

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Vol. 4. Issue.3., 2017 (July-Sept.)

ISSN
INTERNATIONAL
STANDARD
SERIAL
NUMBER
INDIA
2395-2628(Print):2349-9451(online)

ASSIMILATING IN HOST CULTURE
-PROCESSES AND STEPS

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ABSTRACT

Diaspora literature is one of the major literary trends that has drawn attention of the literary scholars and critics to the multiple levels of problems faced by immigrants while trying to settle down in the host culture. They have to adapt certain new features in them which will help them in erasing or at least narrowing down the differences in host and guest societies. These acquired features may be somewhat same to the traditions immigrants were already following in their culture or it may be entirely different and alien to them but in order to be accepted by the hosts, immigrants willingly or unwillingly adapt to the new culture and environment of their host area. This paper tries to highlight some of the processes and steps taken by the guests to acquire acceptance of the host culture.

Keywords: Diaspora, Immigrant, Host culture, Guest Culture, Expatriate

Language is the first step taken by the guest society to get assimilated in the host culture as it is the first step through which they can understand the hosts and convey their feelings to them. Adoption of the language is a must for those immigrants who are aspiring to settle down in the host country. The people of the Indian subcontinent who migrated to countries like USA, UK, Canada, or Australia and New Zealand after Indian independence did not face any such problem as English is taught as a second language in India. But their migration to other non-English speaking countries forced them to learn the language of the host country so that they can communicate with the locals; those who go only as visitors or travellers for some time, can manage with English as most countries use it as a language for communicating with outsiders. The point made here is that those aspiring to settle down in a different country than their own need to develop a hold on their native language. Even the colonizers felt the need for learning the colonized's language to govern them properly. Though Australia and New Zealand can be taken as a different case, these may rightly be described as countries of the migrants and English is the language of most of the migrants who outnumbered the local population. Now English is spoken by all irrespective of race or tribal affiliation in these countries. Different aboriginal movements have pressurised the immigrant community who are now in majority, to learn the native languages. For example all official functions in New Zealand open with a few sentences in Maori.

Another bold step taken by immigrants for assimilating in the host community is intermarriage. Intermarriages certainly open the way for assimilation of expatriates. But these may take a long duration and are generally possible after a generation or two. Though after the first generation the place of origin of immigrants and hosts might be the same but the socio-economic and cultural, religious background of the immigrants may

vary. Attitude of both, the hosts and diasporics towards each other may also differ. In such situations we may not find such intermarriage between the migrants and the host society much useful or intermarriages may be one way process. For instance, immigrants may accept daughters-in-laws from the host society but may not like their daughters to be daughter-in-laws of the host society. It could also be opposite to the above stated process where hosts accept immigrant girls as brides but daughters are not given to the "outsider". These practises are not helpful in assimilation instead it will give rise to sandwich culture in such cases there will always be a rift between immigrants and hosts.

To assimilate in the host culture names can be adopted to camouflage immigrant identity if physical looks of the hosts are not significantly different. It can be due to various reasons, immigrants may change their names when they find that the members of the host society are finding it difficult to pronounce their names or it may in certain circumstances where immigrants want to shadow their origin or nativity. They may shorten their names such as Rupender to Rob or Robby. Other circumstances may be changing of name is mandatory for immigrants as it is in Thailand though this may not cause much problem as these names will only be used officially and other such legalities and original name may be more frequently used in day-to-day communication.

Another major step could be acquiring host religion. Though this may be a rarely opted way but if it occurs it becomes a clear indicator of a process that is directing openly towards will to assimilate. Rigidity of a religion serves as an insulator doesn't matter it is of host or immigrant society. Even if the religion permits conversion, it comes to the person or the group concerned. They may or may not opt for it. If not opted then the communities have their separate identities. Rituals and religious ceremonies entirely different from that of hosts demonstrate independence and separateness of migrants. However there is always a possibility of entry of certain elements from other religions into other religious world. It is quite possible that people not belonging to a religion do partake in certain religious festivals of the other group. Christmas and New Year are celebrated all over the world. Greeting Muslims on the Id festival by Non-Muslims and playing role of different characters of Ramayana by Non-Hindus are such examples.

Food habits can also indicate differences. Food habits of all the migrants may not be similar even if they have migrated from the same place. There may be variation of cultural, regional, and religious within a country. Therefore, the adoption of food habits and developing taste for the cuisine of the host society by the migrants would help in assimilation not only in the host society but among migrants as well. It may go either way, some may be more willing to adopt the food habits of the host society but there might be others who may resist and vice-versa. Reasons could be different. There may be differences between the first generation migrants and those who either came as kids or were born and brought up in the host society. The attitude of some hosts and immigrants in this connection may be more rigid and conservative. Those who have to interact more with the members of the host society, may be less rigid. They may make some kind of adjustment due to the need of the hour, and thus the chances of becoming sandwiched between the two cultures are greater among them.

There are examples of several dishes and food items which can no longer be attributed to one culture or society as they have been adopted by every part of the world irrespective of their country of origin. For example Pizza and burgers have uncountable variations now and are now part of dietary habits in many parts of the world. Similarly, some of the Indian dishes, both vegetarian Dosa and Curry and nonvegetarian Tandoori Chiken are enjoyed by many people all over the world.

Along with the above stated processes there are a number of variants among host and immigrants that may serve as insulator mechanisms and may impede the process of assimilation. Immigrants with more insulator will be sandwiched between parent and host culture instead of being assimilated. The areas where apertures of immigrant culture can be opened also serve as insulators if they are not allowed to be opened. Though these apertures vary from society to society, we briefly elaborate some of the prominent insulator mechanisms.

Adoption of native tongue of the host society is an important step towards assimilation. Immigrants try to keep their Mother tongue alive in a foreign land. They do it by communicating with each other in their

native language wherever it is possible. For example At home, they generally use the native language and at the place of work the language of the host society. The larger the size of the immigrant group the greater is the difficulty of acquiring the host language. However, children have better capability of learning new languages, and they can easily become fluent users of the language of the area where they are being brought up. Religious congregations and functions, if held in host language, help in promoting the use of the host language. Sometimes immigrants make special arrangements to teach native language to younger generation resulting the members of the sandwich culture to be bilingual. Migrants from the Latin America to USA are good examples of this phenomenon.

Living with the members of host culture. Lodging in an entirely new environment especially when immigrants do not know the language of the host society may create an atmosphere not only to acquire the language of the host but also to assimilate. In order to find a friendly environment, which may serve them to get assimilated, immigrants prefer to settle initially in those areas which are cosmopolitan and provide reach to maximum facilities in this alien land. This facilitates their adjustment at new place and also keeps alive their own culture. When Indians in large number are taken as indentured labour by the British to distant lands, they were put together in separate barracks with little or no interaction with the local people. This facilitated their better integration as a migrant group but created a distance between them and the locals. A separate colony of immigrants served as a good insulator and hampers the process of assimilation. The drawback of concentration of immigrants at one place is that it reminds them about their parent culture and reduces their chances of full integration with the local community. Fiji Indians offer a good example of the phenomenon.

Children are more open to adopting and acquiring new ways. Thus introducing them to new culture at an early stage like education helps them to assimilate faster. Differences in the language of the host society and that of the migrants may create problems in assimilation which is there with the first generation of migrants. Schooling for the children of migrants especially when the medium of instruction is the language of the host society may help them to assimilate well in host culture. Opening of schools at the place of migration may not be an easy option as it requires lot of efforts including finances and availability of teachers for that particular area. It is also a possibility that the host society would not send their children to those areas. Those migrants who are able to use the facilities of schooling in the host society send their children to those schools so that assimilating can be easy for their children. This ensures that children are introduced to a foreign culture and, at the same time remain in touch with their parent culture. But there might be many migrant groups who may open their own schools. Provision of separate educational facilities for immigrant children ensures their continuous exposure to the parent culture but makes it difficult for them to assimilate. This reduces the chances of integration of immigrants into the culture of the host society.

This paper has already talked about intermarriages but endogamy too plays a vital role in assimilation. It is present in all immigrant societies but its intensity can vary from society to society and generation to generation. In traditional societies, it is practiced more rigidly for example Indians who migrate to other countries, prefer, by and large, to select a spouse not only from India but also from the same religion and caste settled in the host country. Failing that, they may look for spouse in the country of their origin preferably from the same religion and caste. Though second generation migrants may be more liberal in selecting a spouse for them but that may not be same with first generation migrants. They may not hesitate marrying a person who may belong to a different caste but also to a different cultural region within their parent society. Inter-religious and inter-racial marriages especially with the people of host society strengthens the process of assimilation whereas the endogamy may resist it.

Immigrants may get assimilated through community works in the host societies. It can be achieved by attending gatherings or through various organizations that work for the betterment of people of that area. Formation of voluntary organizations by immigrants in a foreign country not only provides an opportunity for social gathering but also plays a significant role in assimilating into the host culture. These voluntary organizations may be formed on the basis of religion, region, language or caste. Besides, there might be an organization which may provide opportunities to various groups from the same country to come in contact and to lend their helping hand to the host culture.

While talking about Indian society, traditionally Indian society is divided into various caste and each caste in India has been assigned a particular occupation to be carried out by them, but now this has become an outdated practise, as several vocational options are open for competition, But still there are few occupations which are carried out by people of a particular caste. But in a foreign country, the best candidates get the job, irrespective of their religion and caste. Indians too in foreign countries are opting for all kinds of jobs. Even Indians, who were imported as indentured labourers could not keep their caste intact, forget about the occupation. While travelling from India to various British colonies they spent many days in ship and in the process they lived together and also dined together. Upon reaching their destination, all of them were employed as labourers irrespective of their religion and caste. There are few occupations, such as those of priest in a temple, which go by caste otherwise caste based occupations are rarely followed now.

Immigrants who are pursuing their own religious rituals at home can also form various religious organizations which will help the host culture in hour of need thus increasing acceptance in the host society while keeping the parent society's religion intact. These organizations celebrate various religious functions and can invite members of host society in them. Such celebrations can provide them an opportunity to interact with members of the host society and expose younger generation to their religion and the host culture.

To get assimilated completely, one has to change a lot of habits and food habits are no exception. All immigrants try to relinquish the taste of their native dishes, they try to have the same taste with which they were familiar in their parent country and when it comes to taste buds there present position becomes irrelevant. Taking example of Indians who are settled in abroad also generally prefer Indian food, on occasions preparation of Indian food is preferred over foreign food. Notwithstanding the food of the host society may be due to various reasons. Some immigrants from Immigrant society sticks to their choice of a particular kind of food though they may allow their children to eat food of their choice, even allowing non-vegetarian dishes. It is quite possible that at home only vegetarian dishes are prepared but members might eat non-vegetarian food outside, thus observing a double standard.

Considerations of Purity and Pollution can be other factors. As some immigrants, especially Brahmans, may not eat food cooked by a person belonging to a particular caste or a different religion. Various kinds of food taboos are also observed by Indians. For instance, some Hindus avoid beef, and Muslims avoid Pork. Observing such taboos serve to insulate people from other non-membership groups.

Every culture has its own particular dressing sense. For an immigrant who is trying to get assimilated in the host culture it is quite obvious to adopt the attire of the host culture as continuation of cultural diacriticals, including dress, by immigrants may act as deterrent in their integration. All societies prefer to wear their national dress especially on certain occasions. this is truer for almost everyone irrespective of the fact whether they are in USA, or South Africa, or Japan. Though once that occasion is over they again try to put on the attires preferred by local populace of the host culture yet some immigrants prefer to keep diacritical marks such as Dhoti, Kurta, Turban, Beard etc. intact. When these people visit there native land they mostly wear their native dicriticals as such but on their return to the host culture the acquire attire alien for their native culture in order to get assimilated. Similarly, some. Many visible diacritical marks can be seen among many immigrants in most of the countries for example Indian women prefer to wear salwar kameez or saree at home but at work they may wear jeans or other western dress.

Every community has its own specific feature which can be attributed to its racial features. These features differentiate the people of immigrant group from host society easily. In almost every country inter-racial marriages do take place but such cases are not in abundance. Although so much racial mixing has already taken place that no one could claim of pure race any more, prominent racial features of Mongoloid character can be seen amongst the Chinese, and Negroid charters amongst most of the people from Africa. The case of Obama, former President of the United State presents a good example of inter-racial marriage; he is described as "Afro-American" which itself indicates about the bondage of Negroid to Whites. When interracial marriages occur they penetrate the insulation and create an environment for the assimilation of a immigrant culture.

Keeping apertures open to the host culture also serves as a facilitator towards assimilation in the host culture. The greater the frequency of interaction with the host culture the stronger is the bond with it. Such an

outward orientation marks the prospect of identifying with the host community, and leads the migrant group towards assimilation. The links with the host culture are maintained, in several ways. Some of those are listed below:

Frequent gathering with majority of the population that is the host community. Immigrants do not serve relations with the people of the host society. Initially, the immigrants regularly visit their home town or invite family members to visit them. Visits to home country is one way by which immigrants are able to expose those children to parent culture, who have been born and brought up in a foreign country. Some immigrants may still have immovable property in their home country and this requires regular visits to maintain them. Assimilation of such people to integrate and assimilate in the host society are relatively harder.

Sometimes immigrants choose to send their children to the schools which provide education in the manner suitable to the parent culture. Thus they lack the chance to have a myriad exposure to the host culture. This drawback can be overcome by music, books and film of the host country. Through them, the migrants develop empathy with the host culture and remain in touch with the latest developments in thinking, politics, and literature of their hosts. Such links do not allow an easy breakdown of ties with one's own cultural milieu but help in recreating the parent culture in an alien setting hence allowing assimilation to take place.

Revolution in information technology has helped in making communication so easy that now through a click one can instantly connect with any one in any part of the world. Developments in transnational network have allowed the first generation of immigrants to build social, cultural and marital relations in any part of the world. These developments have somewhat catalysed the chances of assimilation of an immigrant group in the host society.

In conclusion by analysing the dynamics of apertures and insulator mechanisms one has to keep in mind that like all humans, immigrants may have originated from the same country, all migrants do not constitute a homogeneous group. The assimilation pattern depends on different characteristics of the migrants like age, sex, education, religion, region, language, rural-urban background and so on. The conditions of their migration may also differ and that too will affect their assimilation process. Even the attitude of the immigrants towards the members of the host society and the attitude of host society towards immigrants influences the adaptation process.

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