

Chapter 10

Roots of Identity: Unpacking Memories in Indian and Pakistani Diasporas in the UAE

Sakshi Mathur¹⁸ & Shalini Mittal¹⁹

Abstract

This chapter presents an in-depth analysis of the very complicated interplay of memory and identity formation applicable to the specific population of the Indian and Pakistani diasporas in the United Arab Emirates (UAE). The UAE has one of the largest expatriate populations in the world, and Indians and Pakistanis hold the biggest diasporic communities amongst them. They are also one of the most culturally diverse expatriate communities in the UAE, having brought with them a rich melting pot of traditions, narratives, food, culture and memories that provide a structure to their sense of self in the foreign land. This chapter explores various theoretical frameworks in order to understand the factors that contribute to the formation of hyphenated identity in the diasporic community. The theories also help examine the role of individual and collective memory in shaping the self-perception of diasporic populations in a multicultural society like the UAE. A small section of the chapter also explores the historical context of the Indian and Pakistani diaspora in the UAE. Their shared historical memories still impact the integration process of both communities in the host country. Although this process of integration is fairly seamless, it comes with its own challenges. Some of the biggest challenges explored in this chapter are the navigation between dual identities

18 Sakshi Mathur, Research Scholar, School of Liberal Arts, Bennett University email: sakshi.mats@gmail.com

19 Shalini Mittal, Assistant Professor, School of Liberal Arts, Bennett University email: mittal.shalini2011@gmail.com

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in the diasporic population and cultural integration. An overall understanding of the diaspora population helps promote empathy, tolerance and a more informed citizenry. For both the diaspora population and the host population, this knowledge helps build social cohesion, cultural exchange and diversity.

Keywords: Indian, Pakistani, Diaspora, Expatriate, United Arab Emirates, Memory, Identity

Introduction

*“my mother thinks i’m a living proof of cultural appropriation
but aren’t i a foreigner in my own country
an outsider
but only on the inside”
- Xayaat Muhummed,
The Breast Mountains of All Time Are in Hargeisa*

The above quote is from a poetry book about first-generation diaspora and immigrants (amongst other things). This book is an excellent example of an essential and commendable shift towards increasing representation of diaspora and immigrants in various art, literature, and media forms. The awakening of these marginalised voices slowly makes us aware of the universal threads that connect us all. This is leading to a deeper appreciation of human experiences and the strength that comes from embracing our differences.

Such diaspora groups include the Indian and the Pakistani diaspora in the United Arab Emirates (UAE). The UAE, because of its expatriate-welcoming laws and multicultural settings, has emerged as a global hub, attracting individuals from various nationalities and backgrounds from all over the world. As people seeking better economic opportunities, career growth and a high standard of living flock to the UAE, the country’s culture becomes more diverse and vibrant, forming a perfect cosmopolitan society. According to the official statistics of the UAE government, in 2023, only

11.48% of the entire population of the country constitutes the Emirati population and the remaining 88.52% is the expatriate population. These expatriates are predominantly from India (27.49%), Pakistan (12.69%), Bangladesh (7.40%) and other countries like the Philippines (5.56%), Iran (4.76%), Egypt (4.23%).

As these numbers signify, the Indian and the Pakistani diasporas have the largest communities in the UAE. As a result, they exert a significant influence on the country's sociocultural fabric and economic landscape. Over 3 million Indians are estimated to live in the Emirates. They have significantly contributed to the economic structure of the UAE, resulting in strengthened economic ties between India and the UAE. A range of jobs, from skilled professional jobs in IT, finance and healthcare, to blue-collared jobs like construction work, electrical work and plumbing are all dominated by Indians. This dominance also extends to the integration of Indian culture, festivals, cuisine and art into the sociocultural fabric of the UAE.

As with India, the Pakistani diaspora also holds a prominent position in the multicultural society of the UAE. Pakistan and the UAE share a close cultural affinity, which makes UAE a lucrative choice for Pakistani individuals seeking better job opportunities and improved living standards. Over the years, the Pakistani diaspora has contributed immensely, across a wide array of sectors, including hospitality, medical, trade and manufacturing. They have also managed to establish a strong cultural identity in the UAE. Compared to the Indian diaspora, the Pakistani diaspora has more cultural and religious similarities with the UAE,

As people from countries like India and Pakistan continue to make the UAE their second home, the host country continues to evolve as a dynamic melting pot for expatriates from all over the world. Inclusive UAE policies, and a diverse array of social and cultural events, have helped foster an atmosphere of integration and acceptance, enabling

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individuals from different communities to preserve their traditions while embracing the local way of life.

The air of multiculturalism in the UAE makes it easier for the Indian and Pakistani diaspora (amongst others) to acclimatise to the new country. However, for the diaspora population, the preservation of their cultural identity becomes a paramount concern. They continue to carry a rich bundle of historical, familial and cultural memories from their countries of origin which continues to shape their sense of self and belonging in the UAE. These memories, of ancestral traditions, customs, food, languages, festivals and people help them preserve and celebrate their unique identities while fostering a strong sense of community cohesion. For identity formation in the diaspora population, the impact of such memories is a multifaceted concept.

Specifically for Indians in the UAE, memories of Indian heritage, diverse culinary culture, colourful art, literature and Bollywood films evoke a sense of nostalgia and pride that reinforces their distinct cultural identity. These memories are often also an intergenerational connecting thread. It allows them to cherish and share Indian values and traditions while also adapting to the multicultural and cosmopolitan environment of the UAE.

Similarly, for the Pakistani diaspora, memories are intertwined with a deep connection to their country's rich history, literature and arts that play a crucial role in shaping their identity. Their shared experiences and nostalgia help form a bond that fosters a strong sense of unity among the community members. This bond and sense of unity is also a ground for collective strength that aids in overcoming challenges and adapting to life in a foreign country.

Alongside memories of the homeland, the memories of migration and the challenge of building a life in the UAE also contribute to the identity of both diasporas. The struggles that they face often bring forth a sense of resilience and devotion to maintain their cultural heritage in the rapidly evolving globalised nature of the culture of UAE.

An additional thread of memories that can lead to complex intersections of emotions between the Indian and the Pakistani diaspora are the memories of historical events and political dynamics between India and Pakistan. Both these now-independent countries were once a part of one single nation. The religion-based partition of British India in 1947 resulted in the birthing of two independent countries, India—a Hindu-majority state, and Pakistan—a Muslim majority state. This monumental event was etched in mass violence and displacement and resulted in the uprooting of millions and the claiming of countless lives. Even after the partition, both countries have engaged in multiple wars, skirmishes, religious-based riots and political disagreements and distrust. This historical baggage, along with the memories of partition and grievances between the two countries, can often be intense and could adversely affect the perception and interaction of the diaspora population of both countries. The historical tension has often led to divided loyalties amongst the diaspora communities. At the individual level, some might harbour intense nationalistic sentiments that can create mistrust and segregation between the Indian and Pakistani diaspora communities in the UAE. This segregation can limit cross-cultural interactions and can alter the socio-cultural fabric of the UAE. The conflicted history acts as an origination point for smaller conflicts and differences between the two diasporic communities in the UAE. Such differences include cultural and religious differences, sports rivalries, political differences and economic and business rivalries. Although temporary, such differences can be a source of tension and misunderstandings.

To conclude, memories play a significant role in shaping the identity of the diaspora population in the UAE. This helps them create a sense of unity and belonging, preserving their cultural heritage, navigating challenges, and forging connections with each other. These memories create a sense of unity and belongingness, not just within the UAE but also with each other, contributing to the vibrant and diverse fabric of the UAE's multicultural society.

Theoretical Framework

“I am the shore I left behind as well as the home I return to every evening. The voyage cannot proceed without me.”

- Luisa A. Igloria

Within the context of exploring and elucidating the intricate interplay between memory and identity within the diaspora communities, several theoretical frameworks can be applied. Some of the popular theoretical frameworks such as *Self Memory System*, *Narrative Identity theory*, and *Social Identity Theory* are discussed below.

Social Identity Theory (SIT) was developed in the 1970s by Henri Tajfel and John Turner. This theoretical framework seeks to understand how self-concepts and social behaviour are influenced by membership in social groups. At the same time, it explains the influence of memory on the way individuals recall and interpret their experiences within different social contexts, which in turn shape their social identities. Individuals, especially in the case of the diasporic populations, define themselves based on the social groups they belong to and the group memberships alter their behaviours, attitudes and perceptions towards themselves and the society. Both Indian and Pakistani communities in the UAE have established strong social identities. They have fostered a sense of cultural pride through language schools, religious institutions, and vibrant community centres. These spaces allow individuals to connect with their heritage, celebrate traditions, and build social networks. The social groups formed can be a source of empowerment and resilience, particularly in a foreign environment.

These social groups are categorised based on similarities, such as ethnicity, nationality, religion, gender, age and other such constructs. This social categorisation takes place naturally and forms an important part of one's self-identity. Within the Indian and Pakistani diaspora communities in the UAE, this categorisation can be multifaceted. Individuals might

belong to various groups simultaneously, such as their country of origin, cultural associations, or religious communities. According to SIT, each membership uniquely contributes to the social identity of the individual.

SIT also emphasises the difference between in-groups and out-groups. As the names suggest, in-groups are the groups which individuals belong to and out-groups are groups that individuals do not belong to. Individuals perceive their in-group more positively and naturally develop a sense of loyalty and favouritism towards it, while exhibiting discrimination and prejudice towards the out-groups. By extension, this helps individuals enhance their own self-esteem and maintain a positive social identity. In the case of the diaspora population, strong prejudices and biases against out-groups might also lead to individuals engaging in behaviours that benefit their group. In the quest to differentiate their group positively from other groups, individuals might indulge in conflicting behaviour as well. When it comes to large diasporic communities, as is the case with the Indian and Pakistani diasporic communities in the UAE, they might consider members of the host country as out-group members.

In some cases, an individual's adherence to their social identity of the group is so high that they lose their sense of individual identity, also known as 'depersonalisation'. Depersonalisation further contributes to intergroup conflict and conformity with group norms. However, SIT proposes that individuals often seek a balance between the need to belong to a social group and the need to maintain a distinct personal identity. This balance is imperative for maintaining positive self-esteem and social cohesion.

In the context of SIT, memory is not just an occasional and objective recollection of past events. Instead, memory is understood as a socially constructed process that is shaped by the collective narratives and experiences of the groups to which people belong. Memories are often influenced by stories, shared histories, traditions and the social contexts in which they occur. Group interactions can also influence the way

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people remember and interpret events and that can reinforce narratives. In the case of diaspora communities, memories, identity, and belongingness are especially intertwined. Historical events, shared memories of cultural practices and migration experiences can often reinforce people's sense of belongingness and their connection to their ancestral roots. For example, memories of triumphs, and moments of resilience in the face of struggles, can foster a strong collective identity and a sense of unity within the diaspora population.

For the Indian and Pakistani diasporas in the UAE, memories and interpretation of historical events play an essential role in the identity formation of individuals. The group conflict between them reflects the complex historical and political relationship between the two countries, as well as the diasporas of both countries, present in the UAE. The national identities of India and Pakistan, often intertwined with historical baggage and political rivalry, add another layer of complexity. Despite shared cultural and linguistic roots, national narratives can shape perceptions and create an "us vs. them" mentality. These group conflicts can become especially aggravated during the events of national or cultural pride or sports rivalries (e.g., cricket). High-stake cricket matches between the two countries can lead to competitive sentiments and passionate discussions. However, it is important to recognize that national identity is not monolithic, and individuals within each community may hold nuanced views and varying degrees of attachment to their home country.

Although there are examples of conflicts between Indians and Pakistanis in the UAE, they often co-exist peacefully and have respectful interactions. The credit for this peaceful co-existence also goes to the UAE government which promotes harmony among its diverse expatriate population. However, the UAE's unique demographics, with a majority expatriate population, present both challenges and opportunities for social integration. The government's multicultural policies and emphasis on tolerance create a relatively open environment for diverse communities to

coexist. But, navigating social hierarchies and power dynamics within the broader society can be a complex task for members of the Indian and Pakistani diaspora.

Self-Memory System (SMS) is another theoretical framework that attempts to understand the complex interplay between memory and identity. It was developed by cognitive psychologists Susan Nolen-Hoeksema, C. Davis, and J. Larson (Conway & Pleydell-Pearce, 2000). Through this framework, they focused on understanding the contribution of autobiographical memories to the formation and maintenance of the concept of self.

The SMS proposes that people construct and maintain their self-concept through the organisation and retrieval of autobiographical memories. Alternatively, we can say that memory is viewed as a database of the self. In the context of the diaspora population, an extra layer of the context of living away from the country of origin gets added to autobiographical memories. The diaspora population often struggles to maintain a balance between cultural adaptation of the host country and maintaining ties to their roots in their home country, and this balance in turn affects the formation of their hyphenated identity. For the Indian and Pakistani diaspora, autoethic consciousness plays a crucial role in negotiating the complexities of living between two cultures. Most individuals have developed a more fluid and complex sense of self, incorporating elements of both their heritage and adopted home.

Autobiographical memories are an individual's memories of specific events that they have experienced. These memories are often associated with significant life events, emotions, and contexts. According to the SMS, such memories are extremely important in forming and updating the self-concept. In the case of the members of the diaspora population, memories of traditions, significant cultural experiences and customs from their country of origin contribute greatly to their cultural identity. Cultural identity helps to maintain a connection to one's home ground, which

is an important part of the concept of self. For example, strong event memories of cultural celebrations, weddings, and religious festivals solidify the sense of belonging and shared identity within the diaspora. These memories contribute to the transmission of traditions across generations.

Self-concept, according to the SMS, is an ever-changing and dynamic construct. This construct is highly influenced by the activation and retrieval of relevant autobiographical memories. For the Indian and Pakistani diaspora populations, autobiographical memory plays an important role in cultural adaptation as well. As people interact with individuals from new cultural backgrounds and go through new experiences, they create new memories that shape their cultural identity and eventually affect their ever-evolving concept of self. Autobiographical memories also influence people's perception of themselves in the diasporic setting. Memories of experiences shared with other members of the diaspora population can help form a sense of belonging and solidarity with the community and can contribute to shared diasporic identity. Similarly, nostalgic memories can evoke strong emotional responses among diasporic individuals. The self-concept is also influenced by nostalgic memories, leading to a stronger attachment to the cultural identity and a desire to preserve and celebrate heritage. Self-memories can also influence how individuals interact with their social groups. For example, Individuals with strong positive memories of their cultural heritage may be more likely to actively participate in community events and contribute to the preservation of traditions.

Another aspect of autobiographical memory defined by SMS is the reflective self-appraisal nature of the memory. People tend to incorporate feedback and evaluation from others into their concept of self. When memories involve interaction and feedback from loved ones, they play a role in shaping how individuals perceive themselves based on external evaluation. The sense of agency fostered by the SMS can motivate members of the said diaspora to strive for success and contribute positively to their communities and

the UAE society. Memories of overcoming challenges also help bolster resilience and adaptability. The SMS also points out the importance of maintaining a sense of continuity in the concept of self, over time. The autobiographical memories help create a narrative that connects past experiences to the present, contributing to a stable and continuous sense of self. Additionally, memories related to historical narratives of migration and resilience can provide a sense of continuity and meaning in the face of displacement. Understanding the collective journey can empower individuals to navigate any other challenges faced by them.

SMS is an excellent framework that provides great insights into the complex relationship between memory and identity. Especially in the context of the population diaspora, it offers a nuanced understanding of the interaction of autobiographical memories and cultural identity. Personhood narratives, shaped by both individual experiences and broader cultural narratives, are continuously crafted and re-crafted within the diaspora. These narratives, in turn, influence how individuals view themselves and their place in the host country and the world.

Narrative identity theory (NIT) is another theoretical framework that attempts to understand identity formation in relation to memories. This theory focuses on the construction of a sense of self and identity through the formation and interpretation of personal narratives and life stories. NIT is a psychological framework that was developed by Dan P. McAdams and has taken inspiration from the works of psychologists like Eric Erikson (McAdams, AdlerJ, 2010). Similar to SMS, this theory also suggests that our identities are dynamic and ever-evolving narratives.

For NIT, the stories that we tell about ourselves are of the utmost importance. These personal stories help us form a coherent narrative of our experiences, relationships and life events. This narrative further helps shape self-perception and identity. Furthermore, a coherent connection has been established between narrative formation, personal

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stories and memory, through various studies in the field of psychology and neuroscience. For example, Bartlett, in their study, suggested that memory is not a passive process but a collection of narratives of our personal experiences and cultural expectations (Bartlett, 1932). In this context, for Indian, Pakistani and diaspora populations from other countries, the UAE acts as a diverse, multicultural ground where they get a chance to explore and construct a narrative that drives their hyphenated identity. The construction of this narrative identity is influenced by societal, interpersonal and cultural factors. Many members of the diaspora share stories of leaving their home countries, often driven by economic aspirations or political turmoil. These narratives highlight sacrifice, resilience, and hope, shaping their understanding of themselves as individuals who have overcome challenges and built new lives.

An important element of NIT is the idea of agency and authorship. It suggests that we are the protagonist in our story, and we choose the events and experiences that shape our narratives. We have full control over the interpretation and meaning of these experiences. A good example in the case of a diaspora population might be the professional and economic narratives formed by individuals who migrate for economic opportunities. Their narratives might highlight the pursuit of financial stability, upward mobility and better job opportunities.

Narrative identity theory emphasizes the importance of individuals having agency in constructing their own stories. The diaspora can utilize storytelling platforms, community projects, and artistic expressions to reclaim their narratives and assert their place within the UAE's social fabric. When we hold the agency of our memories and narratives, our identities become more coherent. A more logically developed narrative helps individuals make sense of their past, present and future, leading to a deeper understanding of self. For the diaspora population, these narratives also have stories of migration, cultural heritage, family ties, and aspirations for a better life integrated into them. A unified narrative

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for the Indian and Pakistani diasporas in the UAE serves as an anchor to their cultural roots and helps develop a sense of belongingness within them. The Indian and Pakistani diasporas often maintain ties with their home countries and act as bridge-builders between the UAE and their countries of origin. Even in the UAE, both Indians and Pakistanis form very tight-knit communities, providing a strong support system. These communities contribute to the construction of narratives that emphasise shared experiences, common values, and a sense of belonging. Having said that, they also take up the challenge to adapt to the new cultural context. Their narratives also reflect their experiences of navigating cultural differences, stereotypes, and potential instances of discrimination. The challenges they face shape their narratives of resilience, cultural pride, and a desire to challenge misconceptions. Additionally, stories of professional achievements and entrepreneurial ventures within the UAE are common within both communities. These narratives not only celebrate individual accomplishments but also contribute to a collective sense of pride and empowerment, showcasing the diaspora's contributions to the UAE's economic and social development.

The NIT explains that people indulge in redemptive narratives to find meaning and growth from challenges and negative experiences. However, Individuals may face internal conflict when reconciling narratives of their home countries with their experiences in the UAE. This can lead to a sense of identity confusion or the need to develop compartmentalized narratives for different contexts. Stereotypes or negative narratives about Indians and Pakistanis in the UAE can challenge their self-perceptions and sense of belonging. In this case, counternarratives that highlight positive contributions and resilience become crucial in combating prejudice and promoting positive identity construction. This redemptive narrative offers an opportunity for personal development, positive change and resilience even in the face of difficulties.

Historical Context of Indian and Pakistani Diasporas in the UAE

“Sometimes we feel we straddle two cultures; at other times, that we fall between two stools.”

– Salman Rushdie, Imaginary Homelands: Essays and Criticism

Indian and Pakistani diaspora populations have a strong historical background in the UAE. Their presence in the country is closely tied to the economic development and labour needs of the UAE, starting particularly from the latter half of the 20th century.

India has always had connections with the Gulf countries because of trade practices and maritime activities. However, the most significant movement of Indian labour to the UAE started in the 20th century. One important historical event that marks this movement is the discovery of oil in the UAE. Following this discovery in the 1950s, there was an oil boom leading to rapid economic growth and infrastructure development. In the UAE, this sudden and fast-paced development created a demand for different types of labour, ranging from construction workers to professionals. Indians from different regions and backgrounds started to flock to the UAE in search of better employment opportunities. Although this migration was initially temporary, over time the pattern expanded and people from all sorts of career backgrounds started to move to the UAE. From construction workers and transportation service workers to doctors, engineers and information technology specialists, everyone wanted the best of everything that the UAE had to offer.

Similarly, Pakistani migrants also began to move to the UAE during the oil boom era. The demand for labour was growing so rapidly in the UAE that not just Indians and Pakistanis, but people from all over the world, were moving to the country. Just like the Indian migrants, Pakistanis from various backgrounds started to enter the UAE. From labourers, drivers, domestic helpers and support staff to an

educated workforce including engineers, doctors and other professionals, these migrants started to contribute to the UAE's development. Along with the contribution towards the UAE's economic development, these migrants also have been sending remittances²⁰ back to their home countries. These remittances became an important source of foreign exchange for both India and Pakistan.

While the involvement of the Indian and Pakistani diasporas has significantly impacted the economic structure of the UAE, the cultural landscape of the country has also been highly influenced by the diaspora population from India and Pakistan.

The unique environment of the UAE has given the Indian and Pakistani diasporas an open stage to develop distinct identities inspired by various social, cultural and historical factors. The primary factor that ties the entire system together is *economic opportunities*. Historically, the main reason for Indians and Pakistanis to migrate to the UAE has been the need to seek better economic conditions and better employment options. This shared experience of seeking employment and sending remittances home fosters a sense of solidarity and identity among the diaspora population. Moreover, the economic success achieved by many individuals from the diaspora community has led to a positive image of the UAE.

Another such factor is the *cosmopolitan outlook* adopted by the UAE. The Indian and Pakistani diaspora community is exposed to a number of cultures from around the world. This leads to a more integrated community where individuals have the ability to adapt to diverse surroundings. Such an environment also results in cross-cultural learning and exchanges, shaping a unique mixture of identities. Due to their cosmopolitan outlook, the UAE is very tolerant and *accepting towards various religious and social practices*. The presence of religious institutions like mosques and temples has played

20 When migrants send home part of their earnings in the form of either cash or goods to support their families, these transfers are known as workers' or migrant remittances.

an important role in creating a sense of community and preserving different cultural and religious practices. Indian and Pakistani festivals like Diwali, Eid and Independence Day for both countries are also celebrated in the UAE. These celebrations provide a platform for the diaspora population to come together and strengthen their hyphenated identity. In addition, the Indian and Pakistani diasporas have been able to establish a social organisation that further reinforces their sense of identity by providing them with support and networking opportunities.

Cultural integration has also impacted *language and education systems* in the UAE. Acceptance of languages like Urdu is an important cultural anchor for all Pakistani and Indian diaspora populations. Many successful individuals from this section have invested in the education of themselves and their children. This helps preserve their linguistic and cultural heritage while also adapting to the local education system.

With the growth of the diaspora population in the UAE, there is an entirely new generation born in the country with a hyphenated identity. This younger generation often has limited exposure to their homeland's culture and is more likely to be acculturated to their local customs and norms. However, they also experience the sense of being different from others due to the difference in their heritage and cultural roots.

Both the Indian and Pakistani diasporas in the UAE have managed to develop a strong and significant presence in their host country. Their hyphenated identities have also evolved, especially in response to the multicultural and cosmopolitan setting of the UAE. The shared experiences of Indians and Pakistanis, their economic contributions and their cultural connections have led to the development of diverse but robust communities that continuously shape the social structure of the UAE.

Indian and Pakistani diaspora communities in the UAE have a rich history of migration and the cultural heritage of their home countries is deeply intertwined with their sense of belonging and identity. The memories of these historical

events play an important role in preserving the individual's cultural roots, even in a foreign land.

Historical memories of their respective homeland act as a bridge between the past and the present, which helps individuals in the diaspora maintain a strong connection with their cultural and ethnic backgrounds. This connection is vital for preserving traditions, languages, customs, and values that might otherwise fade away over time. These memories also serve as a repository of collective knowledge about traditions, rituals, festivals, and practices. It allows older generations to pass down these traditions to younger generations, ensuring the continuity of cultural practices that define their heritage.

The memories of the challenges faced and their historical journey help the diaspora population to develop a stronger sense of belonging. Historical memories help to create a common narrative that holds the diaspora community together. This feeling of connection to this shared narrative helps foster a sense of solidarity and unity within the diaspora community. By reflecting on their struggles and achievements from the past, people belonging to the same community can find common ground and build supportive networks.

Historical memories and language also share a special relationship. Memories play a significant role in passing down and maintaining languages that might decline in usage as the second-generation diaspora merges into the local culture of the UAE. Preserving the native language is imperative, as it is a carrier of cultural knowledge and therefore helps us preserve our cultural roots. These memories and the association with the native language also influence the continuation of cultural celebrations, such as religious festivals and cultural events. The celebrations provide the diaspora communities with a chance to come together and reinforce their shared identity. They also offer a relatively fun platform to raise awareness among younger generations about their ancestors' experiences, struggles and achievements. This in turn helps shape a more comprehensive understanding of their heritage, fostering a sense of pride and appreciation.

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Historical memories also inspire artistic expression in the form of literature, music, dance and visual arts. Diaspora artists from India and Pakistan may produce art inspired by their historical background to create meaningful and impactful work that reflects their cultural roots. Most historical memories are an amalgamation of stories of resilience, determination and perseverance. Sharing these stories helps to develop significant values and ethics across generations, encouraging people to uphold their ancestral principles.

As discussed above, historical memories are an important tool for preserving cultural roots. However, it also helps make the process of adaptation and integration easier. It acts as a safety net for the diaspora communities while they try to blend their cultural heritage with the host country's culture, creating a new fusion that enriches both sides. It enables the transmission of traditions, strengthens the sense of belonging, fosters community cohesion, and serves as a foundation for the continued celebration and preservation of their rich cultural heritage.

Challenges and Opportunities in Diaspora Identity Formation

“Who am I but someone others define? It’s easier to be a stereotype. It hurts when you are yourself.”

- Trang Thanh Tran, She Is a Haunting

The UAE is not only home to the largest Indian and Pakistani diasporas but is also considered one of the best host countries. Additionally, both Indians and Pakistanis contribute significantly to the country's economy and society. However, the Indian and Pakistani diasporas often face unique challenges, especially those related to dual identities and cultural integration. They struggle to maintain a balance between their original cultural identity and the need to integrate into the local Emirati culture.

Individuals in the Indian and Pakistani diasporas may feel torn between their roots and their desire to embrace the Emirati culture. They often struggle to maintain a balance between upholding the cultural elements of their homeland and adapting to the ones from the host land. One of the most significant barriers to this integration can be language. Usually, the South Asian community in the UAE speaks English, however, maintaining their native languages (Hindi, Urdu, etc.) and learning Arabic for better interaction with the local population can be difficult for them. Language can act as a barrier for the Indian and Pakistani diaspora communities while building connections with locals and other expatriate communities. Additionally, the distinct social norms and cultural practices in the UAE may differ from what Indians and Pakistanis are accustomed to in their home countries.

Along with sociocultural integration, workplace integration can also be challenging for the diaspora population. Working with different management styles and getting adjusted to different communication norms and expectations can foster a sense of isolation for some people. Most individuals from the Indian and Pakistani communities have strong associations with their religious identities. Therefore, practising their faith while respecting local customs can be complicated. This complication is also translated to celebrations of festivals and other national events.

Initial juggling between the connections with the home and the host countries can be emotionally demanding as well. During this transition period, family ties, community events and traditions become even more crucial for providing support. Like other diaspora communities, the Indian and Pakistani communities also face stereotypes and biases based on their nationality. This in turn can affect their sense of belonging and can cause a range of unique challenges. The best way to overcome these challenges is an open and inclusive approach from both the UAE's society and the Indian and Pakistani communities. Promoting awareness of cultural differences, providing resources for language learning and encouraging intercultural exchange can help build a more integrated and

harmonious environment for the diaspora. Creating safe spaces where individuals can embrace their cultural identity while connecting with the local culture is important for an enriching and fruitful experience for everyone involved.

The Indian and Pakistani diasporas in the UAE often adopt various coping mechanisms to preserve their cultural memory and identity while living in a foreign country. These strategies help them maintain a connection to their roots, pass down traditions to future generations, and create a sense of belonging within the multicultural context of the UAE.

One such important coping mechanism is establishing cultural and religious organisations. These organisations create a sense of community, make organising cultural events and celebrating local festivals easier, and help offer support to newcomers. Such organisations also help those individuals who want to prioritise maintaining their native languages, at least within their families and communities. This includes speaking their mother tongue at home, offering language classes for children, and organising language-focused events.

Another significant way to preserve cultural memories is by celebrating traditional festivals and cultural events. For example, Diwali, Eid, Holi, and other festivals are celebrated with enthusiasm, allowing individuals to connect with their heritage. Additionally, food is also a powerful cultural connector. Individuals often continue preparing traditional dishes, hosting food-related events, and frequenting restaurants that offer authentic cuisine from their home countries. For many in the Indian and Pakistani diaspora, practising their religion is essential. This may involve attending religious institutions, observing rituals, and participating in community prayers and events. Staying connected with media from their home countries helps preserve cultural identity. Watching movies, and television shows and reading newspapers in their native languages can provide comfort and familiarity.

As a way to pass down cultural knowledge to the next generation, parents of the Indian and Pakistani diaspora

population educate their children about their heritage, including customs, values and history. Some parents even try to make regular trips back to their countries of origin to reconnect with family, friends, and their cultural roots. These visits can be essential for building a grounded sense of identity.

Maintaining a strong connection with their traditional arts, crafts and culture can help individuals build coping mechanisms that allow them to navigate the challenges of living in a different cultural context while preserving their cultural memory, identity and sense of belonging.

It is important to foster a sense of belonging and inclusivity within the Indian, Pakistani and other diaspora communities in the UAE as it builds a supportive and vibrant environment. One of the best ways to do this is by organising cultural festivals, celebrations, and events that bring together people from different backgrounds. Encouraging collaboration between various community organisations can also help magnify the diversity of traditions, languages, and customs. Also, collaboration with local Emirati organisations might provide an opportunity for the Indian and Pakistani diasporas to share their culture while learning about the culture of the host country. Similarly, offering language classes for both children and adults will help in language retention and encourage communication within the community. Arabic language classes can be added to facilitate interaction with the local population.

The government, along with the various communities, can establish support groups within the community. The focus of these support groups will be topics such as career development, mental health, parenting, and integration. These support groups can also act as a safe space for people to connect with each other and seek assistance. Communities can also take smaller but impactful steps like engaging the younger generation by creating youth clubs, sports teams, and cultural activities and letting them take leadership roles in organising events, in turn helping the said generation to connect with their heritage while contributing to the

community at the same time. They can host workshops that encourage dialogue, dispel stereotypes and celebrate the contributions of the diaspora population to raise awareness about Indian and Pakistani culture. Additionally, collaborating with other expatriate communities to organise multicultural events can promote inclusivity and also help in building strong relationships with different groups. Encouraging community members to participate in volunteer activities, both within the diaspora community and in the broader UAE society, can help foster a sense of purpose and build connections. Lastly, showcasing Indian and Pakistani art, music, dance and theatre through performances and exhibitions can provide a platform for artists within the community and promote cultural exchange.

Conclusion

In the UAE, the Indian and Pakistani diasporas have taken the shape of dynamic and multifaceted communities. They are influenced by a variety of factors, with memory and identity playing pivotal roles in their experiences. Both memory and identity highly influence the diasporic population's sense of belonging, cultural preservation and their role in Emirate society. The Indian and Pakistani communities in the UAE find solace in their memories, as they serve as a profound bond to their respective homelands. These cherished recollections encapsulate their rich cultural heritage, age-old traditions, diverse languages and historical narratives. This memory not only fosters a deep connection but also ensures an unbroken lineage, enabling them to retain a strong sense of self even when distanced from their native lands. It is through shared memories that they establish a sense of community, helping them cope with the challenges of being in a foreign land.

Maintaining cultural identity is crucial for both the Indian and Pakistani communities in the UAE. These communities consist of individuals hailing from various backgrounds, encompassing a multitude of languages, religions and regional customs. Despite this rich diversity,

members of these diasporas make dedicated efforts to preserve their unique cultural heritage. Celebrations, culinary delights, music and religious rituals all serve as significant pillars that uphold their sense of identity. The various forms of cultural representation not only offer a feeling of familiarity and solace but also serve as conduits to establish connections among individuals and the broader society in the UAE. The notion of identity for those belonging to the Indian and Pakistani diasporas residing in the UAE is multifaceted. They find themselves navigating between their original cultural backgrounds and the need to assimilate into the cosmopolitan ambience prevalent in the UAE. Although they retain deep-rooted affinities with their origins, they also make substantial contributions towards advancing both the UAE's growth and its economy. This hyphenated identity highlights the resilience and adaptability of the diaspora as they negotiate their sense of self in a multicultural context.

The importance of memory and individuality stretches far beyond one's personal encounters, reaching into the intricate social tapestry of the United Arab Emirates. Within this vibrant nation, a thriving community of Indians and Pakistanis contributes to its cultural richness, nurturing a climate of intercultural comprehension and shared admiration. Acting as intermediaries between the UAE and their countries of origin, these diasporas play a pivotal role in bolstering economic exchanges, tourism opportunities and diplomatic relations. Undoubtedly, for those belonging to the Indian and Pakistani diasporas residing in the UAE, memory and identity bear immense significance. The presence of these factors acts as a wellspring of resilience, enabling individuals to overcome the obstacles that come with living in an unfamiliar country, while preserving a profound bond with their cultural roots. As the expatriate community flourishes and makes valuable contributions to the progress of the UAE, their distinct amalgamation of recollection and sense of self will persist as an essential component within the nation's diverse fabric.

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