

ROOTS & ROUTES

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Figure indentured labour: Microsoft Copilot. (2024). Indian indentured labour. Microsoft Copilot.

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GRFDT
Global Research Forum on
Diaspora and Transnationalism

Editor's Note



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Dear Readers,

Greetings!

The two interconnected areas that hold significant importance in shaping the global landscapes are – the Girmitiya and the role of Diaspora in development. These two are the major focus of current Roots & Routes edition.

The term “Girmitiya” refers to Indian indentured labour who were sent to work on plantations in various colonies during the early 19th and 20th centuries. The contract labourers were supplied to work in the plantation after the abolition of slavery. Despite the passage of time, the legacy of “Girmitiya” remains deeply within the fabric of Indian culture and tradition. Their descendent continues to follow the same culture and tradition what their forefathers has taken with them as their home culture. Their festivals, cuisine and music bear the imprint of Indian culture.

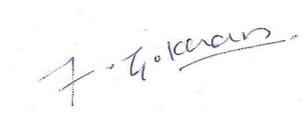
The role of diaspora in the development of their home country is another important theme that cannot be overstated. The diasporic communities contribute significantly to the economic development through remittances. They contribute in providing knowledge and skills. Moreover, they also play the key role in the bi-lateral relationship and politics of both native and host countries.

Both the areas highlight the impact of migration on societies and their contribution to the native and host countries.

The current issue covers the report by **Prof. Onkar Nath Upadhyay** on International Interdisciplinary and Multilingual Seminar on *Girmitiya Descendants: Past, Present & Future*, sponsored by the Indian Council of Social Sciences Researches (ICSSR), was organized by the Centre for Indian Diaspora & Cultural Studies in association with the Department of English and Modern European Languages, University of Lucknow from January 30, 2024, to February 01, 2024. The issue also covers an article “Diaspora as an Investment Factor in Nigeria” by **Ahmed Murtala Hassan**. The article focuses on the role and contribution of Nigerian Diaspora in the country’s development. Both these contributions highlight the importance and role of migration and diaspora engagement.

We invite readers to participate and share their experiences with us to have a meaningful engagement. You can communicate with us through email at

editorinchief@grfdt.com. We wish you happy reading and look forward to your suggestions and comments.

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "F. Khan" with a horizontal line underneath the name.

Feroz Khan

GIRMITIYA DESCENDANTS: PAST, PRESENT & FUTURE

AN INTERNATIONAL INTERDISCIPLINARY AND MULTILINGUAL SEMINAR

A BRIEF REPORT

An International Interdisciplinary and Multilingual Seminar on *Girmitiya Descendants: Past, Present & Future*, sponsored by the Indian Council of Social Sciences Researches (ICSSR), was organized by the Centre for Indian Diaspora & Cultural Studies in association with the Department of English and Modern European Languages, University of Lucknow from January 30, 2024, to February 01, 2024. In broader visions, the conference focused on the unheard voices of indentured laborers, known as ‘Girmitiya’, who were transported from different parts of India, especially from Eastern Uttar Pradesh and Bihar, to the countries like Mauritius, Fiji, Surinam, South Africa, Trinidad, Jamaica, Guyana etc in between 1836 to 1920. They were hired on a temporary agreement of five years, giving them the hope of a ‘Dreamland’, a land that is full of luxury, opportunity, and possibility, a land that can change their life completely. Finally, their dream land was vanished during their journey in which they were treated as cattle. They became helpless, toiling in the foreign land ceaselessly to survive. Therefore, it was very important to organize a seminar like this to navigate deeply into such breathtaking incidents that happened in the past and also to highlight their role in the better prospect of their own as well as to present India as Vishva-Guru.

The objectives of this seminar spanned historical exploration, aiming to scrutinize the socio-economic, cultural, and political factors that underpinned the Girmitiya migration. Delving into the indenture period, the focus extended to the understanding of the experiences of Girmitiya Communities, encompassing their trials, tribulations, and resilience. Transitioning to contemporary times, the seminar aimed to analyze the present-day socioeconomic and political dynamics within Girmitiya Communities globally. An exploration

of challenges and accomplishments in preserving Girmitiya cultural heritage and identity formed another crucial facet. The significance of cultural preservation and identity maintenance among Girmitiya Descendants were underscored, examining the evolution of tradition, languages, and customs across generations. Community empowerment caught special attention, involving an assessment of present socio-economic challenges faced by the Girmitiya Community and the discussion of strategies for empowerment. Additionally, successful community initiatives contributing to the well-being and development of Girmitiya Descendants were highlighted. Prospects, especially the aspirations of and goals of the younger generation within Girmitiya communities were explored. The role of global connection, diaspora networks, and transnational collaboration in shaping the future of Girmitiya descendants was also a matter of discussion.

The significance of this seminar lay in the scholarly engagement of different scholar, exchanging their ideas and methodologies related to the Girmitiya Study. The facilitation of collaborations between academic institutions, community organizations, and individuals interested in Girmitiya history and diaspora studies was also a key objective. Moreover, the seminar actively engaged in raising public awareness about the historical significance of Girmitiya migration and advocated for the recognition of Girmitiya’s contributions to the societies they settled in, emphasizing the imperative need for preserving their stories and heritage. In short, the International Seminar on Girmitiya Descendants aspired to create a comprehensive and inclusive space for dialogue, collaboration, and knowledge exchange, fostering a profound understanding of the past, present, and future of Girmitiya communities worldwide.

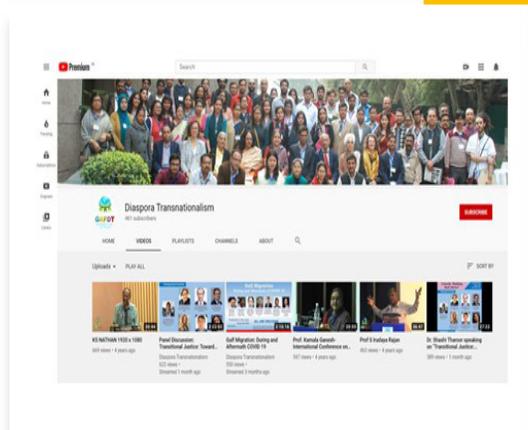
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To make this conference a sky-high success, it built communication with different dignitaries living in different countries. Besides the wish of our honorable Vice Chancellor Prof. Alok Kumar Rai, the aspirations of national as well as international speakers namely Ajay Chaubey, Ajay Chhabra, Amit Mishra, Deepak Pandey, Deepti Aggarwal, Dennis Ramdahin Indrani Rampersad, Jyoti Sharma, Krishna Maharaj, Nutan Pandey, Pankaj Jain, Rajneshwar Deo Lal, Satish Rai, S.H. Singh, Sunanda Verma, Vimlesh Kanti Verma were present. Besides, there were 150 paper presenters on both physical and virtual modes across India which got an overwhelming response from scholars and professors.

The session was inaugurated with the lighting of the lamp, succeeded by a welcome address delivered by Prof. M. Priyadarshini, Head, Department of English and Modern European Languages, University of Lucknow, who addressed cordially and wished the event a grand success. Her talk was followed by Prof. Nishi Pandey, Professor of Eminence who encapsulated the objectives of this conference. The books of Shardhan and Harinandan Singh's *Homogenization in Multiculturalism* and Dr. Satish Rai's *The Age of Truth* were unveiled. Thereafter the keynote lecture of Prof. Surya Prasad Dixit viewed on Hindi Journalism in Girmitya countries. The collaborative talk of Dennis Ramdahin and Dr. Archana Tewari centered their focus on the obituary of Basdeo Pandey, Former Prime Minister, of Trinidad & Tobago. The chief guest address was given by Dr. Amit Mishra. Consequently, there were two consecutive plenary sessions. The first session included the speech of Ajay Chhabra, who shared his joining in a project that had included a Gimit immersive 360° animation experience of an indentured laborer from India. His talk was further elaborated by Dr. Satish Rai who traced his forefathers' root. He addressed the core issues such as the grant-narrative of Colonialist that the descendants of the global girmityas face regarding how the past, present, and future have been presented generally by academics, scholars, and other documenters of global gimit thus far, discussed with special reference to his sixth book, *The Age of Truth-Positioning Global Gimit In Historical Context: A Discourse on the Doctrine of Discovery* (2023). Finally, he offered some practical

solutions and strategies to address these issues. In the second session, Dr. Amit Mishra and Prof. Jha unfolded the role of compulsive nostalgia, certain markers of culture e.g. religion, language, cuisine, etc. to explore the negotiations of girmityas and their descendants to articulate their diasporic identities, and the idea of space as companion in Gimit Diaspora.

The shine of the conference continuously glowed with more rays of hope on the second day, which consisted of two plenary sessions along with another academic session. In the first session of that day, Dr. Indrani Rampersad, an Independent Academician, articulated on Bharatiya Indentured diaspora from the postcolonial perspective. Subsequently, Dr. Rakesh Pandey, editor of *Pravasi Sansar*, highlighted his lecture on the impact of Avadh and Avadhi Diaspora on Girmitya world. In the second plenary session of that day, we had Prof. Vimlesh Kanti Verma, Dr. Sunada Verma, Dr. Deepak Pandey, Dr. Deepti Agarwal, Dr. Jyoti Sharma, and Dr. Nutan Pandey spoke on the relationship between language and identity. The key theme that they all tried to emphasize was – how language determines the identity, existence, and the creation of one community. Last but not least speaker of the day Dr. Avinash Kumar, Deputy Director ICSSR, spelled out the cartographic memory of the Bhojpuri region and their cultural heritage.

The concluding day preserved one plenary session, two academic sessions, and a valedictory session. The main speaker of the plenary session was Dennis Ramdahin who offered his view on the digitalization and statistical analysis of global Indian-indentured emigration records. Another keynote speaker Krishneil Maharaj concerned with diaspora issues faced by younger members of the diaspora. Then the valedictory report was presented by Prof. O.N. Upadhyay, Organizing Secretary and Professor of the Department of English and Modern European Languages, University of Lucknow. The presidential speech was given by Prof. P.S. Shukla, Vice Chancellor, NEHU, Shillong who recapitulated the findings of the seminar. Consequently, Prof. Ranu Uniyal gave formal vote of thanks. The conference came to an end with the national anthem sung by all together.

In a nutshell, this particular seminar had been a groundbreaking platform for unearthing the perilous

history of the Girmitya diaspora. It also created a stage where the exchange of ideas on the Girmitya Study played a pivotal role. The following resolutions were passed in the Seminar:

- To establish Global Girmitya Research Centre
- To declare Indian indentured labour a crime against humanity by the UNESCO;
- To support the digitization of the details of Girmityas across the world in collaboration with the Global Girmitya Association at the level of State Government of Uttar Pradesh.
- To assist the Girmitya descendants to meet their Indian relatives with the help of Govt. of Uttar Pradesh.
- To connect the disconnected with their roots.

- To prepare the platform for presenting India as Vishva Guru, the leader of the world.
- To consider Indian civilization as the oldest civilization of the world.

Prof. Onkar Nath Upadhyay

Organising Secretary

Centre of Indian Diaspora and Culture Studies

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6 Thursday Forum Seminar Series
on Migration and Diaspora



*PAPIIT Project IN302324



Dr. Larisa Lara

Global Diaspora Expert at IOM HQ, Geneva

Diasporas:

*Powerful Communities Driving
Change*

29th February 2024

7:30 pm IST/ 3:00 pm Geneva/ 9:00 am New York/
8:00 am Mexico/ 10:00 am Port of Spain/ 6:00 pm
Dubai



<http://surl.li/qldnr>

*PAPIIT Project IN302324–Diaspora Communication and Diplomacy, Perspectives from Reception Contexts in the Americas, Europe, and Asia”, DGAPA–UNAM



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DIASPORA AS AN INVESTMENT FACTOR IN NIGERIA

Nigerians in the Diaspora have a significant role to play in the development of the country through their remittances, Foreign Direct Investments (FDIs), skills and technology transfer and their professional network in their respective countries of destinations. Remittances from Diaspora to Nigeria are substantial, placing Nigeria as the second highest in Africa and the largest in Sub-Saharan Africa. According to the World Bank's Migration and Development Review, Remittances to Nigeria rose by 11.2% from \$17.21b in 2020 to \$19.2b in 2021. Many countries have established policies and legislations to create an enabling environment for full participation and contribution of Diaspora to their national development. Such countries include, notably India, Israel, China, Pakistan, Mexico, and the Philippines have successfully engaged their Diaspora for rapid development (World Bank, 2011). The African Union through the Declaration of the Global African Diaspora Summit, 2012 emphasized the need to engage the African Diasporas at various levels. Nigeria is a signatory to the Declaration and being Africa's most populous country with the largest Diasporas, ought to effectively implement the Declaration.

In a follow up to domesticate the Global Africa Diaspora policy document, Nigeria undertook efforts to ensure the effective participation of the Diaspora in economic and infrastructural development. Such efforts have included the provision of guidance for medical missions, the Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN) regulation of financial remittances and international money transfer and the Diaspora Bond, managed by the Debt Management Office, developed to raise funds from Nigerians in the Diaspora. As part of the effort to provide an institutional framework for involving the Diaspora in the affairs of the country, the government in 2003 established the Nigerian National Volunteer Service (NNVS), which had the responsibility of facilitating the engagement of the Diaspora in the development process at home. This

effort has now been expanded with the establishment of the Nigerians in Diaspora Commission by the enactment of the Nigerians in Diaspora Commission (Establishment) Act, 2017. The Commission is empowered by the Act to amongst other things, provide a direct link for Nigerians in Diaspora to participate in the development of the nation. In order to facilitate the implementation of the NiDCOM Establishment Act 2017, a National Policy on Diaspora has been provided to offer a comprehensive institutional framework and a strategy for the mobilization and involvement of Nigerians in the Diaspora in the national development process and to address the challenges militating against their participation. Some of these challenges include:

- a. Inadequate diaspora database;
- b. Insufficient information on existing Diaspora data;
- c. Limited coordination of efforts and information relating to the diaspora;
- d. Inadequate environment for diaspora investments;
- e. Poor transfer of technology and capacity arising from inadequate infrastructure and insecurity;
- f. High cost of remittances;
- g. Inadequate data on remittances through informal or alternative channels;
- h. Insufficient information on investment opportunities and information channels for passing across current information;
- i. Time and cost constraints in the provision of services required by the Diaspora;
- j. Hostile environment in the host country; and
- k. Significant brain drains particularly of medical professionals in the health sector.

The National Diaspora Policy (NDP), 2021 is anchored on the existing National Migration Policy (NMP), 2015 and the National Policy on Labour Migration, 2014 in Nigeria. It is further founded to extend the benefits of the National Economic Recovery Growth Plan as well as the Sustainable Development Goals, 2030. The policy was informed also by the huge global presence of the Nigeria in diaspora who are among the most educated and successful of the immigrant population in many countries. A significant percentage of them are professionals with specialization in fields such as medicine, education, information technology, real estate, law, banking, and engineering etc. Nigerians in the Diaspora, especially the professionals, constitute a large pool of well trained, skilled, and experienced human capital; a critical resource that the country requires to drive its technological advancement in the 21st century and beyond. The Policy framework is based on the following guiding principles which are to govern the implementation of the Policy: Partnership, Engagement and Synergy; Mutuality, Empowerment and Reciprocity; Accountability; Integrity; Inclusiveness; Transparency and Communication; Sustainability; and Consistency.

The federal government of Nigeria as part of efforts to engage Nigerians in Diaspora towards the development of the country, announced, at the National Diaspora Day 2022 celebration in Abuja themed, “Diaspora Engagement in a Globally Challenging Time”, a mortgage investment initiative for Nigerians in Diaspora to own estate property across major cities in the country. According to the Federal Mortgage Bank of Nigeria (FMBN), the initiative is imperative for two reasons. On one hand, it is meant to attract more remittances flow into the country, and on the other hand, it is meant to prevent the diaspora Nigerians from being defrauded by estate agents and relatives in the process of acquiring property in Nigeria. The housing schemes are aimed at enabling Nigerians in diaspora to have mortgage accounts, participate in the National Housing Fund (NHF) scheme, access loans up to N50 million, and own homes through certified developers all from the comforts of their locations. The package is available to any Nigerian (above 18)

living in the Diaspora, with evidence of the regular flow of income, with contributions made over a minimum period of one year before being eligible to access the mortgage loan. Subsequently, applicants will register with the NHF through an accredited Primary Mortgage Bank and contribute \$150 (for beneficiaries earning \$3,000 and below monthly), or \$200 (for beneficiaries earning \$3,001 and above, monthly), respectively for a minimum period of a year. In addition, the package includes: 30% down payment, a single-digit interest rate of nine per cent and a payback period of up to 10 years.

The 2022 Diaspora Day in Nigeria was celebrated by NiDCOM in partnership with Palton Morgan Holdings, a real estate firm that focuses on upscaled development to meet the taste of diaspora Nigerians. The firm and its subsidiaries had positioned themselves in the real estate sector as a notable player in the industry for over 12 years, with operations spanning across Lagos, Ogun and Abuja, Nigeria. Over the years, the firm has created and deployed economic strategies that have improved the industry and made the industry more attractive for Nigerians both at home and abroad to invest in their own country. With a track record of over 7,000 housing units and serviced plots delivered and, about 2,000 units still under development, *Palton Morgan Holdings* firm is well positioned as a leader in the industry. It has its vision as an organisation to be a preferred real estate development brand in Africa and beyond.

Recently, as part of its intra-governmental engagement, NiDCOM announced a huge investment valued at 1 billion naira from the Ekiti Diaspora forum, a diaspora organisation of the sons and daughters of the Ekiti State of Western Nigeria. NiDCOM in collaboration with the Ekiti State government has facilitated investment incentives which lead to the approval of 250 hectares of land in Irele Ekiti State for a livestock production farming for the Ekiti Diaspora Forum (EDP). According to EDP, the first phase will be a cattle ranch and a Special Purpose Vehicle (SPV) for the project in the state which is known as Ekiti Kete Livestock Limited established and registered under the Corporate Affairs Commission of Nigeria.

Additional efforts made by NiDCOM to improve engagement between government and the Diaspora include: a project of partnership between NiDCOM and the Africa Development Bank (AfDB) to set up a strategic investment platform to enable sustainable management of the National Diaspora Investment Trust Fund (NDITF); and the Diaspora Data Mapping project, initiative aimed at creating skills mapping of Nigerians in the Diaspora for effective management of human and capital resources, which is to be achieved through the collection of specific demographic characteristics such as their locations and addresses, contacts, duration in the diaspora, among other variables; process and publish accurate statistical information for development purposes.

The impact of diaspora in the economic development of countries can't be over emphasised. It is clear that Nigeria is now set to tap into the human and capital resources of its citizens in the Diaspora. From the information gathered in this article, Nigeria has provided a substantial legal and institutional framework to harness these resources. The project of Diaspora Data Mapping being carried out by NiDCOM is crucial to the

activities of the organisation, it will enable Nigeria to locate the population of its diaspora, their professional capacities, and multiscalar network across the world. Nigeria can tap more political and diplomatic power from its diaspora population that has dual citizenship. This political opportunity can facilitate bilateral and related diplomatic relations between Nigeria and the host countries of its diaspora. The two instances of diaspora investment initiatives reported in this article, the housing scheme and livestock farming projects, provide policy evidence that more commitment from NiDCOM is capable of attracting huge diaspora investment into the country. NiDCOM should collaborate with states and local governments to encourage Nigerians in diaspora to replicate the patriotic and development initiatives of the Ekiti Diaspora Forum and invest in viable sectors of the economy in their respective states of origin in Nigeria.

Ahmed Murtala Hassan



7 Thursday Forum Seminar Series
on Migration and Diaspora



*PAPIIT Project IN302324



Prof. Beatriz Padilla

Director, Institute for the Study of Latin America and the Caribbean (ISLAC), University of South Florida

Refugee women in Europe

Policy issues and challenges



7th March 2024

7:30 pm IST/ 3:00 pm Geneva/ 9:00 am New York/
8:00 am Mexico/ 10:00 am Port of Spain/ 6:00 pm
Dubai/ 9:00 am Florida

Register: <http://surl.li/qtgdf>

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