

Migration and Acculturation of Indian Queer Diaspora in United States

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Abstract

Acculturation makes its impact on the lives of migrants and immigrants. Generally, diasporic individuals have to go through the process of acculturation after migrating to host lands. Acculturation which has been described, by theorists, in four different types: integration, assimilation, separation and marginalisation mould migrants and immigrants' lives accordingly in the host land. Differences in acculturation system between family members due to generational gaps sometimes create unfortunate and apprehensive environment. Indian queer individuals and community in United States face different challenges due to their ethnic, sexual and gender identity. These challenges further affect in their acculturation process in the host land. Their acculturation process starts even before their migration due to social and cultural stressors in homeland. Acculturation stressors are linked with socio-cultural and psychological health of diasporas.

Keywords: Acculturation, Migration, Indian-American Diaspora, South-Asian Diaspora, Indian-American Queer Diaspora, Social and Cultural Stressors, Psychological Health.

Introduction

Migrants and immigrants always go through the process of acculturation after migrating to the destination land. They often get confused between home and host land culture as in the beginning period of their migration they are emotionally attached with their heritage culture but after some time they start enjoying the new culture, hence, adopt and follow host land culture while preserving heritage culture. Some Indian immigrants in US do not agree to accept host land culture and thus distance themselves from the host land's cultural community. Some Indian-American immigrants give much preference to host land culture thus slowly they stop following their heritage culture. And some Indian-American immigrants tend to reject cultures of both the lands especially the marginalised community who face abundant issues in their homeland and host land. Marginalised community includes LGBTQ individuals, racially marginalised group etc. Various social and cultural differences between home and host land create an environment of confusion between first, second, third and other generation immigrants which create differences in their acculturative system and thus lead to mental health issues and depression in immigrants.

The paper tries to elaborate the issues of Indian queer immigrants in US and the factors of their acculturation process and how it has affected their psychological health. It tries to analyse the lives of Indian queer individuals in homeland and host land and how social and cultural differences have affected their lives and acculturation system. Studying their acculturation process is important to make a better understanding of their lives in the home and host land, and how their life is different from Indian heterosexual immigrants in US. And also it will provide a clear image of the differences in the acculturation process of Indian-American queer immigrants and Indian-American immigrants.

Examining Acculturation Methods

Studies on acculturation have come to the result that it has direct link with socio-cultural and psychological life of migrants and immigrants (Zhang & Moradi, 2013). Migrants often acculturate

the dominant culture while preserving their own culture in the host land. Dow (2011) says that the host land's culture becomes more powerful and dominating on migrants that they gradually adopt host land's culture. Host land's culture have its impact on migrants' psychological aspects that they not only follow host land's culture but starts giving much preference to host land's culture, as a result they slowly start forgetting their own culture and fail to pass on to the next generation.

Acculturation creates a state of confusion, anxiety and depression in migrants and immigrants. They lose root land's cultural identity and form new identity from their host land's culture which in the beginning they find difficult to adopt. After adopting host land's culture they feel separated from their root land's culture (Dow, 2011).

Dow (2011), Kuo (2014), Berry (2010) and Schwartz et al. (2010) elaborate four types of acculturation: integration, assimilation, separation and marginalization (p. 222; p. 21; p. 7). Integration is when migrants and immigrants take both root and host land's culture parallel. Assimilation is when they give importance to host land's culture than their homeland's culture. Separation is when they preserve and follow only their homeland's culture and reject host land's culture. Marginalization is when they show less interest in both home and host land's culture.

Berry (2010) says that in the four acculturating types the most preferred type among immigrants is integration. Immigrants wish to balance between their heritage culture and host land culture, they show their interest equally in both the cultures. Hence, they manage in learning language and culture of host land while preserving their homeland's culture and succeed in expanding relations with both homeland and host land's cultural community.

Integration and assimilation have good impact on migrants and immigrants psychological health, whereas, marginalization and separation have negative impact on their psychological health (Dow, 2011; Schwartz et al., 2010). Immigrants who come under the marginalization acculturating type have very poor relations with both home and host land's cultural community, thus have limited friends in the host land and struggle to face depression and forlorn (Berry, 2010).

Titzmann et al. (2010) say that migrants and immigrants who have friends in their ethnic community and host land community have good psychological and socio-cultural aspects. By engaging in host land culture they can save themselves from discrimination and by being in their ethnic community they can have emotional support in their adverse times in the host land such as nostalgia, lonesome, etc.

Interaction with host land's native individuals and community plays big role in learning host land's language and culture. If immigrants and native people of host land do not pay much attention in interacting then it becomes difficult for immigrants to acquire new language and culture (Erten et al., 2018).

Differences in Acculturation Process of First, Second and Third Generation Immigrants in United States

Generally, first generation immigrants prefer integration and separation kind of acculturation when they follow cultures of home and host land or follow only homeland culture. But it is different with second and third generation immigrants; they mostly choose to follow host land culture due to their connection with host land culture since their childhood. Most of the second and third generation immigrants are brought up in the company of host land's native children which gradually make them to reject their heritage culture due to frequent contact with host land culture. Often parents and children make arguments because of the differences in their acculturation system (Birman, 2010; Mesoudi, 2018).

Differences between first, second and third generation immigrants include language differences. First generation immigrants, most of the times, use their native language for making conversation with their family members but many second and third generation immigrants use host land's

language for conversation which make them less interested in learning their native language. Immigrants in US easily learn its language as English language is the second official language in many countries of the world. Second and third generation immigrants in US speak English with more fluency and easily learn American accent which is not same with the first generation immigrants. Many first generation immigrants in US may not speak English language with fluency in the beginning period of their migration and it may also happen that even after residing in US for many years they cannot speak with fluency and learn American accent of English language (Birman, 2010; Zhang & Moradi, 2013).

Most of the Indian diasporic parents believe in arranging their children's marriage in Indian community. First generation Indian immigrants teach Indian culture and tradition to second and third generation Indian immigrants. They also try to be surrounded by the Indian community in the foreign land to celebrate festivals and occasions such as marriages, etc.

Problems arise between family members when their acculturation system differs, individuals who follow integration type of acculturation can cope with other members of the family but individuals who follow separation and marginalisation form of acculturation cannot easily cope with other members of the family and thus the conflict arise between family members due to differences in their acculturation forms (Birman, 2010).

To maintain the harmony between family members in the host land, it is important that second and third generation immigrants should be taught their native language since their childhood. It is also important to preserve and retain their heritage cultural identity. Likewise, to form fruitful conversation between family members especially with second and third generation immigrants, first generation immigrants should show their interest and concern in learning host land's native language and culture while maintaining their heritage culture and language (Birman, 2010).

Schwartz et al. (2010) says that individuals who have migrated to other countries in their early childhood are better foreign language learners comparing to those individuals who have migrated in their adult or old ages. Hence, he compares first generation immigrants who have migrated in their early childhood with second generation immigrants. He also suggests that bicultural or integration type of acculturation is the healthy kind of acculturation which helps in balancing immigrants' psychological health.

Explicating Challenging Factors of Indian Queer Diaspora in United States

Gnanadass (2013) argues that Indian diasporas in America face racial and cultural issues. They are discriminated on the basis of their Indian cultural practices and racial identity. They are bullied and punished in the academic and job sectors for performing and following their Indian culture and tradition such as celebrating Indian festivals, enjoying Indian cuisine, performing Hindu rituals such as fasting, etc. According to Gnanadass (2013) some of the respondents have claimed that they were punished for following their Hindu tradition and culture in their schools and were asked to bring their parents. They were not only punished for following and preserving their Indian culture but were also blamed for incidents that were happened in the school campus. He also argues that not only Indian diasporic individuals were targeted but other South-Asian individuals were also targeted for their racial identity. Due to all these discriminations they are mostly included in the groups that have been marginalised and separated from the society (Chatterjee, 2014).

Indian queer individuals in US face both kinds of stressors, many Indian queer individuals hide their sexuality from their family and Indian community and on the other hand, they also reveal their sexuality to limited individuals, groups and communities which stuck them in two different lives. Hiding their sexuality from their family also affects their homosexual relationship that in

many cases Indian queer individuals were left by their American queer partners (Sandil et al., 2015).

Often out of concern, parents of homosexual children try to put them in the company of those individuals who follow the traditional norms of the society (Chatterjee, 2014). Due to Indian cultural and traditional values most of the Indian queer individuals think that their sexuality should be suppressed to sustain their social, cultural and religious beliefs (Sandil et al., 2015). In some of the cases when queer individuals suffer from the social and cultural discrimination for long, they attempt suicide or go through depression.

Queer individuals do not find space for themselves in the social structure of heterosexual society. To create space for themselves in the society they either hide their sexual orientation or obtain heterosexual identity. Failing to follow any of these alienates them from the social and cultural environment of the society.

Due to their sexual orientation they are already in need of support and care from their family, friends and society but if the alternate situation occurs then there are more chances that they will go through depression, which in severe cases can lead to suicide (Meyer, 2003).

Kruzykowski (2007) argues that in many societies homosexuality and divorce is unacceptable thus he says that both come under same sphere because homosexuals and divorcees are unacceptable individuals in the society especially in South-Asian countries. Though Indian society has changed gradually and started normalising divorce in some societies and communities.

Acculturation Process of Indo-American Queer Diaspora

Studies on acculturation show that some immigrants become flexible in their socio-cultural attitudes. Flexibility in adopting new culture changes their socio-cultural and psychological behaviour towards homosexuality. Some of the immigrant parents easily accept their children's homosexuality due to their acculturation aspects (Soehl, 2016).

Aged first generation immigrants are less likely to accept homosexuality if their origin land do not allow homosexuality. They are more likely to adopt separation form of acculturation which does not expose them to destination land's culture. So, they limit themselves with the rigid thoughts of their origin land's cultural values and norms. Education is an important factor as much as interaction with host land's natives is important to develop host land's socio-cultural attitudes. Flexibility in accepting homosexuality comes with proper education and knowledge on the concept of homosexuality, queer rights and human rights (Soehl, 2016).

Fuks et al. (2018) argue that immigrants experience numerous problems in the starting period of their migration. As a consequence of their ethnic identity especially South Asian identity in countries like US faces problems related to social interaction and integration. Queer immigrants face more challenges than heterosexual immigrants; they are double or multiple marginalised communities in the host land. Their ethnic, immigrant and queer identity marginalises them in the host land. Due to their marginalised identity they lack social interaction with host land's native community and also lack connection with their homeland's cultural community. To form individual homosexual identity in the host land, they form collective identity by connecting with other queer individuals and community.

Queer immigrants' acculturation process deals with their cultural, sexual and gender identity development (Fuks et al., 2018, p. 306). Queer individuals in countries where homosexuality is not accepted migrate to countries where homosexuality and homosexual marriages are legal. Their migration to other countries occurs due to heterosexist culture in their homeland which has pushed them to acculturate western culture. Most of the queer individuals start following and admiring western culture, even before their migration, due to its flexibility in accepting homosexuality.

Thus, according to Fuks et al. (2018), acculturation process for queer community starts before their migration while heterosexual individuals' acculturation process starts after migration.

After migrating to host land queer come across various socio-cultural problems which affect their psychological health and raise social and cultural issues such as racism, discrimination etc. Most of the queer immigrants adopt marginalisation form of acculturation due to rejection from their homeland culture and host land culture. Thus, they lack social interaction with the native community of the host land and they also separate themselves from homeland's culture (Fuks et al., 2018).

Sandil et al., (2015) argue that many Indian and other South-Asian queer individuals have adopted American culture to strengthen their connections with American queer individuals and also to boost their self-esteem which they have lacked due to their Indian and South-Asian culture which do not accept homosexuality and defines it as a sin.

Various organisations that fight for the equality of queer community say that to make a place between heterosexual societies, queer individuals should assimilate to heterosexual culture to possess equality in heterosexual society. Organisations that demand for equality for queer community and say that homosexuals are also like heterosexuals, such statements, according to Ferry (2012) further provide power to the dominant culture. She also says that assimilating to heterosexual culture does not create platform to queer individuals to form queer identity.

Indo-American queer individuals go through some acculturative challenges such as they have to pretend to be heterosexual (if they have not revealed their sexuality) in their home land and sometimes they have to hide their racial identity in host land to prevent discrimination and racism. If they choose integration kind of acculturation then they have to disguise their sexuality according to their home and host land culture. If they choose assimilation kind of acculturation then they have to completely reject their homeland culture while residing between host land cultural communities. If they choose separation kind of acculturation then they have to reject host land culture and accept homeland culture which they have already rejected while residing in the homeland due to its inflexible behaviour in accepting homosexuality. And if they choose marginalisation kind of acculturation then they have to be with queer community to form queer cultural identity which rejects the dominant heterosexual culture of home and host land societies (Singh et al., 2006).

Singh et al. (2006) elucidate that for Asian-American queer individuals queer identity is more important than Asian-American identity. Indian, South-Asian and Asian queer individuals migrate and immigrate to US to form their sexual identity so, it becomes important for them to interact, communicate and join queer community in US to form individual and collective queer identity.

Indo-American queer individuals who follow their homeland culture rarely reveal their sexual orientation in public provinces rather they choose to reveal their sexual orientation to close ones who have positive thoughts about homosexuality. Indo-American queer individuals who follow American culture disclose their sexuality publically but not soon after their immigration. They still go through homophobic situations even after their immigration unless they become confident in revealing their sexuality publically. Most of the Indo-American queer immigrants take time to reveal their sexuality to their parents and other family members. But American queer individuals reveal their sexuality to their family, friends and society (Singh et al. 2006).

Conclusion

The ideal acculturation type is integration type; it balances the culture of home and host land and provides better psychological health to immigrants. Integration form of acculturation further develops social and cultural relations of countries through their immigrants which help in

developing healthier political relations between countries. Due to different social and cultural experiences between Indian heterosexual and homosexual individuals, their acculturation process also differs. Most of the Indo-American immigrants try to preserve their Indian culture while following American culture but many Indo-American queer immigrants do not look to develop Indian-American identity rather focus on developing their sexual identity, thus, focus on queer culture by joining queer community which may differ from the dominant heterosexual cultures of India and US. Thus, most of the Indo-American immigrants especially first generation immigrants follow integration acculturation form and Indo-American queer immigrants follow marginalisation acculturation form. Indo-American Second, third and other generation immigrants mostly follow assimilation acculturation form. Due to acculturation challenges, Indo-American queer immigrants face more psychological health issues than Indo-American heterosexual immigrants. Positive changes towards marginalised community in home and host land can prevent acculturation stressors on immigrants which will further prevent their psychological health issues. Such changes can also increase the rate of integration acculturation form which will benefit social, cultural, political and economic features of countries.

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