Indian Diaspora
Indian Diaspora

Post-independence, overseas Indians have served as a bridge of friendship and cooperation between India and their adopted homes abroad. Regardless of whether they are successful professionals, traders and entrepreneurs, or second generation Indians, comfortably reconciling their two identities, or workers toiling hard to build a future for their families, they are at all times a most effective window for the world to India’s heritage and its progress.

Dr. Manmohan Singh
8.1.2013 at Kochi, Kerala

Introduction

The Indian Diaspora is estimated to be second largest in the world and has a diversified global presence. The Diaspora, estimated at over 25 million, is spread across more than 200 countries with a high concentration in regions such as the Middle East, the United States of America, Malaysia, South Africa.

The Indian Diaspora has not only increased in numbers but has been gaining universal recognition for the unique contributions to its host countries, be it skilled and semi-skilled work force in the Gulf region or technocrats and educated professionals of

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1 [http://pmindia.nic.in](http://pmindia.nic.in) (official website of Prime Minister’s Office)
Indian origin. Members of the Indian Diaspora do play a significant role in mobilizing political support for in their country of residence on issues of vital concerns to India.$^3$

1. History

The dispersion of people from India and the formation of Indian Diaspora communities is the result of different waves of migration over hundreds of years driven by a variety of reasons: slavery under mercantilism, indentured labour under colonisation, and guest work programmes post colonialism. This transnational engagement of people, riding on the processes of globalisation has been reinforced through global networks of families, friends and businesses, which are symbiotic and which enable the exchange of shared ideas of cultural, social and economic interests.$^4$

In retrospect, the formation of the Indian Diaspora makes up an engaging saga of trials, tribulations and the eventual triumph of determination and hard work. It pleases all Indians when the Overseas Indian community is respected for its work culture, discipline, and successful integration with the local community as much as being counted for its outstanding contributions in their countries of residence. This community having overcome considerable adversity represents an eminently successful Diaspora in the host countries with several of its representatives occupying leadership positions there. We could look at them as a significant strategic resource for India as they have considerably added to knowledge, innovation and development across the globe.$^5$

Contemporary flows from India are of two kinds: The first is the emigration of highly skilled professionals, workers and students with tertiary and higher educational qualifications migrating to developed countries, particularly to the USA, UK, Canada, Australia and New Zealand. This flow started after Indian independence and gathered momentum with the emigration of IT professional in the 1990s. The second is the flow of unskilled and semi-skilled workers going mostly to the Gulf countries and Malaysia, following the oil boom in the Gulf countries, mainly from Kerala and other south Indian

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$^3$ Ibid
$^4$ Ministry of Overseas Indian Affairs, Annual Report 2012-13, p. 4
$^5$ Ibid
states. Of late, however northern states in India like Uttar Pradesh and Bihar have also emerged as the leading states of origin for such migration\(^6\).

Put together, these migratory flows have resulted in diverse communities of people of Indian origin in various parts of the world: East Asia, the Middle-East Asia, South and Eastern Africa, Europe, North America, Australia, the northern part of South America and the Caribbean Islands. These distinct communities of people of Indian origin as well as-Indian nationals living abroad constitute the vast Indian Diaspora. There is no single homogeneous Overseas Indian community; there exist diversities within them, including in the level and degree of their engagement with India, defined by the lapse of time, generations and distance that separate them from their country of origin\(^7\).

2. The issue of safety of Indians abroad

There have been several reports regarding attacks on Indians abroad, mostly on individual basis. The shocking shootout at Oak Creek Gurudwara, Wisconsin, USA, by an unidentified gunman, has shocked the world; and calls for a mechanism to confront such challenges. The nature of problems faced by our Diaspora in developed nations is different from the ones encountered in Middle East and Gulf countries. In countries like UK, Canada and Australia, the victims are largely reported to be students and young professionals. Indian Diaspora in the Middle-East and Gulf region, however, encounters contractual disputes with the employers like holding back of passports, non payment of salaries and work under stifling conditions\(^8\).

Steps Taken

On a bilateral basis for the protection and welfare of Indian workers abroad, India has signed Memorandums of Understanding ( MOUs) on manpower with UAE, Kuwait, Qatar, Oman, Bahrain, Jordan and Malaysia. The Government has also set up Indian Community Welfare Funds at Indian Missions to provide on site relief and assistance to

\(^6\) Ibid
\(^7\) Ibid
\(^8\) op.cit., FICCI, p. 32
Indian workers in distress. India has signed bilateral Social Security Agreements (SSA) with Belgium, France, Germany, Switzerland, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Denmark, Austria, Portugal, South Korea, Hungary, the Czech Republic, Norway, Finland, Canada, Japan and Sweden. These agreements provide exemption from double payment of social security, export of benefits and totalization of periods to Indian detached workers in these countries on reciprocal basis, thus facilitating their mobility\(^9\).

Wherever circumstances so demand, Indian government vigorously takes up the issue of protections of its citizens abroad with the countries concerned. For instance, in the case of attacks on Indian students in Australia, India had asked the Australian authorities to amend their existing laws pertaining to universities, so that there could be an institutionalized mechanism to ensure the safety of foreign students\(^{10}\).

Likewise, in the Gurdwara shooting incident, India was quick to take up the issue with the American government to ensure the safety and security of the Indian nationals. The US administration handled the situation in a manner that instilled a sense of confidence and security amongst the Sikhs settled in USA\(^{11}\).

Besides systemic intervention at bilateral level, India is also pursuing a proactive policy to transform the emigration system. It has notified the Emigration (Amendment) Rules 2009 on 9th July, 2009, revising the eligibility criteria of Recruiting Agents (RAs), enhancing their recruiting capacity and increasing the security amount and service charges. Ministry of Overseas Indian Affairs (MOIA) also takes stringent action against Recruiting Agents for any malpractices committed by them\(^{12}\).

Ministry of Overseas Indian Affairs is implementing the e-Migrate project that will provide end-to-end computerized solutions for all processes in the emigration system. The system will link all key stakeholders on a common platform, which will be used by workers, offices of the Protector of Emigrants, Recruitment Agents, immigration officials,

\(^9\) Inserted by Ministry of Overseas Indian Affairs  
\(^{10}\) *Ibid*  
\(^{11}\) *Ibid*  
\(^{12}\) *Ibid*
employers and the Indian Missions abroad.\footnote{Ibid}

National awareness cum publicity campaigns are carried out regularly to create wider awareness among the general public, and particularly among the potential migrants, on the risks of illegal migration and to safeguard against illegal practices by unauthorized intermediaries and fraudulent recruiting agencies.\footnote{Ibid}

An Overseas Workers Resource Centre (OWRC), with a 24X7 helpline supported by eight regional languages, assists emigrants intending to go abroad for employment to 17 notified Emigration Clearance Required (ECR) countries. Indian Community Welfare Funds in Indian Missions provides on-site welfare services to emigrants in distress.\footnote{Ibid}

3. Schemes for Welfare of Overseas Indian

I. \textbf{Indian Community Welfare Fund (ICWF)}\footnote{Rajya Sabha Unstarred Question No. 1469 dated 6.12.2012}

The ‘Indian Community Welfare Fund’ (ICWF) provides contingency expenditure incurred by the Indian Missions for carrying out welfare activities for Overseas Indian Citizens who are in distress. The ICWF scheme has the following objectives:

\begin{enumerate}
  \item Boarding and lodging for distressed Overseas Indian workers in Household / domestic sectors and unskilled labourers;
  \item Extending emergency medical care to the Overseas Indians in need;
  \item Providing air passage to stranded Overseas Indians in need;
  \item Providing initial legal assistance to the Overseas Indians in deserving cases;
  \item Expenditure on incidentals and for airlifting the mortal remains to India or local cremation/burial of the deceased Overseas Indians in such cases where the sponsor is unable or unwilling to do so as per the contract and the family is unable to meet the cost;
\end{enumerate}
(vi) Providing the payment of penalties in respect of Indian nationals for illegal stay in the host country where prima facie the worker is not at fault;

(vii) Providing the payment of small fines/penalties for the release of Indian nationals in jail/detention centre;

(viii) Providing support to local Overseas Indian Associations to establish Overseas Indian Community Centres in countries that have population of Overseas Indians exceeding 1,00,000; and

(ix) Providing support to start and run Overseas Indian Community-based student welfare centres in Countries that have more than 20,000 Indian student’s presence.

So far, over 28,421 overseas Indians benefited from ICWF and an amount of Rs. 37,38,29,447 has been spent. The scheme has been extended to all Indian Missions across the globe\textsuperscript{17}.

\section*{II. \textit{Mahatma Gandhi Pravasi Suraksha Yojana (MGPSY)}\textsuperscript{18}}

The Government has launched Mahatma Gandhi Pravasi Suraksha Yojana (MGPSY) on 01.05.2012 on a pilot basis. The objective of MGPSY is to encourage and enable overseas Indian workers having Emigration Check Required (ECR) passports going to ECR countries, to (a) save for their return and resettlement and (b) save for their pension. They are also provided Life Insurance cover against natural death, during the period of coverage, without any additional payment by them.

The Government also contributes, for a period of five years, or till the return of workers to India, whichever is earlier, as under:

\begin{itemize}
  \item Rs.1,000 per subscriber who saves between Rs.1,000 and Rs.12,000 per annum in their National Pension Scheme (NPS)-Lite account;
  \item An additional contribution of Rs.1,000 per annum for overseas Indian women workers who save between Rs.1,000 and Rs.12,000 per annum in National Pension Scheme (NPS)-Lite account;
  \item An annual contribution of Rs.900 per annum per subscriber who saves at least Rs.4000 per annum towards Return and Resettlement fund;
\end{itemize}

\textsuperscript{17} \textit{op.cit.}, Annual Report, p.24
\textsuperscript{18} Rajya Sabha Unstarred Question No. 1469 dated 6.12.2012
- Rs.100/- per year for life insurance cover of Rs.30,000/- against natural death and Rs.75,000/- against death by accident through the Janshree Bima Yojana of Life Insurance Corporation of India (LIC)\textsuperscript{19}.

There is an integrated enrolment process for the subscribers who will be issued a unique MGPSY account number upon enrolment. On their return to India, the subscriber can withdraw the Return and Resettlement savings as a lump sum. However, the subscriber would be able to continue savings for their old age in the NPS-Lite in line with the Swavalamban scheme. Alternatively subscriber can withdraw pension corpus as per the guidelines prescribed by the Pension Fund Regulatory Development Authority (PFRDA).

\textbf{III. Pravasi Bhartiya Bima Yojana (PBBY)}\textsuperscript{20}

The Pravasi Bharatiya Bima Yojana is a compulsory insurance scheme for overseas Indian workers having Emigration Check Required (ECR) passport going to ECR countries. The premium along with other benefits effective from April 1, 2008 are detailed below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>PBBY 2008</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Maximum sum for which insured under the PBBY</td>
<td>Rs.10 lakh</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hospitalization (Medical Expenses) covering injuries / sickness / ailment / diseases</td>
<td>Rs.75,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Repatriation covers for medically unfit</td>
<td>Actual one-way economy class air fare</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family Hospitalisation in India</td>
<td>Rs.50,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maternity</td>
<td>Rs.25,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attendant</td>
<td>Actual one way economy class air fare</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Legal expenses</td>
<td>Rs.30,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Actual Premium to be charged (without any hidden costs)</td>
<td>Rs.275 for 2 years policy period</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\textsuperscript{19} Vetted by Ministry of Overseas Indian Affairs
\textsuperscript{20} Ibid
IV. **Overseas Citizen of India (OCI) Card Scheme**\(^{21}\)

The Scheme was introduced in 2006 by amending the Citizenship Act. A registered OCI is granted multiple entry, multi-purpose, life long visa for visiting India and is exempted from registration with FRRO for any length of stay in India. OCI Fee is $275 or equivalent in local currency. For OCI applications to be filed in FRRO in India, the application fee is Rs.15000/-. In case of PIO card holders, it is $25 or equivalent in local currency.

As on 30 June 2013, a total number of 13,47,334 have been registered as OCIs\(^{22}\).

V. **Know India Programme (KIP)**\(^{23}\)

Know India Programme (KIP) of the Ministry of Overseas Indian Affairs (MOIA) is a three-week orientation programme for Diaspora youths (between the age of 18-26 years) of Indian origin conducted in partnership with one State Government with a view to introduce India to them and promote awareness on different facets of Indian life and the progress made by the country in various fields e.g. economic, industrial, education, science & technology, communication & information technology and culture.

This programme provides a unique forum for students and young professional of Indian origin to visit India, share their views and to bond closely with contemporary India. After end of KIP, Indian Diaspora Youths become Youth Ambassadors of art, culture, heritage and positive image of India.

The Ministry has conducted 24 editions of KIPs so far and a total of 729 overseas Indian youth have participated in these programmes\(^{24}\).

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\(^{21}\) *Ibid*

\(^{22}\) *op.cit.*, Annual Report, p.14

\(^{23}\) *Rajya Sabha Unstarred Question No. 1469 dated 6.12.2012*

\(^{24}\) Vetted by Ministry of Overseas Indian Affairs.
VI. **Study India Programme (SIP)**

First ‘Study India Programme’ (SIP) was launched for the first time from 25.09.2012 to 23.10.2012 in Symbiosis University, Pune, Maharashtra with participation of 9 youths of Indian origin from four countries like Trinidad & Tobago, Malaysia, Fiji and South Africa. Like KIP, SIP has immense potential of connecting youth Indian Diaspora with India through the channel of educational institutions. SIP will be held twice a year for a period of 4 weeks involving maximum 40 diaspora youths in the age-group of 18-26 years.

It will enable overseas Indian youth to undergo short term course in an Indian University to familiarize them with the history, heritage, art, culture, socio-political, economic developments etc. of India.

The focus of the programme is on academic orientation and research. Cost of boarding, lodging, local transportation & course fee during the programme to be borne by Government of India. 50% of the cost of air-ticket by economy class would be borne by Government of India. Gratis Visas by Indian Mission are granted to the participants. SIP will be organized twice a year.

VII. **Scholarship Programme For Diaspora Children (SPDC)**

Scheme launched by Ministry of Overseas Indian Affairs in 2006-07 to make higher education in India accessible to the children of overseas Indians and promote India as a centre for higher studies.

Under the scheme, 100 scholarships up to US $4000/- per course per annum are offered to People of Indian Origin and Non-Resident Indian students (50 each) for undergraduate courses in Engineering, Science, Law, Management, etc. The scheme is open to NRIs/PIOs from 40 countries with substantial Indian Diaspora population.

A total of 668 candidates have availed the scholarship since inception of the scheme.

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26 Ibid
27 Vetted by Ministry of Overseas Indian Affairs
**VIII. Overseas Indian Youth Club (OIYC)**

Ministry of Overseas Indian Affairs has also launched a new scheme named ‘Overseas Indian Youth Club’ through our Missions abroad. Purpose is to keep the overseas Indian youth in touch with the developments in India & create a sense of belongingness towards their Country of origin.

In order to continue the momentum of affinity and networking of the Diaspora youth with their ancestral motherland, Ministry of Overseas Indian Affairs has supported opening of Overseas Indian Youth Club in Consulate General of India Durban, South Africa, High Commission of India Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, High Commission of India Colombo, Sri Lanka, High Commission of India Port of Spain, Trinidad & Tobago and High Commission of India Port Louis, Mauritius. Funds have also been sanctioned to the Consulate General of India, Melbourne and High Commission of India for opening the Overseas Indian Youth Club.

**IX. Tracing the Roots**

Tracing the Roots Scheme has been launched by Ministry of Overseas Indian Affairs in October 2008. Persons of Indian Origin (PIOs) desirous of tracing their roots in India may fill up the prescribed application form enclosing relevant information/documents available with them and deposit it with the concerned Indian Mission located in that country along with a fee of Rs.30,000/-. In case the attempt is not successful, the Indian Mission is authorized to refund Rs 20,000/- to the applicant.

Based on the details furnished by the applicant, Ministry of Overseas Indian Affairs entrusts the job of tracing the roots to an agency empanelled with it who in turn may take the help of the concerned State Govt./District Admin. etc. to successfully complete the job.

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29 Vetted by Ministry of Overseas Indian Affairs
30 Ibid
The traced details of roots in India, i.e. name of close surviving relative(s); place of origin of their forefathers (paternal and maternal side); and a possible family tree, are made available to the applicant.

**X. Scheme for Legal/Financial Assistance to Indian Women Deserted / Divorced by their NRI Husbands**\(^{31}\)

The scheme is for providing legal/financial assistance to the Indian woman who have been deserted by their overseas Indian / foreigner husbands or are facing divorce proceedings in a foreign country.

This assistance will be limited to US$ 3000 per case for developed countries and US$ 2000 per case for developing countries and will be released to the empanelled legal counsel of the applicant or Indian Community Association / Women’s organization / NGO concerned to enable it to take steps to assist the woman in documentation and preparatory work for filing the case.

Assistance will be provided to meet the legal and other costs, by the Heads of Indian Missions/Posts overseas directly to the applicant's legal counsel empanelled with the concerned Indian Mission/Post, or through the Indian Community Associations / Women’s organizations / NGOs acting on the woman's behalf in an overseas legal institution.

26 (Twenty six) NGOs have been empanelled by the Indian Missions/Posts abroad to provide the assistance. A sum of Rs.80 lakhs approximately has been disbursed under the scheme till date to provide assistance to Indian women deserted/facing divorce proceedings in foreign countries\(^{32}\).

**XI. Voting Rights to Non-Resident Indians**\(^{33}\)

The Representation of Peoples Amendment Act, 2010 has been passed conferring voting rights on overseas Indian passport holders. A notification dated 3rd February, 2011 has been issued allowing overseas electors’ names to be included in the roll pertaining to

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\(^{31}\) *Ibid*

\(^{32}\) Vetted by Ministry of Overseas Indian Affairs

\(^{33}\) *Ibid*, p. 14
the locality in which their place of residence in India as mentioned in their passport is located. Overseas electors are required to apply in the requisite form (Form 6A) along with copies of all the documents mentioned in the said form to the concerned registration officer directly or send the application to the registration officer (RO) of the constituency of his residence by post. The rules allow self-attestation of documents by the applicants. As per electoral rolls, 2013 the total number of overseas Indian electors is 11,328\textsuperscript{34}.

4. Pravasi Bhartiya Divas (PBD)

The Pravasi Bharatiya Divas (PBD) Convention is the flagship event of the Ministry - organized every year since January, 2003, with a view to connecting India to its vast Indian Diaspora and bring their knowledge, expertise and skills on a common platform\textsuperscript{35}.

The 11\textsuperscript{th} edition of the Pravasi Bharatiya Divas Convention was held in Kochi from 7- 9 January, 2013. The Convention was organized in partnership with the Government of Kerala. It was inaugurated by the Prime Minister on 8 January, 2013 and the Valedictory Address was delivered by the President on 9 January, 2013. The President also conferred the Pravasi Bharatiya Samman Award on 15 distinguished PIOs/NRIs. Mr. Rajkeswur Purryag, H.E. President of the Republic of Mauritius was the Chief Guest\textsuperscript{36}.

The three day Convention saw a participation of around 2000 persons including overseas delegates, speakers, exhibitors, state government officials, media persons etc. These included 13 Members of the Prime Minister's Global Advisory Council and PIO Ministers from different countries like Mauritius and Malaysia, Ministers from Canada and UK besides Union Ministers and Chief Ministers, PIO dignitaries, distinguished speakers and other noted Indians from diverse fields.

The flagship event of the Ministry was widely acclaimed as a grand success both for its organizational aspects and its substantive aspect, as also for the choice of speakers and the topicality of the themes chosen for deliberation at its various sessions.

\textsuperscript{34} Vetted by Ministry of Overseas Indian Affairs
\textsuperscript{35} Ibid
\textsuperscript{36} Ibid
The four pre-conference seminars of NRIs in the Gulf, Skill Development, Tourism and Pure Sciences drew enthusiastic participation of all stakeholders and came in for appreciation from several quarters. The Gulf session was attended by the Indian Ambassadors to Gulf Cooperation Council countries, Shri E. Ahmed, Minister of State for External Affairs, Chief Minister of Kerala, Mr. K.C. Joseph, Minister for Non-Resident Kerala Affairs and delegates from the Gulf.

The Convention had four plenary sessions:
- India's Growth: Greater Opportunities
- Heritage and Diaspora
- Engaging Young Overseas Indians
- Investment opportunities in States

The Convention also had four concurrent sessions:
- Innovation and Technology
- Meeting of Diaspora Organizations
- India's Growing Soft Power
- Overseas Indians and India

In addition, there were separate State sessions and the PBD Oration by PBD Oration on 'Ghadar Movement' by Prof. Harish Puri, retired Professor of Political Science and Head, BR Ambedkar Chair Guru Nanak Dev University, Amritsar37.

Highlights of PBD 2013
- Overwhelming participation by delegates from India and abroad.
- Release of a stamp on the Ghadar Movement by Prime Minister of India.
- Release of publications - (i) India Supports and (ii) Handbook for Emigrants.
- Attendance by a host of dignitaries from abroad.
- Four plenary sessions, four concurrent sessions besides separate States sessions.

37 Ibid
• Four pre-conference seminars of NRIs in the Gulf, Skill Development, Tourism and Pure Sciences.

• PBD Oration on 'Ghadar Movement'.

The Ghadar Movement started in 1913 by Non-Resident Indians in the USA and Canada was an important milestone in India's long struggle for freedom from foreign rule; the bravery show and the sacrifice made by the "Ghadar Babas" will always find a place in the annals of self sacrifice for mother India. This is the centenary year of their movement. To commemorate the event, and honour the brave individuals involved in the struggle, during the Pravasi Bhartiya Divas at Kochi this year, the honorable Prime Minister announced that the Ghadar Memorial in San Francisco would be converted into a functional museum and library, with a sculpture to honour the Ghadar Babas. The Government of India will appropriately fund the project.  

Conclusion

In the past couple of decades, the overseas community has grown into an energetic and confident diaspora over 25 million strong that has given India a presence in many parts of the world. A successful, prosperous and politically influential diaspora is an asset to India, for it acts as a vibrant bridge between two countries, adding sustenance to their bilateral relations. It is not a one-way interaction that benefits only one side; both India and the diaspora have something to gain from the connection, in real as well as intangible terms.

Maintaining the bonds between India and the people of Indian origin is an emotional need for overseas Indians; it has economic advantages for India and helps in good bilateral relations between India and the country where the overseas Indian are domiciled.

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38 Ibid, p. 16
40 Ibid
India and its diaspora can enrich each other in a spirit of mutual interest. The Indian diaspora is like a mass of variegated strands with differing forms and textures, each with its own needs and expectations\textsuperscript{41}.

\textsuperscript{41} Ibid
### ANNUAL LABOUR OUTFLOW FROM INDIA DESTINATION WISE FROM 2008-2012

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SN</th>
<th>Country</th>
<th>2008</th>
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<th>2012</th>
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<td>256</td>
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<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
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<td><strong>6,41,355</strong></td>
<td><strong>6,26,565</strong></td>
<td><strong>7,47,041</strong></td>
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Source: Ministry of Overseas Indian Affairs, Annual Report 2012-13, p. 53