

## Country Brief - Singapore



### I Demographic features of the country

Singapore was founded as a British trading colony in 1819. It joined the Malaysian Federation in 1963 but separated two years later and became independent. It subsequently became one of the world's most prosperous countries with strong international trading links (its port is one of the world's busiest in terms of tonnage handled) and with per capita GDP equal to that of the leading nations of Western Europe. Since 1959, Singapore's development has been orchestrated by Mr. Lee Kuan Yew (who continued as Prime Minister till he stepped aside in November 1990). Conscious of its small size and negligible natural resources (even water needs to be imported), Singapore concentrated on developing quality infrastructure and a skilled labour force, while shifting its economic focus away from trade towards becoming a provider of financial and other services with a high-tech oriented manufacturing sector.

**Population: 4,131,200** (Singapore Census, 2000.)

**Age Structure:**

0-14 years: 15.6% (male 362,329/female 337,964)  
15-64 years: 76.1% (male 1,666,709/female 1,750,736)  
65 years and over: 8.3% (male 165,823/female 208,589) (2006 est.)

**Ethnicity:**

Chinese 76.8%, Malay 13.9%, Indian 7.9%, other 1.4% (2000 census)

**Religion**

Buddhist 42.5%, Muslim 14.9%, Taoist 8.5%, Hindu 4%, Catholic 4.8%, other Christian 9.8%, other 0.7%, none 14.8% (2000 census)

**Language:**

Mandarin 35%, English 23%, Malay 14.1%, Hokkien 11.4%, Cantonese 5.7%, Teochew 4.9%, Tamil 3.2%, other Chinese dialects 1.8%, other 0.9% (2000 census)

**Economy:**

Singapore, a highly-developed and successful free-market economy, enjoys a remarkably open and corruption-free environment, stable prices, and a per capita GDP equal to that of the four largest West European countries. The economy depends heavily on exports, particularly in electronics and manufacturing. It was hard hit in 2001-03 by the global recession, by the slump in the technology sector, and by an outbreak of Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) in 2003, which curbed tourism and consumer spending. The government hopes to establish a new growth path that will be less vulnerable to the external business cycle and will continue efforts to establish Singapore as Southeast Asia's financial and high-tech hub.

**Labour Participation:**

Manufacturing 18%, construction 6%, transportation and communication 11%, financial, business, and other services 39%, other 26% (2003)

## II Indian Diaspora

### 1 Demographic Features of the Indian Diaspora:

As per Singapore Census, 2002, total Indian **Population is 309,300.**

Table 1- Age wise distribution of Indian Population in Singapore

| Age Interval | Indian Population (000) |
|--------------|-------------------------|
| 0-19         | 91.9                    |
| 20-39        | 101.3                   |
| 40-59        | 83.8                    |
| 60 and above | 32.3                    |

Source: Singapore Census, 2000

### 2 Brief History of Migration:

Indian migration to Singapore dates back to the early 19th century when Sir Stamford Raffles established Singapore as a trading post. Malaya and Singapore were sparsely populated, so the British authorities encouraged the migration of Chinese and indentured Indian labor to meet the demands of the expanding colonial economy.

The trading post also attracted Indian merchants and traders. The Chulias (Tamil Muslim traders from the coastal area) were the earliest Indian traders to come to Singapore. Another important group of migrant traders was led by Narayana Pillai, an influential figure among the old diaspora, who built the famous Sri Mariamman Temple in 1827. Next came the Chettiars, who were in the money-lending business, followed by Sindhi traders in 1860. English educated Malayalis also headed to Singapore, giving rise to a middle class of Indian professionals. The Sikh immigration started in 1870, mainly as part of the police force and as military personnel. By 1931, Indians in Malaya and Singapore numbered over

620,000 and comprised 14.3 percent of the population. In the 1940s, Indian nationalism in Singapore reached its peak

During the Emergency period (the 1948-60 communist insurgency in peninsular Malaya and Singapore; most active between 1948 and 1951), Singapore imposed strict restrictions on migration. Immigration for Indians was not fully opened until 1990. The new immigrants, members of Singapore's new diaspora, are mainly professionals and have had major impact on the demographics of the Indian community. The vast majority of Indians in Singapore today are descendants of immigrants who arrived during the colonial period. The term "Indian," in the context of Singapore is used as a generic category to refer to all people who originate from the Indian subcontinent — Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka.

### **3 Profile of Indian Diaspora:**

The vast majority of the Indians in Singapore, almost 64 percent, are Tamilian. They are followed by Punjabis, 8 percent; Malyalis, 8 percent; Sindhis 6 percent; and Gujaratis 2 percent. Almost a quarter of the Indian population, 90,000, are permanent residents — non-citizens who live and work in Singapore, mostly as financial services professionals, computer engineers, construction labor and domestic help.

Singapore's Indian citizens have noticeably lower academic credentials: fewer than 8 percent of Singapore Indian citizens have a college degree. Though new, educated and high income Indian professionals have altered the overall community demographics in dramatic ways. In the last ten years, the proportion of Indian blue collared workers has halved, from about 15 percent to 8 percent, while the proportion of the professionals and managerial workers has doubled from about 22 percent to 43 percent of the total Indian workforce, revolutionizing the image of Indians in the Singaporean society.

**Table 2: Some features of Indian Diaspora in Singapore**

|   |        |
|---|--------|
| Indians in Singapore                      | (%)    |
| <b>Religion</b>                           |        |
| Hinduism                                  | 55.4   |
| Islam                                     | 25.6   |
| Christianity                              | 12.0   |
| Buddhism/Taoism                           | 0.7    |
| Other Religions                           | 5.6    |
| No Religion                               | 0.6    |
| <b>Education, Literacy &amp; Language</b> | (%)    |
| General Literacy Rate                     | 95.1   |
| No qualification                          | 13.9   |
| Primary                                   | 24.5   |
| Secondary                                 | 26.4   |
| Upper Secondary                           | 15.6   |
| Polytechnic                               | 3.1    |
| University                                | 16.5   |
| <b>Labor force participation rate</b>     | 63.6   |
| Home ownership                            | 86.8   |
| <b>Median monthly household income</b>    | \$2005 |

**Table 3: Participation of Indians in Labour Market**

| Workforce Participation             | 1990 | 2000 |
|-------------------------------------|------|------|
| Professional, Technical, Managerial | 22.3 | 43.3 |
| Clerical, Sales & Services          | 32.0 | 29.2 |
| Production & Related                | 24.1 | 15.4 |
| Cleaners & Laborers                 | 15.2 | 8.0  |
| Others                              | 6.4  | 4.3  |

*Source: Singapore Department of Statistics*

#### **4 Size of Indian Diaspora:**

Although Indians constitute only 8 percent of Singapore's population, they have become a major ingredient in the mixed racial salad bowl of this city state — South East-Asia's most hi-tech and wealthiest country. The size is estimated to be **3093,000**.

#### **5 Geographical Concern of Indian Diaspora:**

Singapore is a city country

## **6 Concerns and problems of Indian Diaspora:**

There is a wide gap between the two classes of Indians. On the one hand, you have a class of highly successful Indians in politics, in business and in the professions. On the other, there is this group of Indians that forms the underbelly of Singapore society. Indians are divided between themselves because of their social and economy position in country of residence.

## **7 Diaspora Publications:**

The Hindu, one of India's leading English dailies, has a resident correspondent based in Singapore. There are many societies in Singapore (such as the Singapore Fine Arts Society, Nrityalaya, Kalamandir, the Expatriate Indian Women's Club etc.) as also societies constituted along regional and linguistic lines, which are actively propagating Indian culture. Popular culture in the form of Indian films and music is also widely distributed in Singapore on a commercial basis, targeted at the Indian-origin community and resident NRIs.

## **8 Distinguish Diaspora:**

The current president of Singapore, Sellapan Ram Nathan, is of Indian descent. Earlier, another Indian, C. V. Devan Nair served as president from 1981-1985. Singapore's present Deputy Prime Minister, Professor Shunmugam Jayakumar is of Indian descent, as are two other cabinet ministers: Tharman Shanmugaratnam, Minister for Education, and Vivian Balakrishnan, Minister for Community Development, Youth and Sports, and Second Minister for Trade and Industry.

Singaporean Indians have distinguished themselves as judges, doctors, civil servants, air force commanders, entrepreneurs, artists, union leaders, teachers, and academics. J.Y. Pillai has led Singapore Airlines to world renown. A.

Vijaratnam is the engineering brain behind the posh Changi International Airport and the Port Authority of Singapore. S. Dhanabalan is chairman of DBS Group Holdings and Temasek Board of Directors, Singapore's prime investment company managing a diversified portfolio of \$60 billion.

Vikas Goel, chairman and group managing director of eSys Technologies, received the 2005 Entrepreneur of the Year award at the 4th Ernst & Young's annual Entrepreneur of the Year Awards.

### **9 Diaspora Relations:**

The Singapore government has aggressively sought to integrate the races and Indians have assimilated into Singapore society.

#### **Bilateral Relations: *Comprehensive Economic Cooperation Agreement 2005***

Singapore has emerged amongst the top foreign investors in India. During the period January 1991 to April 2002, approvals for Foreign Direct Investment from Singapore to India (excluding NRI and portfolio investment) amounted to Rs.49478.41 million (approx USD 1150 million,) making Singapore the 11th largest foreign investor in India.

### **10 Diaspora Associations: yet to explore**