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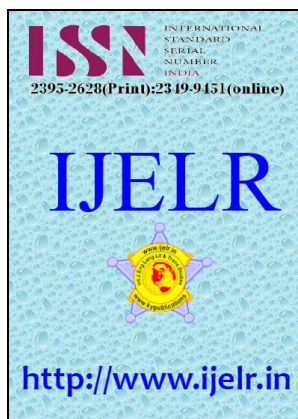
MIGRATION AND CULTURAL IDENTITY: GUJARATI DIASPORA IN KENYA

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ABSTRACT

Human Migration is the movement by people from one place to another with the intention of setting in the new location. Migration of human might be because of political conflict or natural disaster vs. economic or labor migration. There is an increasing trend among scholars to study migrant communities under the fabric of 'Study of Diaspora' or 'Diasporic Study'. This article aims to assess the pre-modern migration of Gujarati Diaspora into East Africa, particularly to Kenya. This paper also discusses the reasons and the point in time of migration of the Gujarati diaspora into Kenya. Finally discusses about Gujarati's understanding and valuing the cultural diversity and explores the uniqueness of their culture. Further, discusses on Gujarati's role in enhancing Kenya.



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INTRODUCTION

Migration can be defined as the process of going from one country, region or place of residence to settle in another. The duration of this new settlement varies, but for the purposes of this paper the focus is on individuals who relocate either semi-permanently or permanently to another country. People who migrate for economic or educational reasons may move singly and at a later date be joined by their families, whereas people who move due to political reasons may move in mass but with or without their families.

Cultural Identity is a feeling of belonging to, as part of the self-conception and self-perception to ethnicity, religion, social class, generation, locality and any kind of social group that have its own distinct culture. Culture is an important factor in shaping identity. Preserving of cultural identity is a diverse force in society.

According to Chandrashekar Bhat and K Laxmi Narayan, Indian Diaspora communities are emerging transnational communities with their extensive global networks, with different layers of coexisting identities. Migration of IT, ITES, and the Nursing professionals to developed countries since the 1980s to date are a potential diaspora as they initially migrate to international destinations under the H1B Visa and gradually seek

green-cards and, finally opt for the citizenship of those countries where the working environment is highly conducive for their career development. Global organizations have emerged to preserve and promote identities and culture of their own social group uniting transnationally India and the global Indian diaspora.

According to Kadekar, during 1829 – 1924 about 769,437 Indians migrated to East African region, South Africa, Mauritius, Seychelles and Reunions indenture workers. The colonial era witnessed an increased number of free emigrants as traders, skilled artisans, bankers, petty contractors, clerks, professionals and entrepreneurs.

Today there are significant Gujarati communities in some 27 nations. Many are in Africa but others can also be found in Myanmar, Iran, and Malaysia. Living conditions in these countries vary; however, the Gujarati who have emigrated are usually from the higher, wealthier castes and have maintained many aspects of their own culture. They are often involved in trade or in operating small businesses.

This paper gives a clear review about the migration of Gujarati Diaspora into Kenya. It also focuses *the cultural diversity and explores the uniqueness of Gujarati diaspora in Kenya and their role in enhancing Kenya.*

Indian migrated to modern Kenya between 1896 and 1901 as indentured laborers for the construction of railways. After the completion of the railway many of the laborers chose to settle in East Africa by bringing their family over from India. The early Indian settlers hailed predominately from the Indian provinces of Gujarat and Punjab. The railway opened the interior to trade, and many soon began migrating away from the coastal cities. Most settled in the new town of Nairobi, which had been the capital of the British protectorate since 1905. Indian population demanded a role in the developing political life of Kenya colony. Indians enjoyed significantly greater economic strength than black Africans, had greater bargaining power with the colonial government.

Today over a hundred thousands of Gujarati diaspora in Kenya saw a gradual improvement in their legal status and continued to be cautiously inward and self-reliant despite varying degrees of acculturation, most have retained their strong Indian ties and traditions.

The Gujarati are living very close to their roots and preserves their cultural identity. It is observed that majority of migrants feel comfortable living and celebrating festivals in narrowed circle of relatives, caste fellows, regional and religious groups of Indian origin. In state of speech communication with the Gujarati diaspora they have retained the ancestral language, even though they communicate in the national language of Kenya to the others. Many Schools are built in many parts of Kenya to uphold their language and traditions. The newer generations are able to communicate in Gujarati and the local language.

Gujarati women are bearers of Gujarati culture and responsible for passing it on the future generation. Gujarati women wear chudidhar and sarees to maintain their cultural identity though the younger generation sport in western dresses. The celebration of religious festivals like Holi, Navratri, Diwali, Janmashtmi and National festivals like India's Independence Day with relatives, friends, caste fellows of their home region is another common patter of their socio-cultural life.

Gujarati houses have a little place of worship with the idols and pictures of deities which shows their religiousness. Many temples, mosques and Gurudwara which are considered as holy places of different religious groups of Gujaratis are built in many parts of Kenya. They gather during the fairs and festivals. The folklore of the Hindu Gujarati reflects the mythology surrounding the Hindu deity, Krishna. Dances in honor of Krishna have survived in the form of the popular folk dance known as garaba. Courtesy home visits to their relatives and friend belonging to above groups as well as weekly or fortnightly group meeting or get together in public places like temple is common feature of their social life.

A huge chunk of Gujarati are business men at Kenya and runs many numbers of firms. Many are engaged in business and retail, and the community enjoys a relatively prosperous status. Gujaratis are also found in police force, bureaucracy and professionals, both in Nairobi and the townships. Although Asians represent less than 1 percent of the population, they control more than 60 percent of the retail businesses in the country's cities and towns. Thus, commercial skills of Gujarati contribute a lot to the economic development and prosperity of Kenya.

## CONCLUSION

Today, Kenya has largest population of Gujarati diaspora in Kenya. Festivals and fairs, arts and crafts, folk dances, music, cuisine and lifestyles form a major cultural background of these people. The customs and beliefs make the culture more homely and truly blended with values and moral characteristics. They have

been contributing through various intellectual capacities. Despite constituting less than 1% of the population, they play a key role in the economy. Many are engaged in business and retail, and the community enjoys a relatively prosperous status. Consequently, this article summarizes the history evolution of Gujarati diaspora into Kenya and discusses the cultural Identity of the Gujarati diaspora. Finally summarizes the role of Gujarati diaspora and enhancement of Kenya.

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