

Diasporic Communities, Indigenous Sovereignty and Allyship

by DIVYA THOMAS

Colonization across the globe

The Doctrine of Discovery is a philosophical and legal concept that Europeans used for centuries to justify dispossessing non-Christians from their lands during colonization.

This concept was instrumental in the colonization of Indigenous Peoples of Turtle Island. However, many forget that this same colonial tool was used to colonize many parts of South Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa.

In 1947, India and Pakistan gained independence from 300 years of colonial rule and underwent partition. Partition led to the largest mass migration in human history, with millions of people dying during the conflicts that followed. The legacy of partition is an incredibly painful part of South Asia's history, which continues to shape its current realities. South Asians have different perspectives and lived experiences of colonization and its consequences. However, most can agree that British colonial rule distorted South Asia's trajectory, delaying its development and stability today.

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Champaka Srinivasan (my grandmother) wedding photo captured in Mysuru, India. Photographer Unknown. Taken in 1971.

The South Asian diaspora in Canada

Throughout my childhood, my paati (grandmother) shared her experiences of partition and India's independence from British colonial rule. She shared how colonization diminished Indian women's voices and increased violence against them. She also shared her inner conflict when she came to Canada and had to pledge allegiance to the British Crown for her Canadian citizenship: the same Crown India had just become independent from.

When my grandparents landed in Canada, they experienced systemic racism and anti-Asian hate stemming from the **1885 to 1923 Chinese Head Tax** and the **1951 quota-system for South Asian immigration**. In this time of ignorance, my grandparents were often mistaken for Indigenous people and were called anti-Indigenous racial slurs. This experience highlighted the connections between our family's experience of colonization and the colonization actively happening here.



A group of Cree youth that walked 1,600 kilometres from their home in Whapmagoostui, Que. to bring attention to aboriginal issues.

PHOTO: Paul McKinnon/iStock

LEARN

Step out of your comfort zone and educate yourself about Indigenous culture and history. Read **the Truth and Reconciliation Commission Report** and the 94 Calls to Action.

LISTEN

Actively listen and believe Indigenous Peoples when they share their lived experiences. Take part in a **Blanket Exercise**.

TAKE ACTION

Donate/Volunteer at Indigenous organizations (wijewinen.ca). Shop from Indigenous owned businesses. Take part in a peaceful protest or demonstration. Support Indigenous rights through public policy.

References

Bartlett, C., Marshall, M., & Marshall, A. (2007). Integrative science: Enabling concepts within a journey guided by Trees Holding Hands and Two-Eyed Seeing. Retrieved June 30, 2009, from integrativescience.ca

South Asian solidarity with Indigenous communities

Mi'kmaw Elder Albert Marshall coined the concept of Two-Eyed Seeing: "learning to see from one eye with the strengths of Indigenous ways of knowing and from the other eye with the strengths of Western ways of knowing and to using both of these eyes together." When I learned about this concept, I felt connected to it. Diasporic communities often feel that they live 'in between', with both a Western and Eastern way of seeing the world. Two-Eyed seeing intentionally and respectfully brings together our different ways of knowing.

The experiences of diasporic communities, including those from South Asia, cannot be equated to those of Indigenous Peoples on Turtle Island. However, members of the South Asian diaspora have an embodied knowledge of colonialism that overlaps in some ways with Indigenous experiences of colonization.

I believe this shared experience of colonization uniquely positions us to become active allies to Indigenous Peoples on Turtle Island and be champions of reconciliation. While many of us in the South Asian Diaspora come from countries that are now independent from colonial rule, we must understand that we will never be free from colonialism while Indigenous Peoples remain unfree. Given our lived experiences of colonization, I believe we have a responsibility to support Indigenous sovereignty, by actively learning and using our embodied knowledge.