CHAPTER - 6

CONCLUSION

Diasporic studies have become an important subject of study for the past three decades because of its multidisciplinary nature and its influence on the international politics. Indian emigration has been taking place for centuries but never before in the history India witnessed such massive movements of people from India to other parts of the world as in the 19th and 20th centuries. Among the immigrants of diverse nationalities, Indian diaspora makes the third largest group, next only to British and Chinese.

Perhaps no other country in the world is characterized with such diversity in its population as India, in terms of culture, including language, regions, religions and other forms of social stratification. Emigration from India too has been widely varied in terms of their historical context, causes and consequences of migration from India as much the social characteristics, such as level of education, caste and class, place of origin and religious and linguistic affiliation of these immigrants.

The Indian diaspora in Francophone is largely an unexplored area. Francophone as a region consists of French speaking countries. It includes France, French West Indies: Guadeloupe and Martinique and almost twenty five countries of Africa which includes French Indian Ocean territories. Overall the Francophone Indian Diaspora constitutes over 5% of the total Indian Diaspora.

Both Madagascar and Seychelles are Francophone countries. However, the impact on Indian community was different. On the one hand, Indian community in Madagascar has strictly retained its identity, in Seychelles, People of Indian Origin, at least until last decade were fully assimilated. Recently there is a renewed interest of Indians, especially Tamils to rediscover their identity.

In the concluding chapter let us test our hypothesis.

The first hypotheses is : The divergent colonial policies of British [in Seychelles] and the French [in Madagascar] led to different patterns of identity formation amongst the PIO.
Our existing knowledge is that unlike Britain, France has always followed the policy of assimilation in their colonies. French ruled their colonies as extension of their empire. Under this policy the subject population was to be fully acculturated in the mainstream French culture in terms of language and culture. French influence is clearly seen in its ex-colonies. The French learned early that their colonies would last longer if they worked to become friends with the people of their colonies. France therefore never left its colonies even after formal independence was granted to them.

With this background if we analyze the identity formation of PIOs in Seychelles, we will find that despite over 150 years of British rule, PIOs are fully assimilated in Seychellois society and culture. An important provision when French handed over Seychelles to Britain was that the conquering power would "respect and preserve" the customs and laws of the people of the island. Because of this provision, to which British faithfully adhered during their entire colonial period, French Laws, customs and culture have always been absorbed in Seychelles.

The Indian Diaspora in Seychelles became integrated with the local population resulting in inter-marriages and some conversions also. They became well versed in the local creole language also. They own a large number of business houses. In the course of this development their traditional values including language, religion and culture took a back seat in the land of their settlement. The inter-mingling of races -- British, French, African and Asian -- and mixed marriages without barrier of colour created a multi-faceted and almost unparalleled community, a peaceful community that is a good example for other countries. Another important feature is the acceptance of three languages – English, French and Creole – as the official languages of the country.

In the 1980's, however, there was renewed interest of Indians, especially Tamils in establishing religious and cultural centres. If Indians in Seychelles are fully assimilated then why there is sudden need to rediscover the identity has come up. Why Tamils in Seychelles have now established a Temple and celebrate all festivals and rituals with such pomp and show? To find a reason for such a shift in a community's behaviour is difficult. At this level we can only find some possibilities. One could be that it is the Tamil community among the Indian community that is rediscovering its identity as Tamils and not as Indians.
Quite opposite to it, despite living under the French colonial rule, Indians in Madagascar have retained their identity. The PIOs in Madagascar appear as a homogenous group from outside. They never assimilated with the native Malagasies nor even tried to. This could be because Indians considered their culture as superior. Marriage is strictly endogamous in nature. Indians marry within their community. Marriageable age is very low. It is between eighteen and twenty one. Among Muslims, girls are sometimes married between the ages of fourteen- sixteen. This is because parents want to arrange marriage of their children themselves. This is one of the ways how Indian community maintains its social exclusiveness. In general, it has been seen that the attitude of Indian immigrants towards their religion are favourable since immigration. One of the possible explanations may be that religion acts as a psychological connection with the home country in an alien society. Most Indian families have a place of worship at their homes. One can support the hypothesis that religious activity among Indian emigrants has not declined as a result of immigration. On the contrary, there is a greater religious consciousness and a need to practice religious rituals individually as well as communally. The social life of Indians in Madagascar revolves largely around Mosques and Temples. Majority of Indians in Madagascar are Muslims. They are extremely religious. Despite French Policy of ‘Assimilation’, Indian community in Madagascar has been able to maintain strong religious identity. Conversion to Christianity is not practiced and is also looked down upon. Unlike, Indians in other French colonies (for example: Reunion- where Indians have converted into Christianity, have taken French ways of life, have even changed their names), Indians in Madagascar strongly uphold their religious identity. Maintaining this identity has remained and today also is a challenge among the Indian Community.

The next hypothesis is that the economic positioning of PIO in these two countries led to two different types of identity formation

People of Indian Origin in Madagascar and Seychelles have done extremely well economically. They have risen up the economic ladder. During the colonial rule, In Seychelles, most Indians worked on white-owned estates as slaves. After the abolition of slavery and when British took over they became agricultural wage labourers, share croppers, fishers or artisans. When French left Seychelles, the loyal Indians were given huge land area. Therefore, many Indians rose up economically. Similarly, in Madagascar, Indians came as traders, most of them coming from Gujarat-Bombay Belt of India. Indian
merchants have monopolised trade in Madagascar. Similarly in Seychelles, Tamils have captured entire retail trade of Seychelles. Likewise, Gujaratis in Seychelles are in the control of the construction sector. Likewise, in Madagascar People of Indian origins are controlling almost entire Gold Trade. Almost 90% of the gold shops are owned by PIOs. Even in foreign trade and commerce Indians have made their presence felt. They are also dominant in the banking sector. However, this made the PIOs in Madagascar quite unpopular among the native Malagases. PIOs are seen as exploiters and at time they become obvious targets of anger of peasants. They are victim to any political and civil unrest in the country. Thus, as far as economic status is concerned PIOs in Seychelles as well as in Madagascar enjoy a very high status. However, in Madagascar PIOs constitute only two percent of the population but are controlling more than fifty percent of the economy.

In order to test this hypothesis we will have to analyze it historically. If we look at the pattern of migration we will find two different patterns. In Madagascar, there were evidences that Indians were present before the colonization period. Medieval Arab sources give evidence about South Asian Merchants along the Indian Ocean Littoral. From the 9th century onwards, traders from India frequented the coasts of Oman, Socotra and Aden. French accounts also reveal that small Indian trading community was already present on Madagascar by the late 18th century. Even during colonialism, Indians came as a result of free immigration. They came as artisans or skilled workers and then shifted to trade after reaching their destination. A significant number were migrants who had already spent time in the Mascareness or elsewhere in the region. This was the migration in search of opportunities rather than forced mobilization or an escape from desperate socio-economic conditions. Indians established their trade networks in Madagascar through chain migration, whereby, first one merchant would come and establish an agency and then he would call his sons and other people from his clan or his village of origin. Therefore, Indians lived in a clan and were able to maintain their identity.

Where as in Seychelles Indians came in small number first as slaves and then as indentured labour. A small number of traders came from present day Tamil Nadu and later from Gujarat. Firstly, when Indians arrived in Seychelles there was no native population on the island. And Secondly, they came as indentured workers under the
oppressive regime, so adopting the French culture would mean rise in social and economic status. Therefore, we find two different identity formations.

The third hypothesis is: economic and educational status of PIO in these two countries resulted from the nature of Indian migrant people to these countries.

Economically, as mentioned earlier, Indian communities in these two countries are doing well but if compare the two Indians in Madagascar enjoy a higher economic status than the Indian community in Seychelles.

Education was up till now sadly absent among the Indian community in Madagascar. They are many reasons for this lack of education among the Indian Community. One of the most important reasons is the strong desire of maintaining ethnic identity and resisting any kind of intermingling with the native population. Most girls are married by the time they are 16 or 17 and hardly even finish their schooling so that parents can control their choice of grooms and will ensure their marriage within the Indian community. After marriage girls are expected to take up household chores and help their husbands in business. As for boys, after completing their schools they look after family shops or business. They are not expected to take up government jobs. Therefore, higher education is not considered essential. The present generation, however, is concerned about the education of their children. The problem is that they would like their children to study in a French medium school. Good schools are in the capital, Tananarive. Those living in coastal areas are deprived of good education. Very few parents, who could afford used to send their children to France for higher education but now many parents are sending them to India, especially to Bangalore. Families also try to control peer group of the younger ones. Earlier, children were not encouraged to make friends with Malagasies. Now in many families children are allowed to make friends with Malagasies, however, they are not allowed to bring them home.

This is quite opposite to situation in Seychelles. PIOs in Seychelles acquire high education. Greater tertiary education among the Indians in Seychelles, accounted for the shift to management, professional and technical positions. The rising educational achievements among Indians (most of them go for higher education in France) saw
A growing number of Indians graduates entering the teaching profession and also in bureaucracy.

Thus, Indians in Madagascar live like a clan, keeping all Indian customs; marrying always only amongst their own community and many went back to India to get married so the group become bigger. However, Indians in Seychelles have on the one hand assimilated almost fully with the Seychellois society and have accepted French ways and lives, on the other hand the Tamilian Hindus in Seychelles are rediscovering their Indian Identity and Indian roots.

The fourth hypothesis is that the new diaspora policy of India under globalisation has led to pro-active recognition of PIO even in third world countries like Madagascar and Seychelles.

After decades of neglect, the Indian Government is actively courting the over 20-million strong Indian diaspora. Responding to constraints posed by its post-1991 financial crises and on-going market reforms, New Delhi was led to re-evaluate the diaspora’s potential, recognizing it as a valuable asset to further its transformed economic and foreign policy interests

While governmental mechanisms to explore the diasporic potential, such as remittances, bank deposits and bonds, had already been in place since the 1970s, they were mainly ad hoc and opportunistic, restricted at ensuring minimal conditions for a continuous inflow of foreign exchange. This strategy rapidly lost effectiveness and gave signs of exhaustion by the end of the 1990s, Overseas Indians also beginning to organize transnationally and reclaim more than mere economic incorporation.

A more sophisticated (Government-initiated) diaspora policy thus emerged after 2001, reshaping the terms of engagement in a more balanced way: in return for contributing with financial capital, know-how and philanthropy, as “catalysts” to India’s economic development and global affirmation, People of Indian Origin and Non-Resident Indians worldwide are now offered extensive cultural and symbolic capital, and celebrated as privileged members of the “global Indian family”.

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However, till the first Pravasi Bhartiya Divas the Government of India showed no particular interest in Indian diaspora from third world countries. Dual citizenship was extended to only PIOs of the developed world. Later, when this policy was criticised by everyone, it is extended to all Indian diasporas.

Though Singhvi’s committee report voices the demands and expectations of Indian Diaspora in Madagascar and Seychelles, we do not see any special policy directed towards Indian Diaspora in these two countries. Indian diaspora in heterogeneous in nature and therefore any uniform policy will not cater to the special demands and expectations of Indian Diaspora in Madagascar and Seychelles. Indian Government should take initiatives to formulate policies that will address special needs and involve her diaspora in extending her relationships with Madagascar and Seychelles.