



DIASPORA CONFLICTS: A LITERATURE REVIEW

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ABSTRACT In recent years, the diaspora – peace – conflict nexus has developed into an area of key research interest, particularly within conflict - and diaspora studies. This is an emerging field of study, but one which remains largely underdeveloped. We systemically collected empirical data, in-depth analysis on the dynamics of diasporas and the nature of the conflict in the country of origin and theoretical conceptualisations that could explain the complexity of the field. Those studies were included which focused on diasporic literature in relation to its peace and conflict nexus. Studies related to diasporic fiction, historical evolution of diaspora and Exile Literature of diaspora were excluded. The authors concluded that it is important to define the level of analysis, whether at the individual, societal or organisational level and to look at how these levels interact. The DIASPEACE project will therefore concentrate on the transnational activities of diaspora groups, with a focus on collective actions.

KEYWORDS :

INTRODUCTION:

Etymologically, the term Diaspora coined from Greek word Diaspeirein - "to scatter about, disperse", from Dia means "about, across" + Speirein means "to scatter". It was used by the ancient Greeks to refer to citizens of a dominant city-state who emigrated to a conquered land with the purpose of colonization, to assimilate the territory into the empire. The situation today is largely the "success story" of the Indian diasporas in the Silicon Valley and the other professionals mainly settled in the U.K., North America and Europe. In the Namesake, Gogol's parents Ashoke and Ashima belong to this wave of immigration to the United States whereas Gogol is a product of the contemporary success story of the Indian diaspora in the United States¹.

The Diasporic Indian is like the banyan tree, the traditional symbol of the Indian way of life, he spreads out his roots in several soils, drawing nourishment from one when the rest dry up. Far from being homeless, he has several homes, and that is the only way he has increasingly come to feel at home in the world. With the globalization of national economies, the chutnification of cultures and Bollywood's increasing cultural appeal and reach, Indians became one of the forces to flatten the world. Indians in the USA are one of the largest among the groups of Indian diasporas, about 2.5 million².

In recent years, the diaspora – peace – conflict nexus has developed into an area of key research interest, particularly within conflict - and diaspora studies. This is an emerging field of study, but one which remains largely underdeveloped. According to the related literature, the debate on diaspora and conflict can be divided into three categories. First, migrants or diasporas can be perceived as agents for promoting peace and development. The second and opposing conceptualization is that these two groups can have a negative or even destructive impact. The third argument is that they can simultaneously be 'peace-makers' and 'peace-breakers'³.

Nevertheless, there is still a paucity of research on this area, including systemically collected empirical data, in-depth analysis on the dynamics of diasporas and the nature of the conflict in the country of origin and theoretical conceptualisations that could explain the complexity of the field.

METHODOLOGY:

We searched the PubMed, PMC and PsycINFO electronic databases using the National Library of Medicine's Medical Subject Heading (MeSH) terms like diaspora, diaspora peace, diaspora – conflict nexus, and diaspora conflict. Further research was conducted on the internet via search engines like Google Scholar and Index Copernicus. Inclusion and exclusion criteria were applied to the articles identified from the literature search. Eligible studies were those published from 01 January 2000- 31 May 2018 in English language. Any degree of uncertainty over the applicability of the publication, it was automatically included and the full text article was assessed. Stage 2 involved screening of full text articles against inclusion criteria which was absolute and strictly followed.

Inclusion Criteria:

Those studies were included which focused on diasporic literature in

relation to its peace and conflict nexus.

Exclusion Criteria:

Studies related to diasporic fiction, historical evolution of diaspora and Exile Literature of diaspora were excluded.

Interpretations From The Literature:

Diasporas And Conflicts:

In recent years, there has been a growing interest in examining the roles and contributions of diasporas to their country of origin. As Demmers points out, the reasons for this interest stem from the "rise of new patterns of conflict, the rapid rise of war refugees; the increase speed of communication and mobility and the increased production of cultural and political boundaries" (Demmers 2002)⁴. Due to an increased level of global interconnectedness through cheap modes of transportation and communication, diaspora groups are also more than ever before able to build strong links between their country of origin and their host country. Thus, nowadays, diasporas are said to be a 'fax time' away from relatives in their original homeland, with modern technologies making it easier than ever to keep in touch. The diasporas' commitment to maintaining contact with relatives in their original homeland can manifest itself in the form of regular phone calls or letters and/ or establishing and maintaining diaspora organisations and networks dedicated to keeping homeland relations alive and well.

According to Bercovitch⁵, "the best way to conceive of the role of diasporas in conflict is to think of the various phases or stages of a conflict (conflict emergence, continuation, escalation, termination and post-conflict reconstruction) and then to evaluate the possible role diaspora may play in each phase" (2007).

Case Studies:

Sri Lanka: One of the best known cases of conflict deeply shaped by the diaspora's intervention is the Sri Lankan Civil War, which opposed the Tamil and the Sinhalese between 1983 and 2009. Starting from the early 1980s, Tamil migrants provided strong financial support to the main Tamil armed group in Sri Lanka, the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE). The diaspora, which relied on a well-organized global network to channel funds to the fighters on a very large scale, has been described by Joshi (1996)⁶ as the 'economic backbone of the militant campaign', and contributed significantly to sustaining the conflict. In addition to favoring the escalation of violence through massive financial support to its group of origin, the Tamil diaspora undertook a relentless lobbying activity aimed at mobilizing international opinion. Eventually, however, at the end of the 1990 s, most of the main migrants' host countries labeled the LTTE as a Foreign Terrorist Organization. In the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks, the suspicion over the funds sent by the Tamil migrant community became even stronger, leading to a change in the role of the diaspora, which started to support nonviolent conflict resolution and power-sharing settlements (Fair, 2007⁷; Orjuela, 2008)⁸.

Ireland: The Irish community in the USA is usually regarded as a decisive player for the evolution of conflict in Northern Ireland, and has been the object of a substantial amount of research in political science. According to Cochrane (2007)⁹, this evolution in political

views corresponded to (i) the transformation of Irish-American 'from refugee/ immigrant community to integrated, moneyed and highly networked sector of the indigenous population', (ii) the demographic decline of the Irish diaspora, induced by smaller migration rates and (iii) the reduced tolerance of violence by the Irish-American and the higher cost of funding political groups abroad, in the aftermath of 9/11. While becoming more integrated in the American social fabric, the Irish diaspora also became less heavily concerned with the situation in Northern Ireland.

India: Malti Agrawal¹⁰ in *English Literature – Voices of Indian Diaspora* (Atlantic Publishers & Distributors (P) Ltd.; 2009) (Agrawal) presents a useful collection of twenty-two research papers on the literary works of various eminent diasporic writers. They all voice the anguish of the people, living far away from their native land and being discriminated on the grounds of race, colour or creed. The writers included in this list are A.K. Ramanujan, Uma Parameswaran, Vikram Seth, Anita Desai, Bharti Mukherjee, Jhumpa Lahiri, Robinton Mistry, Kiran Desai and Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni. Besides having these stalwarts in the field, this volume also includes papers on the works of some emerging writers like Iqbal Ramoowalk, Yasmine Gooneratne and Ann Bhalla. This volume combines a variety of research papers on the literary works of such diasporic writers with the articles on theoretical aspect of diasporas¹⁰.

DISCUSSION:

In recent years, a broader view has begun to emerge vis-à-vis the link between diasporas and conflicts. This type of literature emphasises the possibilities for diasporas to contribute to conflict resolution and peace building. Although the existing literature acknowledges the potentially negative role that diaspora can play in conflict situations, there is also a growing recognition of the need to critically examine this traditional view. The latter tends to exclusively view diasporas as dangerous and to associate them and their networks with illegal activities and terrorism. The central premise of the emerging debate on diasporas is to seek an objective and balanced view of their roles. This requires recognising not only the negative impacts of diaspora groups on conflict situations but also their potential to contribution to peace building.

The claim that diasporas support warring parties through remittances should not be underestimated, but it should also be considered with caution insofar as very little is known about the actual amounts, scope, or impact of the support. Generally speaking, there is a paucity of evidence to gauge the extent to which remittances protract civil wars; how much money is channelled towards conflict perpetuation activities; and who the real recipients are. According to the literature review, remittances are often underreported and much of the remittances flowing to conflict areas are transmitted through informal channels (Collinson 2003)¹¹. According to Mohamoud (2006)¹², the amount of remittances sent by diaspora members that could be used in conflict perpetuation is relatively small.

CONCLUSION:

One of the issues in the current literature on the conflict - diaspora nexus, is that the level of analysis is not always clear. This may be due to a lack of systematically collected data. It is therefore important to define the level of analysis, whether at the individual, societal or organisational level and to look at how these levels interact. The DIASPEACE project will therefore concentrate on the transnational activities of diaspora groups, with a focus on collective actions.

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