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9. INDIAN DIASPORIC GRANDPARENTS IN CANADA AND THE UNITED STATES

Their Urge to Transmit Indian Culture and Heritage to Their Descendants

ABSTRACT

From the dawn of human civilization every human being has had an urge to transmit his own culture and heritage to his descendants to preserve and reserve their own identity of roots to their next generation to come. In the passage of time everything decays by the laws of nature; but roots of origin of human beings are not abolished totally due to the preservation and transformation process. It is an inherent quality or habit of human beings. Grandparents play an important role to pass their hereditary culture and history of roots to grandchildren. This feature is almost the same all over the world. But now-a-days, the society is changing rapidly due to the technological development, globalization and liberalization. The impact of these societal forces on the new generation of Indians living in the United States and Canada appears to very high. In this context the role of Indian diaspora grandparents living in North America has been changing over time.

In this paper we first present a brief history of the Indian diaspora in U.S.A. and Canada basically for pedagogical purposes. To be sure, this history is readily available to the experts, but in my experience the general public is not sufficiently aware of the history of the Indian diaspora in North America. Secondly, we present voices of eleven diasporic Indian grandparents in North America with whom we have had relatively long conversations. During these conversations we listened to them sympathetically, and came to realize that the Indian diasporic grandparents have an apprehension that the flow of globalization and liberalism would float away their own values of life if they are not careful and sincere enough to transmit and imprint their own roots of culture and heritage to their descendants properly. Finally, we describe their daily practices which shed light on their grand parenting styles, which we believe are directed towards preventing this particular apprehension they appear to have.

HISTORY OF INDIAN DIASPORA IN THE US AND CANADA

According to the Encyclopaedia of Social Sciences, “diaspora” is a Greek term, which refers to “nation or a part of nation, separated from its own states or territory
and dispersed among another nation, but preserving its own national culture.” V. S. Seth describes diaspora as “scattering of people with a common origin, background and beliefs.” Indian diaspora refers to all people of Indian origin living outside India and who, for the most part, preserve at least some major Indian ethno-cultural characteristics and beliefs. We have seen use of the following words in various writings and discussions about the Indian diaspora: Overseas Indian, NRI (Non Resident Indian) and PIO (Person of Indian Origin).

The first Indian immigrant came to Massachusetts in 1790 as a maritime worker from Madras and this was a part of early commerce connection between India and the US. This flow was going on slowly in 18th century and by the end of 19th century (around 1898–1899), some Punjabi peasants came to look for jobs in State of Washington’s lumber mills and California’s vast agricultural fields. In 1901, the 1st Indian came to U.S. as a student and within a decade some Indian students came to the University of California. This trend continued and at the beginning of the 20th century, lot of Indians came to the U.S and among them, most were agricultural workers. In 1920, it was estimated that there were about five thousand Indians living in the U.S. Even though they got their citizenship, they did not have the right to buy land property. After World War II, there was a severe scarcity of doctors, engineers and entrepreneurs in the US which opened the door of opportunities for Indians to immigrate to the United States. Before 1965, it was not easy for Indians to get visas and stay in U.S. They were affected by various social, political and legal obligations in every step of their life. Thus the U.S. government made a law namely “Immigration and Naturalization Act of 1965” which provided the option to issue 20,000 visas for each country in the eastern hemisphere. This opened up the gateway for many Indians to fulfill their dreams and the Indian population in U.S was drastically increased to almost 350,000 by 1970. This flow never stopped and according to US Census, there were about 815,447 and 1.215 million Indians in 1990 and 1997, respectively. The data of U.S. census 2000 show that Indian-American is the third largest population among Asian-American population group in the U.S. The latest American Community Survey shows that there are 3.18 million Indian-Americans which represent 1% of the U.S. population. Most of the Indian-American communities live in California followed by New York, New Jersey, Texas, Illinois, Florida, Pennsylvania and Washington DC. The percentage of educational level in the Indian community is more than the average US population. 87% of the population has finished their high school whereas 62% has college degrees. In comparison, only 20% of the US population has the same level of education. Over 72% of Indian-Americans have absorbed themselves in the work force and spread their steps in various areas like medicine, engineering, law, IT (Information Technology), international management and finance, higher education (teachers in colleges and universities), mainstream media, journalism, writing, film and music, traditional business (real estate, retailing), taxi driver, factory worker, news stand workers and farmers. Although in