



NEGLECTED PROMISES: NEHRU'S POLICIES AND THE INDIAN DIASPORA IN MYANMAR

Briefing Document

A Comprehensive Analysis by the
Indian Diasporic Network

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NETWORK

Introduction

This report examines the long-term effects of **policies implemented by Jawaharlal Nehru on the Indian diaspora in Myanmar**. Despite early promises, the Indian community in Myanmar faced **extensive neglect and discrimination** which has had **lasting repercussions** to this day. This analysis aims to uncover the roots of these challenges and provide insights into how historical policies continue to affect diaspora relations.

Historical Context and Nehru's Commitment

On **March 18, 1946**, Jawaharlal Nehru addressed a predominantly Indian crowd in **Singapore**, promising that **India would soon be capable of protecting its overseas citizens**. This promise set high expectations among Indian communities abroad, including those in Myanmar. **However, post-independence, the political realities proved quite different.**

Demographic Overview

According to the Ministry of External Affairs 2024, the global Indian diaspora numbers at 3,22,85,425, with 1,86,83,645 being Persons of Indian Origin (PIO) and 1,36,01,780 being Non-Resident Indians (NRIs). Specifically, in Myanmar, there are 20,09,207 Indians including 20,00,000 PIOs and 9,207 NRIs. Historical data from the Burmese census also highlights a significant Indian presence, growing from 4.9% of the population in 1872 to 6.9% by 1931.

Policy Analysis: Citizenship and Political Neglect

At **Myanmar's independence in 1948**, eligibility for **citizenship required eight years of residence out of the ten preceding years**. Due to political instability and the assassination of Aung San, **many Indians hesitated to apply. Only 10,000 out of over 400,000 applicants received citizenship**. At this critical juncture, **Nehru's government failed to advocate** for the Indian community, focusing instead on forging economic ties with Myanmar, **despite its promising economic prospects as a major rice exporter**. This inaction set the stage for their alienation and persecution. **Even during the formation of the Non-Alignment Movement in 1961, this critical issue was overlooked.**

Economic and Social Consequences

During the 1950s and 1960s, '**Burmanisation**' of public services led to **significant job losses for the Indian community**. The **Burmese Socialist Programme** further **marginalized Indians** by nationalizing industries where Indians were predominant. Restrictions imposed **deprived the community not only of their livelihoods but also their cultural identities**, as **women were not allowed to take back their Mangalyasutra**, and **families could not repatriate their savings**.

Comparative Perspective: The Chinese Diaspora in Myanmar

In contrast, the **Chinese government actively pushed for reforms benefiting the Chinese diaspora** in Myanmar. This advocacy **ensured that the Chinese community remained well-represented both in commerce and in politics**, starkly contrasting with the plight of the **Indian diaspora, who continued to face discriminatory treatment.**

Conclusion

The **policies of Nehru's administration** towards the Indian diaspora in Myanmar were marked by a significant **disconnect between promises made and actions taken**. This neglect **resulted in profound socio-economic and cultural impacts** that have echoed across generations. **This historical analysis serves as a critical reminder of the importance of proactive and responsive diaspora policies.**

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Acknowledgements

This **briefing document** is brought to you by the **Indian Diasporic Network**, an initiative dedicated to providing research and analysis on issues affecting the **global Indian community**. Our mission is to advocate for the **interests of Persons of Indian Origin worldwide** by bringing historical and contemporary issues to light through rigorous research and active engagement with the community.

About the Indian Diasporic Network

The Indian Diasporic Network is **committed to fostering understanding and support among the Indian diaspora**, providing insights, and facilitating dialogues on **significant diaspora issues**. We strive to **empower and support the Indian community globally through advocacy, education, and community-building efforts**.

Contact Us

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