Double migrants, diversity and diasporas: A snapshot of the Hindustani and non-resident Indian community in the Netherlands.

The Indian diaspora has become the subject of considerable academic and practical attention. Scholars speak of a global Indian diaspora or even diasporas (Dien, 2000). A high-level committee of the Indian Parliament, led by Dr L.M. Singhvi (former minister of parliament and Indian High Commissioner to the UK, 1993-1997), conducted a general survey of people of Indian origin (PIOs) and non-resident Indians (NRIs) having combined these two population groups with Indian links into a single category of the Indian diaspora. While some academics doubt the validity of such a broad category (Markovits), there is arguably much usefulness in it now, as global travel and communication lead to a revival, re-establishment and re-assessment of old links.

Western Europe and North America remain two of the most important migration destinations for Indians and people of Indian origin. In Europe, the United Kingdom has the largest population of South Asians - two million - well over half of whom are Indian. The Indian diaspora in the Netherlands is represented by both PIOs (the Indo-Surinamese) and NRIs. The Netherlands has the second largest population of PIOs on the continent. The majority, approximately 160,000, are Hindustani (Indo-Surinamese), double migrants with Dutch citizenship. The remainder, some 15-20,000, are NRIs who came directly from India and hold Indian passports. (Their loyalty to India is expressed through cultural activities and political lobbying in favour of India). The number of both communities is rising. It is estimated that between two and three thousand Indians in Holland are illegal immigrants. There are also about 20,000 Pakistanis in the Netherlands, who are culturally close to Indians and share a common history with Indians.

The Lalla Rukh

Holland’s Hindustanis are descendants of indentured workers transported to Dutch Guyana (Suriname) from the territories which today forms the Indian states of Uttar Pradesh and Bihar, historically known as Hindustan. The first ship carrying human cargo from India was the Lalla Rukh, and it landed in Suriname on the 5th June 1873, (making 2008 a special year for the Lalla Rukh). These communities found themselves engaged in a process of searching for and constructing an identity. This process was itself complicated by the fact that the Hindustani community in both Suriname and in the Netherlands is both linguistically and religiously disparate. While some Hindustanis find themselves happy under the umbrella of Surinamese identity, others prefer to stress their ‘Indianness’ instead.

Religion

Both the Hindustani and NRI communities in the Netherlands are multi-faith groups. The majority of Hindustanis are Hindus (88%) or approximately 125,000. The remainder are Muslims (16%) and Christians (4%). In terms of the NRI community, there are approximately 2,000 Sikhs, in addition to Hindus, Muslims and Zoroastrians ( Parsees). The Indian and NRI Hindu communities within the Netherlands are affiliated to different sects (sampradayas). The majority of Hindustanis are traditionalist Sanatan Hindus. Roughly 16% of them adhere to the ‘Arya Samaj’, a Hindu reform movement founded in India in 1875 by Swami Dayananda. Research by Choenin shows, however, that the differences among the new generation of Hindustanis in Holland are not that significant, and in fact many Indian and NRI Hindus are unaware of the nuances of traditionalist and reformist Hinduisms. Another study (Lynebakke), claiming a significant divide between the Hindustanis and the NRIs in Amsterdam, admits the growing number of intermarriages between the young generation Hindustanis and Holland-born Indians of subcontinental origin. For the younger generation (especially for the Hindu) religion is more a matter of belonging, rather than active participation. There is however, some evidence that young Hindustani Muslims are increasingly influenced by the ideas of global Umma and Muslim brotherhood. My research suggests that among NRI Muslims in the Netherlands, there is considerable common ground between the Pakistani community and Sarnami Hindustani Muslims. For example, the Indian language of Urdu is one of the languages of religious instruction in their mosques.

The Indian Hindus are most eager to claim their links to India. The 1980s saw a significant number of marriages between Surinami Hindu women and Indian men. This produced a significant number of children of mixed parentage but with strong Indian links. These families usually choose Standard Hindi as the language of communication at home. (For a period of almost 20 years, this trend stopped, but increasingly now there appears to be a renewed interest by Dutch-Indians and Hindustanis in each other). Despite these intermarriages, the Hindustanis and NRI communities remain wary of each other. Hindustanis from Suriname are often considered as being ‘low caste’ by the NRIs, while the Hindustanis often view NRIs as opportunists. Interestingly, a number of illegal immigrants within the community are Indians from India. So some Hindustanis see Indians as being of a lower social class. The existence of very influential Indian businessmen in the Netherlands and importance of the Brahman priests among the Indo-Surinamese perpetuates the stereotypes.

Language

It is apparent that for younger generations of Hindustanis and Dutch-Indians, the Dutch language and identity are important. Those Hindustanis who were born in the Netherlands are often not well-practiced in speaking and understanding Surinamese Hindi, also known as Sarnami. Surinamese Hindi is a derivative of local Indian dialects close to Awadhi and Braj, and developed in isolation from the other Indo-Aryan languages (Damsteegt). There also

More than 175,000 Hindustanis (Indo-Surinamese) and non-resident Indians (NRIs) have made the Netherlands their home. In fact, Holland’s Indian diaspora is the largest in continental Europe and a significant part of the Indian diaspora worldwide. The diversity of the groups and the complicated relations between Hindustanis and NRIs make the picture of the Indian diaspora in the country a multi-faceted mosaic. Yet, NRIs and Indo-Surinamese are united by their special relationship with the sub-continent.
Chinese Confucianism gradually broadened its scope from traditional to modern owing to the influence of Ching Dynasty scholarship. Tai-Chen (1732-1777), in particular, believed that sentiments and desires are a valuable part of human nature, an idea in opposition to traditional Confucianism, notably to Sung-Ming’s Neo-Confucianists, who claimed that rationality is good and emotions are evil. Modern Chinese scholars, however, continue to greatly value and appreciate Tai-Chen’s work.

An ‘aesthetic education’: the role of ‘sentiments’ in the transition from traditional Confucianism to modern aesthetics

Two such scholars were Liang Chi-Chao (1873-1929) and Tsai Yuen-Pei (1885-1977), who were influential in the modernization of Chinese society. Liang, an ‘aesthetic education’

T owards an ‘aesthetic education’ as the tool of cultivating a culturally Indian but mostly English-speaking community. It is important to add, however, that many Hindustanis, and the disinterested nature of aesthetic senti

Ref: Choenni Ch., Hindu Youngsters in the Netherlands: The Emergence of Hindu youth organizations in an influential and non-resident Indian community in the subcontinental of South Asia. They continue to maintain ties and support for their home countries.

Simultaneously, these two masters, under the influence of Western aesthetic education, responded to public yearnings by developing a new way to appreciate aesthetic values. Aesthetics here refers to more than mere art; it’s a more general appreciation of beauty, of harmony and idealised, or what is termed in many areas of art as composition. Aesthetics, then, had created a sense of urgency to recognise the importance of aesthetic education so that it might play a constructive role in developing their beloved nation.

A means to a harmonious society

Liang Chi-Chao was an emotionally profound and colourful man. His ideas about sentiments were derived from his belief in the aesthetic value of sentiments towards the end of the Ching Dynasty: a social ‘aesthetics’ whose object is a harmonious society, well ordered like a work of art. Like art, the phenomena of life, death, fortune, misfortune rise and fall like waves in response to the universal principles that are universal and elevate beauty. Beauty, to Kant, humanity’s sentiments are common to all people); spontaneity (led by human nature without effort).

In sum, Liang and Tsai claimed aesthetic sentiments were entwined with ‘production’, whereas Kant believed that aesthetic education was transcendental and pure. The difference may lie in their emphasis on Liang and Tsai looking towards the source and Kant at the result. Yet, in spite of these differences, Tsai laid the foundation for modern Chinese aesthetic education by adapting some of the ideas of Liang and Tsai’s theory of human sentiments injected new life into traditional Confucianism that had always valued rationality and dispassioned emotions.

Liang and Tsai asserted that the disinterested nature of aesthetic sentiment is the essence of ‘aesthetic sense’, and the disinterested nature of aesthetic sentiments helps to make a man disinterested in gain or loss and helps to eliminate the obsession of self-interest. Yet, to both Liang and Tsai, aesthetic education as the tool of cultivating man’s spirit includes the property of being purposeful.

According to Tsai, ‘aesthetic sentiments’ are derived from the interaction between a human’s inner sentiments and his external environment. In Kant’s opinion, however, aesthetic sentiments are neither inner emotions nor experiential, and they are certainly not concerned with the material objects in question. Rather, Kant believed that when people bracket physical sensations and practical utility derived from external stimulations, they will acquire a free mind capable of experiencing pure aesthetic sentiments.

In Liang’s view, aesthetic education should be based on the moral aspect and the disinterested nature of aesthetic sentiment, ‘ignore the fact of whether he or she is rich or poor, beautiful or ugly, human or inanimate…’, and that when people bracket physical sensations and practical utility derived from external stimulations, they will acquire a free mind capable of experiencing pure aesthetic sentiments.

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Liang and Tsai initiated a series of plans to introduce lifelong aesthetic education to Chinese schools, families, and society, to make aesthetic education a necessary tool for building the nation. Unfortunately, their plans failed to come to fruition, mainly because the Chinese were hard pressed by political unrest and economic hardship. But they undeniably made a great contribution by laying the groundwork for modern Chinese aesthetic education. Because of their efforts to promote the paramount value of human sentiments, modern Chinese thinking regarding aesthetic education can develop into a new and promising field.