 'Babylon' usually creates a sense of "captivity, exile, alienation and isolation" (Cohen, 2008:23).

The maintenance of plight and sharing of grief helped Jews to preserve the homeland identity and forward the common goal of homeland return to next generations. In fact, after 71 years, in 515 BC, Jews attempted to return to their homeland, but they could not succeed. The affection of homeland and inclination for 'Babylon' remain continued for many centuries. The community had successful status in different parts of the world. The Jews communities in "Alexandria, Antioch, Damascus, Asia Minor and Babylon became centres of civilization, culture and learning" (Cohen, 2008:24). By the end of Fourth Century BC, a greater number of Jews were spread outside Israel, than those living inside (Safran, 1991).

Jews went to settle in separate regional groups during middle ages. These movements can be broadly segregated in to two distinct groups: Northern and Eastern Europe Migration and Spain and Portugal, North Africa, and West Africa Migration. Asa-EI, A. (2004: 28) in 'Diaspora: The last tribes of Israel' stated that the Jewish community is so culturally and geographically stretched, "that its dispersion set it apart from other nations even more than its distinctive laws, rules, tradition, languages, and dress". For more than two thousand years, the integration of Jews in different countries with diverse numerically and geographically existence has strong cultural heterogeneity in terms of language, food, dress, norms, and religious observance. The community has made an extensive impact on various social and economic strata of world economies. Today, the overall Jews diaspora community include many migrants and their communities and require a more relaxed definition to move beyond the limits.

Jews community has long history of arrival in India (Sohoni and Robbins, 2017). Judaism was one of the first religion to arrive in India (Weil, 2006). The community has long history of assimilation in India culture and has largely been considered as classic case of community cultural diffusion (Weil, 2006). Majority of Jews in India are living in Mumbai. Other major regions of residences are Kerala and Kolkata. While some Indian Jews claim that their ancestors arrived in India in the time of the Old Kingdom of Judah, others identify as descendants of the ten lost tribes of ancient Israel that arrived earlier. Some claim to come specifically from the Menashe tribe of ancient Israel and are called the Bnei Menashe. It is estimated that India's Jewish population peaked at about 20,000 in the mid-40s and began to decline rapidly after its founding in 1948 due to its emigration to Israel (Weil, 2006).

According to Weil (2006), India has nine distinct groups of Jews:

- I. **Mumbai Jews:** Mumbai has been the largest centre of Jews in India. The region primarily hosted 'Bene Israel' community. According to Weil (2018), some of these 'Bene Israel' claim descent from the "lost" ten tribes of Israel. Bene Israel accepted the occupation of the oil press in Konkan and became known as "Shanwar Telis" or "Shabbat-acting oilmen". They embraced the local language Marathi and were physically indistinguishable from locals. In the village society, Bene Israel was clearly distinguished from others because they were associated with Judaism. The Bene Israel who remain in India can be divided into two sub-groups: those who stay because of their overriding attachment to India, and those who will emigrate to Israel and re-unite with their families and the majority of their community (Weil, 2018).

- II. **Cochin Jew:** The Jews in Kerala has arrived together with Hebrew King Solomon's merchants. The initiatil of these Jews were as traders. The Jews are largely considered as close descent of European Jews.
- III. **Chennai Jews:** Chennai Jews were mostly traders arrived using sea route in Madras during 16th century. These Jews were Spanish and Portuguese Jews, Paradesi Jews and British Jews. These Jews were mostly of Sephardi and Ashenazi heritage with diamond business.
- IV. **Nagercoil Jews:** Settled around Nargarcoil and Kanyakumari, Tamil Nadu with St. Thomas in 52 AD, these were majorilySyrian, Musta'arabiand Arab Jews. Most of these Jews were merchant and had also settled around the town of Thiruvithamcode.
- V. **Goa Jews:** In Goa, Sephardic Jews arrived from Spain and Portugal. The arrival of Jews to Goa is seen as a result of commencement of the Inquisition in Span and Portugal. The community reached Goa and converted to Christinity to take advantage of being Portuguese subjects. This group of Sephardic Jews had to face Inquisition in Goa also, which forced them to move to other parts of India.
- VI. **Karachi Jews:** Before partition of India in 1947, a group of Mumabi based Jews, namely 'Bene Israel Community' lived in Karachi. They moved from Mumbai to Karachi during early twentieth century and left soon after particion. The community moved to India or returned to Israel after partition. Jews from other parts of Pakistan also fled to India in 1947.
- VII. **Baghdadi Jews:** Another group of Jews reached Surat, Gujarat from Iraq, other Arab States and Iran in the eighteenth Century.
- VIII. **Mizo and Kuki Jews:** These Jews claim ancestry reaching back to ten lost tribes of Israel. They are settled in Manipur and Mizoram.
- IX. **Telugu Jews:** A small number of Telugu speaking Jews also claim ancestry from Ephrain, one of the sons of Joseph.

The majority of Indian Jews have "emigrated" to Israel since the creation of the modern state in 1948. There are currently more than 70,000 Indian Jews living in Israel. Of the remaining, the largest community is concentrated in Mumbai, and are divided into Bene Israel and Baghdadi Jews. Kerala Jews are still left in India. The majority of Jews in Kolkata have also emigrated to Israel.

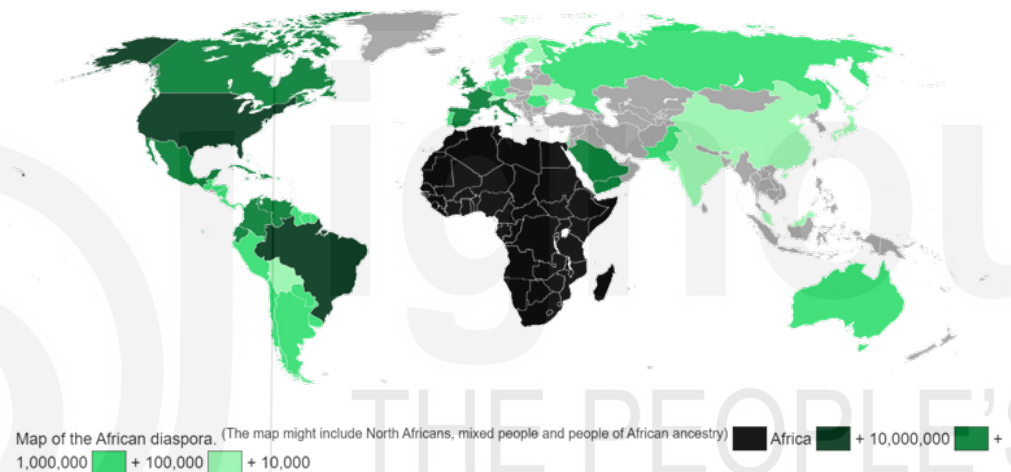
78.3.2. African Diaspora

In the broader discussion of old or pre-colonial diaspora, Jews gets overwhelm recognition and often considered as point of comparison especially in the case of victim diaspora. However, another large diasporic group with over-victimised past did not received terminological recognition until 1950s or1960s (Cohen, 2008). The history of African Diaspora or Black Diaspora is a history of slavery and trafficking by white traders. Cohen in his book 'Global Diaspora' cited an account of William Bosman, the chief agent of the Dutch West India:

When these Slaves come to Fida, they are put in Prison altogether ... they are thoroughly examined, even to the smallest Member; and that naked too both Men and Women, without the least Distinction of Modesty. Those which are approved as good are set on one side; and the lame and faulty

are set by as Invalides ... the remainder are numbred, and it is entred who delivered them. In the mean while a burning iron, with the Arms or Name of the Companies, lyes in the Fire; with which ours are marked on the Breast ... I doubt not but this Trade seems very barbarous to you, but since it is followed by meer necessity it must go on; but we yet take all possible care that they are not burned too hard, especially the Women, who are more tender than the Men (emphasis added). – Cohen (2008:41)

The general movement of these slaves (recently termed diaspora) use to take place with the process of branding. The process of branding was to mark the name of company on the body of these slaves with hot burning irons with name and details of the companies. Often, these slaves were branded several times to prove their worth in the trade process. The process of branding continued till 1813 and later replaced with iron collar or bracelet but restored again after five years. After 1818, the slaves were branded by silver road to earmark them as mere commodity, not human (Cohen, 2008).



Source: Alice Hunter (n.d.). https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/African_diaspora#/media/File:African_people_around_the_world.svg.

The intercontinental business missions moved African emigrants to the Caribbean, Mexico and Brazil to work on tropical plantations. The suffering and pain of these slaves were hardly acknowledged by European and American white traders. These slave trade movements took Africans to Atlantic and Indian Ocean, Asia and the Mediterranean and Americas. The website of Anti-slavery Society considers that the intensity of slave trade remained high from seventh century till nineteenth century. Like Jews Diasporic journey, African diaspora also had a long history of victimisation and prolonged past. However, Africans do not have similar homeland sentiment like Jews. The notion of homeland is more scattered and depends on individual community. According to Cohen (2008), for many Africans, the homeland created where returnees settled or from where Africans could locate their origin identity.

Indian subcontinent has also seen the significant wave of African migration. There are many ethnic groups in India arrived directly or indirectly as slaves, traders or as soldiers (Ali, 1996). Among these African immigrant some of the leading communities were Siddi, Sheedi, Makrani and Sri Lanka Kaffirs. These pre-colonial African diaspora include; some people from Malay Peninsula, New Guinea, and the aboriginal peoples of Melanesia and Micronesia (Rashidi,

1999).

Africans have long history of arrival to different parts of India. The movement can be seen from seventh century till twentieth century, when Arab vessels brought significant number of trafficked Africans as a part of the Indian Ocean Slavery. According to Islamic records, the early African immigrants were known by different names. The Africans arrived from Ethiopia during thirteenth century were known as ‘Habshis’. The approximately 25,000 people of African descent currently living in India are most commonly referred to as ‘Siddis’ (alternatively spelt ‘Sidi’, ‘Seedi’, ‘Seedee’) and their most concentrated communities can be found in the regions of Janjira, Gujarat, Andhra Pradesh, Hyderabad, and Karnataka.

The Siddis are regarded as a notable African origin of diaspora living in India. There are contradictory assumption about the origin of the Sidi name. One theory derive the terminology from Sohibi, the Arabic term of respect in North Africa, is similar to the word Sahib in modern India and Pakistan. The second theory is that the term “Sidi” is derived from the title obtained by the captain of arab ships, knownas ‘Sayyid’ that first brought Sidi immigrants to India. Similarly, another term for Siddis, habshi, is held to be derived from the common name for the captains of the Northeast African Abyssinian ships that also first delivered Sidi slaves to the subcontinent. Siddis are also sometimes referred to as Afro-Indians. Siddis were referred to as Zanji by Arabs; in China, various transcriptions of this Arabic word were used, including Xinji.

Pre-colonial African Diaspora in India are mostly characterised by Siddis group. The Ethiopians arrived separately alsodescribed under overall term of ‘Siddis’. Currently, approximately 20,000 to 50,000 Siddis are residing in India and Pakistan, with the majority concentrated in Karnataka, Gujarat, Hyderabad, Makaran and Karachi.

Check you progress 1:

1. What are the major groups of pre-colonial diaspora?

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1. Write a note on African diaspora.

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78.4 TRADE AND BUSINESS DIASPORAS

Trade and Diaspora has a long history of inter-relations. According to Cohen

(2008), the trade or business diaspora can be considered as “a socially interdependent, but spatially dispersed nation”. Curtin (1984) argues that diaspora trade can be considered the “most common institutional form” after location-based marketplaces. Traders from a community as foreigners live in another town, learn the language, customs and business practices of their hosts and then start exchanging goods. Curtin (1984) in the book, “Cross-cultural trade in world history” documents the networks of merchants in Africa, Anatolia, Mesopotamia, pre-Columbian America, Armenians and China. According to Cohen (2008), some of the major forms of trade and business diaspora can be considered as Indians, Chinese, and Labenese. Pre-colonial movement towards India can be broadly be seen among Chinese, Sindhis and Parsis. This section of the module, we will discuss each of these diaspora groups.

78.4.1 Chinese Diaspora

Unlike Indian Diaspora where individual and caste was dominating factor behind success, Chinese Diaspora were more clan based. For China, the feature of trade diaspora was high level resilience on family and clan unity, which gave rise to China’s famous ability for ‘adaptation’. According to Cohen (2008), the most convenient example of ‘adaptability’ of China can be see with the example of fishing village in Singapore. Sir Stamford Raffles, a British administrator invited Chinese traders to Singapore to develop ports in the 19th century. They arrived in significant numbers, quickly learned European laws and trade practices, and soon began speaking English for commercial purposes. The high rate of adoptability provided an opportunity for Chinese traders to settle and expend business in Singapore. Similarly, for many other locations, government and administrator invited Chinese to work mentioning “No one can serve us better than Chinese”. Some of these countries are France, Indonesia, Mauritius, Reunion, Portuguese and Dutch.

The arrival of Chinese to India can be traced back to centuries ago. The movement became more prominent in the late 18th century, when many Chinese arrived at the ports of Kolkata and Madras to work in sugar plantations. The community continued to live in the social and economic life of Kolkata through the production and trade of leather products and by running Chinese restaurants (Haraprasad, 2012). Today, the Chinese Diaspora in India are mainly located in ethnic neighbourhoods in Kolkata and Mumbai. In Mumbai’s Chinatown, there are 400 Chinese Indian families. The population of Chinese in Mumbai stood at 4,000 in 2015. In 2013, there were 2,000 Chinese-Indians live in Kolkata (Krishnan, 2013).

The most visible Chinese community in India is found in Kolkata, where there are two Chinatowns. There was one in Tangera, and the previous Chinatown was founded in the Tiretta Bazaar, sometimes called old Chinatown. China’s presence in the Tiretta Bazaar and Tangera markets has gradually declined. The older generation of this community works as tannery-owners, sauce manufacturers, shoes hop owners, restaurants and beauty shop owners. The new generation has majorly preferred dentistry. Many of the shoe shops near Dharmatola, are owned and operated by Chinese. Restaurants have increased the fusion of Chinese and Indian culinary traditions. There is one Chinese newspaper published in Kolkata, The Overseas Chinese Commerce in India. The Chinese New Year remains widely observed as well as Zhong Yuan Festival and

Mid-Autumn Festival. The Chinese of Kolkata celebrate Chinese New Year with lion and dragon dance. It is celebrated in the end of January or early February.

78.4.2 Sindhi Diaspora

The discussion of Sindhi Diaspora can be largely categorised under the broader definition of Diasporic ‘Myth and Memory of homeland’. Sindh, as the coastal region of the nearest continent to the Persian Gulf, has always been actively involved in sea trade with that region of Asia. It has also played an important role as a commercial gateway between Central Asia and Northern India. Not much is known about the groups that were active in maritime trade in medieval Sindh. Arab businessmen played an unpleasant role, as well as anonymous “Sindhi” businessmen. In terms of land, Sindh occupied a geographical space on the central Asian route to India and was always part of intercultural connections. The community has strong trade orientation and has knowledge about the people of the region.

Sindhis with wide trading network were dealing with vast range of products. These include Arabian horses, Indian cotton and South East Asian spices and also Chinese silk. There is also Damascus steel, first steel, materials and production method, coming out of India. Every major war known around the world is said to have been fought with an Indian steel sword. In addition, there were a variety of commodities: there was a reference to the coral trade from Italy. Sindh is an important example of Banjara’s business, having commercial networks across land and sea. It means having an awareness of what to go with; That’s why diversity is probably a common feature of Sindhi’s business.

This capability increased when Sindh merged into the British Empire in 1843 and was subsequently included in Mumbai’s presidency. The group was crucial to Britain’s operations in Central Asia with the wars in Afghanistan and beyond, as part of this network to Egypt. As part of Mumbai’s presidency and by road and rail, the community was better connected to the rest of India. The Parsis dominated trade in the Mumbai region, and areas were controlled and monopolized by the British. The alignment with British and opening of international trade route using port was crucial for Sindhis since they had an opportunity to go beyond Asia into South East Asia, West Africa and beyond. While the Sindhi movement was controlled by British Empire, the community’s well established trading abilities to navigate through numerous commercial areas, allowed them to maneuver and profit even in the British-controlled monopolistic empire.

After Independence Sindhis lost their homeland, considering the region merged into Pakistan. The region was no longer representing Sindhi’s preserved identity. The country identity divide, converted the existence of homeland into myth. The Community is a part of Indian society and also part of the Indian diaspora, but at the same time preserving an identity and legitimacy that is just as lost with that homeland as it is with its current location. It is difficult to trace the historical trajectory of their movement, regardless of the theory of a society beyond borders.

The majority of Sindhis left India in 1950s and 1960s to relocate them in various countries where they have trade branches. The main destinations were

the greatemporaria where Sindhi traders were already a force to be reckonedwith, such as Hong Kong and Singapore, but other importantdestinations included the Canary Islands, Gibraltar, Indonesia, thePhilippines, etc. The largest undoubtedly was into Hong Kong, where, in the mid-1960s, Sindhis were said to account for some 75 percent of an Indian population of 20,000, i.e. some 15,000.

78.4.3 Parsi Diaspora

Parsis are religious ethnic groups that have migrated mainly from Iran to India and Pakistan. According to the saga between 8 and 10 AD, the Persians continued to migrate from the collapsed Iranian empire to Gujarat between the 8th and 10th centuries CE, escaping religious persecution during the early conquests of Muslims. The word “Persian” is derived from Persian and literally translated into Persian.

Two centuries after landing, the Persians began settling in other areas of Gujarat, leading to “difficulties in defining the limits of the priest’s competence.” By 1290, these problems were solved by dividing Gujarat into five pantaks (districts), each under the jurisdiction of a family of priests and their children. (Continued disputes over jurisdiction over the Bahrain fire led to the transfer of fire to Udwarda in 1742, where today the jurisdiction is shared in rotation among the five Pantak families.)

The inscriptions of Kanye Ray caves near Mumbai suggest that, at least until the early 11th century, Middle Persian was still the literary language of an ancient reactionary priest. However, aside from the inscriptions of Kosari and Kahnari, there is little evidence from the Persians until the 12th and 13th centuries CE that his translations and rewritings of “The Master” and interpretations began to produce. Among these translations, Della states that “religious studies have been prosecuted with great talent during this period”, and that the Middle Persian and Sanscott commandments among Ohans “have been superior to order.”

From the 13th century to the end of the 16th century, priests of the ancient religion in Gujarat (in total) sent twenty-two requests for religious leadership to their colleagues in Iran, possibly because they made Iranian custodians “better aware of their own religious issues and certainly kept the ancient tradition more faithful than their own.” These transfers and their responses—which society constantly protects as a dock (epic)—spanned the years 1478-1766 and dealt with religious and social issues. From a 21st-century superficial perspective, some of these “questions” are very trivial - for example, Riviat 376: if the essence prepared by a non-decontamony is suitable for copying texts in the Ustan language - but offers a demanding view of the fears and anxieties of early modern zoroastrianism. Therefore, the question of substance is the fear of assimilation and loss of identity, a question that dominates the questions asked and remains the question of the 21st century.

Parsis emerged in the 18th and 19th centuries as India’s “most important person in educational, industrial and social issues.”. They came to the forefront of progress, gathered a lot of happiness and gave a lot of money to charity. At the end of the 19th century, the total number of Parsis in colonial India was 85,397, of which 48,507 lived in Mumbai, accounting for about 6.7% of the city’s total

population, according to the population of 1881.

78.5 OTHER PRE-COLONIAL DIASPORA

The pre-colonial Diapsora also include some of the distinct groups dispersed with regions other than trade or victimization. This module discusses Nepali Diaspora under other pre-colonial diaspora, considering the group largely moved as a security group under the broader flagship of Gorkha Diaspora.

78.5.1 Nepali Diaspora

The political and social history of Nepal has largely been formed by waves of migration from the south and north at different periods of time. The first of migration from Nepal was recorded in the wake of unification by King Prithvi Narayan Shah. The process resulted in high number of Nepali movements. According to Subba (2002), “more displacement took place due to unfamiliar and crippling laws and order passed various Gorkhali rulers from 1769 onwards which benefitted only the high-caste Nepalis close to the ruling dynasty”. The movement of Nepalis further escalated when British decided to engaged Gorkha soldiers after the Anglo-Nepal war of 1814-16 (Subba, 2002). The recruitment centres were created near the brodering areas targeting central hills, and later Rais and Limbus from the east. The Nepalis mainly worked in the forest, roads, construction sites, mines, plantations and so on.

According to Nath (2010), nepal’s population structure has waves of great ethnic diversity, their fusion with congressional species, migration at different times in their history. The popular movement existed before Nepal was bounded by neighboring India and China. This is evident from hindu and Buddhist intercultural influence in Nepal. Nepal” was developed after the Peace and Friendship Agreement of 1816 (after the First Anglo-Gurkha War) and ended in 1861 after Terai’s return to Nepal, west of the British East India Company (Kansakar, 2003, P. 85). It was then developed into the Indo-Nepalese peace agreement of 1950, which also set standards for population movements between the two countries when the border was set. The Nepalese in India were heading to the northern and northeastern border regions, where the British had approved the Gurkha colonies. The hills of Kumaon and Garhwal, the hilly regions of Uttar Pradesh, North Bengal, Sikkim, Darjeeling, in northeastern India, have all become important destinations for Nepalese workers.

According to Bilateral Migration Matrix published by the World Bank (2017), currently 5,37,517 Nepalese lives in India. However, the actual number of Nepalese in India may be multifold, considering lack of border control and entry regulations. Documented Nepalese pre-colonial Diaspora to India can be broadly traced with Gorkha Movement and further recruitment of Nepali wariorsin to Colonial armed forces. The closure proximity and linguistic-cultural similarities has made the distinction between India and Nepali community almost faded.

Check Your Progress 2:

1. Write a note on Parsi Diaspora?

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2. Discuss Current Status of Chinese Diaspora in India?

78.6 LET US SUM UP

Pre-Colonial Diaspora network can be largely characterised by two major distinct categories; Victims and Trades. The victim diasporas largely include Jews, African, and Armenian. The trade Diaspora include, Indian, Chinese, Sindhi, and Parsis. This module also include Nepali Diaspora as a third and distinct diaspora group primarily spread as a security personnels (Gorkha Diaspora). The construction of pre-colonial diaspora goes uptoBabileon time with the discussion about Jews Diaspora and Comes upto classic case of Armenian Diaspora. In the initial section, we discussed the diasporic experience of Jews, which is one of the oldest document displaced group. The unit listed major arrival and settlement patterns of Jews in India. We have also examined the slave trade and making of African Diaspora. African and Jews are considered as classic case of ‘Victim Diaspora’. In India, Siddis are considered major pre-colonial African Diaspora community.

In the second second, we looked into some of the major pre-colonial trade diaspora in India. These groups are some of the important examples of comes under the time frame of pre-colonial and colonial. Countries like China need to be discussed separately, considering their pre-colonial experience as trade diaspora is complete different in comparison of their colonial experience as labour diaspora. The section specifically include Sindhis and Parsis, which are primarily trade diaspora with considerable pre-colonial past. A small section on Nepali Diapsora has also been including considering their unique profession driven spread. The vast time frame covered by pre-colonial diasporaic discussion gives us ample opportunity to discuss many globally important issues. Leaners, after reading this unit can further look into country and region specific population movement and identify other diasporic group to further enhance their understanding.

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78.8 CHECK YOU PROGRESS

Check you progress 1:

1. What are the major groups of pre-colonial diaspora?

It includes the diasporas that were existent in India before the European colonised India. During that period which was an outcome of forced eviction such as Jewish diaspora and African diaspora or which resulted due to trade and business as in the case of Chinese, Sindhis and Parsis. In addition, India hosted many other diaspora who came before European colonised India they include Armenian, Afghani, Nepalese etc.

2. Write a note on African diaspora.

Africans have long history of arrival to different parts of India. The movement can be seen from seventh century till twentieth century, when Arab vessels brought significant number of trafficked Africans as a part of the Indian Ocean Slavery. According to Islamic records, the early African immigrants were known by different names. The Africans arrived from Ethiopia during thirteenth century were known as 'Habshis'. The approximately 25,000 people of African descent currently living in India are most commonly referred to as 'Siddis' (alternatively spelt 'Sidi', 'Seedi', 'Seedee') and their most concentrated communities can be found in the regions of Janjira, Gujarat, Andhra Pradesh, Hyderabad, and Karnataka.

Check Your Progress 2:

1. Write a note on Parsi Diaspora

Parsis are religious ethnic groups that have migrated mainly from Iran to India and Pakistan. According to the saga between 8 and 10 AD, the Persians continued to migrate from the collapsed Iranian empire to Gujarat between the 8th and 10th centuries CE, escaping religious persecution during the early conquests of Muslims. Today, parsis are found in Gujarat, Chennai in Tamil Nadu and Mumbai in Maharashtra and very successful in business and trade.

2. Discuss Current Status of Chinese Diaspora in India?

Today, the Chinese Diaspora in India are mainly located in ethnic neighbourhoods in Kolkata and Mumbai. In Mumbai's Chinatown, there are 400 Chinese Indian families. The population of Chinese in Mumbai stood at 4,000 in 2015. In 2013, there were 2,000 Chinese-Indians live in Kolkata (Krishnan, 2013). The most visible Chinese community in India is found in Kolkata, where there are two Chinatowns. There was one in Tangera, and the previous Chinatown was founded in the Tiretta Bazaar, sometimes called old Chinatown. China's presence in the Tiretta Bazaar and Tangera markets has gradually declined. The older generation of this community works as tannery-owners, sauce manufacturers, shoe shop owners, restaurants and beauty shop owners. The new generation has majorly preferred dentistry.

UNIT 79 COLONIAL DIASPORA (ARMENIAN AND CHINESE DIASPORA IN INDIA)

- 79.1 Learning Objectives
- 79.2 Introduction
- 79.3 A Historical Perspective on Colonialism
- 79.4 Armenian Trade Diaspora and Colonialism
- 79.5 Armenian Diasporic Settlements in India
- 79.6 Armenians' Commercial Intelligence Network
- 79.7 The Early Chinese Migration to India
 - 79.8.1 Demography and Settlement
- 79.9 Social and Economic Status of the Chinese Diaspora
- 79.10 Indo-China War, the Galwan Valley and the Chinese Twice Migrants
- 79.11 Let Us Sum Up

79.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Keeping the above-mentioned features of colonialism and the Armenian and Chinese diasporas in mind, the Unit will focus on the forces responsible for it, its features, characteristics and its impact on human migration and the formation of these two ethnic diasporas in India. Although the forces of colonialism impacted colonies differently, the Unit will mainly focus on Armenian and Chinese diaspora in India. After you have gone through the unit, it is hoped that you will be able to understand:

1. The forces responsible for the emergence of colonialism
2. Its chief features and characteristics, including its exploitative nature.
3. The role of colonialism in human migration
4. The formation of Armenian diaspora and its settlement in India
5. The history of Chinese migration, diaspora formation and settlement.

79.2 INTRODUCTION

In the earlier units we learnt about various forces responsible for human migration and, as a result, the formation of various diasporas. While the push and pull factors have been the main reasons in the voluntary migration, there were geopolitical forces, which were equally responsible in deciding the course of human migration. Among them, Colonialism was the most singular and profound force, which brought massive demographic movement across the continents. Its impact was so far-reaching that it changed the very course of human history, thus bringing new politico-economic forces to the fore.

The colonial migration and the imperialistic forces were also, in no less measure, impacted by pull and push factors as emerging European economies needed fresh supply of manpower, raw materials and consumers for their industrially produced goods. It was these quests accompanied with political ambition that propelled countries like Britain, France, Spain, Portugal, the Netherlands to navigate, explore and exploit the newfound lands and its people.

In addition to imperial diasporas, there were other ethnic diasporas which were either formed or diluted because of the colonial impact. The examples of Armenian and Chinese diasporas in India conveniently fall into these categories. Both these ethnic groups had immigrated to India as traders, merchants, artisan and craftsmen and as entrepreneurs. With the British, the French, the Dutch and the Portuguese dominating the Indian Ocean trade, both these diasporas lost their salience and were overtaken by the British imperialist forces. What remains today is only a remnant of these diasporas which once had a rich legacy of mercantile and craftsmanship contribution to their host countries.

79.3 ARMENIAN TRADE DIASPORA AND COLONIALISM

Colonialism was responsible for the formation of various diasporas as it was marked by displacement, up-rootedness and dislocation of various ethnic and nationalistic communities. In most cases, its impact was pernicious as it not only relocated people to far-flung areas but also harmed the social, economic and political fabrics of the territories they invaded and acquired. Colonialism was responsible for bringing to the hegemony of the Armenian trade diaspora, which had intercontinental presence and was marked with high efficiency and an advanced level of network connectivity. In India, Armenian trade diaspora was a rich, prosperous and thriving community as late as the 1680s as many of the Armenian merchants were owners of ships that carried cargos to the Persian Gulf and traded as far as Indonesian archipelago.

A form of familial-ethnic trade diaspora based on merchant-capitalism, Armenians had dominated the Indian Ocean trade till the end of 17th century. But in the beginning of the 18th century, they had to compete with colonial powers, the British, the French, the Dutch and the Portuguese in the same economic sphere and on the same trade routes. These Armenian merchants were individual entrepreneurs with strong backing of the community but bereft of state-sponsored support in contrast to national-stock-holding companies like the British East India Company. Although they had an advanced level of trade and intelligence network, they were not so well organized and strategically placed to counter the imperial onslaught. To overcome their inherent weakness, they developed indigenous survival mechanisms to meet the new challenges.

When the British East India Company realized that they could not compete with Armenian merchants on a level-playing field and seeing that the competition was getting tough between them and the Armenians, they often resorted to piracy and confiscating Armenian ships on the one pretext or the other. They resorted to extra-judicial means to stop Armenian merchants from carrying out mercantile trade. The confiscation of the Armenian-freighted ship, Santa Catharina in 1746, by Admiral Griffin offers one such example. Santa Catharina was an Armenian ship with a cargo full of silver and other valuables from Bazra

and was bound for Calcutta. It was manned by an Indian crew and followed all navigational laws. Without any provocation, it was confiscated by the British East India Company citing that it belonged to the enemy, the French, with which the British were at loggerheads. The Armenian merchants appealed to the court in London and a protracted battle was fought between the Armenian owners of the ship and the East India Company from 1749 to 1752 with the Armenian losing the case at the end. It is interesting to observe how British colonialism treated various diasporas. While on the one hand, it encouraged Armenian merchants to settle down in its colonies in India and provided them with new opportunities; it also harassed them and used extra-judicial means whenever their commercial interests were thwarted.

79.4 ARMENIAN DIASPORIC SETTLEMENTS IN INDIA

Armenian trade diaspora is one of the oldest diasporas in the world and offers a good example of both trade as well as a victim diaspora. As a trade diaspora they had mastered the art of overland trade on caravan routes, trading in spices and silk. They would trade as far as northern Poland and Western Europe. However, the first wave of major Armenian dispersal took place in the eleventh century after the collapse of the Armenian kingdom in 1064 when the Seljuks overran its capital Bagradit which was completely destroyed by the invaders. A large number of Armenians escaped to northern shores of the Black Sea and reached Crimea and established thriving colonies at Tana, Taffa and in Kamenits in Poland.

It was the beginning of Armenian dispersal; settlement and diaspora formation uniquely positioned as a trading community. The Armenian diaspora has also been called a victim diaspora because they were persecuted several times, most violently in 1915-16 in Turkey. In fact, they were as disliked as the Jews in Europe and the Chinese in Southeast Asia, inciting jealousy and prejudices amongst the natives. They were supposedly called engrossers, monopolists and greedy middlemen, for their commercial success and the wealth they accumulated for themselves. Such labeling of immigrant communities has been hypothesized as a common response in the course of immigration and diaspora formation of powerful communities.

The first Armenian immigration and settlement in India began as early as the 14th century during the Delhi Sultanate period in Cambay (Surat) in Gujarat. The Armenian community began their commercial attempt in the city selling precious stones, cotton, silk, jewelry and other goods. Unfortunately, there is no historical account to add credence to this claim. What can be said with certainty however is their increased immigration to Surat and other parts of the country from the 16th century onwards. It led to the emergence of a prominent Armenian community with significant presence in Surat, Calcutta and Madras. They were engaged in trade and took active parts in the cultural life of these cities and even in its politics. Unlike other trade and immigrant communities like the Arabs from West Asia, the Armenians came to India with their families, wives and children looking for a permanent place of settlement.

These Armenian traders who had settled in Surat would eke out their livelihood by selling precious products to Armenian-owned vessels coming from Basra and Bandar Abbas. These goods were further exported by these Armenian merchants to Turkey, Egypt, the Levant, Leghorn and Venice, which were sold on a premium. The Armenian trade community had come to India much before any other European traders. In fact, they were the connecting link between the Indian Ocean and the Mediterranean trade. And it was Shah Abbas of Safavid Empire who was instrumental in facilitating the New Julfa Armenians in their trade activities by giving them access to Bandor Abbas port in the seventeenth century. The port was an important entry point to the Indian Ocean, which helped the Armenian diaspora to trade with thriving outposts both within as well as outside the community. They followed the overland routes, from Persia, Bactria what is now Afghanistan and Tibet and Kashmir reaching northern parts of India before making it to Indian commercial centres in the 1660s. From Tibet, they could reach heartland China and establish their trading posts there as well. Some of them also took the maritime route and came in Arab ships from Hormuz and Persian Gulf to the port city of Cambay.

There are historical records suggesting the visit of Armenian traders to Akbar's court during the Mughal period. It is suggested that Akbar invited them to settle in his new capital in Agra. Although there are no records of the number of Armenians who came to live in the city, there is an Armenian Church there which dates back to 1562, thus suggesting the presence of a sizable Armenian community. But it was only during the sixteenth and seventeenth century when Armenians were trying to spread to other parts of the world including the Volga from the Caspian Sea, that they moved eastwards reaching India as merchants and traders after the fall of Safavid Empire (1501-1722), which ruled in the present day Iran. In fact, Safavid Empire played an important role in the dispersal of the Armenian community to the Indian Ocean and other parts of the world in the seventeenth century. It was one of the most important Islamic empires and one of its rulers, Shah Abbas moved its capital to Isfahan, which was to become an important site of Armenian settlement. It was during this time that the Armenians were asked to move to Julfa, a suburb of Isfahan. Julfa soon became a vibrant, thriving and prosperous center of Armenian settlement, which monitored and controlled overseas trade through its nodal and peripheral sites of settlement.

79.5 ARMENIANS' COMMERCIAL INTELLIGENCE NETWORK

One of the reasons that Armenian merchants were able to survive and thrive under these hostile conditions was that they had built an advanced network of commercial intelligence through centuries' of trade. With the nodal point at Julfa/Isfahan, which was the site of individual and family businesses, they could control and monitor far flung business outposts through their elaborate communication network. They had also established a postal system which was much ahead of its times. These postal systems were individual or family-funded with runners, couriers, merchants, clerics and consuls employed at their service. Their postal delivery system was so reliable that the British and the Spanish took its service to reach out to far-flung transcontinental posts in India, Africa, America and Philippines.

The Armenian families based at Julfa would write letters and send documents about the accounts, prices and new business opportunities to their masters in Julfa. It was because of this and the intra-community trust that it helped them in dominating the Indian Ocean trade. Information was shared over long distances through privately funded networks, which Julfa merchants had mastered. Initially these commercial mails were sent through overland routes by the New Julfa/Isfahan merchants to their agents in India, but were soon replaced with maritime mail delivery after the 18th century. There is historical evidence of some of the leading families like Minasians having their own “runners” which were called shatir and chapar in Persian. These communication networks were also used to transfer credit, capital and resources from one part of the diaspora group to another, thus making knowledge and information a precious commodity. A large number of such communications however focused on prices of precious commodities like Iranian raw silk, opium and cotton textile, trading itineraries and manuals on the transfer of capital and credit.

Check Your Progress 1

Note: a) Check your answer with possible answers given at the end of the unit

1. Write a short note on Armenian trade diaspora describing its main features

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2. Describe briefly the commercial and intelligence network that Armenian traders had built and which helped them survive.

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79.6 THE EARLY CHINESE MIGRATION TO INDIA

As mentioned earlier, Armenians in India formed the part of the trade diaspora who came for commercial reasons and for settlement. This was quite unlike the Chinese diaspora who came as sojourners with the intention of returning to their homeland. The demographic distribution of Armenians in India showed a continuous decline after their commercial interests were subjugated by the British. There are no more than 100 Armenian families left in India now. This was in complete contrast to the Chinese diaspora whose number swelled and dwindled depending on their demand in India's workforce market. There are some 3000 Chinese left in Kolkata and over 4,000 in Mumbai. But the figures are contested. While the Armenians were invariably a trading community, the Chinese were employed as skilled and unskilled workers in multiple industries. The Armenian community was well organized and inter-connected while the Chinese migrated to India sporadically.

The history of Chinese immigration to India is almost 200 years old when they started coming in small numbers to work as sailors, fitters and unskilled workers. Some of them shared geographical proximity with other diasporas like the Jews, Parsees and Armenians although each one of them had their own, separate settlement areas. As the Chinese traded and manufactured some of the consumer goods, their name was closely based on some of these products like the Chinese silk, chini (granulated sugar), chinimiti (porcelain products). They are also credited with introducing some of the Chinese products for the first time in mass scale, thus leading to its mass consumption.

Looking at the pattern of their migration and settlement in India, scholars have marked three distinct such periods. One, from the late 18th to 19th century, the second between 1920-1930 and the third phase covers the post-World War II migration. The Chinese migrants who came to India did not belong to a homogenous group but came from diverse sub-ethnic groups from various Chinese provinces and included the Cantonese, Hakka, Shanghai and Hubei. During the first half of the 20th century, a good number of them came from Shantung, Yunnanese and Amoy. Depending on which part of Mainland China they came from, they divided themselves into various categories like Mong, Chun, Han, Hui and Man. The early Chinese group that migrated to India came from Macao, Canton and Amoy regions from South China.

The first known and recorded evidence of Chinese migration and settlement in India comes from Atchipur, which derives its name from its first Chinese settler, Atchew Po, who on his way to trading outpost, was shipwrecked and reached the Indian shore. According to some sources, Atchew came from the Canton region of Southern China and reached Calcutta in 1778. At that time Governor General Warren Hastings headed the British administration in India. Atchew petitioned Hastings for help and settlement. As the Chinese were very industrious people and had helped in the establishment of other British colonies, Hastings granted him land near Calcutta, which he used to set up a sugar factory. As India did not have a skilled workforce to produce sugar, Atchew made several trips to China to bring in trained Chinese manpower.

In 1781, Atchew was granted permission to bring in 110 Chinese workers who were allowed to settle on the land granted by Hastings. Atchew began the production of sugar and established the first sugar mill in the country. That probably explains why sugar was called chini, thus having an allegorical association with the Chinese people. In addition to sugar mill workers, there were others who made their way from Canton, Macao and Hong Kong, which were the emigrants' ports in the South China Sea. There were runaway sailors, port and ship workers who came to work and live in India during this time. Calcutta was also a major sojourn post where sailors would stay and wait for their next China-bound ship. Some of them while on their way to China found good work opportunities and preferred to stay on.

79.7 DEMOGRAPHY AND SETTLEMENT

As Atchew brought in more Chinese workers to work in his sugar mills, other Chinese workers began following the early migrants. Calcutta soon

became a popular port for the early Chinese migrants. By 1792, the city had earmarked areas, which were called China Lane and China Bazaar and by 1793 as record shows, there were some ten Chinese shops and houses in these areas. They engaged themselves in various activities and small-time trading businesses. According to one estimate by 1821, there were more than 414 Chinese migrants in the city. Almost all of early migrants during the 18th and 19th century were male and therefore formed an exclusive 'bachelor society' because of their skewed sex ratio.

World War II brought in a new wave of Chinese refugees, especially from Southeast Asia, which substantially increased their population, estimated to have reached 40,000. The 1962 Sino-Indian War was a watershed mark as it forced many of the Chinese diaspora members to either return to their home country or migrate to the western world, thus bringing their population in India drastically down. Many of them went to live in the US, Australia and Canada, thus forming the part of doubly-displaced people. As the Indian Census record of 1991, 2001 and 2011 does not specifically mention their population either in Bombay or Calcutta, it is difficult to cite a headcount of the Chinese people in India. The frequently quoted figure of 3000 Chinese diaspora in Calcutta and some 4,000 in Mumbai, does not correlate with real estimates.

CASE STUDY 1: CHINA TOWNS IN KOLKATA AND MUMBAI

But the Chinese diaspora was a vibrant and thriving community in Calcutta and Bombay some few decades back, but their number has now reduced drastically. Their place of settlement was mainly confined to China Town localities of these two cities. In Calcutta, they lived in two China Towns, namely the Old China Town called Cheenapara around Colootola Street and Dr. Sun Yat Sen Road; and the New China Town on the outskirts of Calcutta called Dhapa or Tangra. Majority of the Chinese living in New China Town are those who had come here during the Second World War. The New China Town is also known for Chinese tannery work, a specialized profession exclusively dominated by Chinese migrants in the region.

Unlike Calcutta, the Chinese diaspora in Bombay are small in number and confined to two China towns situated in Nawab Tank Road, in Mazagaon and Shuklaji Street, which is in Nagpada. What remains of their once thriving population are two monuments, associated with their mass presence in the city. One is Chinese cemetery, close to Central Mumbai's Antop Hill, built in

1889 on land bought by Chinese merchants and the second monument is a temple called Kwan Kung temple which was built in 1919. These two Chinatowns of Bombay were once thriving place of commercial activities, which sold Chinese goods and had Chinese grocery shops, traditional medicine

of the area had come to India as refugees during the Chinese civil war when Mao Zedong had begun prosecuting the dissent groups.

The China town areas in Bombay were once known for Chinese goods, its dentists, shoemakers and traders who had arrived in the city from Canton in South China and were well versed in their profession. The East India Company also employed them , especially in Mazgaon dockyard, as sailors and fitters. Their number however kept on declining and by 1960s it had come down to only 15,000 inhabitants. During the 1962 Sino-India war, there was a mass exodus of Chinese both from Bombay and Calcutta. However, many of these Chinese had lived in the city since generation and identified themselves as more Indians than Chinese.

79.8 SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC STATUS OF THE CHINESE DIASPORA

The early Chinese immigrants who came to India during the British rule were artisans, craftsmen and sugar mill workers who belonged to lower strata of Chinese society. To escape poverty, deprivation and resource-scarcity they had ventured out of China as traders and workers. Initially, many of them worked as fitters at Calcutta port and also as carpenters and cabinet makers. They were employed for their cheap labour. There was also differentiation based on which region of China they came from as each region had developed its own professional expertise. For example, the majority of carpenters and cabinet makers were Cantonese who had initially worked in ship building industry at Kanchrapara, Hooghly dock and in Liluha Railway Workshop and also in jute mills which had sprung up during the 18th and 19th century. As the Cantonese were in majority and in better professions and well settled, they were able to wield considerable influence on the rest of the community members.

There was another group of Hubei migrants who had come from Hubei and were in minority but were professionally successful as dentists and were experts in teeth setting. Many of the local people thronged to them for their dental treatment. This group of Hubei migrants had come to India between 1920 and 1930 and was able to quickly make their mark. They opened dental clinics and were experts in treating dental cavities. Some of them were also using indigenous art of traditional medicine in treating ailments. Another group of Chinese migrants came from Shadong, East China, specialized in silk and soon took to silk peddling. However after the silk import from China was banned in the 1950s, many of them became traders of Indian silk and some of them also opened laundry shops with the help of loans provided by the Chinese banks.

A group of women from Hakka took to salon business and became hairdressers and beauticians. The Hakka men, on the other hand, took to the tannery business in which they had invested since the beginning of 1910s and became shoe-makers and other leather products. Some of them also got into the bakery business and opened shops in different parts of the city. Christian missionaries also employed educated Chinese in translating the Bible and other religious

books from English to Chinese languages. There are also historical records of import of Chinese labour. For example when tea companies lost their monopoly over tea trade in China through a Charter Act of 1833, they began cultivating tea in India. One such company, Assam Tea Company, started importing Chinese labour in large numbers. In fact, the scarcity of tea chest makers and tea labours had posed a serious threat to the tea industry in India for which Chinese labour was imported. It was in 1838 when the first batch of Chinese tea cultivators landed in Calcutta in the vessel named 'Fulty Salam'. Subsequently 'Tenasserin' brought in 47 Chinese tea cultivators in 1839 and 'Asia Felin' brought in 247 Chinese in 1840. According to the Committee for Overseas Chinese, Taipei, some 300 Chinese were hired for railroad construction in colonial India. Some of the Chinese coolies were also brought in for the reclamation of wasteland in Sunderbans. So, while concluding this section, one can say that there were several waves of Chinese migration to India. These migrants came from different parts of China, each specializing in particular skill and profession, thus filling the existing void in colonial India.

79.9 INDO-CHINA WAR, THE GALWAN VALLEY AND THE CHINESE TWICE MIGRANTS

Although the Chinese diaspora has been living in India since centuries and for generations, they soon become a subject of suspicion and mistrust whenever the two nations - their home and host country, become hostile to each other. During these times, their loyalty is questioned and they are often asked to prove their identity and intentions. If the situation becomes too hostile they are at times interned or deported depending on their status in the host country. A similar situation was observed during the Indo-China War in 1962 when some 3,000 Indian Chinese were interned and remained in prison in Deoli Camp in Rajasthan on the charges of suspicion and mistrust. The war was also responsible for gradual diminishing of their population as many of them either went back to China or took refuge in Western countries. Many of them went to live in Canada, Australia and Hong Kong where they already had a sizable diaspora. Once bustling with life and vibrancy, the China towns in Bombay and Calcutta, fell silent because of the loss of its inhabitants.

The Indian Chinese who went to live abroad still continue to identify themselves with India and its culture and have formed philanthropic and cultural groups to help their fellow beings. Those who were interned at Deoli during the Indo-China war of 1962 and now live in Markham and Scarborough, suburbs of Greater Canada, have formed groups like Hakka Helping Hands and the Association of Chinese Indian Deoli Internees to help the community members. It was no surprise that in May 2020 when Chinese incursion took place at Sino-Indian border, at Galwan Valley, leading to bloody skirmishes between the two nations, the Indian Chinese soon became the target of close scrutiny. Many of them remained indoors and were scared of public backlash. Also during the Covid-19 pandemic, the Chinese restaurants were pejoratively named 'corona' because of the alleged origin of the virus in China. These incidents often bring indignity and insecurity to the Indian Chinese, many of whom have preferred to migrate to Western countries thus being displaced and becoming twice migrants in another country after having lived for many generations in India. This reflects

in their numbers, while according to 1951 and 1961 their population in Calcutta alone was 9,215 and 14,607 respectively; it has come down to few thousands after the Indo-China war.

79.10 LET US SUM UP

After having gone through the unit, you would now have understood how the process of colonization played a catalytic role in diaspora formation. Various ethnic and diasporic groups were differently impacted by the process of colonisation. While it was the major reason that brought an end to Armenian migration to India and its dwindling number, its impact on Chinese migration and the formation of Chinese diaspora was significant. There was also a fundamental difference between these two diasporas in terms of their relationship with homeland and the state of being stateless as in the case of Armenian diaspora. The response of both these diasporas have been different to both colonial powers as well as India, to which they made their home. With the end of trade opportunities in India, the majority of Armenians dispersed to various parts of the world, with some going back to their place of origin. The Chinese diaspora, on the other hand, remained in India for a protracted period of time, moving from one profession to another and from one business to the other. Both the diasporas have not only magnified the multicultural flavour of the country but have also contributed to its development in their own way.

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
3. Describe briefly the early Chinese migrants who came to Calcutta

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4. How is the Armenian Diaspora different from the Chinese diaspora? Elucidate their main features.

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79.12 CHECK YOUR PROGRESS – POSSIBLE ANSWERS

Check your progress 1

1. Armenian trade diaspora in India was a rich, prosperous and thriving community as late as the 1680s as many of the Armenian merchants were owners of ships that carried goods to the Persian Gulf and traded as far as Indonesian archipelago. A form of familial-ethnic trade diaspora, which was based on merchant-capitalism, Armenians had dominated the Indian Ocean trade till the end of 17th century. But in the 18th century, they had to soon compete with colonial powers, the British, the French, the Dutch and the Portuguese in the same economic sphere and trade routes. These Armenian merchants were individual entrepreneurs with strong backing of their community but bereft of state-sponsored support and a national-stock-holding like the British East India Company. Although they had an advanced level of trade and intelligence network, they were not well organized and strategically placed to counter the imperial onslaught.

2. One of the reasons that Armenian merchants were able to survive the colonial powers was that they had built advance network of commercial intelligence. With the nodal point at Julfa/Isfahan, which was the site of individual and family businesses, they could control and monitor far flung business outposts through their elaborate communication network. They had also established a postal system which was ahead of its times and were individual or family-funded with runners, couriers, merchants, clerics and consuls employed at their service. Their postal delivery system was so reliable that the British and the Spanish took its service to reach out to far-flung transcontinental posts in India, Africa, America and Philippines. The Armenian families based at Julfa would write letters and send documents about the accounts, prices and new business opportunities to their masters in Julfa. It was because of this and the intra-community trust that it helped them to dominate the Indian Ocean trade. Within the Armenian network, information was shared over long distances through privately funded networks, which Julfa merchants had mastered over the centuries.

Check your Progress 2

3. The first known and recorded evidence of Chinese migration and settlement comes from Atchipur, which derives its name from its first Chinese resident Atchew Po, who on his way to trading outpost but was shipwrecked and reached the Indian shore. According to some sources, Atchew came from the Canton region of Southern China and reached Calcutta in 1778. At that time Governor General Warren Hastings headed the British administration in India. Atchew petitioned Hastings for help and settlement. In 1781, Atchew was granted permission to bring in 110 Chinese workers who were allowed to settle on the land granted by Hastings. Atchew began the production of sugar and established the first sugar mill in the country. There were other groups of people including the runaway sailors, port and ship workers who came to work and live in India during this time. Calcutta was also a major sojourn post where sailors would stay and wait for their next China-bound ship. Some of them while on their way to China found good work opportunities and preferred to stay on and work in Calcutta.
4. Armenians in India formed the part of the trade diaspora who came for commercial reasons and for settlement. This was quite unlike the Chinese diaspora who came as sojourners with the intention of returning to their homeland sometime in the future. The demographic distribution of Armenians in India shows a continuous decline after their commercial interests were subjugated by the British. As of now, there are no more than 100 Armenian families left in India. This was in contrast to the Chinese diaspora whose number swelled and dwindled depending on their demand in India's workforce market. There are only a few thousand Chinese left in Kolkata and Mumbai. While the Armenians were invariably a trading community, the Chinese were employed as skilled and unskilled workers in multiple industries. The Armenian community was well organized and inter-connected, unlike the Chinese who migrated to India sporadically.

Colonialism was the main reason that brought an end to Armenian migration to India while in the case of the Chinese diaspora it was the reason for its

formation, starting from the late 18th century to the first few decades of the 20th century. There was also a fundamental difference between these diasporas in terms of their relationship with homeland and the state of being stateless, as was the case with the Armenian diaspora. The response of both these diasporas have been different to both colonial powers as well as India. With the end of trade opportunities in India, the majority of Armenians dispersed to various parts of the world, with some going back to their place of origin. The Chinese diaspora, on the other hand, remained in India for a protracted period, moving from one profession to another and from one business to another. Both the diasporas have not only magnified the multicultural ethos of the country but have also contributed to its development in their own individual ways.

Colonial Diaspora
(Armenian and Chinese
Diaspora in India)



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