GLOBAL INDIAN DIASPORA

CHARTING NEW FRONTIERS
VOLUME II

Edited by
J. Vijay Maharaj and Radica Mahase

Indian Diaspora World Convention was held in Trinidad in 2017 to commemorate the 1917 decision of the Indian legislature to end further recruitment of Indians for overseas indentured service.

The eleven essays in this two volume series cover a wide range under the heading 'Charting New Frontiers'. It is a diverse collection, indicating broad scope among the researchers on this theme. The contributors to this volume think through the conundrum of national citizenship, in relation to their routes and roots from a variety of perspectives. The essays compiled in this monograph, thus, reveal that the subject areas comprising the study of the Indian diaspora are interdisciplinary in nature and constantly evolving.

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Introduction

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DIASPORA: CONCEPTS OF BELONGING

THE NATION AND THE nation state were predominant concepts governing ideas of individuals selfhood and belonging throughout the twentieth century. Colonial capitalism gave birth to these concepts as the nations of Europe demarcated their separate territories and identities in order to claim their separate shares of global space. The global capital schemes out of which the modern world system arose have not, however, been very conducive to the development of postcolonial nations and nation states, which have been chronically threatened by other claims of belonging, particularly ancestral belonging. At present, moreover, liberal notions of selfhood are seen as comprising on the one hand 'global obligations', as A. Aneesh notes, for the protection of universal human rights while at the same time being a celebration of local differences. In this scenario, since late twentieth century, theoretical concepts such as Diaspora have become academically popular in order to articulate multiple perceptions of the self and for the self in relation to one's 'roots and routes' to use an idea stamped on our thinking by Paul Gilroy's repeated use of it in many of his works, following James Clifford, and of noting from their work by others.

The contributors to this volume think through the conundrum of national citizenship in relation to their routes and roots from a variety of perspectives. In 'The Future of Citizenship in the Global Age', Aneesh continues to explore ideas we have become familiar with throughout his work. He reminds us that T.H. Marshall, to whose work most citizenship scholars refer in order to contextualize their own thoughts, noted in his seminal account that 'one of the major

institutional accomplishments of national citizenship . . . was the gradual development of social rights in addition to political and civil ones. Marshall considered social citizenship as a welfare device through which the worst excesses of capitalism could be mitigated.' Aneesh interrogates Marshall's certainty in this regard by considering the global dimensions of capitalism and vastly different notions of citizenship that have developed as a result of the constant circulation of three large Ms: 'money, media and migration'. He also questions the failures of national citizenship, under the pressure of these three factors, to generate the social solidarity that has been its mainstay from inception. He argues that '. . . if the definition of "community" refers to a set of relationships marked by a high degree of personal intimacy, emotional depth, moral commitment, social cohesion and temporal continuity' then what is community today?

In order to work out the terms of community, Aneesh examines the '. . .[c]onsequences of . . .[a] paradoxical coding of citizenship as voluntary, formally equal, membership as well as inherited and ascribed membership based on ethnicity, language, or religion. . .'. He argues that these '. . . are not merely academic in nature'. He notes that they have, rather, 'had far-reaching effects on the ground. The combination of territorial scale and the ideal of kinship-like ethnic cohesion has given rise to "anomalous" populations in every nation, populations that do not fit the communal norm.' His recognition of this aspect of citizenship is critically important in exploring representations and discussions of people of the Indian Diaspora. To one extent or another the anomaly of the existence of communities of the descendants of people from the Indian subcontinent in various locations across the world is the subject of the rest of the essays in this volume.

Nivedita Misra's contribution, titled 'Neil Bissoondath's *A Casual Brutality* and Rabindranath Maharaj's *Homer in Flight: Travelling without Luggage*' looks at a similar anomalous condition within the framework of diaspora studies. She begins her essay, by noting, 'Engagements with the Indian diaspora range between two diametrically opposed views regarding diaspora consciousness: a celebratory Salman Rushdie-like notion of being 'twice blessed' and a Vijay Mishra-like notion of traumatized post-indenture subjectivity.' Like Mishra, she uses V.S. Naipaul's work as the baseline against which to evaluate

evolving ways of conceiving the self at various stops on routes away from India in the writing of Naipaul's nephew Neil Bissoondath and his Canadian peer, Rabindranath Maharaj. She notes that in both writers' work there is a certain sense of 'the portability of roots' but, she argues that carrying around one's roots '. . . will clearly remain an unfinished agenda for the first generation migrant who is torn between the country of his birth and the country of his adoption.'

In the following essay Shirin Haque gives an introspective examination of her own diasporic sense of un/belonging as an astronomer by profession whose varying ethnic identities provide a chaotic background against which her daily life unfolds. Haque reviews a wide range of literature on the subject of ethnicity and she also reports on one of the very popular DNA tests which she did on herself in order to formulate a few pertinent conclusions about her possible roots. In addition, she explores how these roots are informed by the various routes through which she has arrived at this point in her life in Trinidad. She suggests that despite the tortuous pathways she has traversed like so many others into developing her multiple senses of ethnic identity, the route into the future for everyone will be a return to the universal concept of the human race. Like many writers who have produced volumes of literature which have been popularly categorized as sci-fi literature, she postulates that this is the inevitable conclusion of human colonization of outer space. Notwithstanding the possibility of creating a spoiler, it is worth quoting at length what she poignantly, says:

> As an astronomer, I know far too well, that it is only a matter of time before there will be colonization of space and we shall venture to Mars. It is anticipated that it can be as early as the mid 2030s. . . . It is expected to be an international effort and let us assume there are men and women from many countries. . . . What identity will they carry that all will have in common? It is only a matter of time when there will be persons who can rightfully say they are Martians. Today there is not a single person who has ever lived on planet earth that could use that sense of identity. Without a doubt, the defining common identity will be of belonging to the human race. They will represent this and nothing else will matter – not which country they were born in, grew up in, not their race or their native language. They will simply be the Homo Sapien race. The same Homo Sapien race

which walked out of the African continent hundreds of thousands of years ago to colonize the entire planet earth and now are venturing beyond into space. In the end all who we are and share in common is the human race.

On the other hand, Kheera Daly-Novoa's anthropological perspective on the *antyeshti samskaara*, the name for the body of Hindu rituals performed after death, tries to grapple with how ethnicity is irrevocable. She argues that because of the routes by which they have come there is constant adjustment of a variety of root-factors in what can be categorized as 'boundary-reducing, boundary-maintaining and boundary-fusing rituals'. Her essay provides details of the actual performance of the funeral and attempts to explain these details by reference to information gathered from practitioners and from Vedic texts. She notes as well that the power dynamics in the society are the primary motivators of the different classes of adjustments people make. She says, for example, that 'As it relates to burning human remains, the Trinidad and Tobago Cremation Act Chapter 30:51 Section 6 states 'no person shall burn any human remains on a pyre or in a crematorium unless he is in possession of a valid permit or license to do so . . .'. The laws of a country she implies is one of the major factors.

Unlike the three previous essays which focus on the Anglophone Caribbean, in particular on Trinidad and Tobago, Chan Choenni's essay, 'Hindostanis in the Netherlands: A Success Story?' examines the experiences of the Hindostani people of The Netherlands. The author notes that in 2013, 1 per cent of the 17 million inhabitants of The Netherlands, were Hindostanis. Approximately 175,000 Hindostanis are the descendants of the Hindostanis who emigrated to The Netherlands from Suriname. By 2013, more Hindostanis were living in The Netherlands (175,000) than in Suriname (148,000). He looks at key aspects of the emergence and development of this group over a period of time. He notes that after their mass emigration in the 1970s, the Hindostani community in The Netherlands seized economic opportunities and became prosperous citizens in due time and eventually an identifiably successful ethnic group in Dutch society.

Choenni compares the progress of this group to that of Dutch, Surinamers and other groups in Netherlands society. The Hindostani

group has emerged as a successful one particularly in the socio-economic field. In fact, in terms of educational achievement, second generation Hindostanis are on par with the Dutch and have surpassed the second generation Creole. There is high educational mobility within the Hindostani community and a number of young Hindostani women are medical doctors. Ironically, their parents come from the Surinamese countryside and cannot even speak Dutch very well. Generally, they have retained their Indian culture but their participation in mainstream Dutch culture is limited. This group has retained a strong ethnic identity which is reinforced by the influence of the Indian diaspora and Bollywood, and the emerging role of India as a global power.

The second and third generation diasporans are also the subject of Taracharran Singh's article, 'Neighbourhood Revitalization in New York City: Indo-Caribbeans Make a Mark'. The author notes that 'despite NYC's complexity, diversity and toughness, Indo-Caribbeans have been able to work around these and [are] still able to move forward and make a mark on the city'. Singh's article examines the evolution of NYC neighbourhoods, especially those in which a substantial number of Indo-Caribbeans reside. He notes that, 'One is literally left in amazement at the level of revitalization that's taking place. The development of commercial strips in Queens such as those along Liberty Avenue, 101 Avenue, and Jamaica Avenue is conspicuous. New and renovated housing, the opening of entertainment houses and clubs, restaurants, offices, catering halls, sports facilities, as well as the rapid expansion of churches have given new life to these neighbourhoods that, a few decades ago, had been struggling to remain viable. Presently, on weekends certain parts of Liberty Avenue in Richmond Hill are as busy as any part of Manhattan.' His article examines the interplay of forces that influenced the development of neighbourhoods and the creation of a 'community within a community' which embraced traditional cultural values. Singh analyses the impact of education, income level, and poverty rate in the evolution of Indo-Caribbean communities in NYC.

Similar to Choenni's study, Singh compares the Indo-Caribbeans to other immigrant groups such as Ecuadorians, Mexicans, Dominicans and El Salvadorians referring to indicators of development such as

income, poverty levels, education, etc. He notes that, 'The ongoing search for a better life by Indo-Caribbeans was not propelled by an education thrust, but rather by the impulse of hard work, deferred gratification and the entrepreneurial spirit more than anything else.' In fact, he notes that, 'It is important that Indo-Caribbean leaders begin to sensitize members of their community on the value of higher education, especially in the science, technology and healthcare sectors.' Indo-Caribbeans need to make changes and become more educated and competitive in non-traditional jobs as 'What worked well for them in the past will not necessarily work for them in the future. Globalization is creating rapid changes and unsettling the status quo.'

Ghan Shyam's article, 'In the Land of Opportunity: A Study of the Indo-Caribbean Community in New York City' is also an examination of Indo-Caribbeans in New York. The author notes that '. . . since 1970, the number of Indo-Caribbean immigrants who have come to the US in search of better opportunities has grown exponentially, as a result of changes to US immigration law in 1965 which facilitated entry for broader categories of people'. This group has its own distinct identity; a rather complex one as it has strong Indian elements as well as a mixture of other ethnic influences from both the Caribbean and the US. Unfortunately, it has been placed in a position where it has been overshadowed by the larger Afro-Caribbean community and by the numerically and economically more powerful Indian community.

Shyam analyses the socio-economic development, political participation and cultural adaptation of the community in the USA. He also looks at the nature of their ties with India and their home countries in the Caribbean. A key aspect of this article is its historical background; the author traces the migration of Indians from India to the Caribbean and gives a comprehensive account of their emergence and consolidation in the Caribbean during the indentureship era. The article then traces the migration of second and third generations of descendants of indentured labourers to the USA, which was seen as the land of opportunities. He examines language, culture, gender and political consciousness of this group. Unlike Singh, Shyam concludes, 'The Indo-Caribbean immigrants place a lot of emphasis on education of their children. These children are not only joining

community colleges as many parents are sending their children to private universities and colleges where they have to spend a substantial amount of their savings; in some cases, parents have even mortgaged their houses for their children's education.' Similar to Singh, he notes, 'The majority of the Indo-Caribbean immigrants still maintain a close tie with their relatives and extended family members in the Caribbean. They send huge amount of remittances and barrels of goods to family members.'

The other four articles focus on the Indian diaspora in the Caribbean. Both Arnold Thomas and Sylvia Lucia Gilharry Perez focus on the Indian diaspora in countries where smaller numbers of Indian indentured labourers settled. Thomas' article, 'Adaptation and Survival in a Small Society: The Indians of St. Vincent and the Grenadines' looks at the indentureship experience in St Vincent and the Grenadines. Thomas gives a comprehensive account of the arrival of the Indians and their experience during indentureship. Education, conversion to Christianity and the evolution of an Indo-Vincentian culture are key points of discussion.

This group was also prone to migration and Thomas noted 'During the period between the end of the First World War and the end of the Second World War, the outward drift of able-bodied men continued unabated to other West Indian islands, in particular to Trinidad and the Dutch islands of Curacao and Aruba where work was available in the oil refinery. Many also went to Panama to work on the Panama Canal and to Cuba and Santo Domingo as seasonal cane cutters.' However, for those who made St. Vincent their homes, in recent times they have made attempts to research and celebrate their history and to establish an Indo-Vincentian Heritage organization. The high point of their attempts have been the official recognition by the Parliament, declaring 1 June as Indian Arrival Day and 7 October as Indian Heritage Day.

In the article, 'Highlighting Contribution of Diasporic Indians to the Multi-Ethnicities of Belize' Sylvia Perez provides accounts of the lives of the Indian-descended in Belize to show how much this group has retained a strong ethnic identity even though there has been significant racial mixing and second and third migrations although these have taken place within the Caribbean itself. Perez is interested

in this subject from the perspective articulated by Ruben Gowricharn. She argues, 'The notion of diaspora in which this essay is interested is one about diasporic relationships leading eventually to a transnational community.' As Ruben Gowricharn argues, 'what the concept of "diaspora" actually refers to is the relationship dispersed people maintain, rather than the dispersion itself.' And it is into such relationships within the little studied community of Indian-descended in Belize that she provides insight.

The topic of the Indian diaspora and its engagement in sports in the Caribbean has not been a main focus of academic writing. The article 'Indian Involvement in Cricket in the Caribbean' by Daren Ganga, Zuwena Williams-Paul and Gloria Ramdeen-Mootoo, therefore, introduces a relatively new topic as well as interesting concepts of ancestral influence, village identity and family influence in the world of sports. Ganga et al., examine the prominence of cricket in the Caribbean (called Windies cricket). They note, 'The West Indies cricket team comprises of multi-nationals across the Caribbean and in Trinidad and Tobago there is a high involvement of Indians in this sport at both a community and national level.' In fact, their article 'Accounts for the gravitation to, and passion for the game of cricket by a vast majority of the Indo-Trinbagonian community resulting in the successful selection of many Indo-Trinbagonians to serve on the national team and by extension the "Windies" team.' The authors refer to both past and present prominent cricketers to emphasize the consolidation of Indo-Trinbagonians within the world of West Indies cricket.

This article gives an invaluable personal account of family and ancestral ties and roles in the development of sports. The influence of the elders played a key role in Ganga and his brothers' interest and involvement in sports. Their story is one of success in the field of cricket and one of family strength and support – something that was always evident within the Indo-Trinbagonian community. Interestingly, Indo-Trinbagonian women were also able to enter and make their mark on the cricket arena.

In an article titled 'Consideration of Research Management and Diasporic Bonding between Higher Education Institutes in Trinidad and the Indian Diaspora: A Case Study Approach' authors Halima-

Sa'adia Kassim, David Rampersad, Navin Boodhai and Florence Louis-Edouard take the Indian diaspora forward into the future. This article examines the potential of the Indian diaspora to 'promote academic and research excellence, and support internalization, which in turn can help to create 'world class universities'. Kassim et al. note that '. . . the Indian Diaspora, which totals over 25 million in 130 countries is an unexploited resource that can help increase the international dimension of higher education institutions. It can facilitate the development and enhancement of collaborative relationships that strengthen research management, and facilitate the mobility of Diaspora academics and student mobility.'

This article attempts to chart a future creatively for the Indian diaspora through research collaborations. The authors note that this type of research collaborations can 'facilitate capacity building and complementary knowledge and expertise aimed at solving developmental problems or contributing to societal improvement rooted in interactive governance. . . .' The article identifies music, film, fashion and the nutraceutical/biomedical industry as possible areas for collaboration by India/Indian diasporic universities and notes that areas such as climate change, coastal zone management, water resources, waste disposal, biodiversity conservation and management can also be included.

The essays compiled in this monograph thus reveal that the subject areas comprising the study of the Indian diaspora are multi- and interdisciplinary and constantly evolving. As recent books on the subject of diaspora in general, such as *Diasporas in the New Media Age*, assert, the shrinkage of time and space because of ever-new computer-based technologies is at the heart of these diaspora phenomena, followed closely by scholarly attention across previously impermeable theoretical and methodological disciplinary boundaries. Such scholarly attention on the Indian diaspora has always drawn attention to this boundary shattering quality of diaspora studies, which may still be, to borrow the phrasing of Chela Sandoval, the 'Methodology of the Oppressed'. At the same time, as the title of one of the earliest texts to study this diaspora: *India-spora*, implies, the ideal of India scattering its spore remains central to interest in studying this subject.

To contend with this spectrum of perception and find ways of dealing with the pressures diaspora exercises on the enlightenment formulae for national identity as the primary mode of belonging are to forge a renaissance of thought that could guide us through the twenty-first and into the next century, whether here on earth or elsewhere as Shirin Haque suggests. Diaspora studies can provide new tools for collective dreaming and imagining, for self-reflection and self-critique of same. Moreover, diaspora studies such as the ones undertaken in this volume provide insight into the '. . . concerns, anxieties, hopes, and desires, which to a certain extent go unnoticed by both [the] host societies and [the] countries of origin . . .' of those in diaspora (*Diasporas in the New Media Age*, ix). For those so beset, works like these become practical guides and sources of consolation. To this end, the labour involved in gathering and editing the volume and seeing it through to publication and dissemination has been for us a labour of love.

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CHAPTER 1

Who Am I? It Depends! The Evolving Nature of Identity from Out of Africa and into Space

SHIRIN HAQUE

INTRODUCTION

THE QUESTION OF ETHNIC identity is central to our sense of belonging and who we are as a people. From the time the notion was first studied in the eighteenth century to the present, we see the challenges of defining ethnic identity and the changing nature of its definition becomes apparent.

The earliest ideas of ethnic identity were linked to race identity (Augstein 1996). The 1775 treatise 'The Natural Varieties of Mankind', by Johann Friedrich Blumenbach classified humans into five major divisions: the Caucasoid race, the Mongoloid race, the Ethiopian or Negroid race, the American Indian race, and the Malayan race (Blumenback 1865). As noted by Trimble and Dickson (2005), 'Race and ethnicity were often used interchangeably in reference to both the physical and cultural characteristics of an individual as a member of his or her ethnic or racial group and the circumstances that influenced its importance.'

By 1922, sociologist Max Weber included a subjective element into the ideas of ethnicity. He differentiated between racial and ethnic identity by noting that a blood relationship was necessary for the former but not for the latter (Trimble and Dickson 2005).

Ideas of ethnic identity in the early nineteenth century were predominantly associated with common language and the ability to share one's common mental images from a nationalistic perspective (Von Humboldt 1830-5/1985, p. 12). Historically, we see the ideas

of race, nationalism and language being incorporated into the notion of ethnicity. The commonly used notion in psychology for ethnic identity meanwhile is that 'ethnic identity is a dynamic, multi-dimensional construct that refers to one's identity, or sense of self as a member of an ethnic group' (Phinney 2003).

Ethnic identity is thus not a clear cut notion as is evident by the variation of definitions in use by different authors and as noted by Phinney (1990): there are 'widely discrepant definitions and measures of ethnic identity'. The sense of affiliation a person may feel towards a group can be based on racial, natal, symbolic and cultural factors (Cheung 1993). Cheung defines ethnic identification as '. . . the psychological attachment to an ethnic group or heritage'. Therefore, racial and ethnic identity becomes important in psychology and counselling in development perspectives of individuals. We note that definitions of ethnicity started with the physical attributes of a person, shifted to common aspects that a group shared, such as the place of birth and the language they spoke and now, in the present era to the notion of a feeling as represented by psychological attachment. In the field of sociology ethnic identity was tackled historically as group identification and an individual sense of perceived identification. In this personal case study, the best description of ethnicity is a sense of belonging. This subsumes all the aspects mentioned by different researchers.

Quintana (2007) found that longitudinal research showed the progressive nature of ethnic and racial identity development. He also notes that exposure to racism causes further development of one's sense of identity during adolescence. Syed and Azmita (2008) examined the ethnic identity in emerging adulthood of 191 diverse participants using the narrative approach. Their study showed the importance and value of the narrative approach in understanding ethnic identity, which is essentially the approach used in this article. The authors based their study on the developmental model of Erik Erikson (1968), which holds that an individual arrives at a sense of identity by integrating seemingly disparate aspects of the self lending to continuity across time. With the increase of longitudinal studies (Syed et al. 2007), it is becoming clearer that ethnic identity is a developing process rather than a static description. The study by

Syed and Azmita filled the gap in understanding of how individuals '. . . explore and construct, revisit or potentially change their ethnic identities' through the narrative approach.

Ethnicity therefore is a fluid construct with different evolving meanings in different disciplines. With scientific progress in biotechnology and with the mapping of the human genome, it is notable that ethnic identity can also be viewed from the lens of genetics. Completing the human genome project in 2003 has affected our understanding of our origin as a species and our racial compositions greatly although the focus of genetics has been in human health and disease. However, Bonham et al. (2005) note that the challenge for genomics research is to understand its role in race and ethnicity. They recommend that it is important to include social and behavioural scientists in the dialogue with geneticists and natural scientists. It has been found that any randomly chosen two humans are 99.9 per cent same genetically. The 0.1 per cent equates to about three million differences between individuals' DNA of which most have no impact on the phenotype, or the outward appearance which plays a dominant role in the traditional notion of ethnic identity (Bonham et al. 2005). It is noted that this small fraction lending to uniqueness confers susceptibility to some diseases by some persons and protection in others which is where the focus of the geneticists is (Majumdar 2001).

The non-scientific perspective of ethnicity is summed up well by Trimble and Dickson (2005) when they remark, 'Thus, the term is used to express the notion of sameness, likeness, and oneness'. More precisely, identity means 'the sameness of a person or thing at all times in all circumstances; the condition or fact that a person or thing is itself and not something else' (Simpson and Weiner 1989, p. 620). Combining the definitions and interpretations of identity and ethnicity it can be concluded that they mean, or at minimum imply, the sameness of a band or nation of people who share common customs, traditions, historical experiences and in some instances geographical closeness. At one level of interpretation the combined definition is sufficient to capture the manner in which the identity is generally conceptualized and used to understand ethnocultural influences on its formation and development. At another level identity is almost synonymous with ethnicity prompting some sociologists

like Herbert Gans (2003) to suggest that identity is no 'longer a useful term'.

With the science of genetics in the mix, however, evolutionary perspective has thrown this notion of ethnicity into quite a tail spin as it has captured the imagination of the general population regarding the possibility of using trusted science to gain insight into our ethnicity. Bolnick et al. (2007) warn about the scientific limitations of genetic ancestry testing which is continuing to gain popularity commercially. They note that the testing should be approached with caution since the findings can often have a profound effect on the individuals and it can cause them to rethink their personal identities. It is therefore important to understand the limitations of these tests. The mtDNA test operates via the maternally inherited mitochondrial genome. It is compared with haplotype from other sampled individuals who share a common maternal and paternal ancestor and the location where the haplotype is found geographically. The mtDNA enables researchers to probe the distant past and shed light on prehistoric migrations. As noted above, less than 1 per cent of the DNA of the individual is actually tested and it tracks one ancestor in each generation. Another type of test actually provides a better measure of the ancestry by using 175 autosomal markers from both parents to determine their biogeographical ancestry. These tests typically identify some of the groups and locations around the world but not all, based on the database and the algorithms of the company running the test. It tends to not factor in the genetic diversity within populations and gene flow between populations.

These tests are often taken by individuals to shed light on their ethnicity or race. However, scientifically there is no clear connection between one's genetic markers and one's ethnicity. The tests cannot determine with total certainty the place of origin or social affiliation of even one ancestor.

Elliot and Brodwin (2002) also warn against genetic ancestry tracing to determine claims of ethnic, political, familial and religious identity and feel that it should be taken within the context of cultural determinants and historical narratives. A major point of controversy is who gets to decide who is a member of a particular group. Who counts as a Jew or a Native American they argue. The laws of the

government using such definitions are often at variance from the informal tribal laws. Whose rules take priority? How much relative weightage should be given to genetics as opposed to other measures of identity are questions we must grapple within the present era.

An interesting study by Yang et al. (2005) on a diverse set of 796 DNA samples including self-identified grouping of nine ethnicities with examples such as Europeans, Americans, Ameridinians, and South Asians, found that the predicted ethnic identity corresponded with the self-identified ethnicity at high probability ($p > 0.99$) and they note that Ancestry Informative Markers (AIM) can provide a useful support for forensic medicine, pharmacogenomics and disease studies in ancestry associated variations in human disease.

Yet DNA testing is yielding very useful information in determining the movements of people from an evolutionary perspective. Majumdar (2001) examines the ethnic populations of India from this perspective and notes that after *homo sapiens* migrated out of Africa, one of the first waves of migrations came into India, causing it to act as a major corridor for modern humans. It is accepted that the tribal populations are the original inhabitants of India. Majumdar (2001) studied four ethnic groups, Brahmin, Chamar, Muslim and Rajput, all inhabiting the Indian state of Uttar Pradesh. He notes that a large section of the Muslims of Uttar Pradesh are religious converts from upper and middle ranked caste groups and note that there is also evidence of population movement from Iran and Central Asia into India.

For this article, the definition as noted above of 'at minimum imply, the sameness of a band or nation of people who share common customs, traditions, historical experiences, and in some instances geographical residence' is adopted and its implication to the case study of the author to address the question of 'Who am I' are explored.

However, it is interesting to note the findings of a study on 'What is a Malay?' by Nagata (1974). She notes that 'Most studies to date of ethnic relations, ethnic boundaries, and criteria used to define ethnic status have been biased toward a particular 'assimilationist' model drawn from experience in North America, Australia, etc. These have generally assumed there is some dominant or ethnically 'neutral' area of culture by whose standards all 'ethnics' can be judged, and that ethnic identity normally changes in one direction only'.

In her study she examines the case of a plural society in which there is no clear dominant or neutral culture and continuous oscillation of ethnic status occurs without direct assimilation. The scenario explored by Nagata bears a significant parallel to this study because it explores ethnicity and identity in a plural society of a migrant. Such plural societies include ethnically diverse populations, with little neutral areas of culture (Furnivall 1939) and are typical in postcolonial settings. Trinidad thus bears similarity in this context to Malaysia. This study notes that typically, in the assimilationist model, individuals move towards the dominant culture, losing their ethnicity of origin. The notion of oscillation or partial assimilation is not seen as a healthy adjustment. Nagata notes 'This assumption is based on the belief that variability or oscillation in ethnic membership is either abnormal or undesirable and generates tensions for those involved.' Many similarities of this type have been experienced by the author in Trinidad to those in Malaysia where many persons were Muslims but of Indian origin. India is predominantly a land of Hindus and Muslims make up a minority.

Nagata (1974) concludes that while assimilation is the dominant way of adjustment in the Malay plural society, ethnic oscillation, according to situational requirements explains the notion of identity in a plural society better. It is found that the ethnic reference groups can vary depending on how their ranking is perceived in the wider society. The author speculates that this modus operandi, rather than being a source of stress for the individuals, is actually a positive adaptation to a fluid situation in which multiple ethnic roles are used to personal advantage.

Insights into this study are also gained from R. Radhakrishnan's review of the book *Theories of Ethnicity: A Critical Appraisal* by Richard H. Thompson. He begins by reflecting on the questions raised by his own nine-year old son, born in America while the parents are Indian citizens, who asks 'Am I Indian or American?' and he explains that he is both. The book asks the question 'Is human nature intrinsically ethnic?' and the author defines 'ethnic nature' as 'the propensity of individuals and groups to be organized and classified on the basis of race, i.e. physical, or morphological characteristics or ethnicity' (tribal, linguistic, national, religious, or other cultural characteristics). The reviewer explores the ideas of mindless Westernization and fanatical

nativism and ends on the optimistic note that he hopes his son's future will have many roots and his identity will be a result of rich and complex negotiation and not depend on a blind and official decree. These two examples show that in our present time of increasing diasporic spread, the questions of ethnicity have become very complex with many variables which have altered traditional definitions of ethnic identity.

INTROSPECTIVE CASE STUDY

Namaste . . . I am Shirin Haque
Assalaam-alaikum . . . I am Shirin Haque
Good morning . . . I am Shirin Haque
So, who am I?

What would strike someone in the three greetings above? The greeting or my name? Each greeting is different, one has its origin in the language of the place where I was born, the second in my religion, and last in the places where I grew up and in my current nationality. All represent me. The other part of the greeting, my name, is a fixed identity and nonetheless loaded. It is Muslim, and Persian in origin.

Based on the ethnic definition chosen for partially formulating this study, let us examine common customs and traditions. This is where the name serves that sense of identity not immediately identifiable geographically. The name Shirin Haque is perceived as an immediate affiliation with a religious identity, that of the Muslim faith. However, the spelling is different to how such a name would be spelt had it been originally Trinidadian – 'Shireen'. This particular spelling is immediately recognizable as Persian.

In the timescales of the history of civilizations, Islam is a relative newcomer to the world. Hinduism is one of the world's oldest religions so, clearly the historical line of my identity has something to do with migrations to India. We lived and practised customs as Muslims in India do. So, am I Muslim first or am I Indian first? It depends on my environment at the point in time.

My father, Dr Syed Qayamul Haque migrated to Trinidad as a scientist who worked at the University of the West Indies. He belonged to the part of the migration wave out of India which began in the 1960 and into the 1970s. I arrived in Trinidad as a child-speaking