

Other Countries of Central and South America

Introduction



Most of the countries covered in this chapter fall outside the Caribbean region. The French West Indies and Jamaica may be notable exceptions, as well as one or two of the smaller members of CARICOM. We have added brief sketches here about many of the countries of Central and South (or Latin) America, where there is even a small Indian presence. In doing so, our purpose has been to pay our tribute to the relentless spirit of the 'Overseas Indian' who has ventured forth to remote corners of the world in search of adventure or profit, whatever the impediments or challenges he or she has had to encounter. There are relatively few PIOs or NRIs in most of these countries. But their achievements in what may sometimes have been a hostile or unwelcome milieu must command our respect and admiration. A comparative table has been included on the next page to show, at a glance, the comparative presence of the Indian community in the many countries of Central and South America.

ARGENTINA

- 19.2. Argentina was never a part of the British Empire and there was thus no post-slavery indenture system to take Indian labour to that country. But it seems some intrepid Indians went there around the beginning of the 20th century as employees of British-owned railways, or as plantation workers for British or Anglo-Argentine firms. Most of those who had gone to Salta or Jujuy in the northern part of the country married local women and settled down as farmers. They even adopted local names and became Argentine citizens. In time, some of these people and their descendants took up other professions such as law, medicine, finance, banking and trade. They are generally well off and are held in high regard.
- 19.3. Many of the PIOs in Argentina have remained attached to their Indian culture and traditions. They have constructed a *gurudwara* at Rosarion de la Frontera in Salta province. Some of them are actively involved in propagating *ayurveda*, yoga, Indian classical music and the Hindi language. They have established an Indian Association in the northern provinces and organise social and cultural events to celebrate Indian festivals. Unfortunately, there is little interaction between them and those who have settled down in other parts of this extensive country.

- 19.4. A large number of the Indian Diaspora living in Buenos Aires are businessmen, doctors, financial or business executives, and employees of multinational corporations. Most of them have retained their Indian citizenship.
- 19.5. Considering the small size of the Indian community in Argentina, its impact on the general population of its country of settlement is insignificant. Nor does it have any special demands or expectations from India. However, some of the prominent businessmen in the Diaspora have expressed the hope that the bureaucratic hassles often encountered by them in the course of their business dealings with India should be reduced, if not totally eliminated.

Table 19.1: PIOs, NRIs and Stateless Persons in some of the countries of Central and South America

No.	Country	Population	PIOs	NRIs	Stateless	% of the Population
01	Argentina	36,600,000	1,200	400	Nil	Insignificant
02	Barbados	260,000	2,100	100	Nil	0.81
03	Belize	250,000	500	NA	Nil	Insignificant
04	Brazil	169,000,000	1,500	400	Nil	- do -
04	Chile	15,650,000	Few	650*	Nil	- do -
05	Colombia	42,000,000	1	19	Nil	- do -
06	Costa Rica	3,600,000	1	15	Nil	- do -
07	Ecuador	12,000,000	Nil	5	Nil	- do -
08	Guatemala	11,500,000	22	NA	Nil	- do -
09	Guyana	775,000	395,250	100	Nil	51.01
10	Jamaica	2,600,000	60,000	1,500	Nil	2.36
11	Mexico	99,580,000	400*	NA	Nil	Insignificant
12	Panama	2,800,000	211	1,953	Nil	- do -
13	Peru	25,200,000	5 – 10	135*	Nil	- do -
14	St. Lucia	156,260	250*	NA	Nil	- do -
15	Suriname	438,026	153,306	150	Nil	35.00
16	Trin.&Tob.	1,282,000	500,000	600	Nil	39.04
19	Venezuela	24,000,000	400	280	Nil	Insignificant

Notes: NA = Not Available; * = Approximate

BARBADOS

- 19.6. The first Indians to arrive in Barbados were a small group of silk merchants from Bengal in the year 1913. Almost all of them left around 1925. The present-day Indians in this island began arriving there in small numbers from 1929. They now constitute less than 1 per cent of the total population of 260,000. There are four distinct segments in the local Indian community – Suratis, Sindhis, professionals and the descendants of indentured labour who had originally been taken to Guyana (or some other Caribbean country) and who migrated to Barbados after completing their contractual period of labour.
- 19.7. The Suratis form the largest segment of the local PIOs, numbering about 900 persons. They are mostly Muslims. They have established four mosques and a nursery school. Many of them continued to ply their traditional occupation of itinerant salesmen. But their children have taken advantage of locally available educational facilities to become professionals. All of them maintain their links with their extended families in India. The Sindhis, on the other hand, are Hindus. They are followers of Satya Sai Baba or Maharishi Mahesh Yogi, while the remainder belong to the Radha Soami sect. There is one Hindu temple in Barbados, but it is the professionals and the descendants of former indentured labour from the Caribbean who usually go there. The professionals in the Indian community number just over a hundred persons. Most of them went to Barbados after its independence in 1966 – either directly from India, or under the aegis of the UN or the CFTC. Recently, many computer programmers have also gone there, in response to local demands. There are approximately 800 descendants of former indentured labour. They have prospered well in their new country, especially in the tourism sector and in the construction industry.
- 19.8. Most of the ethnic Indians in Barbados are successful in whatever economic activity they have been engaged in.

BELIZE

- 19.9. The Indian Diaspora in Belize consists only of PIOs as there are no restrictions here to the acquisition of local citizenship. Most of them had gone there in the 1950s, when Belize was still a British colony. They subsequently invited some of their relatives, as well as some of their employees, to join them from India. The community is comprised almost entirely of Sindhis and so there are few differences among them. They are mostly retail traders and are well accepted. They have little interest in local politics, but their economic strength assures them an influential position in Belize.
- 19.10. The PIOs maintain close and regular contact with India through frequent trips to visit friends and relatives back home. Some of these visits are connected with their quest for Indian brides for their children. As in all other countries of Indian settlement, Indian music and Hindi films are popular here and have been useful in nurturing friendly relations with the local people.

19.11. In addition to the community described above, there is a fairly large group here persons who trace their origin to India. These persons live in villages scattered all over Belize. Like the indentured Indian who founded the Indian community in the Caribbean, the ancestors of those persons had reached Belize in the 19th century as cane cutters. As they were a small group, they intermarried with the local people and lost their language and original religion. However, they are still identifiable through their physiognomy and are known as 'Hindus'. They live in reasonably compact rural communities. Re-establishing their linkages with India is a useful and necessary endeavour as they number between 10 to 15 thousand, which is more than 5% of the population of Belize. It is also necessary because this effort will create another strong bond between India and this region.

BRAZIL

19.12. Brazil is not only the largest and most populous country in South America, but it is also the only one that is not Spanish speaking. That is because it was part of the former Portuguese Empire. It would be apparent from the statistical Table 19.1 that the size of the Indian community in this country is also the biggest in this entire region, marginally more numerous than its counterpart in Argentina.

19.13. There are 1,500 PIOs and about 400 NRIs in Brazil. A small number of Sindhis had arrived here from Suriname and Central America in 1960 to set up shop as traders at a place called Manaus. A second wave consisted of university professors who arrived in the 1960s and also in the 1970s. Other PIOs migrated to this country from various African countries, mainly from former Portuguese colonies, soon after their independence in the 1970s. The number of PIOs in Brazil has been augmented in recent years by the arrival of nuclear scientists and computer professionals. A few Christian nuns and priests were also attracted to this predominantly Catholic country. It is not surprising that there are as many as 1,500 PIOs among the Indian community in Brazil, as against only 400 NRIs, since foreign nationals can easily acquire local citizenship without any discrimination after 15 years of domicile in this country. Brazil has also no bar against dual citizenship. But in recent years, it has been granting immigration visas only in high tech. areas. The fact that it is a monolingual country has also deterred aspiring Indian emigrants from attempting to go there.

19.14. In a country with a total population of 169 million people, the Indian Diaspora must be regarded as miniscule. It is spread thinly over the vast expanses that constitute this gigantic land, so much bigger in area than India. The only exceptions are the Sindhis in Manaus (who have formed an Indian Association with about a hundred members) and the Goans in Sao Paulo. There is also an Indo-Brazilian Association in the national capital at Brasilia. This is natural, considering that our Embassy is located in that city. Otherwise, it is not surprising that the Indian community has not been able, nor found the need, to organise itself into any single recognisable group. Besides its dispersal over this continental sized country, many of those that arrived in the earlier years have

acquired Brazilian brides and are totally assimilated in the local society. The children born to such couples are Brazilians by birth.

- 19.15. On the whole, it would be right to conclude that the Indian Diaspora in this country has good interactions with the local community and is held by it in high regard.

CHILE

- 19.16. A few Indians had gone to Chile in the 1920s. The others migrated there about 30 years ago - not only from India, but also from Hong Kong, Indonesia, Nigeria, Panama, the Philippines and Singapore. The total number of PIOs today does not exceed 650 persons in a country of almost 16 million people. Belonging mostly to the Sindhi community, they are usually engaged in trade and are reasonably prosperous. Many of them have married Chilean women and acquired Chilean nationality, and yet they have largely remained out of the Chilean mainstream. Some members of the younger generation, being Chilean citizens by birth, have however ventured into professions.
- 19.17. It is unfortunate that most members of the Indian community in Chile have little interest in India and few cultural bonds with their country of origin. But they do occasionally visit India, if only to meet their relatives or to pursue some business interest or other. Visits of a tourist orientation are rare. Not surprisingly, they do not have any demands or expectations from India.

COLOMBIA

- 19.18. Colombia has historically maintained tight controls on immigration. Foreign nationals can acquire local citizenship only after ten years of residence in the country. There is only one Indian citizen and 19 PIOs in this country of 43 million people. This small Indian community is mostly engaged in business, with a sprinkling of professionals and others. But RITES has recently won a contract to provide its services to both of Colombia's privatised railway concessions. Accordingly, fifteen of this PSU's personnel would be deployed in this country at different times over the next five years, and perhaps also during the rest of the thirty years duration of the RITES contract.
- 19.19. The presence here of a small number of Indians associated with spiritual or charitable organisations is an interesting feature of our diasporic history in this country. They are in Colombia in response to considerable local interest in Indian spiritualism, civilisation and culture. In fact, an estimated 300 Colombians visit India every year in connection with spiritual pursuits. The *Brahma Kumaris* and the Missionaries of Charity maintain offices in this country. In addition, there are here a number of yoga centres. The *Satyananda* Yoga Academy, located in Bogota, is affiliated to the *Satyananda School of Monghyr* in Bihar.
- 19.20. The Indian community in Colombia faces no major problems, apart from that of physical insecurity resulting from the general climate of violence prevailing in this country and affecting all its inhabitants. The size of the community is unlikely to grow substantially in the foreseeable future.

COSTA RICA

- 19.21. This predominantly Spanish speaking country in Central America has a population of just 3.6 million people. Costa Rica is a picturesque and mountainous country with extensive forests and several volcanoes. It has the unique distinction of being the only country in the world that has no defence forces. It exports enormous quantities of bananas, to the United States and Western Europe, whose cultivation and packaging seems to be its main industry.
- 19.22. India's relations with Costa Rica are minimal. Ten training slots have been allotted to it under the ITEC programme and solar energy equipment costing Rs.18.5 lakhs was donated to it in 1997 to assist it in establishing a research laboratory. Nevertheless, 15 NRI professionals and businessmen are to be found in this country. In addition, there is one PIO, a fact that pays tribute to Costa Rica's non-discriminatory immigration laws. Naturally, considering the small size of the Indian community, it has not made any particular impact on this friendly country.

DOMINICA, COMMONWEALTH OF

- 19.23. The most northerly and largest of the Windward Islands, Dominica is situated between Guadeloupe to its north and Martinique to its south. It has an area of 290 square miles and a total population estimated as 74,700 in 1996. The Dominicans are primarily of African origin, with a small number among them of Carib Indians and some descendants of former European settlers.
- 19.24. There is no Indian community as such in this country. The Committee's purpose in including a reference to it in this chapter on Other Countries of Central and South America is to illustrate the ingenuity and initiative of Indian youth – qualities that have taken them to distant lands in search of opportunities that they did not have in India. There is, in the Commonwealth of Dominica, a medical school whose graduates are entitled to practise in the United States of America. This has attracted about a hundred students of Indian origin to this country who aspire to head northwards to 'their country of final destination' as soon as they have acquired their medical degrees!

ECUADOR

- 19.25. As in the case of Costa Rica, there is hardly any Indian presence in this remote Andean country that is situated to the south of Colombia and faces the Pacific Ocean. Nevertheless, five NRIs are currently located here. All of them are engaged in trading. Although this country has a fairly relaxed and non-discriminatory immigration policy, none the NRIs has attempted to acquire local citizenship, which would probably imply the transitory nature of their sojourn in Ecuador. With their small size, they maintain a low profile and concern themselves only with their business.

FRENCH WEST INDIES

- 19.26. The abolition of slavery by France in 1848 created a crisis in its three colonies in the Caribbean – French Guinea, Guadeloupe and Martinique. It was feared that the impending desertion of African

slaves from the plantations would result in enormous losses to the French planters, losses that would be compounded by recurrent floods and epidemics that were endemic in that region. Accordingly, France decided to follow the example of Britain and recruit indentured labour from India to replace the former slave labour. Initially, it had no difficulty in doing so because of its own Indian connection in the form of its territories in Pondicherry, Mahé and Karaikal. But it soon found that the supply from those areas was insufficient. Accordingly, it commenced negotiations with Britain in 1851 for permission to recruit Indians from British India. As these talks went on endlessly without agreement, it apparently managed in 1852 to spirit out some persons from British India to its own enclaves and then shipped them off to the Caribbean. Initially, the British Government had been willing to allow France to recruit Indian labour for work only in Réunion. It finally conceded the French request by the Treaty of Paris of 11 July 1860.

- 19.27. As many as 42,326 Indian labourers are reported to have arrived in the three West Indian French colonies between the years 1853 and 1889 when this system of recruitment was finally terminated by Britain. Only 4,613 of them had remained there by 1898 due to the death or repatriation of many labourers. Contemporary British records were full of horror stories about the condition of the Indian workers. Their migration to an unknown land without any satisfactory system of supervision and control had been unfortunate. Even at the end of the 1990s, Professor Lotus Vingadassamy, a native of French Guinea, made the following remarks about the PIOs in the French West Indies at a meeting in Delhi's India International Centre. The transplantation of her community from India to the West Indies, she said, 'carried psychological connotations of deep sorrow and suffering, inconsolable mourning, along with the everlasting feeling of being torn inside.

GUADELOUPE

- 19.28. Guadeloupe, an island in the Atlantic Ocean and a French Department had traditionally been a bone of contention between the French and the British. The British occupied it from 1759 to 1763. In 1763, it was restored to France in exchange for all French rights to Canada. It was finally designated as territory of France through The Treaty of Paris in 1815. It was represented in the French parliament for the first time in 1871. It became a French Department on 19 March 1946.
- 19.29. After the abolition of slavery in 1848, to meet a shortfall in labour, over 40,000 workers were brought from India to Guadeloupe to there for work on plantations through an agreement reached between France and Great Britain in 1861. Most of the workers came from the Tamil Nadu region. The importation of Indian labour was gradually discontinued after 1883 as a result of adoption of a policy by the British Government against recruitment of labour in its territories and also because of high mobility of Indian labour. Over 10,000 of them perished as a result of difficult living and working conditions and the rest of them continued to be treated harshly till

the efforts of Henri Sidambarom in 1904 gave them some political rights. It was in 1923 that Guadeloupeans of Indian descent were granted citizenship and the right to vote.

- 19.30. Since the cessation of migration, the history of the Indian community has been one of steady integration with the rest of the population, to the extent that there are very few Tamil speakers left on the island. However, the third or fourth generation persons of Indian origin still maintain links with India in many different ways such as adopting Indian names.
- 19.31. The Indian community in Guadeloupe is estimated to be approximately 40,000 in a population of over 450,000. Some of them have acceded to important posts in the public and private sectors. Dr. Henri Bangou held the post of Senator from Guadeloupe in the French Senate. Ernest Moutoussamy has been the Depute of Guadeloupe in the National Assembly of France since 1981.
- 19.32. There are several associations to promote Indian culture in Guadeloupe. These associations, run by mostly people of Indian origin, are fairly active in organising cultural activities in all the principal towns, namely, Pointe-a-Pitre, Moule, Port Louis, Cape Terre and Saint-Claude. One such prominent group is 'Association Culturelle Guadeloupeenne des Armis de l'Inde', which has over 300 members and 2000 associates.
- 19.33. Cultural troupes sponsored by ICCR have also been visiting Guadeloupe to enable the locals to have a glimpse of Indian cultural heritage. A 10-member *Mohiniattam* dance troupe led by Dr. Kanak Rele and sponsored by ICCR visited Guadeloupe in 1999.
- 19.34. A Festival of Women and Cinema with India as the theme was organised in Guadeloupe in 1997. This also coincided with workshops on Indian cuisine and exhibition and sale of Indian art objects. At the initiative of the Depute of Guadeloupe, Mr. Ernest Moutoussamy, a photographic exhibition on the theme 'The World of Tomorrow & Gandhi's Vision' was organised in January 1997. A Festival of Indian films to be organised in Guadeloupe under the Cultural Exchange Programme has been pending consideration in the Directorate of Films Festivals, New Delhi.
- 19.35. The city of Basse-terre in Guadeloupe and Pondicherry have been designated as twin cities to promote cultural links and exchanges.
- 19.36. Recently, we have received information that in 2004, celebrations to mark the 150th anniversary of the arrival of the first Indians in 1854 transported to Guadeloupe by the French to work in the plantations would be held. The Indian Associations in the territory are in the process of forming a committee, which will start working to realise the event.

GUATEMALA

- 19.37. Guatemala is a tiny mountainous country in Central America, immediately south of Mexico. Like in the rest of this region, Spanish is the only language spoken in it. It is a picturesque country with an over-abundance of rivers and volcanoes. But in addition to those formidable gifts, Nature

has also been bountiful to it by giving it the kind of ecological environment that has enabled it to grow a plentiful crop of cardamom, its principal export commodity.

- 19.38. It was this last feature that must have attracted a few enterprising Indians to seek their fortune and settle down here in Guatemala City. In a country of about 11.5 million natives, there are currently just 22 PIOs, of who five are businessmen; three each are professionals or housewives; one is a priest; and ten are students. They arrived in Guatemala not so long ago but have already dominated the cardamom export trade of the country. The community is visibly prosperous and respected by the Guatemalans for their cultural and family values, besides their generous response to local charities. Notwithstanding their small number, they have formed an informal group called the *Bharat Bandhu*. The community has taken on itself the responsibility of hosting and organising Indian cultural events from time to time.

HONDURAS

- 19.39. Mostly facing the Caribbean Sea in Central America, Honduras has a small Indian population of 52 Indian citizens, which includes members of their families. Most of them reside in the capital city of Teguchigalpa. There are approximately 25 businessmen among them, a few professionals, two or three experts affiliated to one or other international organisation, and even 15 or 16 Christian missionaries. This last group is indeed surprising, considering that Honduras, like the rest of Central and Latin America is a predominantly Catholic region. Being a sophisticated and educated group, many of the NRIs are already familiar with the Spanish language. Comparatively recent arrivals in this country, they are relatively well off, are quite active on the cultural front, and are respected by the mainstream population.

JAMAICA

- 19.40. As in the other former British colonies in the Caribbean like Trinidad & Tobago and Guyana, Indian indentured labourers were recruited for work in the sugar plantations of Jamaica after the abolition of slavery in 1834. It is estimated that no fewer than 38,959 Indians were taken to this country between 1845 and 1917. Most of them had gone from Eastern UP and Bihar. Of the total number of persons who migrated to Jamaica, only 11,959 returned to India after serving their indenture contracts.
- 19.41. On their arrival in Jamaica, the 'East Indian' indentured labour lived in their barracks on the sugar estates. They tended to huddle together, not out of choice but merely because the coercive system of indenture kept them largely confined to very specific geographic and ecological areas. Preservation, much more than promotion of the culture and the values that they had brought along from India, was an uphill task in such an environment. Most of them were illiterate, unable even to read and write their native language. Only a few had a few years of education. Not a single person was able to speak English. The cultural practices of this ethnic group were centred on the few *pandits* and *maulvis* that happened to be in their midst.

- 19.42. At the termination of their indenture contracts, they left the plantations to which they had been assigned, for other areas. This meant that they were dispersed among the general population and thus were much less visible as a distinct racial and ethnic group. In addition, they began absorbing the values of the larger Jamaican society. This led to an increase in their intermarriage with the Blacks. In fact, since the end of indenture in 1917, such intermarriages have been on the rise and Jamaican culture was beginning to make serious inroads into the lifestyle of the East Indian community.
- 19.43. The descendants of the indentured workers are said to number about 60,000 today. All of them have assimilated themselves within the mainstream society in this country and do not have any direct links with India. Nevertheless, they are reported to have keen interest in Indian culture and many of them are also proud of their Indian heritage. Since the latter half of the 20th century, Indo-Jamaicans have progressed academically and economically. Many of them have become professionals. A large number have migrated to the USA, Canada and Britain to pursue vocations such as medicine and engineering.
- 19.44. From 1973 onwards, some NRI professionals also went to Jamaica. They consisted of doctors, accountants, schoolteachers, university professors, information technology consultants, and similar other professions. The number of such expatriate personnel is about 1,500. Members of this community visit India regularly for tourism and to meet their relatives. Some of their prominent members of the community visit India for specific purposes such as participation in conferences.
- 19.45. On the other hand, the main community of Indo-Jamaicans does not have much direct contact with India. Nevertheless, they are afraid of losing their distinct identity completely and are therefore making a concerted attempt to resist total assimilation into the larger Jamaican culture. With this objective in view, they have established their own social and cultural organisations. There is an Indo-Jamaican Cultural Society in Kingston. A Club-India, set up by them in the same city, is mainly patronised by the business community, although its membership also includes some other Indo-Jamaicans and the expatriate Indian community. The NRIs in Jamaica also have their own Indian Cultural Society. In addition, an Indian Benevolent Association exists at Montago Bay. There is National Council for Indian Culture that is an umbrella organisation for all these cultural associations. Then there are three religious groups: the *Sanatan Dharma Mandir*, the *Prema Sangha* and the *Sai Baba Centre*. Religious and cultural functions are organised in the temple premises from time to time, while arrangements have been made for the teaching of Hindi at the Club India.
- 19.46. Over the years, as the Indo-Jamaicans had progressed academically and economically, some of them were able to make a mark in Jamaican society and are now even represented in politics and the various local bodies. A few hold high positions such as Ministers, MPs, judges and administrators. Jamaican regulations permit NRIs to acquire the citizenship of Jamaica. Most of the Indian businessmen and their families who came here before India's partition have become

Jamaican nationals. The Indo-Jamaicans and the NRIs are regarded as vital for the progress of the country.

MEXICO

- 19.47. There are in Mexico, about 80 Indian families, constituting a total number of about 400 NRIs. Most of them are recent arrivals in the country. Almost all of them have settled down in the capital city. Mexico has a non-discriminatory policy with regard to the grant of its citizenship. The spouse of a Mexican national would generally not face any problem in acquiring local citizenship. But although a few of the NRIs have married Mexican girls, they have retained their Indian citizenship.
- 19.48. The Indians in this country are mainly businessmen or professionals. Many of them work with one or other international organisation or a multinational corporation. There are also some academicians and scientists among them. They have helped to bring about greater mutual understanding between India and their host country. At present, Dr Raja Ram (a distinguished Indian scientist and Padma Shri recipient) is also in Mexico, working at CIMMYT. Some of the Indians work for *ISPAT Mexicana*. This company is part of the *Laxmi Mittal* group, well known in this region for having turned around a sinking steel company in Trinidad. The Indian presence in Mexico has been greatly appreciated as fifty other business ventures have invested around US\$ 1.58 billion in this country during the period 1994-2000. There are also about 20 to 25 Indian Christian missionaries in Mexico.
- 19.49. The Indian community in Mexico has no divisive factions in it, although its constituents come from different parts of India. It has jointly established an organisation called *Sangam*, under whose auspices it celebrates important festivals and cultural programmes. A *Sai Baba* temple, a *Vaishnav* temple and a *Gurudwara* have also been constructed by it in Mexico City. Most members of the Diaspora speak Spanish and have adapted themselves admirably to their foreign environment.

PANAMA

- 19.50. Unofficial figures compiled by our Embassy in Panama would indicate that ethnic Indians number approximately 8,000 persons in this small country of 2.8 million inhabitants. If confirmed, this would mean that Panama has one of the largest concentrations of overseas Indians in this entire region, apart from the main Caribbean countries. On the other hand, official statistics provide a totally different picture, indicating the presence here of only 211 PIOs and 1,953 NRIs! This statistical confusion is probably due to the fact that the official figures take into account only the relatively new arrivals. They may not have included the Indians who had first come to Panama during the construction of the Colon-Panama railroad in the 1840s. There are also several Indian families here that trace their origin to the first decades of the 20th century.

- 19.51. The Indian Diaspora in Panama consists mostly of Muslims from Gujarat State. They have been there for a long time. They often bring their male relatives over from India to marry locally available Indian girls. They have built two mosques and a school for their children. The Hindus in Panama are also mostly from the same state in India. They too have constructed a place of worship for themselves. Besides their temple, they have set up a cultural society that is called the *Hindustana Society of Panama*. There is also a small Sikh community with its *gurudwara*.
- 19.52. The Indian Diaspora in Panama has, over the years, established itself well and has been able to acquire some influence in the government. A few PIOs have occupied high positions in the government, including that of Vice-Minister and Director General of the National Police. Many members of the community are running wholesale business and retail shops. At one time, the Panamanian road transport was in the hands of Indians settled here. Some PIO companies are currently engaged in construction work. There are many Indian companies in the Colon Free Zone of Panama. They import Indian goods into the country, either directly or otherwise.
- 19.53. The community has adapted itself well to the living conditions in Panama by mixing with the local people and speaking their language. It does not have any specific demands or expectations from the Government of India.

PERU

- 19.54. Like Ecuador, its northern neighbour, Peru is another remote Andean country facing the Pacific Ocean. Its main claim to international fame is the presence here of the ancient 'Indian' civilisational remains at Machupicchu. The first 'Indian Indians' to have arrived in this country were businessmen who had gone there in the early 1960s. Later on, the community grew in number marginally until the early 80s, after which many of its members left due to the severe local economic crises and the prevailing terrorism. Those with relatives in other Latin countries joined them. In the recent past, the size of the community has remained stable. The majority of Peruvians are Catholics and Spanish-speaking. There is a small remnant of the original 'native Indians' in this country who still maintain their traditional culture and religious beliefs. This probably explains the presence in this country of a small number of Catholic missionaries from India.
- 19.55. Most members of the local Indian community are Sindhis. They are reasonably well-off, but very few can be regarded as prosperous. Their general level of education is low. Most of them speak only their mother tongue and Spanish, with a smattering of English. There is also here a small number of professionals from other parts of India. Residence permits are not difficult to obtain in Peru. But citizenship is more complicated and only a small number of Indians have obtained it – not more than 10 out of a total number of almost forty persons. While a few cultural activities are organised by the more enterprising PIOs, in general they maintain a low profile. Considering the vast distance that separates the community from India, its interest in its country of origin is

limited to major events, mainly derived from occasional browsing on the internet. But being invariably first generation migrants, many of them do occasionally visit India.

ST. LUCIA AND ST. VINCENT AND THE GRENADINES

19.56. These two tiny island states are among the Windward Islands in the Caribbean Sea. Both of them have a largely Afro-Caribbean population with some remnants of the former European colonisers. There are also here a small number of PIOs. But most members of the Indian community are so integrated with the local people, socially and through inter-marriage, that they cannot be easily differentiated from them. A few NRI families, mainly professionals and traders, are also found here. They are mainly traders, but some of them are doctors and professionals.

VENEZUELA

19.57. During the oil-related high-income years of the 1970s, there were around 400 NRIs in this country. The Indian community consisted of personnel from the petroleum and petrochemical sectors, as well as a large number of traders. Many of them had taken their families with them to Venezuela, whether from India or elsewhere. Most of the traders belonged to the Sindhi community but there were also some persons from Gujarat, Punjab and the southern Indian States. When the oil boom ended in 1982, followed by devaluation of the local currency, many of the NRIs decided to seek their fortunes elsewhere. Currently, the Diaspora has been whittled down to half its former size. There are now only about 45 Indian families in Venezuela who are mainly engaged in retail trade. There are also a small number of experts in high tech. industries such as telecommunications. All of them have adapted themselves very well to their country of residence and are generally held in high regard by the local people on account of their hard work, expertise and non-political nature.

19.58. The Venezuelan Constitution guarantees equal rights without discrimination to all expatriate personnel. This has facilitated the Indian community's life. Another interesting feature is that many local persons are interested in Indian religions and spirituality. There are several Sai Baba, Radha Soami and Hare Krishna (ISKCON) Centres, as well as Rama Krishna Missions in this country. Some members of the Indian community also attend their functions. Most of the NRIs are well educated. However, given their small numbers, they have not formed themselves into an active representative body. But they remain in touch with one another and with the Indian Embassy in Caracas. Even though they have little time to engage in numerous cultural activities, they do get together to celebrate Indian festivals like Diwali.

19.59. On the whole, the Indian community in Venezuela is quite prosperous and has a *per capita* income that is above the national average that is itself as high as US\$ 8,300 in terms of PPP. They take an active part in mobilising donations to help in alleviating distress at times of national calamities in India.

