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Dynamics of Ethnic Diversity and Cultural Pluralism in the United States of America: Exploring the Indian Diaspora

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The fabric of American history is woven with the narratives of diverse ethnic groups who settled in the new continent, enduring myriad challenges since the arrival of European colonisers in 1492. America has metamorphosed into a nation of immigrants, each wave bringing its unique struggles and contributions. Drawing upon historical insights, theoretical frameworks, empirical data, and scholarly discourse, the study provides a comprehensive analysis of the evolution of ethnic identity, the challenges and opportunities posed by multiculturalism and cultural pluralism, and the unique experiences of the Indian American community. Thus, this discourse embarks on a concise exploration of ethnicity and ethnic pluralism within American society, specifically focusing on the ethnicity and challenges faced by the Indian diaspora in the United States. The multicultural ethos and cultural pluralism in American society allow Indian Americans to maintain their cultural heritage while actively participating as citizens, asserting their preference for retaining distinctiveness while contributing to the broader community. Embracing cultural pluralism serves as a means for Asian Indians to preserve their ethnic identity while aspiring to be recognised as a "model minority" within American society.

Keywords: Diaspora, Indian Americans, model minority, multiculturalism, ethnic identity, cultural pluralism.

All American families, except those who are wholly Native American, have an immigrant story to tell, whether they know it or not. For some, it is a story of allure-ancestors seeking new opportunities in a land full of natural resources and commerce. For others, it is a story of escape such as fleeing religious or political persecution (Iceland,2017). The United States' rich history of immigration spans from its earliest colonisation to waves of European migration, followed by diverse influxes from Latin America, the Caribbean, Asia, and Africa. Evolving immigration laws, from national quotas to flexible caps, reflect efforts to attract skilled professionals and diversify the immigrant population. The flow of immigrants continues, seemingly unabated, the only difference being that, unlike mainly European immigrants in the earlier centuries, it is largely Asian influx now (Sarva Daman Singh and Mahavir Singh,2003). Koreans, Filipinos, and Vietnamese are augmenting an already substantial Asian population, predominantly composed of Chinese and Japanese immigrants. Within this diverse Asian community, a significant segment hails from South Asia, predominantly of Indian origin popularly known as Indian-Americans (Nalini Kant

Jha, 2004). From the arrival of British settlers to the influx of diverse communities seeking refuge and opportunity, the United States has embraced a multitude of cultures, shaping its societal fabric in profound ways. The paper examines the intrinsic ethnic diversity within the United States, by presenting the Indian diaspora as a distinctive and consequential ethnic group within the nation.

Within the United States, the term "ethnic group" encompasses a spectrum of characteristics, including distinctions based on race[1], religion, or national origin. Scholars in America often define ethnic groups as communities sharing a common cultural heritage and a collective sense of identity, existing as subsets within a larger societal framework. An ethnic group has been operationally defined as a collectivity of people who share some patterns of normative behaviour and form a part of a larger population, interacting with people from other collectivities within the framework of a social system (Paratma Saran, 1985). There are three primary ingredients in defining ethnic groups: 1. the group is perceived by others in the society to be different in some combination of the following traits; language, religion, race, or ancestral homeland with its related culture; 2. the members also perceive themselves to be different; and 3. they participate in shared activities built around their (real or mythical) common origin and culture (Gudykunst,2001). Castles and Davidson (2000), equated minority groups as ethnic groups. For them, it is the minority groups who were referred to (usually pejoratively) as ethnics. This definition effectively equates ethnic groups with minority communities. In the American context, the term "ethnic group" has historically been applied to minorities, as well as religious or linguistic groups.

Early in American history, it was anticipated that cultural assimilation, bolstered by English language usage and participation in public education, would homogenise immigrant groups, leading them to adopt Anglo-Saxon values and norms (Paratma Saran, 1985). However, ethnic distinctiveness persisted, with German-Americans, Irish-Americans, Polish-Americans, Italian-Americans, and numerous others maintaining their cultural identities while integrating certain aspects of White Anglo-Saxon Protestant culture. Despite attempts at Anglo-conformity, ethnic individuality endured. This article delves into the concept of ethnicity and ethnic pluralism within American society, tracing the historical trajectory of immigration and its impact on the country's demographic composition. It explores the evolution of ethnic identity

[1] There is no ûrm distinction between ''race'' and ''ethnicity,'' as both are dimensions in group identity. Groups currently considered ''ethnic'' or ''national'' were once viewed as separate ''races.'' Cornell and Hartmann (2007) argue that while race and ethnicity often intersect, they are distinct in how they are socially constructed and perceived. The term "race" refers to groups of people who have differences and similarities in biological traits deemed by society to be socially significant, meaning that people treat other people differently because of them. Meanwhile, ethnicity refers to shared cultural practices, perspectives, and distinctions that set apart one group of people from another. Ethnic differences are not inherited; they are learned. When racial or ethnic groups merge in a political movement to establish a distinct political unit, then such groups can be termed nations that may be seen as representing beliefs in nationalism. Race and ethnicity are linked with nationality particularly in cases involving transnational migration or colonial expansion. Ethnicity, like race and nation, developed in the context of European colonial expansion, mercantilism, and capitalism, which promoted global population movements while state boundaries became more rigidly defined, linking theories of race, ethnicity, and nationality to broader ideas of globalisation and populist nationalism. (Polly Rizova, 2018).

amidst the backdrop of assimilationist ideals and the emergence of multiculturalism and cultural pluralism. Additionally, the article examines the challenges and prospects faced by the Indian diaspora as an ethnic group in American society.

The present study draws from a diverse variety of primary and secondary sources. Secondary sources embody books, journals, studies articles, news reports, and papers offered at seminars and conferences. Primary sources consist of posted authorities' files, annual reviews, reliable web sites, and responses from Indian Americans. The studies applied email surveys dispensed to a national sample of Indian immigrants inside the United States, leveraging online survey platforms. Due to the shortage of complete country wide biographical directories on Asian Indian immigrants inside the USA, mailing addresses have been accumulated with the help of numerous Indian ethnic and professional institutions. A compiled listing of 500 Indian immigrants within the United States became prepared, from which questionnaires had been despatched out, yielding approximately 400 responses. However, about 305 of those responses had been usable for analysis, as the closing submissions were incomplete. Additional data was collected via direct conversations at FOKANA conventions, Pravasi Bharatiya Divas celebrations, and telephonic interviews with members of the diaspora. From the survey responses collected, the data on various problems faced by the Indian community is utilised for this study.

America's Evolving Ethnic Mosaic: From Assimilation to Multiculturalism

America is becoming racially and ethnically heterogeneous. The dynamics of racial classification in American society reflect a complex interplay of historical, political, and social forces, contributing to the enduring salience of race as a central category of social difference (Croll and Gerteis, 2017). While there's ongoing debate over racial categorisation methods, the study underscores the importance of acknowledging the complexities of racial and ethnic identities. America's demographic landscape reflects increasing racial and ethnic heterogeneity, with high immigration rates and disparate birth rates among ethnic groups. High rates of immigration, declining birth rates among White Americans, and relatively higher birth rates among Hispanic Americans and Afro-Americans have poised America on the threshold of becoming a nation with no major ethnic majority. By 2050, it is projected that no single ethnic group will constitute a majority of the population (Smelser, et.al., 2001). The National Research Council's examination of racial and ethnic trends underscores the growing diversity within ethnic communities, with Hispanic Americans experiencing explosive growth fuelled by immigration from Latin America. Similarly, the Asian American population has undergone significant transformations, evolving from a predominantly United States-born demographic to a heterogeneous mix of foreign-born individuals from diverse nationalities.

The latest analyses from the U.S. Census Bureau, underscore a notable uptick in the overall racial and ethnic diversity across the nation since 2010. Typically, states boasting the most elevated Diversity Index (DI) scores are clustered predominantly in the Western region, encompassing locales such as Hawaii, California, and Nevada. Additionally, noteworthy DI scores are observed in Southern territories like Maryland and Texas, alongside the District of Columbia, which holds a status akin to a state (Jensen et.al., 2021). The Northeastern corridor, represented by states like New York and New Jersey, also demonstrates considerable diversity.

In the recent census findings, Hawaii emerged as the frontrunner with the highest DI recorded in 2020, standing at an impressive 76 per cent, marginally surpassing its 2010 DI of 75.1 per cent. Among the states delineated Maryland experienced the most substantial DI advancement, surging from 60.7 per cent in 2010 to a commendable 67.3per cent in 2020 (US Census, 2020).

TABLE 1:States with the Highest Diversity Index in 2020

State	Diversity index		Percentage-point difference
	2010	2020	
Hawaii	75.1	76.0	0.9
California	67.7	69.7	2.0
Nevada	62.5	68.8	6.3
Maryland	60.7	67.3	6.6
District of Columbia	61.9	67.2	5.3
Texas	63.8	67.0	3.2
New Jersey	59.4	65.8	6.4
New York	60.2	65.8	5.5
Georgia	58.8	64.1	5.3
Florida	59.1	64.1	5.1

2020-united-states-population-more-racially-ethnically-diverse-than-2010-table-1 (census.gov)

The predominant racial or ethnic demographic in the United States was the White alone non-Hispanic population, constituting 57.8 per cent of the total populace. Notably, this figure marked a decline from its previous standing at 63.7 per cent in 2010. Following closely, the Hispanic or Latino community emerged as the second most prevalent racial or ethnic group, encompassing 18.7 per cent of the overall population. In third place, the Black or African American alone non-Hispanic population accounted for 12.1 per cent of the demographic landscape (Census. gov,2020). Following a similar pattern as in 2010, the Asian alone non-Hispanic population was the second-most prevalent group in several counties throughout the Northeast, West, Alaska and Hawaii.

The Asian Indian alone demographic witnessed a remarkable surge of 54.7 per cent, reaching a population of 4,397,737 between 2010 and 2020, thus claiming the title of the most populous Asian alone group in the nation. Subsequently, the next largest Asian alone groups and their respective population changes from 2010 to 2020 are as follows: Chinese, excluding Taiwanese alone, totalling 4,128,718 (a notable increase of 31.6 per cent). Filipino alone, tallying 3,076,108 (reflecting a growth of 20.4 per cent). Vietnamese alone, numbering 1,951,746 (experiencing a rise of 26.0 per cent). Korean alone, standing at 1,508,575 (a modest increase of 6.0 per cent). Japanese alone, recording 741,544 (a decrease of 3.2per cent) (Jensen, et. Al.,2021). It's noteworthy that the Japanese alone population, along with the Laotian alone population, were the only specific Asian groups to undergo a decline during the decade. However, their populations, whether alone or in any combination, registered increases of 20.6 per cent and 9.5 per cent, respectively.

In the face of this ethnic pluralism scholars wondered whether America was a melting pot, an orchestra, or a salad bowl. The conceptualisation of America as a "melting pot" emerged in the mid-20th century, heralding a vision of unity amidst diversity. This concept suggests that people from different backgrounds and cultures

come to the United States and gradually assimilate[2] into a common American culture, losing their original distinctiveness in the process. This concept later evolved into that of a multicultural society. Earlier, it was thought that the cultural forces of American society, especially the use of the English language and participation in the public school system, would level the differences among American immigrant groups and that most of these groups would accept Anglo-Saxon values, institutions, and way of life (Paratma Saran, 1985). The completeness of assimilation can be hindered by outright blockage, delayed progression, or simply remaining unfinished, each carrying distinct implications for both theoretical understanding and policy formulation (Susan K. Brown, Frank D. Bean, 2006). Racial/ethnic discrimination can also lead to incompleteness in assimilation, representing a form of blocked progression. Along with the problems in assimilations, the shift towards a multicultural model in policy is often a response to the evolving realities of cultural diversity within societies, as well as changing political ideologies and demographic trends. Ethnic minorities increasingly prioritise the preservation of their cultural heritage while simultaneously embracing and celebrating the richness of other cultures. it becomes apparent that ethnic individuality refused to yield to Anglo-conformity. German-Americans, Irish Americans, Polish-Americans, and Italian-Americans and countless others kept their hyphens intact. They adopted some mores of White Anglo-Saxon Protestant (WASP) but retained, as did the Anglo-Americans themselves, cultural and emotional links with countries of their origin. Movements such as the Civil Rights Movement advocated for the rights of marginalised groups and emphasised the importance of cultural diversity (Steven Kasher, 2018). The ascendancy of identity politics (Steph Lawler, 2008), which heightened demands for the acknowledgement and representation of diverse cultural groups, and the process of globalisation, which facilitated cross-cultural exchange on a global scale, fostering a cosmopolitan mindset that celebrates the kaleidoscope of cultural diversity (Manfred B. Steger,2003) prompted a shift from assimilationist approaches to policies that honour and accommodate cultural disparities.

Politically, ideological transformations towards pluralism and inclusivity (Meaghan Lynch ,2018), international norms and conventions advocating for cultural rights and diversity (Charles Taylor et al., 1994) have exerted influence, aligning national policies with global trends towards multiculturalism. Demographically, the dynamic landscape of migration necessitates inclusive policies that accommodate cultural diversity. Additionally, younger generations, growing up in multicultural environments and exposed to diverse cultural influences, are more inclined towards multiculturalism. Overall, the shift towards a multicultural model in policy is often a response to the evolving realities of cultural diversity within societies, as well as changing political ideologies and demographic trends. In a multicultural society, individuals from varied backgrounds could retain their cultural heritage while

[2] Assimilation, also referred to as integration or incorporation, is the gradual process whereby the traits of immigrant individuals and the native society become more similar, encompassing economic and sociocultural aspects and spanning from the immigrant generation onwards, persisting into subsequent generations. The theories like the classic and new assimilation models (Milton Gordon (1964), Richard Alba (1990) and Victor Nee (2003), the racial/ethnic disadvantage model (Nathan Glazer (1963), Patrick Moynihan (1963), and Alejandro Portes (1993), and the segmented assimilation model (Portes and Min Zhou (1993), Gans (1992), well explained the different models and changing nature of assimilation.

contributing to the collective tapestry as citizens. Multiculturalism championed as a means to integrate immigrants into American society while revitalising its cultural landscape, gained traction. Within this framework, the diaspora assumed greater significance, nurturing individual and ethnic identities within a multicultural milieu.

However, multiculturalism has not been immune to criticism. Harvard political scientist Samuel P. Huntington, among others, has castigated multiculturalism as divisive, advocating for the preservation of Western civilisation in the face of globalisation. Huntington believes that the United States must remain rooted in "Western civilisation" and not fall victim to the false notion of a "multicivilizational" society. He stated that "A multicivilizational United States will not be the United States; it will be the United Nations" (Huntington,1996). But the immigrant and ethnic groups themselves proved by their deeds that pluralism held no major threat to national unity. In basic loyalties, they were all Americans. This assertion implies a sense of unity and common identity among immigrants, rooted in their shared commitment to American values and ideals. An important statement that supports this perspective comes from President Theodore Roosevelt's speech delivered in 1915, often referred to as the "True Americanism" speech. In this speech, Roosevelt emphasised the importance of immigrants assimilating into American culture while maintaining their unique cultural identities. He stated:

"In the first place, we should insist that if the immigrant who comes here in good faith becomes an American and assimilates himself to us, he shall be treated on an exact equality with everyone else, for it is an outrage to discriminate against any such man because of creed, or birthplace, or origin. But this is predicated upon the person's becoming in every facet an American, and nothing but an American... There can be no divided allegiance here. Any man who says he is an American, but something else also, isn't an American at all. We have room for but one flag, the American flag... We have room for but one language here, and that is the English language... and we have room for but one sole loyalty and that is a loyalty to the American people" (Theodore Roosevelt, 1915).

This citation reflects the sentiment that immigrants, upon coming to the United States, are expected to assimilate into American society and adopt American values and customs, ultimately aligning their loyalties with their new country. However, the statement is debatable, as the immigrant experience is often multifaceted and complex. While many immigrants indeed aspire to integrate into American society and uphold its values, their sense of loyalty and identity may not be exclusively American, especially in the context of diaspora transnationalism and ethnic identity assertion. Their loyalties can be influenced by a variety of factors, including their personal experiences, cultural background, and sense of belonging. Migrant communities often assert and celebrate their ethnic identities alongside their American citizenship (Portes, A., & Rumbaut, R. G. 2006). While embracing their American identity, immigrants also seek recognition and respect for their cultural heritage. Again, the immigrants may express their loyalty to their adopted country in their public life for several reasons. Expressing loyalty to their adopted country in public life is often a complex interplay of gratitude, integration, legal requirements, and a desire for acceptance and belonging. It reflects immigrants' aspirations for a better future and their commitment to contributing positively to the society in which they now live. This is evident from the statement of Dalip Singh Saund, an Indian American, who was elected to the House of Representatives in 1956 for the first time.

As a freshman Congressman, he was given the rare honour of an appointment to the powerful House Committee on Foreign Relations and asked to tour India to study the effectiveness of the government's foreign aid programme. Throughout his travels, he presented himself as a "living example of American democracy" (Padma Rangaswamy, 2007). While the immigrants seek recognition and respect for their cultural heritage, they also embrace their American identity. An incredible diversity of peoples, languages, cultures and values found new homes in America.

Cultural Pluralism: Embracing Diversity in America

In contemporary discourse, the concept of "cultural pluralism" has emerged as a salient framework for understanding the complex tapestry of ethnicities and cultures that comprise the United States. Unlike the traditional notion of the "melting pot," which suggests assimilation into a singular American identity, cultural pluralism celebrates the diversity of immigrant groups while acknowledging their distinct cultural heritages. Propounded by Horace M. Kallen, cultural pluralism envisions a society where immigrants can retain elements of their own culture while also embracing aspects of American identity.

While empirical evidence may be lacking, social, historical, and psychological factors lend credence to the validity of the cultural pluralism model. As observed by Glazer, cultural pluralism has gained traction, albeit with variations in its interpretation. Glazer delineates between "weak cultural pluralism," characterised by tolerance and gradual acculturation, and "strong cultural pluralism," which emphasises the preservation of ethnic identities in the face of Anglo-American dominance (Glazer, 1977). This spectrum underscores the complexities inherent in navigating cultural diversity within American society. Moreover, Glazer posits the concept of "integration" as a middle ground between assimilation and cultural separatism (Glazer, 1977). Integration implies a harmonious coexistence where ethnic identities are respected while contributing to the larger American experience. This nuanced approach to cultural pluralism seeks to reconcile the preservation of ethnic heritage with the broader imperatives of national unity and cohesion.

However, critics of cultural pluralism caution against its potential for division and separatism. Movements like black power in the 1960s underscored the challenges posed by cultural pluralism in fostering a cohesive national identity. Moreover, proponents of assimilation advocate for a unified American identity, viewing cultural pluralism as a hindrance to social cohesion. Along with the two models of "melting pot" and "cultural pluralism", a third notion of a "multiple melting pot" was introduced by Ruby Jo Reeves Kennedy and made popular by Will Heeberg (Grelley,1969). This paradigm suggests that traditional ethnic identities are supplanted by broader categorisations based on religion, such as Protestant, Catholic, or Jew (Saran, 1985). Jews, in particular, have wielded significant influence in American society, despite their relatively small numbers, highlighting the complexities of ethnic dynamics in the United States.

In practice, however, neither the melting pot nor the multiple melting pot theories have proven entirely effective. The melting pot metaphor implies a passive blending of cultures without state intervention, while the multiple melting pot theory oversimplifies complex ethnic identities. Cultural pluralism, with its emphasis on diversity and integration, appears to offer a more relevant framework for navigating contemporary ethnic realities.

Within the American context, the Indian diaspora has emerged as a prominent example of the cultural pluralism model, showcasing a preference for maintaining distinct ethnic identities while actively participating in the broader society. Positioned as a 'model minority,' Indian Americans embody the principles of cultural pluralism by celebrating their heritage while also contributing to the multicultural fabric of American society. This approach allows them to preserve their cultural heritage, traditions, and values while simultaneously engaging with and adapting to the mainstream American culture. The following session discuss the Indian diaspora in the context American ethnic mosaic.

Indian Diaspora in the United States as an Ethnic Group

Here it is imperative to elucidate the notion of diaspora, an intricate phenomenon denoting the dispersion of an ethnic or cultural group from their native land. Diaspora has become a popular term to describe how ethnic groups live in the world today. Gabriel Sheffer, in his Diaspora Politics: At Home Abroad (2003), clearly emphasises the importance of ethnic considerations in the understanding of diaspora. He cited numerous groups, eg: Koreans, Vietnamese, Indians, Chinese, Japanese, Romanians, Poles, Kurds, and Armenians permanently residing outside of their country of origin, but maintaining contacts with people back in their old homelands, are members of ethnonational diasporas[3]. Gabriel Sheffer proposed a simple definition: "Modern diasporas are ethnic minority groups of migrant origins residing and acting in host countries but maintaining strong sentimental and material links with their countries of origin- their homelands" (Sheffer,1986). While definitions of diaspora offered by scholars vary, they share critical components such as a history of dispersion, the presence of myths or memories associated with the homeland, feelings of alienation in the host country, a longing for eventual return (which may be uncertain or idealised), ongoing support provided to the homeland, and the formation of ethnic groups and identities. Exploring the Indian diaspora thus provides valuable insights into the broader concept of diaspora, highlighting how cultural and ethnic identities are maintained and transformed across borders. Arjun Appadurai's (1990, 1996,2013), theoretical frameworks offer valuable tools for understanding the everyday life and politics of Indian migrants to the US within the context of postcoloniality and globalisation. His concepts such as ethnoscapes[4], ideoscapes[5],

[3] Sheffer (2003), Chaliand and Rageau (1995), Juline Hammer (2005) and others provided conceptual understanding of the term diaspora. The classical notion of diaspora cantered on the Jewish experience and the greatest exponent of this concept was William Safran (Safran, 1991). Later thinkers like James Clifford (1994), Robin Cohen (1997), Vertovec (2000) etc. realized the necessity to depart from the ideal type notion of Jewish experience. Cohen asserts that the term "diaspora" should be extended to encompass new and various patterns of diasporas, he does not suggest that it should be a catch-all term for all kinds of dispersions.

[4] Ethnoscapes refer to the landscape of persons who constitute the shifting world in which we live, including tourists, immigrants, refugees, exiles, and other moving groups and individuals. This concept emphasizes the fluidity and mobility of people across borders, as well as the transnational networks and connections that shape contemporary societies. (Appadurai,1990).

[5] Ideoscapes refer to the global flow of ideologies, images, and narratives, particularly through the media and communication networks. These ideological flows shape perceptions, beliefs, and political discourses across national boundaries, influencing individuals and communities on a global scale. (Appadurai,1990).

and the politics of fear provide analytical lenses through which to examine issues of identity, belonging, political engagement, and cultural adaptation among Indian migrants. By situating their experiences within broader global processes, Appadurai's work enables a nuanced understanding of the complexities and dynamics of migration in the contemporary world.

The Indian Diaspora in the United States stands as a prominent entity among the myriad ethnic communities that have witnessed a surge in visibility over the past four decades. The International Encyclopaedia of the Social Sciences defined an ethnic group as a "distinct category of the population in a larger society whose culture is usually different from its own" (Morris,1968). In this regard, the collective Asian Indian population in the United States undeniably meets the criteria to be classified as an ethnic group, given the distinctiveness of its cultural traditions compared to the broader mainstream American culture. Focus on the immigrants from India, as a component of the American ethnic mosaic, has sharpened only since the late 1970s due to their demand for and subsequent achievement of a distinct nomenclature: 'Asian Indians' (Clarke, Peach and Vertovec ,1990).

The migration history of Indians in the United States goes nearly as far back as the migrations of other Asian groups, such as Chinese, Japanese, Koreans, and Filipinos. Few Indians came to the United States before 1906. An Indian from Madras who visited Massachusetts in 1790 may have been the first to travel to the United States (Joan M. Jenson, 1988). There is no way of determining the accuracy of this report, nor is there any trace of any other Indians who may have come in the 18th century. Early Indian immigrants, primarily Sikh farmers and labourers, along with a smaller number of middle-class students, elites, and political refugees, migrated due to economic hardships under British colonial rule in India, including widespread poverty and unemployment. This early phase saw relatively small numbers, with only 523 Indian immigrants recorded between 1820 and 1898. Discrimination against East Indian immigrants and emigration from India, which was enforced from 1898, continued almost till the early 1940s. The passage of Luce-Celler Bill in 1946 was a landmark in the history of Indian immigration to USA which suggested for full US citizenship, including the right to own property and to marry whomever they choose.

Following the 1940s, a gradual yet oscillating trend in immigration unfolded over the subsequent two decades until around 1965. However, it was the repeal of the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965 that catalysed a significant upward surge, unparalleled in the annals of Asian Indian immigration to the United States. Consequently, immigrants from India, as an integral component of the American ethnic mosaic, found formal recognition as an ethnic group for the first time in the 1980 US census, delineated as 'Asian Indians'. Before the 1980 census, immigrants from India were simply classified as Caucasian; now they are classified as an ethnic minority within the 'Asian or pacific islander' classification (Williams, 1988**).** The Association of Indians in America (AIA) fervently advocated for a distinct census classification for Indian immigrants, a cause championed by community newspapers as well. Certain leaders within the community foresee an inevitable shift in future generations, where the ability to communicate in regional languages or appreciate regional customs may diminish. Consequently, they anticipate a return to the broader designation of 'Asian Indian' as both an ethnic and legal minority classification, and are actively preparing their children for this potential future.

It is important to note that the questionnaire used in the US census of 2000 allowed for more Americans to choose "more than one race". Thus, according to the 2000 census, nearly 16, 78,765 Asian Indians reported their race as 'Asian Indian', but another 2,20,834 persons chose their race as Asian Indian in combination with two or more races. When combined with this number, the total number of Asian Indian descent in the US rises up to 18, 99,599 (Mohapatra, et.al.,2003). The Indian diaspora in the United States encompasses a rich tapestry of linguistic diversity, with communities speaking languages such as Bengali, Gujarati, Kannada, Konkani, Malayalam, Marathi, Punjabi, Tamil, and Telugu. Moreover, adherents of various religious traditions, including Hinduism, Islam, Jainism, Sikhism, Zoroastrianism, Christianity, and Buddhism, contribute to its vibrant cultural landscape. Additionally, deep-seated caste and factional divisions further enrich this complexity, mirroring the intricate diversity found within India itself. Some research articles published mentioned the kind of caste discrimination with in the diaspora community. The caste has travelled with the Indians across the globe and keeps rearing its ugly head of discrimination within the community (Shailendra Kumar,2023). The article explores the emergence of the Indian diaspora and the presence of caste discrimination in the USA by citing the case of caste discrimination against Cisco (MNC) and its Indian employees in California. Thus, the multifaceted regional, religious and cultural diversity within India resonates within the Indian diaspora as well.

Religion and Ethnicity Among Asian Indians in the United States

In the intricate tapestry of ethnic identity among Asian Indians in the United States, religion occupies a prominent position as a means of both self-identity and community acceptance. Within the social landscape of the host society, religious affiliation emerges as a significant marker of identity, offering a sense of belonging while retaining individual cultural distinctiveness. Despite the influences of Westernisation, Indian immigrants maintain their religiosity, often with heightened fervour, evidenced by the proliferation of religious activities within their communities. In certain communities organising private services at home by inviting a priest and friends to participate is more frequent than in India (Jain, 1993). The Indian-Americans on their part have built and building temples, gurudwaras, mosques and religious-cum-community centers around the nation. They launch cultural festivals-big and small in their localities. These festivals often consist of music concerts, dances, dramas, exhibitions etc. They serve the dual purpose of renewing and reinforcing the cultural moorings of their members and also acquaint the host country's population with their distinctive cultural heritage (Bacon, 1996).

Statistics from the Religious Congregations and Membership in the United States 2000 report reveal a significant presence of Hindu, Muslim, and Sikh congregations, with hundreds of religious organisations operating at various levels. While precise figures may be elusive, it is evident that Indian communities in the United States actively engage in religious practices with dedication and organisational prowess. However, the intricate interplay between religious identity and ethnic culture presents a complex puzzle. It remains unclear whether religious affiliation serves as a cornerstone of ethnic identity or merely complements it.

Indeed, religion assumes a multifaceted role among immigrant minorities in the United States. Just as Asian Indians are shaped by their experiences in the U.S., their

religious identities evolve within this context. Moreover, religious affiliations transcend ethnic boundaries, encompassing diverse nationalities and cultural backgrounds. An individual may identify as both an Asian Indian and a member of a particular religious denomination, navigating overlapping identities with fluidity. The decentralised nature of Hinduism, the predominant religion among Asian Indians, presents unique challenges in fostering ethnic neighbourhoods or concentrated communities (Clarke, Peach and Vertovec,1990). Unlike Christian denominations or Islam, Hinduism lacks a centralised hierarchy or congregational structure, emphasising individual spirituality over communal gatherings. Consequently, Hindu temples serve primarily as places of worship rather than as hubs for community organisation or social networking.

The rise of Hindu nationalism under the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and Prime Minister Narendra Modi has significantly transformed the religious and cultural landscape among the Indian diaspora in the United States. Organisations linked to Hindu nationalist ideologies, such as the Hindu American Foundation (HAF) and the Overseas Friends of BJP (OFBJP), have intensified their activities, promoting Hindu cultural values and political views aligned with the BJP's agenda (Chakraborthy, 2023). This has led to a more visible assertion of Hindu identity among Indian-Americans, often manifesting in public events and parades celebrating Indian culture with Hindu nationalist symbols and slogans. Consequently, incidents of communal tension and conflicts between Hindus and Muslims, as well as other religious minorities like Sikhs, have been reported. These tensions often stem from the transnational influence of Hindutva, which promotes an exclusionary vision of Hindu identity that marginalises non-Hindu communities (Chakraborthy, 2023). This transformation involves increased political mobilisation, heightened polarization, strained interfaith relations, and evolving community dynamics. Generational differences within the Indian-American community also shape responses to Hindu nationalism; older immigrants may maintain stronger ties to political developments in India, while younger Indian-Americans, especially those born and raised in the U.S., often have different perspectives on Hindu nationalism, influencing how cultural and religious identities are expressed and navigated within families and community groups (Chakraborthy, 2023). Moreover, the Indian Government also recognised the diaspora as a strategic asset, leveraging its economic, social, and cultural influence to bolster India's soft power. This is truly reflected in its diaspora policy shift from no engagement to proactive engagement. The changing dynamics of Indian politics and its impact on diaspora is an important area of research.

The linguistic diversity within Hindus adds complexity to the formation of cohesive ethnic enclaves, with Hindu temples symbolising emerging ethnic identities but lacking the institutional framework for spatial redistribution or community cohesion. Sub-ethnicities within the broader Asian Indian community, such as Gujaratis and Punjabis, embody diverse cultural traits stemming from regional origins, linguistic variations, dietary preferences, and religious affiliations, contributing to the dynamic and multifaceted nature of ethnic identity. the relationship between religion and ethnicity among Asian Indians in the United States is intricate and multifaceted. While religion serves as a cornerstone of identity and community cohesion, its decentralised nature and the diversity of religious practices pose challenges to the formation of cohesive ethnic neighbourhoods. Within this context, ethnic identity remains a fluid and evolving phenomenon, shaped by a complex interplay of cultural,

religious, and social factors.

The Myth of the Model Minority: Indian American Success and Socio-Economic Status

Indian Americans have emerged as a prominent and esteemed ethnic group in the United States, epitomising the archetype of the model minority due to their reputation for lawfulness, industriousness, and adaptability. Their ascension as a community predominantly comprised of professionals and entrepreneurs was catalysed by the immigration policies post-1965, which favoured individuals possessing specialised skills and substantial capital for investment, resulting in a notable influx of Indian engineers, scientists, educators, and medical professionals into the country. The Asian Indians, who were once mere 'dispersed groups,' are a community now. With hardships, they survived in America, but now they live in their own right. Those who were at some time the objects of social harshness from the host society are now ceremoniously celebrated as a *model minority* community (Kanjilal,2000).

The Indian community's trajectory towards being lauded as a successful model minority stems from its exponential population growth, exceptional educational attainment, and pervasive representation across various professional domains, including pivotal roles in administration, scientific research, and information technology, culminating in significant economic prosperity. Based on findings from the 2018 American Community Survey (ACS) conducted by the U.S. Census Bureau, the United States is home to 4.2 million individuals of Indian descent, with a notable portion, constituting 38 per cent, not holding United States citizenship; however, among the 2.6 million who are citizens, 1.4 million have been naturalised while 1.2 million were born within the United States. U.S. Census data affirm that Indian Americans enjoy a standard of living that is roughly double that of the median American household, underpinned by substantially greater educational attainment—the share of Indian Americans with at least a bachelor's degree is twice the national average (Chakravorty, Kapur,2017).

The exceptional educational achievements of Indian Americans have positioned them as a highly productive segment of society, particularly prominent in fields such as science, technology, and biotechnology, with significant contributions extending to sensitive United States government-owned laboratories, including those in the nuclear sector. Noteworthy individuals across various domains, from jurists to musicians, filmmakers, and astronauts, have demonstrated the community's prowess and influence. In the realm of computer technology and software, Indian Americans play a pivotal role, constituting a significant portion of the workforce and earning substantial wages, reflecting their indispensability to the United States economy, as evidenced by policy shifts in immigration quotas spurred by industry demand.

In the political sphere, the limited involvement of Indians in United States politics began in the form of protests against the ill-treatment and discrimination meted out to them. Overcoming historical barriers, Asian Indians, previously excluded from direct political engagement, secured the right and opportunity to participate in the United States' political process, exemplified by the pioneering success of Dalip Singh Saund, the nation's first Indian American Congressman. Later, Bobby Jindal (Louisiana), Ami Bera (California), represented in the House of Representatives.

Indian American representation in the United States has grown significantly in recent years, with notable individuals like Kamala Harris, the first Indian American Vice President, and Ro Khanna, a prominent Congressman from California, serving as examples of the community's increasing presence and influence in American politics. Several Indian Americans have run for Congress in the past elections, along with dozens more either holding or seeking seats in state legislatures. Despite this political representation, Indian Americans are also represented in the most important departments of administration.

The Indian-American Journey: Cultural Preservation to Successful Diaspora.

The early immigrants were born and brought up in India and migrated to the United States with strong traditional and cultural bonds. They always tried to maintain their cultural identity and emphasized practising traditional values, beliefs and religious rituals which are entirely different from the Western culture. To an extent the desire and even necessity of claiming Indianness is a response to the racism and ethnocentrism encountered by Indian-Americans in the public realm of the host society. Although assimilation into the host society has been marginal, it has had a significant impact in making the Asian Indian immigrants something they had not been before, but still, something distinct and identifiable. According to Parmatma Saran, most Indian immigrants are willing to become citizens of the US for instrumental or pragmatic reasons (economic access, political voice) but will recognise the "Indianness" (nation) of their cultural identity (Saran, 1987). However, there are perception variations among United States-born (Second generation) Indian Americans regarding their Indianness or hyphenated identity.

Viewed as a case of "triumph of quality over quantity," Indians have been labelled by the U.S. media as the "smartest immigrant group" of an era with more than 200,000 Indian millionaires in the United States. This group is highly educated and has a family median income higher than other groups in the United States. Their success in Silicon Valley and other fields has accorded them high visibility in their country of residence. In the course of their integration into American society, they face some problems also. However, the nature and extent of issues of the recent immigrants are entirely different from the earlier immigrants. The concept of cultural pluralism explains the integration of the community in American society without distorting cultural or ethnic identity. Considering the entire period of Indian immigration to the United States, economic achievement, and peculiar Indian cultural tradition and the concept of Indianness, the community has been successful in transforming from a racial to a cultural/ethnic identity. It is considered that over time the salience of sub-national identities may diminish and an ethnic/cultural identity will emerge in their place.

There are several factors which benefited the Indian community to be known for its achievements and the consequent labelling as a successful model minority. The growth of the population from its modest beginnings to one of the fastest growing ethnic groups, high level of education, representation in all sectors of profession including in key areas of administration, science and research, information technology etc., and the resultant economic advancement are the most important among them. The success is typically measured in income, education, and related factors such as low crime rate and high family stability. The socio-economic statistics

substantiate the model minority argument. However, there is resistance to this stereotype and pointed out that they still face racism, social inequality, and institutional discrimination. Disparities in socioeconomic status persist within the Indian American community, challenging the notion of uniform success. Moreover, this myth reinforces harmful stereotypes and neglects systemic barriers that hinder marginalised groups from progressing. Therefore, the image that the entire Asian American community is the "model minority" is a myth. Despite their collective achievements in education, profession, and finance, Indian Americans remain susceptible to racial discrimination, polarisation, and ongoing debates surrounding issues of belonging and identity. While the model minority stereotype may suggest a level of success and assimilation for the Indian community in the United States, it does not shield individuals from experiencing discrimination based on their race or ethnicity. The dimensions of problems vary from earlier and contemporary migrants and generations of migrants.

Problems Faced by the Indian Americans

Despite their collective achievements in education, profession, politics, administration, and finance, Indian Americans remain susceptible to racial discrimination, polarisation, and ongoing debates surrounding issues of belonging and identity. The plight of Indian immigrants in the United States throughout history has been marked by systemic discrimination, starting from the racial riots in Bellingham, Washington, in 1907 and continuing through legislative measures aimed at restricting immigration and property ownership, restrictions on marriage, land holding etc. Although Chinese, Japanese, and Korean immigrants were not eligible for citizenship in the early 20th century, Asian Indians were awarded citizenship because they were not 'Mongolians'. However, in 1923 the US Supreme Court ruled that Asian Indians were not "free white persons" and therefore could not become American citizens (Min, 1995). Institutionalised discrimination persisted through immigration restrictions, deportations, and familial separations, perpetuating negative stereotypes and inhumane treatment (Rangaswamy,1996). Even in contemporary times, Indian Americans encounter personal prejudice and institutional biases, evidenced by reports of workplace discrimination and educational barriers. While attempts to maintain cultural traditions persist, challenges in integrating into American society persist, fuelled by racial biases and exclusionary attitudes (Min, 1995). Despite fluency in English and professional qualifications, Indian Americans often face social isolation and unfair treatment, highlighting ongoing struggles with acceptance and belonging in the dominant US culture (Mishra and Mahopatra, 2002). Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's postcolonial theory (Spivak,1988, 1996,1999) provides essential tools for analysing the Indian diaspora in the United States. Her insights into subalternity, strategic essentialism, and representation offer a critical framework for understanding the complex dynamics of identity, power, and resistance faced by Indian immigrants.

The nature and extent of problems faced by the new immigrants have significant difference from the earlier immigrants. The problems of earlier immigrants are related to their existence and integration into the host society. These problems are a result of the value system of Western culture, which is significantly different from that of their motherland. The problems faced by the new immigrants are less intensive and often individual or issue-oriented. Most Indian families try to maintain their

traditional patterns, but due to forces in American society, they learn to adjust (Mishra and Mahopatra, 2002). Even then, cases reported by Indian and Asian American professional organisations, the media and research show that there are certain issues regarding the Indian diaspora in the United States. Spivak's seminal essay "Can the Subaltern Speak?" (1988) addresses the limitations and challenges of representing marginalised voices within dominant discourse. The Indian diaspora in the U.S. can be seen as occupying a subaltern position, experiencing cultural and socio-economic marginalisation. Spivak's discussion of subalternity highlights the complexities of voice and agency for these communities, often rendered invisible or stereotyped by mainstream society. Her insights into subalternity, strategic essentialism, and representation offer a critical framework for understanding the complex dynamics of identity, power, and resistance faced by Indian immigrants. The survey conducted by the author also found various kinds of discrimination faced by the community. They face conflicts and challenges in the workplace which is a glass ceiling in nature. One respondent in the survey stated that "due to fear of humiliation and racial discrimination, many Asian Indians and their families discourage social contacts outside their group, thus many feel isolated and that they are treated unfairly due to their country of origin, religion, and skin colour by other US citizens". Other factors such as difficulty in communicating with others due to a language barrier, speaking with an accent, style of dress, skin colour, and physical appearance, contribute to the non-acceptance of Asian Indians into dominant United States culture (findings of a survey conducted by the author).

The 'model minority' picture clearly explains the success of the Indian Diaspora in the United States, whereas the survey result reveals the fact that the myth can mask the diversity and the real issues faced by individuals within the group. The majority of the respondents stated that they did not face any discrimination while staying in the United States. On the contrary 27.5 per cent marked that they faced some problems. Few responded that they could not reveal and another 2.3 per cent did not respond to the question. In an immigrant society with a high profile, 27.5 per cent is not a negligible proportion. The survey found that the factors like age and period of migration have a relation with the issue of discrimination. There is a correlation between the respondent's age and period of migration and the responses reflect that the older immigrants who migrated during the period of 1970s and 80s face racial discrimination more than the younger and comparatively new immigrants. The majority of these new immigrants constitute professional degree holders and are engaged in the IT sector and other industries. The younger generation identified that they face problems while dealing with strangers in public place, dealing with neighbours, dealing with government agencies and discrimination at the professional level. The problems faced by the second generation are in different dimensions. A second-generation respondent said that 'during school period, American friends stressed them by connecting to skin, colour and food'. He also stated that 'the situation had changed; now the general public is much aware about India and Indian culture'. Some others pointed out that the 'facial expression of Americans towards the immigrants reveals that immigrants are here to take their opportunities'. The study found that despite concerted efforts from the part of the US Government, through various Court verdicts and laws and efforts from community organisations, discrimination against Indians still exists in different forms.

Since the events of September 11, Indian Americans have unfortunately become inadvertent targets of hate crimes, with several incidents stemming from mistaken identity. Tragically, in one such instance, a Sikh individual in Arizona was fatally attacked by a white supremacist under the false assumption that he was of Arab descent due to his turban. This tragic event underscores a broader pattern of violence directed towards the Indian American community, often fuelled by misconceptions and prejudice, where individuals are mistakenly perceived as being of Middle Eastern or Arab origin (Hong and Bromwich,2021). The post-9/11 era saw heightened concerns about "home-grown terrorism" and the potential for radicalisation within various U.S. communities. Subsequent terrorist incidents and plots involved individuals from diverse backgrounds, including those of South Asian descent. These events intensified discussions around domestic radicalisation and highlighted the complexities of counterterrorism efforts within America's diverse societal landscape. The survey also reflects various issues after the September 11 attacks. The majority of the respondents stated that the incident had greatly affected Indian immigration to the USA and the Visa rules became very strict. It has affected the job market and the business client integration with American society. Strict checking while travelling and at airports, checking and questioning before entering public offices, and increasing suspicion are some of the new trends in profiling the Indian community. Immigrants were looked at with suspicious eyes, treated negatively and working conditions made worse. The development also affected Sikhs and Muslims to a great extent. Some of them elucidate that even though they do not face any problems personally, but witnessed and heard a lot of issues after the attacks.

More recently, there has been a troubling surge in hate crimes targeting Asian Americans in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. Although Indian Americans do not appear to be among the primary targets of this violence—as they were in the aftermath of the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks—the disquieting crime wave has cast a spotlight on the bigotry and violence many Asian immigrant populations experience in the United States (Hong and Bromwich, 2021). The myth of the model minority obscures the nuanced realities of Indian American experiences in the United States. While the community has achieved remarkable success, it continues to face challenges such as discrimination and marginalisation.

Even though certain problems are identified, Indian Americans as an ethnic group show a clear preference for the cultural pluralism model and believe it is the most desirable and serves the interests of the community. Their sense of a strong cultural identity has been stimulated as a psychological anchor in such a pluralistic society. Asian Indian immigrants have assimilated without losing their ethnic identity of which they are proud. They emphasise community and cultural preservation through robust networks and organisations that celebrate their festivals and traditions (Kurien, 2007). Highly qualified skilled professionals constitute the Indian diaspora in the globalised era. This group is highly educated and has a family median income higher than other groups in the United States. Politically, they are increasingly active, driven by issues such as immigration and education, and engage in transnational advocacy (Kapur, 2010). Morally, they navigate a balance between traditional Indian values and American norms, resulting in unique family dynamics (Lessinger, 2003). Their success in Silicon Valley and other fields has accorded them high visibility in their country of residence. Integration into the value systems of American society, such as competitiveness, achievement orientation, egalitarianism, and objective

individualism has been eagerly adopted by Asian Indian immigrants to achieve success and contribute effectively to the larger society. The success achieved by the Indian diaspora in the United States enabled them to become one of the most successful ethnic groups.

Conclusion

The historical narrative of immigration to America has undeniably sculpted the nation's racial and ethnic landscape. The influx of diverse ethnicities, propelled by the quest for refuge from persecution, social upheaval, and economic adversity, has laid the foundation for a mosaic of cultures and peoples. As the nation progressed, the emergence of multiculturalism and cultural pluralism underscored a shift towards celebrating diversity as a cornerstone of American identity. Embedded within American society is the concept of ethnic identity, a fluid and multifaceted construct encompassing distinctions grounded in race, religion, and national origin. Despite early endeavours at assimilation, immigrant groups have fiercely preserved their cultural heritage while integrating elements of the dominant culture.

Among the various ethnic groups, the Indian diaspora in the United States stands as a prominent entity, distinguished by its unique cultural traditions and substantial contributions to American society. From the formal acknowledgement of 'Asian Indians' in census classifications to their notable educational attainments and economic prosperity, Indian Americans have navigated the complexities of cultural assimilation while contending with discrimination and marginalisation. The myth of the model minority often obscures the nuanced realities of Indian American experiences. Despite their considerable achievements, Indian Americans grapple with enduring challenges such as workplace bias, racial profiling, and hate crimes. These obstacles serve as poignant reminders of the ongoing struggle for acceptance and belonging in the broader American milieu. Yet, amidst these challenges, the concept of cultural pluralism emerges as a beacon of hope. By embracing diversity and advocating for integration, cultural pluralism offers a pathway towards a more inclusive and cohesive society. Through this lens, individuals from diverse backgrounds can contribute to the collective narrative of American identity while retaining their cultural and ethnic distinctiveness. In summation, the journey of ethnic diversity within America epitomises the resilience and dynamism of immigrant communities. Through the prism of cultural pluralism, the nation can celebrate its rich fabric of cultures and peoples, forging a society where unity flourishes amidst diversity, and individual identities are cherished within the broader mosaic of American heritage. The Indian diaspora in the USA exemplifies the American Dream through their significant achievements in education, professional success, economic prosperity, and cultural preservation. Their story is one of resilience, adaptability, and a relentless pursuit of excellence, contributing significantly to the diverse and dynamic society of the United States.

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