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# PRAVASI PULSE



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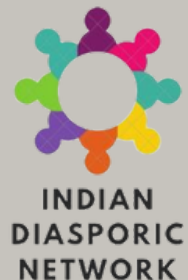
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AN INITIATIVE OF INDIAN DIASPORIC NETWORK



# Letter from the *Editor*



## **Dear Readers, Contributors, and Esteemed Members of Our Diaspora**

As the monsoon winds weave tales of renewal across the vast expanse of our homeland, so too does Pravasi Pulse embrace a season of transformation. With this edition, we find ourselves at a crossroads—where the old meets the new, where gratitude intertwines with hope, and where the pulse of the Indian diaspora beats ever stronger.

First, let us cast a warm glow of appreciation on those who have journeyed with us thus far. To Alok Chaudhary, Adarsh Pandey, Payal Singh, and Anshif Ekkadan—your unwavering dedication and insightful contributions have been the lifeblood of this magazine.

You have not merely held positions; you have nurtured a vision, crafting narratives that resonate with the hearts of our global community. As you step into new chapters of your personal and professional lives, we wish you boundless success. We remain ever hopeful that our paths will converge again, for the bonds forged in the crucible of shared purpose are unbreakable.

This September, we herald a new dawn—a complete reshuffle of our editorial board, bringing with it fresh perspectives, renewed energy, and an undying commitment to our cause.

It is a time to direct our gaze more sharply, to delve deeper into the issues that matter most to the Indian diaspora, and to ensure that Pravasi Pulse not only informs but also influences policy discussions on the global stage. Our mission remains as vital as ever: to be the voice, the mirror, and the heartbeat of our diaspora.

In our ongoing journey, we have prided ourselves on being an independent platform, sustained by passion and purpose, untouched by the strings of donations or memberships. Yet, as we grow and our aspirations reach new heights, we recognize the need to adapt. While our content will always remain free and accessible, we will be introducing a voluntary donation option for those who wish to support our cause. This is not a fee, but an invitation—to our patrons, contributors, and the general public—to join us in this endeavor to amplify the stories and issues that matter most.

As always, we extend our deepest gratitude to our contributors, whose voices echo through these pages, to our readers, who give life to our words with their engagement, and to our new editorial board, whose vision will chart the course for Pravasi Pulse in the months to come.

May this edition inspire, provoke thought, and, above all, connect us—across oceans, across cultures, and across generations. Together, we continue to write the story of our shared heritage, our shared struggles, and our shared triumphs.

With warmth and solidarity,  
Prakash Kunar Jha  
Chief Editor  
Pravasi Pulse

Scattered across the globe, the Indian diaspora is like stardust—each fragment glittering, reflecting the light of a distant yet ever-present homeland.



# Pravasi News Digest



Prime Minister Narendra Modi is set to address the Indian diaspora at the “Modi & US: Progress Together” event on September 22 at the Nassau Veterans Memorial Coliseum in Uniondale, Long Island, New York. The event, organized by the Indo-American Community of USA (IACU), has already seen over 24,000 registrations, surpassing the venue’s capacity of 15,000. The gathering aims to celebrate the diverse Indian-American community, featuring cultural performances and prominent figures from various fields. This event precedes Modi’s address at the United Nations General Assembly on September 26, marking his participation in the 79th session of the UNGA. The IACU is working to accommodate as many attendees as possible, reflecting the strong ties between the Indian-American community and the Indian government.

Arjun Goray, a Boston-based teenager, is making waves in the field of artificial intelligence by developing technology that gives vision to computers. His innovative work focuses on creating AI systems capable of interpreting and understanding visual data, which has applications ranging from healthcare to autonomous vehicles. Goray’s passion for technology and problem-solving has driven him to explore new frontiers in AI, earning him recognition and accolades within the tech community. His journey is a testament to the potential of young innovators to make significant contributions to cutting-edge technology.



During his visit to the United States, Defence Minister Rajnath Singh praised the Indian diaspora as a “living bridge” between India and the US, highlighting their significant contributions to society, science, and the economy. Speaking at the National Civil Rights Museum in Memphis, Tennessee, Singh emphasized the role of the Indian community in fostering close relations and goodwill between the two nations. He also acknowledged their efforts in establishing an exhibit of Mahatma Gandhi and placing honorary ‘Gandhi Way’ street signs near the museum. Singh’s visit included tours of advanced naval facilities, underscoring the strategic partnership between India and the US.

The Muthamizh Murugan International Conference held in Palani on August 24-25, 2024, attracted a diverse crowd, including members of the Indian diaspora and foreign nationals. The event, which celebrated Lord Murugan, saw participation from devotees worldwide, including Japan, Malaysia, South Africa, Sri Lanka, Australia, Switzerland, and Mauritius. Attendees, dressed in traditional attire, engaged in various cultural and spiritual activities. The conference featured over 1,300 research papers, spiritual discourses, and cultural programs, highlighting the global significance of Lord Murugan. The event underscored the strong cultural ties and shared heritage among the global Tamil community.



During his visit to Poland, Prime Minister Narendra Modi received high praise from the Indian diaspora for his speech in Warsaw, which highlighted India's impressive growth trajectory. This event, organized by the Indian community, marked the first visit by an Indian Prime Minister to Poland in 45 years. Modi's address, filled with statistics showcasing India's economic progress, resonated deeply with the attendees, who expressed their admiration for his energetic and charismatic presentation. The speech was seen as a proud moment for the Indian community in Poland, reflecting their strong connection to India's development story.

Indian-origin business leaders and entrepreneurs dominated the Commonwealth Business Excellence Awards 2024 held in Johannesburg, South Africa. More than half of the 60 awards were claimed by Indian-origin individuals and businesses from countries including South Africa, Singapore, Malaysia, India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Dubai, and Mauritius. The event, hosted on the African continent for the first time, recognized outstanding contributions to business, society, and the environment. The awards celebrated excellence in service, customer commitment, philanthropic ideals, ethical behavior, and environmental sustainability. The gathering also provided a platform for discussions among business leaders, civil society members, and political figures, focusing on transformative partnerships and accelerated growth.

Canada's recent decision to curb its Temporary Foreign Worker Program (TFWP) is set to significantly impact the Indian diaspora. With the unemployment rate in Canada reaching a 30-month high of 6.4%, the government aims to prioritize jobs for local citizens by limiting the number of low-wage temporary foreign workers businesses can hire to 10% of their workforce, down from the previous 20%. This change, effective from September 26, 2024, will particularly affect sectors like hospitality, retail, and agriculture, where many Indian workers are employed. Additionally, the maximum employment period for foreign workers in the low-wage stream has been reduced from two years to one year. These measures are expected to slow down the ambitions of many Indians who view Canada as a favorable destination for employment and a pathway to permanent residency.



Bharat Ramamurti, an Indian-American with a distinguished academic background from Harvard College and Yale Law School, has emerged as a key figure in shaping Vice President Kamala Harris's economic agenda for her 2024 presidential campaign. Previously serving as Deputy Director of the National Economic Council under President Joe Biden, Ramamurti is known for his liberal economic policies. His career includes significant roles such as senior counsel for banking and economic matters in the Senate and a close aide to Senator Elizabeth Warren. During the pandemic, he was a member of the COVID-19 Congressional Oversight Commission, overseeing economic stimulus spending. Ramamurti's contributions are pivotal in helping Harris define her economic vision, distancing from the Biden administration's record on inflation and the economy.



Indian-origin playwright Dr. Anu Kumar Lazarus has collaborated with former diplomat Lisa Honan to create an immersive theatrical experience titled "A London Lark Rising," which dramatizes the history of the East India Company and the British Empire. This unique "walking play" takes audiences through various historical sites in London, featuring characters from both Indian and British history. The 90-minute performance, supported by the UK's National Lottery Heritage Fund, aims to bring the shared past of India and the UK to life, with actors in period costumes enhancing the experience. The project also includes educational walks for schools, emphasizing the significant impact of the Indian community on London's history.



MakeMyTrip, in collaboration with the Ministry of Tourism, has launched a campaign titled "India: The Homecoming" to invite the Indian diaspora to rediscover their homeland. Unveiled on the eve of India's 78th Independence Day, the campaign aims to evoke a sense of pride and nostalgia among Indians worldwide. The centerpiece of the campaign is an online film narrated by Gulzar Saab, highlighting India's transformation and urging the diaspora to witness the changes firsthand. Gajendra Singh Shekhawat, Minister of Tourism and Culture, emphasized the initiative's goal to make the Indian diaspora ambassadors of Incredible India. Rajesh Magow, co-founder and CEO of MakeMyTrip, expressed hope that the campaign would inspire the global Indian community to reconnect with their roots and explore the nation's progress, beauty, and rich heritage.



Indian-origin UK MP Jas Athwal, recently elected from Ilford South, has defended his record as a landlord amid media reports of poor living conditions in his rental properties. Athwal, who owns 15 rental flats, expressed shock and profound regret over the issues, which include mould and ant infestations, and attributed the problems to mismanagement by the property agency. He has promised immediate repairs and a review of property management practices. Athwal, known for his advocacy of tenant rights, reiterated his commitment to providing excellent accommodation and highlighted his efforts to implement rigorous landlord licensing schemes during his tenure as leader of Redbridge Council.

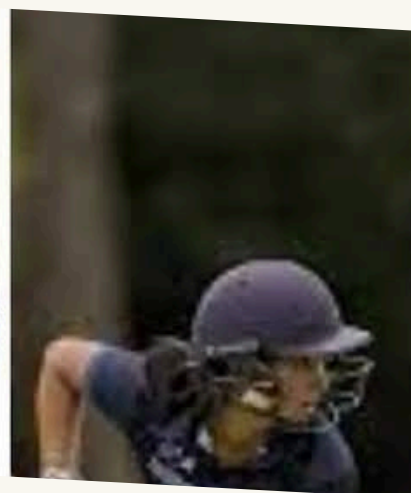


Kevan Parekh, an Indian-origin engineer, has been appointed as Apple's next Chief Financial Officer (CFO), effective January 1, 2025. He will succeed Luca Maestri, who is transitioning to Corporate Services. Parekh, currently serving as Apple's Vice-President of Financial Planning and Analysis, has been with the company for 11 years, contributing significantly to its financial strategy and operations. His career includes roles at Thomson Reuters and General Motors, where he gained extensive experience in finance and business development. Parekh holds a Bachelor of Science in Electrical Engineering from the University of Michigan and an MBA from the University of Chicago. Apple CEO Tim Cook praised Parekh's deep understanding of the company and his outstanding financial expertise, making him an ideal choice for the CFO role.



Dr. Ramesh Peramsetty, a renowned Indian-origin physician, was tragically shot dead in Tuscaloosa, Alabama, on August 23, 2024. Originally from Tirupati, Andhra Pradesh, Dr. Peramsetty was the founder and medical director of the Crimson Care Network, a group of local medical professionals. He was highly respected for his contributions to healthcare, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic, where his clinics were among the first to offer testing, vaccinations, and treatments. The Crimson Care Network expressed deep sorrow over his passing and pledged to continue his legacy. Dr. Peramsetty is survived by his wife and four children, who have requested privacy during this difficult time.

Cricket Australia has announced its squad for the upcoming Women's Under-19 Tri-series, featuring three talented Indian-origin players: Ribya Syan, Samara Dulvin, and Hasrat Gill. This tri-series, set to begin on September 19 in Brisbane, will see Australia competing against New Zealand and Sri Lanka in both T20 and One-Day formats. The inclusion of these players highlights the growing diversity within Australian cricket and the significant contributions of the Indian diaspora. Former Australian player Kristen Beams has been appointed as the head coach for the squad, which will play four T20 matches and two One-Day games over the 14-day series.



In response to the tragic rape and murder of a trainee doctor at RG Kar Medical College in Kolkata, the Indian diaspora in the UK organized rallies across multiple cities to demand justice and highlight the deteriorating safety conditions for female doctors in Indian hospitals. The protests, held in cities like London and Liverpool, called for societal changes in attitudes towards women and improved security measures in hospitals. Many participants, including Indian-origin doctors now working in the NHS, shared personal experiences of declining safety standards in Indian medical institutions. The rallies emphasized the need for immediate reforms and swifter justice for the victims.



Jayshree Ullal, the Indian-origin CEO of Arista Networks, has been recognized as the wealthiest Indian professional manager according to the Hurun India Rich List, with a net worth of Rs 32,100 crore. Ullal, who spent her formative years in New Delhi, began her career at Cisco Systems and later held roles at Advanced Micro Devices and Fairchild Semiconductor. Under her leadership, Arista Networks has grown from a start-up to a major player in cloud networking, achieving a successful IPO in 2014. Ullal's journey highlights her significant contributions to the tech industry and her status as a leading figure among Indian professional managers.

Srikanth Panini Singam, an Indian-origin astrophysics scientist, has been honored with the prestigious Marshall Innovation Award by NASA's Marshall Space Flight Center. The award, presented in Huntsville, Alabama, recognizes his innovative contributions to space research over the past year. Panini, the only Indian among the awardees, has been closely associated with NASA's research efforts, particularly in the Astrophysics branch. The award highlights his creative and groundbreaking work, which has significantly advanced our understanding of the universe. This recognition underscores the global impact of Indian scientists in the field of space exploration.



An Indian-origin woman attending a Jason Derulo concert at a music festival in Tirana, Albania, faced racial discrimination when a group of local girls cut in line and told her to "go back to India." The incident, captured in a viral video, shows the woman expressing her frustration and disappointment with the behavior of the local girls, who laughed and made derogatory comments. The video, shared on social media, has garnered millions of views and sparked a mix of reactions, with some condemning the racist behavior and others defending it. This incident highlights ongoing issues of racism and the need for greater cultural sensitivity and respect for tourists.





# THE ROLE OF THE INDIAN DIASPORA IN BUILDING REMITTANCES TO INDIA

## Introduction

Remittances are financial or in-kind transfers made by migrants to their home countries, playing a critical role in supporting families and fuelling local economies. These transfers, often sent in the form of cash or electronic payments, have become a significant source of external financing for many developing nations. Remittance flows to low- and middle-income countries exceeded the volume of foreign direct investment (FDI). In fact, excluding China, remittances outpaced the combined total of FDI and official development assistance (ODA) (World Bank 2021).

Egypt's remittance receipts are greater than revenue from the Suez Canal; Sri Lanka's exceed tea exports; Morocco's are larger than tourism earnings. This shift underlines the growing importance of remittances in global finance. In 2023, the top five countries receiving remittances are India, with an estimated \$125 billion, followed by Mexico at \$67 billion, China at \$50 billion, the Philippines at \$40 billion, and the Arab Republic of Egypt at \$24 billion (Economic Times, 2023, World Bank 2023).

For certain economies, remittance inflows account for significant portions of their gross domestic product (GDP), underscoring the critical role of remittances in addressing current account and fiscal deficits. Notably, remittances constitute 48% of GDP in Tajikistan, 41% in Tonga, 32% in Samoa, 28% in Lebanon, and 27% in Nicaragua. India has emerged as one of the leading recipients of remittances globally, largely due to its extensive and well-established diaspora. With over 18 million Indians living abroad, remittances have become a critical source of foreign exchange, contributing to economic stability and supporting millions of households.

### **Objective of the Paper:**

This paper explores the critical role of the Indian diaspora in contributing to remittance flows to India, with a focus on key trends, primary sources, and potential future developments. It delves into the dynamics of remittance flows, placing them within a global context and assessing their implications for India's economy. By reviewing existing literature and analysing the current remittance structure, the paper aims to provide insights into how these flows may evolve in the future. Additionally, the paper examines the policies of the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) and offers recommendations to enhance remittance flows, drawing on insights from global institutions such as the World Bank and IMF.

### **Literature Review**

The impact of remittances on household income and their role in financial asset accumulation, thereby enhancing the quality of life, is well-documented in the literature (Azizi, 2021; Basnet et al., 2021; Ogunniyi et al., 2020). The World Migration Report (2022) underscores the intricate relationship between migration, development, and remittances. Migration flows often lead to significant economic benefits for both the origin and destination countries. For India, remittances sent by its diaspora not only support individual households but also contribute to national

development goals by financing education, healthcare, and infrastructure (IOM, 2022). Remittance flows demonstrated remarkable resilience (Kpodar et al., 2021; World Bank, 2021a). despite COVID-19 pandemic. As reported in the World Bank's Migration and Development Brief (World Bank, 2021b), remittances to low- and middle-income countries experienced only a marginal decline to USD 540 billion in 2020, a mere 1.6 percent decrease from USD 548 billion in 2019. India, as the largest recipient of remittances globally, was anticipated to be among the hardest hit, with a projected decline of 23 percent (World Bank, 2020) due to the economic slowdown and the collapse in oil prices affecting its host country basket. Contrary to these early projections, however, India maintained its position as the top recipient of remittances, accounting for 12 percent of total global flows. In 2020, India recorded only a slight decrease of 0.2 percent in remittances, followed by an 8 percent growth in 2021.

The literature highlights the significant impact of remittances on poverty reduction, economic stability, and social development. Remittances contribute to increased household income, improved access to education and healthcare, and better living standards (Ratha, 2003; Kapur, 2010). Remittances can be leveraged for accessing international capital markets, improve country risk rating, future remittance inflows and diversified payment rights can be used as collateral to reduce borrowing costs and lengthen debt maturity. Studies have emphasized the role of the diaspora in sustaining remittance flows, particularly through their strong ties to family and community back home. The sense of obligation and cultural connection drives the consistent flow of remittances, even during economic downturns in host countries (Gupta, 2006; Chiswick & Miller, 2007). The role of policy in facilitating remittance flows is welldocumented. Effective policies can lower transaction costs, improve financial inclusion, and create an enabling environment for remittance transfers (World Bank, 2020).



## Global Remittance Flows and India's Position

The data shows the steady increase in remittances to India over the years, with significant growth particularly in the last decade, culminating in the record \$125 billion in 2023. As reported in the World Bank's Migration and Development Brief (World Bank, 2021b), remittances to low- and middle-income countries experienced only a marginal decline to USD 540 billion in 2020, a mere 1.6 percent decrease from USD 548 billion in 2019. India, as the largest recipient of remittances globally, was anticipated to be among the hardest hit, with a projected decline of 23 percent (World Bank, 2020) due to the economic slowdown and the collapse in oil prices affecting its host country basket. Contrary to these early projections, however, India maintained its position as the top recipient of remittances, accounting for 12 percent of total global flows. In 2020, India recorded only a slight decrease of 0.2 percent in remittances, followed by an 8 percent growth in 2021.

The World Bank (2022) reports that global remittances reached \$773 billion in 2021, with India receiving approximately \$89 billion. By 2023, India's remittance inflows surged to \$125 billion, underscoring its dominant position in the global remittance landscape (World Bank, 2023, Economic Times, 2023). Mexico and China follow in second and third places, with remittance inflows of \$67 billion and \$50 billion, respectively. The primary sources of remittances to India include the United States, United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, and the United Kingdom. These countries host significant Indian diaspora, many of whom are employed in sectors that offer competitive wages, facilitating substantial remittance flows (RBI, 2020). India's status as the top remittance-receiving country is attributed to its large diaspora, strong cultural ties, and the economic opportunities available to Indians abroad. The steady growth in remittances has been crucial in supporting India's balance of payments and providing a buffer against external shocks (IMF, 2021).

The report highlights that total remittance flows to low- and middle-income countries amounted to \$669 billion in 2023. While the average growth in remittance inflows to these countries was 3.8 percent, South Asia experienced a significant growth of 7.2 percent. Of the \$189 billion remittance inflow to South Asia, India accounted for nearly 66 percent.

## Sources of remittances

The United States, the United Kingdom, and Singapore were identified as the most significant contributors to India's remittance inflows, collectively accounting for 36 percent of the total remittances received by India. Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries also played a crucial role, with the United Arab Emirates alone contributing 18 percent, making it the second-largest source of remittances to India after the United States.

In 2023, remittance flows to South Asia are projected to have increased by 7.2%, amounting to \$189 billion, a deceleration compared to the over 12% growth observed in 2022. This growth is primarily driven by remittance flows to India, which are anticipated to exceed earlier projections by \$14 billion, reaching \$125 billion in 2023. The principal factors contributing to this expansion include a historically tight labor market in the United States, robust employment growth in Europe due to extensive worker retention initiatives, and a reduction in inflation rates in high-income countries. However, the growth rate of remittance flows is expected to decline to 5% in 2024, reflecting anticipated weaker economic growth in the United States, the Euro Area, and the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries, which are key destinations for migrant workers from South Asia.

Government initiatives have played a vital role in boosting remittance inflows. The UPI linkage between India and Singapore for cross-border remittances, along with the use

of the dirham/rupee and payment interlinking between India and the UAE, has significantly contributed to the growth of remittance flows between these countries. India has also implemented non-residential deposit programs to attract foreign currency from non-resident Indians (NRIs). As of September 2023, non-residential deposits in India reached \$143 billion, reflecting a \$10 billion increase within the year.

### **Remittances Have Helped India**

**Economic Stability:** Remittances have played a pivotal role in stabilizing India's economy, particularly during periods of economic uncertainty. They provide a stable source of foreign exchange, support the balance of payments, and contribute to the country's foreign exchange reserves (RBI, 2021).

**Poverty Alleviation:** Remittances directly contribute to poverty reduction by increasing household income, which in turn improves access to education, healthcare, and other essential services. This has a significant impact on rural and lower-income families (Kapur, 2010; Ratha, 2003).

**Social Development:** The inflow of remittances has led to improved living standards and increased investments in education, housing, and small businesses. This has had a positive impact on social development, particularly in rural areas (Gupta, 2006; Chiswick & Miller, 2007).

### **Evolution of Remittance Structures**

Beneficiaries in India can receive cross-border inward remittances through banking and postal channels, as per guidelines provided by the Reserve Bank of India (RBI, 2017). Banks are generally permitted by the RBI to enter into partnerships with other banks to facilitate remittance transactions. For remittances received through the postal channel, the International Financial System (IFS) platform of the Universal Postal Union (UPU) is commonly utilized.

Additionally, the RBI recognizes two other prominent channels for receiving inward remittances: the Rupee Drawing Arrangement (RDA) and the Money Transfer Service Scheme (MTSS). These are the most widely used arrangements for remittance inflows into the country, providing secure and efficient means for beneficiaries to receive funds from abroad.

The Reserve Bank of India (RBI, 2022) conducts periodic surveys to analyse emerging trends and the structure of remittances to India. According to findings from the Fifth Round of the Survey on Remittances, which covered the reference period of 2020-21, several key trends have emerged. First, there has been a noticeable decline in remittances from the Gulf region, reflecting shifts in global employment dynamics. This trend is particularly evident among the Indian diaspora employed in informal sectors in the Gulf, who were disproportionately impacted by lockdown restrictions, subdued crude oil prices, and a slower pace of migration in recent years.

Second, stressed income conditions during the pandemic period are evident, as indicated by the increasing share of smaller-sized transactions in total remittances. Third, despite a significant decline in remittances to Maharashtra in 2020-21, the state has emerged as one of the top recipients alongside Delhi, diverging from traditional recipient states such as Kerala and Tamil Nadu, which have experienced a gradual decline in recent years. Fourth, the majority of remittances continue to be routed through private sector banks, followed by public sector banks, although foreign banks have seen a marginal increase in remittance transactions, particularly from Singapore. Lastly, the survey revealed that while the average cost of remittance transactions charged by private sector banks has increased compared to previous surveys, the cost structure for public sector and foreign banks has decreased since the last surveyed period.

**Digital Transfers:** The shift towards digital remittance platforms is a significant trend, with an increasing number of transactions being conducted online or through mobile apps. This has reduced transaction costs and increased the speed and efficiency of remittance transfers (World Bank, 2020).

**Diverse Sources:** As the Indian diaspora expands to new regions, remittance sources are becoming more diverse. Countries like Canada, Australia, and Singapore are emerging as significant contributors to remittance flows to India (RBI, 2021).

**Policy Impact:** The evolution of remittance structures is also influenced by policy changes, such as the liberalization of foreign exchange regulations and the promotion of financial inclusion (IMF, 2019).

**RBI Policy on Remittances Policy Framework:** The RBI has implemented several policies to facilitate remittance flows, including the Liberalized Remittance Scheme (LRS) and initiatives to lower transaction costs. These policies aim to create a more favorable environment for remittance transfers (RBI, 2021). The RBI has also focused on enhancing financial inclusion by promoting digital banking and mobile payment systems. This has made it easier for the Indian diaspora to send remittances through formal channels (World Bank, 2020).

### **SDG Goals and remittances**

Two Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) indicators emphasize this: the volume of remittances (indicator 17.3.2) and the cost of remittances (indicator 10.c.1). Accurate and frequent data are crucial for both indicators. Two key Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) indicators highlight the need for better remittance data. SDG 17.3 prescribes mobilization of additional financial resources for developing countries from multiple sources. Indicator 17.3.2 focuses on the volume of remittances, which requires more frequent and detailed information to understand the true impact on developing countries.

Indicator 10.c.1 addresses the cost of sending remittances, and accurate data on these flows can help reduce the financial burden on migrants and their families. SDG 10.7 requires that by 2030, reduce to less than 3 per cent the transaction costs of migrant remittances and eliminate remittance corridors with costs higher than 5 per cent.

### **Cost of Remittances**

South Asia has the lowest remittance costs globally. While the average global remittance cost stands at 6.2 percent, it is only 4.3 percent in South Asia. Remarkably, the remittance cost between India and Malaysia is the lowest in the world, averaging just 1.9 percent. India is the second cheapest remittance receiving market in the G20 group after Mexico, the cost for certain remittance corridors has been consistently higher than others. The policy measures need to be undertaken that expand the scope of MTSS in high-cost corridors. Further, remittance service providers need to adapt to the changing times by investing heavily in digital technologies. Efforts towards digital payment methods and integration with mobile and digital channels would not only help drop the cost of remittances but also bode well for virtual KYC by connecting the digital wallets of senders and recipients to their SIM cards. Policy environment also needs to facilitate domestic banks in taking a prudent view to facilitate MTOs' access to correspondent banking. During the pandemic period, the World Bank (2021) has noted the phenomenon of de-risking among banks in certain jurisdictions which can potentially push-up costs of sending remittances.

The global average cost of remittances remains above the SDG target at 6.3 per cent and 5.0 per cent for US\$ 200 and US\$ 500 respectively, however, has come down since 2017 (World Bank, 2021). The cost of sending remittances to the major G20 countries, however, varies with Mexico being the cheapest corridor followed by India with a below average cost of remittances.

**Need for timely and accurate Data** The COVID-19 pandemic further emphasized the need for timely and reliable data, especially in countries where remittances are a financial lifeline for households and governments. To ensure consistent and accurate data on remittances, it is important to include all forms of transfers, such as cash, electronic transfers, and in-kind contributions. Uniform reporting standards will help in obtaining a clear and comprehensive picture of remittance flows. To achieve consistency and accuracy in reporting, it is vital to include all forms of remittances, whether in cash, electronic transfers, or in-kind contributions. Establishing uniform reporting standards across countries will ensure that the data collected is comprehensive and reliable, providing a clear picture of remittance flows and their impact on global and national economies.

The 'International Transactions in Remittances: Guide for Compilers and Users' was published more than a decade back by World Bank. The growing importance of remittances as a source of external financing in developing countries as well as the rising significance of data on remittances in the global payments industry has revealed a need for more timely and granular data. The COVID-19 pandemic has further highlighted the need for frequent and timely data, especially in countries where remittances provide a financial lifeline to households and governments. Recent years have seen a surge in new instruments and channels for money transfers, many of which are not adequately captured in current data. This lack of information creates blind spots for regulators and authorities, particularly when monitoring cross-border payments and remittances. To enhance remittance data, it is essential to understand the demographic factors, transmission channels, and regulatory environments that influence the volume, frequency, and methods of remittances. The increasing significance of remittances as a key source of external finance for developing countries highlights the need to enhance the accuracy and timeliness of reporting.

The importance of remittances has grown so much that accurate and timely data on these flows are essential for both national and global financial assessments. While technological advancements allow for real-time data collection, challenges remain in tracking the implementation of remittance data guidelines as per the IMF's Balance of Payments and International Investment Position Manual (Sixth Edition, BPM6). These challenges include improving the timeliness and detail of remittance data—such as frequency, corridors, channels, and the types of senders and recipients—enhancing cross-country and time series comparability, and fostering international cooperation in data collection, compilation, and dissemination, including capacity building.

The World Bank has launched an International Working Group on Improving Data on Remittances (Remit Stat) to bring transparency and consistency to the data collection process. With participation from over 45 countries, as well as Eurostat, the International Monetary Fund (IMF), and the World Bank, the Working Group is tackling the challenges associated with compiling reliable remittance statistics (World Bank, KNOWMAD).

### **Future Outlook:**

**Trends and Challenges** Increasing Migration and Remittances: The future of remittance flows to India appears promising, driven by the continued migration of Indians to various parts of the world. The Indian workforce is characterized by its high level of skills and education, making it competitive in global labor markets. Additionally, India's younger population base ensures a steady supply of workers who are likely to fuel the flow of remittances steady. The world bank projects an 8 percent increase in India's remittance inflows for the coming year, potentially bringing the total to \$135 billion in 2024.



## Conclusion

In conclusion, the dynamics of remittance flows to South Asia in 2023 underscore the region's continued reliance on external financial inflows, particularly from migrant workers in high-income economies. The significant growth in remittances, primarily driven by India's robust performance, highlights the crucial role of favorable labor market conditions and economic stability in remittance-receiving countries. However, the anticipated slowdown in 2024 due to projected weaker economic growth in major remittance-sending regions, such as the United States, the Euro Area, and the GCC countries, signals potential challenges ahead. Policymakers in South Asia must, therefore, remain vigilant and explore strategies to diversify sources of external financing, reduce remittance costs, and strengthen the resilience of their economies against external shocks. The evolving global economic landscape will require adaptive policies to sustain remittance inflows and ensure they continue to support economic development in the region.

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# THE ROLE OF INDIAN DIASPORA IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF SOUTH AFRICAN MEDIA

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In the early 1990s, during the transition from apartheid to democracy, Archbishop Desmond Tutu referred to South Africa as the "Rainbow Nation" due to its diverse multicultural society encompassing various citizens of different identities and nationalities. According to the Ministry of Overseas Indian Affairs, the Indian diaspora in South Africa exceeds 1,560,000, constituting almost 3% of the total population. This diaspora, notably classified by R.K. Gupta as a substantial strength, includes many influential figures such as journalists, academics, and lawyers who are pivotal in shaping public opinion.

Historically, the Indian diaspora's engagement with South African media has been profound. Mahatma Gandhi's establishment of the 'Indian Opinion' newspaper in 1903 and its role in the political movement against racial discrimination marked the beginning of a long-standing tradition of media activism. Publications like the 'Lenasia Times,' 'The Rising Sun,' and 'Satyagraha' further emphasized the diaspora's commitment to social justice and community identity during the apartheid era.

The Indian diaspora continues to play a significant role in shaping South Africa's cultural, social, and political landscape, particularly in the media. Their impact extends beyond conventional reporting, influencing political narratives, fostering cultural assimilation, and raising awareness about social issues.

In the post-apartheid era, contributions from the Indian community have modernized and enriched South African media through the introduction of diverse cultural perspectives and advancements in information and communication technologies.

However, the Indian diaspora media faces challenges, such as maintaining inclusivity and balancing unique perspectives with broader national narratives. Notable controversies, such as the rise and fall of "The New Age," highlight these complexities.

This article explores the multifaceted role of the Indian diaspora in shaping South African media, examining their contributions, challenges, and ongoing impact on the country's cultural and social dynamics. Understanding this interaction is crucial for comprehending the broader media narrative and the role of diverse voices in shaping it.

## **Media Development during Apartheid:**

India and South Africa share a deep historical connection, with India leading global support against apartheid. In 1946, India became the first country to sever trade ties with the apartheid government, imposing a comprehensive embargo and actively advocating for international sanctions. India ensured that the apartheid issue remained on the agendas of both the United Nations and the Non-Aligned Movement.

# Lenasia Weekly

Vol. 1, No. 1, 1986

## JHINA SLAMS 'RACKETEERING LANDLORDS'

The apartheid era marked a crucial period for the Indian diaspora's engagement with South African media. One of the pioneering efforts was the establishment of 'Indian Opinion' by Mahatma Gandhi on June 4, 1903, in the Phoenix Settlement. This newspaper became an essential tool for the political movement led by Gandhi and the Natal Indian Congress, fighting racial discrimination and seeking civil rights for both the Indian community and native Africans. His views evolved into the concept of Satyagraha, the philosophy and practice of non-violent resistance, which was later adopted by other freedom movements in the latter half of the 20th century. Notably, this approach influenced Nelson Mandela's struggle against apartheid and Martin Luther King Jr.'s campaign for civil rights. 'Indian Opinion' continued its publication until 1961, and its location, the Phoenix Settlement, was declared a National Heritage Site by the South African government in 2020.

Another significant effort was the launch of the 'Lenasia Times' by Waheed Camroodeen in August 1976. Camroodeen, known as a doyen of alternative media, made a major impact by

highlighting the ills resulting from the racist policies of the National Party. Lenasia, designated as a racial settlement for Indians during the 1950s by the notorious Group Areas Act, became a focal point for his efforts. The Rising Sun, founded by Vijay Maharaj in 1986, started as South Africa's first free newspaper and has since become a household name. This community newspaper provided accessible news and advertising to the Indian community while raising a voice against apartheid. Newspapers like 'Satyagraha,' founded by Ela Gandhi, also played a pivotal role in addressing fundamental community issues often overlooked by mainstream media.

These newspapers were instrumental in advocating for Indian rights, challenging racial segregation, and fostering a sense of community identity. Through nonviolent resistance and alternative media, these outlets transcended conventional reporting, significantly influencing political narratives and raising social awareness during the apartheid era.

### **Post-Apartheid Contributions:**

The post-Apartheid era has witnessed the Indian diaspora's continued influence on South African media, significantly contributing to its growth and modernization. With the advent of ICT and the internet, the Indian diaspora has kept pace with changing times, playing a pivotal role in the evolving media landscape.

Indian South Africans enriched South African media by introducing their cultural heritage and languages, including Hindi, Tamil, and Urdu, to newspapers and radio stations. This effort catered not only to South Africans of Indian descent but also exposed the broader audience to diverse cultural perspectives. Indian South Africans entered the mainstream media as journalists, editors, and producers, bringing new ideas and unique experiences to storytelling.

Their business acumen further supported the media industry's growth through investments in new technologies, ranging from printing presses to broadcasting equipment. This investment led to a more sophisticated media landscape, enhancing the overall quality and reach of South African media.

Prominent contributions include the TV series "Eastern Mosaic" (2005-2015) and radio services like "Lotus FM" by the South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC), Durban-based "VOW FM," and "Hindvani Radio." These platforms have promoted cultural diversity and catered to the Indian community. Newspapers like the Durban-based "Indian Post" and "Indian Spice" demonstrate innovative approaches to preserving and promoting Indian culture in South Africa.

Through their cultural contributions, journalistic influence, and technological investments, the Indian diaspora has played an integral role in shaping and enriching the South African media landscape.

### **Challenges, Controversies and Considerations:**

Indian diaspora media in South Africa is not monolithic; it encompasses a variety of content and perspectives influenced by regional and linguistic backgrounds. This diversity reflects the broader South African context. Secondly, South Africa is often referred to as the "Rainbow Nation" due to its diverse and multicultural society, these Indian-owned outlets might create echo chambers if they fail to include broader South African narratives.

A notable example of these challenges is the rise and fall of "The New Age," founded by the Gupta family in 2010. The newspaper ceased publication in 2017 due to financial difficulties and political dynamics, facing criticism for its perceived political affiliations. This case exemplifies the complexities faced by Indian-owned media in balancing their unique perspectives with the need to engage with the wider South African audience.

Thus, The Indian diaspora has significantly shaped South African media from Gandhi's 'Indian Opinion' to modern outlets, driving social justice during apartheid and enriching post-apartheid media. To further their impact, they must promote inclusivity, encourage ethical journalism, preserve cultural heritage, and ensure ongoing research and documentation. By addressing these areas, they can enhance their influence and contribute to a more inclusive, informed, and vibrant society in South Africa.



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# Indian Opinion

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## DEBATE ON INDENTURED LABOUR

IN the Imperial Legislative Council of India, on the 20th March, Pandit Mohan Malaviya moved the following resolution :—‘That this Council recommends to the Governor-General in Council that early steps be taken for the abolition of the system of Indian indentured labour.’

In doing so the hon. Pandit said that this system of labour had been in existence for nearly 80 years. Consequent on the abolition of slavery in 1834 the Colonies lost their labour force. Hence they resorted to the system of indentured labour to get

penalties they would have to undergo made plain to them. Mr. Malaviya referred to a coolie who, owing to some default or another, was imprisoned in the aggregate for 692 days.

Turning to the men who were entrusted with this recruitment, Mr. Malaviya said that they were mostly very low class men who would not deem it wrong to practise fraud and be as unscrupulous as the occasion demanded. They mostly came in the guise of helpers in pilgrim centres or station platforms and then by deception drew these unfortunate men and women to the depots. Again, these depots could not

# CALL FOR ARTICLES



As we gear up for our October 2024 edition of Pravasi Pulse, we are once again reaching out to the talented and diverse voices within our community. We invite you to contribute your expertise, insights, and stories to continue enriching our magazine. Your contributions help us explore the multifaceted experiences of the Indian diaspora and shed light on important issues and achievements.

For this upcoming edition, we are particularly interested in exploring the following themes and topics:

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2. The Silent Revolution: How Indian Women in the Diaspora are Shaping Global Narratives
3. Beyond Remittances: The Socioeconomic Impact of the Indian Diaspora on Rural India
4. Preserving Heritage: The Role of Indian Language Schools Abroad
5. Diaspora Philanthropy: Indian Roots, Global Impact
6. Return Migration: The Reverse Brain Drain and Its Implications for India
7. Digital Diaspora: The Influence of Social Media on Indian Communities Abroad
8. Indian Festivals Abroad: A Celebration of Unity and Diversity
9. Youth and Identity: The Challenges and Opportunities for Second-Generation Indians
10. The Future of the Indian Diaspora: Challenges, Opportunities, and Emerging Trends

## IMPORTANT DATE

Article submission deadline  
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1000-2500 words

### For Further Enquiries:



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# MENTAL HEALTH AND THE INDIAN DIASPORA: NAVIGATING THE CHALLENGES OF THE UKRAINE-RUSSIA WAR

The Ukraine-Russia war, which began in February 2022, has had a profound impact on millions of people across the region, including a significant number of Indian nationals who were studying, working, or living in Ukraine. This article delves into the mental health challenges faced by the Indian diaspora amid the conflict, exploring recent examples to highlight the severity and complexity of their experiences. The outbreak of war brought sudden and violent changes to the lives of Indian nationals in Ukraine. Many were forced to flee their homes in a hurry, facing traumatic experiences that would leave lasting psychological scars. One of the most pressing challenges was the trauma associated with the evacuation.. Thousands of Indian students, who had previously settled into their academic routines, found themselves in danger as the conflict escalated. In Kharkiv, students from V.N. Karazin Kharkiv National University reported harrowing experiences as they sheltered in basements during intense shelling. The uncertainty of when they would be rescued, combined with the fear of being caught in the crossfire, led to severe anxiety and stress.

Many students described experiencing panic attacks and insomnia as they waited for evacuation. Though a relief, the evacuation itself was fraught with its own challenges. Students had to undertake dangerous journeys to border crossings, often facing extreme weather conditions and food and water shortages. The physical and emotional strain of these journeys left many feeling exhausted and traumatized.

## **The Psychological Impact of War Zones**

For those who remained in Ukraine longer or were unable to evacuate immediately, the constant threat of violence created a dire psychological environment. In cities like Mariupol and Sumy, where the fighting was particularly intense, Indian nationals lived under constant threat, often taking refuge in makeshift shelters. The sounds of explosions and gunfire became a daily reality, contributing to high levels of anxiety and depression. A medical student from Sumy, who spent weeks in a university basement, reported persistent flashbacks and nightmares long after leaving the war zone.

The psychological toll of living in such conditions is significant, leading to conditions like PTSD and long-term emotional trauma. Ukraine's health ministry estimates that almost half of the population, 15 million of 38 million, are in need of psychological support, while three to four million people likely need medication. Ukraine estimates that almost half the population needs support, but there is a worrying shortage of trained psychologists.(Aljazeera).

### **Challenges of Resettlement**

After escaping Ukraine, many Indian nationals faced the daunting task of resettling in new countries, which came with its own set of psychological and practical challenges. The sudden relocation to countries like Poland, Hungary, and Romania introduced a range of new difficulties. The Indian diaspora found themselves in unfamiliar environments with different languages and cultures, which exacerbated feelings of isolation. For instance, Indian students in Hungary struggled with the language barrier and had difficulty accessing local services. The sense of community they had in Ukraine was lost, leaving many feeling lonely and disconnected. This sense of isolation has been compounded by the lack of support networks in their new locations, making it difficult for them to integrate and adapt.

### **Uncertainty About the Future**

The uncertainty surrounding their future has been a major source of stress for many. Students who were forced to leave their studies behind faced the anxiety of whether they would be able to return to Ukraine or if they would have to start over in a new country. Medical students, in particular, have faced challenges in transferring their studies to other institutions. Some have had their credits not fully recognized, requiring them to repeat years of study. This disruption not only delays their academic progress but also adds financial strain and emotional stress.

The uncertainty about their academic and professional futures has led to heightened anxiety and feelings of frustration. The war has also had a significant economic impact on the Indian diaspora, particularly for those who were working or running businesses in Ukraine.

Indian business owners in Ukraine faced severe economic losses as they were forced to close their businesses and flee the conflict. For example, an Indian-owned restaurant in Kyiv, which had been a popular spot before the war, had to shut down as its owners fled the city. The abrupt loss of their livelihood, along with the uncertainty of what the future holds, has created significant financial stress and emotional distress. Business owners who invested their time, effort, and resources into building their enterprises now face the challenge of starting over, adding to their psychological burden.

Indian professionals who were employed in Ukraine also experienced job losses due to the war. Many companies downsized or relocated, leaving Indian employees without work. For instance, an IT professional from Lviv was laid off as his company moved its operations out of Ukraine. The loss of income and the difficulty of finding new employment in a conflict-ridden environment or in a new country has created financial strain and increased stress levels. The financial uncertainty, coupled with the challenges of starting over, has been a significant source of anxiety for many.

### **Disruption of Education**

The disruption of education has been another major challenge for Indian students affected by the war. The closure of universities across Ukraine left many students in limbo. For example, students at the National Technical University of Ukraine in Kyiv had their academic schedules interrupted as the conflict forced the closure of educational institutions. The uncertainty of whether they would be able to complete their



studies or if they would need to start over in a new country has led to significant psychological stress. The prospect of losing years of academic progress and the additional financial burden of transferring to new institutions has added to their anxiety.

Students who sought to transfer their studies to institutions in other countries faced numerous obstacles. The process of transferring credits and adapting to new academic systems has been complex and frustrating. For instance, a group of Indian medical students who relocated to Poland found that their credits were not fully recognized, forcing them to repeat a year of study. This not only delays their graduation but also adds to their financial and emotional stress. The disruption of their academic journey has had a profound impact on their mental well-being.

### **Mental Health Stigma and Support Access**

The stigma surrounding mental health issues and the difficulty in accessing appropriate support have been significant challenges for the Indian diaspora. Mental health remains a stigmatized topic within many South Asian communities, including the Indian diaspora. Many individuals are reluctant to seek help for mental health issues due to fear of judgment or misunderstanding. For example, an Indian student who experienced severe anxiety during the evacuation process was hesitant to seek professional help, fearing that it would be viewed as a sign of weakness. This stigma can prevent individuals from accessing the support they need, exacerbating their mental health challenges. Accessing mental health support services has been another challenge for the Indian diaspora. In new countries, language barriers and unfamiliarity with local healthcare systems can make it difficult to find appropriate support. For instance, an Indian student in Poland described the difficulty of navigating the local mental health services, which were often

overwhelmed and difficult to access. The lack of culturally sensitive services further complicates the situation, making it harder for individuals to receive the help they need.

### **The Path Forward**

Despite the numerous challenges faced by the Indian diaspora during the Ukraine-Russia war, there are signs of resilience and hope. Communities have come together to support one another, and efforts are being made to address mental health needs and advocate for better support. Indian diaspora organizations have mobilized to provide assistance to those affected by the conflict. Initiatives such as fundraisers, financial aid, and mental health support have been implemented to help individuals cope with the trauma and stress of the war. For example, the Indian community in Poland has set up support networks to assist Indian nationals with food, shelter, and legal assistance. These community efforts provide essential support and help alleviate some of the challenges faced by the diaspora.

Efforts are being made to support Indian students whose education has been disrupted by the war. Several Indian universities have offered to accept students from Ukrainian institutions, allowing them to continue their studies without losing academic progress. Additionally, scholarships and financial aid programs are being established to help students cover the costs of continuing their education in other countries. These initiatives provide much-needed support and help students move forward despite the disruptions caused by the conflict. The Indian diaspora has been active in raising awareness about their challenges and advocating for greater support from governments and international organizations. Through social media campaigns, public demonstrations, and engagement with policymakers, the community is working to ensure that their voices are heard and their needs are met.

These advocacy efforts play a crucial role in bringing attention to the issues faced by the diaspora and pushing for meaningful support and assistance.

## Conclusion

The Ukraine-Russia war has presented the Indian diaspora with a range of significant challenges, impacting their mental health in profound ways. From the trauma of displacement and the stress of resettlement, to the economic hardships and disruption of education, the conflict has left deep scars on the lives of those affected. Despite these challenges, the resilience of the Indian diaspora is evident through their efforts to support one another and advocate for better support. As the conflict continues, it is crucial for governments, international organizations, and communities to work together to address the mental health needs of the diaspora and provide the support necessary for their recovery and rebuilding. The experiences of the Indian diaspora highlight the importance of understanding and addressing the psychological impacts of conflict, ensuring that those affected can find hope and support as they navigate their path forward.



# BIDESIYA: AN EMOTIONAL FOLK OF INDIAN DIASPORA

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Migration has been a feature of human existence since the beginning of civilization. Humans have always migrated in groups and as individuals to seek freedom from war and conflict, to escape hunger and poverty, to find new economic opportunities and employment, to flee from religious intolerance or political repression, or even to trade and travel to new places. In the modern world, the most important economic factors which induce migration may be termed pull and push factors. In ancient times India was the centre of many world-class universities such as Nalanda & Takshashila which attracted several foreigners. Whereas Indians emigrated from the beginning of the 18th century because of various push factors.

After the abolition of the slavery system, there was a shortage of labour in different European colonies. This hurdle was removed by the introduction of indentured labourers. The region where sugarcane production was high needed urgent cheap workers. At that time, India especially the region of United Province and Bihar were the dominant centres of sugar production. So, most of the indentured emigrants from this area arrived in various colonies like Mauritius, Surinam, Fizi Gyuana etc. After the success of indentured labour migration in the British colonies, most of the colonizers requested the government to negotiate with the Indian indentured labourers.

## **Factors affecting migration from the homeland**

So, young male migrants left their families

and relatives in their homeland to earn money and to come back after the expiration of their indenture. Introduction of the Zamindari system, Lagaan (High tax) and famine compelled peasants to sell their land peasants. So, farmers were bound to leave their homeland and go far away from here as indentured labourers. People and families who had been working in the armies of kings and Rajas were now unemployed and the British government appointed the people of Punjab in their army because of their height body and gesture. It was the reason that the people of the United Province and Bihar felt humiliated and unfit to be soldiers. So, there are various factors which have forced people to migrate from India to countless parts of the world as Girmitiya labours.

In 1879, the migration of Indians as indentured labourers started to Fiji by Sir Arthur Gordon, who was the first substantive Governor of the colony (1875- 80). Peter Dillon recorded the first presence of an Indian in Fiji as a sandalwood trader of a lascar (Indian seaman) who was saved from a shipwreck and lived amongst the indigenous of Fiji in 1813. The first ship of 464 Indians was brought from India into Fiji in the British Steamer 'Leonidas' on 15 May 1879.

In this way, Indians had been migrating to various countries at that time for several reasons. In Fiji, 49% of the Indian origin people are the single largest ethnic community, Guyana 53%, Mauritius 74%, Trinidad and Tobago 40% and, Surinam 37%. Approximately there are over 20 million people of Indian origin all over the world,



besides six million Indian citizens. (Government of India 2001:680) Indians had been emigrating as indentured labourers for forty-five years.

### **Voyage of Indentured Labourers**

The journey of indentured labourers who were from Bihar and Uttar Pradesh had begun from Calcutta (Kolkata). Travelling on the tumultuous ocean often leads to certain health problems that can largely account for higher mortality rates. This voyage was so pathetic and disastrous for Indians. Many of them had died because of disease, lack of hygiene and negligence of the ship's surgeon. According to the renowned demographers Ralph Shlomowitz and John Macdonald had shown that there was a trend in the earlier half of the 1800s in which mortality rates while on the sea were considerably higher than those on land between the years 1838 and 1853.

### **Emergence of Bidesiya Folk**

Migration is usually considered an economic phenomenon, but it also creates a cultural phenomenon in both the homeland and the land of destination. For the Bhojpuri people, this migration was first and foremost a heavy emotional loss. Many relationships were torn apart – wives torn from husbands, sisters torn from brothers, fathers from their old age support, and mothers from the 'apples of their eyes'. All were leaving for foreign shores and there was no way to hold them back. The social, economic, political, and historical manifestations of colonial imperialism were drawing them to this migration, which was more of a forced migration for the Bhojpuris. This economic compulsion is expressed in the folk tradition of the people of the Bhojpuri region of India, and the following folk song clearly expresses the pain and suffering that they feel.

To divert the mind from the condition of these burdens they enchanted songs which were coined as bidesiya folk. Even the belongings of those people developed a culture of Bidesiya and birha folks. The famous folk which was chanted by the travellers:

Kalkutta se chuttal jahaj,  
Panwariya Dheere chalo  
Dhire chalo, oh dhire chalo

Oo mein aa gail ba dada hamaar  
Oo mein aa gail ba dadi hamaar  
Oo mein aa gail ba nana hamaar  
Oo mein aa gail ban ani hamaar

Panwariya dhire chalo  
Kalkutta se chhuttal jahaj,  
Panwariya dhire chalo.

Our sailing ship is leaving Kalkutta  
O boatman steer the ship gently,  
O wind steer the ship smoothly

Our dada (Paternal grand father) has come on  
that ship,  
Our dadi (Paternal grandmother) has come on  
that ship,  
Our nana (Maternal grand father) has come on  
that ship,  
Our nani (Maternal grandmother) has come on  
that ship.

O boatman steer the sailing ship gently,  
O wind steer the ship smoothly,  
Our sailing ship is leaving Kalkutta.

(The famous Bhojpuri song from Mauritius)

Huge number of songs, poems and stories in which one can find the perception of the migrants. Through this folk every one can feel the hardship of indentured.

Chhor aili Hindustanwa babwa,  
petwa ke liye Padli bharam mein,  
chhuta Patna ke saharwa  
Chhut gaily ganga maiya ke ancharwa  
Nahi manli egobaba bhaiya ke kahanwa  
Babua petwa ke liye.

[We left Hindustan to satisfy our stomach. We were convinced by the sweet words of the dalal(arkatiya), and in the process were separated from Patna and the Ganga River. We did not listen to our elders but came here because of our stomach.] (Kahegaile Bides, p. 158)



Above folks' song was chanted by the loved ones who were left behind the homeland. The word bidesia was used for the first time as a tek, or repetitive ending to a song line. Scholars believe that this was the special feature of bidesia folk tradition. These songs explained the agony of the people who separated from their loved ones. Folk tradition of Bidesia, the name of the new folk culture that resulted from this movement, Bidesia folk culture was the form of affection which was given to the emigrants by kith and kins. Numerous mediums, including nautanki (musical theatre), dramas, folk ballads, and folk art, are used to depict this folk culture. It is an entire folk culture, or holistic folklore heritage, that arose out of the void left by the migrating Bhojpuris' departure.

### **Conclusion:**

Arts have always been very important in human life. Basic need of human beings to express gets communicated to others through various arts. Folk arts connect the tradition of human lifestyle of our ancestors to the next generations. Bidesiya folk is a sacred thread between the people of Indo-gangetic plains and overseas Indians whose origin is across ganga. So, this popular folk had emerged in Bihar and Uttar Pradesh at the time of British colonial era. It incorporates dance, drama, music, acrobatics and other arts. The performance developed as a cultural response to the outmigration of those who left behind memory. It joints a connection between India and Indian diaspora who lives in various part of the world but did not forget their roots. So, the people of Indian origin live in Fiji. Surinam, Mauritius and other part of the world has retained core elements like language, religious practices, and culinary traditions. However, it has also adapted to local contexts, resulting in unique regional expressions of Indian cultural practices. The Indian diasporic community is an integral part of India, they are the ambassadors of Indian culture and their presence in different parts of the Globe is making the Idea of Vasudhaiv Kutumbakam even more strong.



# GLOBAL POLITICAL ENGAGEMENT: THE PIVOTAL ROLE OF THE INDIAN DIASPORA IN SHAPING POLITICAL LANDSCAPES WORLDWIDE

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The Indian diaspora, spread across continents, has significantly influenced political landscapes worldwide while contributing to India's emergence as a leading political influencer on the global stage. The engagement of the Indian diaspora in global politics is a multifaceted phenomenon, reflecting the diaspora's integration into their host societies and their influence on international relations. This engagement is shaped by the historical context of Indian migration, the socio-economic success of diaspora communities, and the strategic initiatives by the Indian government to connect with its overseas population. Diaspora lobbying groups, think tanks, and advocacy organizations actively work to shape foreign policies, trade agreements, and bilateral cooperation in ways that benefit both India and their host countries. Through cultural diplomacy, educational exchanges, and economic investments, the Indian diaspora continues to contribute to India's soft power, enhancing its global stature and influence. The Indian diaspora's political engagement is a testament to its dynamic and evolving role in shaping the political landscapes of both their host countries and India. Their contributions underscore the importance of diaspora communities in global politics and highlight the symbiotic relationship between India and its diaspora, fostering mutual growth and

development. This article delves into the historical aspects of the Indian diaspora, the role of indentureship, and the political engagement of Indian communities abroad, providing valid examples and case studies to support the analysis.

## **Historical Context and Indentureship**

The Indian diaspora's history is intricately linked with the British colonial period, during which indentured labor was a prominent feature. Between the early 19th and early 20th centuries, millions of Indians were transported to various British colonies, including Mauritius, Fiji, Trinidad and Tobago, Guyana, and South Africa, to work on plantations. These communities laid the foundation for the political engagement and activism that would emerge in the following decades. They formed associations and movements to fight for their rights, laying the groundwork for future political engagement. For instance, the Indo-Fijian community has been politically active since the early 20th century, with leaders like A.D. Patel advocating for the rights of Indians in Fiji. This migration was part of the broader system of indentureship, which replaced slavery and involved contracts that bound workers to a specific employer for a certain period in exchange for passage, wages, and eventual freedom.

Indentureship involved legally binding contracts that obligated Indian workers, often referred to as "coolies," to serve a specific employer for a fixed period, typically ranging from five to seven years. In exchange for their labor, these workers were provided with passage to the colonies, a basic wage, and the promise of eventual freedom. The legacy of indentureship is still evident today, with vibrant Indian communities established across the former British colonies. These communities have maintained and adapted their cultural practices, languages, and religions, creating a unique blend of traditions that reflect both their Indian heritage and their colonial experiences. The history of the Indian diaspora, therefore, is not only a testament to the resilience and endurance of the Indian people but also a significant aspect of the colonial history that shaped the modern world.

### **Political Engagement of the Indian Diaspora**

The political engagement of the Indian diaspora has evolved significantly over time, with notable contributions to both host countries and India. The Indian diaspora varies across different host countries, influenced by factors such as the size of the community, the political system of the host country, and the level of socio-economic integration.

#### **United States**

The Indian diaspora in the United States is one of the most influential, with substantial contributions to American politics and policy-making. Indian Americans, who began migrating in significant numbers after the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965, have excelled in various fields, including technology, medicine, and academia. This success has translated into political clout. For example: Kamala Harris, the Vice President of the United States, is a prominent example of the Indian diaspora's political influence. Her mother, Shyamala Gopalan, immigrated from India in the 1960s. Harris's election to the second-highest office in the US has been celebrated as a milestone for the Indian diaspora, symbolizing their growing political engagement and influence.

For case study, The Impact of Indian American Voters; Indian Americans have become a significant voting bloc, especially in key swing states like Michigan, Pennsylvania, and Florida. Their political donations and grassroots mobilization efforts have also gained attention. For instance, in the 2020 presidential election, organizations like the Indian American Impact Fund played a crucial role in voter outreach and fundraising, contributing to the success of candidates supportive of Indian American interests. Another case study is on Political Organizations and Voter Mobilization; Organizations such as the Indian American Impact Fund have been instrumental in mobilizing Indian American voters and supporting candidates of Indian origin. In the 2020 elections, Indian American voters played a critical role in key swing states, demonstrating their growing political clout.

#### **United Kingdom**

The Indian community in the United Kingdom has a long history, dating back to the colonial era. Today, British Indians are one of the largest ethnic minority groups in the UK, with significant representation in politics. For instance: Rishi Sunak, the former Chancellor of the Exchequer, is a notable example of British Indian political influence. His ascent in British politics underscores the growing acceptance and integration of Indian-origin individuals in the UK's political landscape. For case study: The Influence of British Indian Organizations; British Indian organizations, such as the Conservative Friends of India and Labor Friends of India, have been instrumental in fostering political engagement. These groups work to ensure that the concerns of the Indian community are addressed by major political parties, highlighting issues such as immigration, trade, and cultural integration. Diaspora Organizations and Political Advocacy; Organizations such as the Conservative Friends of India and Labor Friends of India work to promote the interests of the Indian community within the major political parties. These groups engage in advocacy on issues such as immigration, trade, and cultural integration, ensuring that the concerns of the Indian diaspora are addressed at the highest levels of government.



## **Canada**

Canada's Indian diaspora, primarily composed of Punjabis, has been active in politics, particularly at the federal and provincial levels. For example: Jagmeet Singh; the leader of the New Democratic Party (NDP), represents the political prominence of Indo-Canadians. Singh's leadership and advocacy on issues such as social justice, healthcare, and minority rights resonate with a broad segment of the Canadian population. The Indo-Canadian Political Representation; Indo-Canadians hold several key positions in Canadian politics. For example, Harjit Sajjan, a former Minister of National Defence, and Anita Anand, the current Minister of Public Services and Procurement, exemplify the community's political influence. The increasing number of Indo-Canadian MPs and provincial legislators reflects the community's active participation in shaping Canada's political landscape. For case study: Representation in Parliament; Indo-Canadians hold several key positions in Canadian politics. For instance, Anita Anand, the Minister of Public Services and Procurement, and Bardish Chagger, the former Minister of Diversity and Inclusion and Youth, exemplify the community's political influence. Their presence in the Canadian Parliament underscores the active participation of Indo-Canadians in shaping national policies.

## **India's Strategic Engagement with the Diaspora**

The political engagement of the Indian diaspora has not only influenced host countries but also bolstered India's position as a leading global political influencer.

### **(i) Diplomacy and Soft Power**

India has leveraged its diaspora to enhance its diplomatic reach and soft power. The Indian government has established various initiatives and platforms to engage with the diaspora, such as the Pravasi Bharatiya Divas (Non-Resident Indian Day) and the Overseas Indian Facilitation Centre. For Instance: Modi's Diaspora Engagement; Prime Minister Narendra Modi has actively engaged with the Indian diaspora during his visits abroad, recognizing their role in strengthening bilateral ties.

His speeches at Madison Square Garden in New York and Wembley Stadium in London, attended by thousands of Indian expatriates, highlighted the diaspora's significance in India's foreign policy. The Indian diaspora's contributions to India are multifaceted, including remittances, investments, and advocacy. Remittances from the diaspora are a critical source of foreign exchange for India, amounting to over \$80 billion annually. Additionally, the diaspora has played a key role in lobbying for India's interests in foreign capitals, such as advocating for the US-India nuclear deal in 2008.

### **(ii) Economic Influence**

The economic success of the Indian diaspora has positioned India as a significant player in the global economy. Indian-origin entrepreneurs and professionals have established successful businesses and occupy leadership roles in multinational corporations. For example: Sundar Pichai and Satya Nadella; CEO of Alphabet Inc. (Google's parent company), and Satya Nadella, CEO of Microsoft, are prominent examples of Indian-origin leaders shaping the global tech industry. Their achievements reflect the broader contributions of the Indian diaspora to innovation and economic growth. Indian-origin investors and business leaders have facilitated investments in India, fostering economic ties between India and their host countries. For instance, Indian American venture capitalists have funded numerous startups in India's burgeoning tech sector, contributing to its status as a global technology hub.

### **(iii) Cultural and Social Influence**

The Indian diaspora has promoted Indian culture and values worldwide, enhancing India's cultural diplomacy. Indian festivals, cuisine, and traditions have gained global recognition, fostering a positive image of India. For example: International Yoga Day; The adoption of International Yoga Day by the United Nations, initiated by India, showcases the global cultural influence of India and its diaspora. Yoga, an integral part of Indian culture, is now practiced by millions worldwide, reflecting the soft power wielded by India. For case Study: Bollywood's Global Reach; Bollywood, India's film industry, has a vast international following, particularly among the Indian diaspora.

Bollywood films and music are popular in countries with significant Indian communities, such as the US, UK, Canada, and the Middle East. This cultural connection enhances India's soft power and fosters a sense of shared identity among the diaspora.

## **Arguments for the Indian Diaspora's Political Influence**

### **(i) Educational and Professional Success**

The educational and professional achievements of the Indian diaspora have provided them with the resources and platforms to engage in politics. High levels of education and professional success translate into political capital, enabling diaspora members to influence policy and decision-making processes. The professional success of Indian diaspora members also extends to the United Kingdom, where Priti Patel served as the Home Secretary, playing a crucial role in shaping immigration policies. In addition, the robust presence of Indian-origin professionals in sectors such as technology, finance, and medicine in countries like the United States, Canada, and the UK further bolsters their political influence, as they are often called upon to provide expert opinions on policy matters. These examples illustrate how the educational and professional accomplishments of the Indian diaspora translate into significant political influence, allowing them to shape policies and contribute to decision-making processes on a global scale.

### **(ii) Strong Community Networks**

The Indian diaspora has established robust community networks that facilitate political mobilization and advocacy. Organizations, cultural associations, and advocacy groups play a crucial role in promoting political engagement and addressing community concerns. For instance, the Global Organization of People of Indian Origin (GOPIO) has been instrumental in advocating for the rights of Indian communities worldwide and addressing issues such as discrimination and social injustice. Cultural associations like the India Association of Minnesota (IAM) provide platforms for cultural exchange and community bonding, which, in turn, create a unified front for addressing political issues. Additionally, advocacy groups like the South Asian

Americans Leading Together (SAALT) focus on policy analysis and community education to combat hate crimes and promote civil rights.

### **(iii) Strategic Alliances and Lobbying**

The Indian diaspora has formed strategic alliances and engaged in lobbying efforts to advance their interests. By building coalitions with other minority groups and political entities, the diaspora has amplified its voice in the political arena. For instance, in the United States, organizations like the Indian American Impact Fund have successfully mobilized resources to support candidates of Indian origin and advocate for policies benefiting the community. They have collaborated with other minority groups, such as African Americans and Hispanic communities, to push for comprehensive immigration reform and civil rights legislation. In the United Kingdom, the British Indian community has forged partnerships with other ethnic minority groups and political parties, influencing key issues such as healthcare, education, and trade policies.

### **(iv) Bicultural Identity**

The bicultural identity of the Indian diaspora enables them to navigate and influence both their host countries and India. This dual identity fosters a sense of responsibility towards both nations, motivating political participation and advocacy. For example, in the United States, Indian-American politicians like Kamala Harris, the Vice President, and Pramila Jayapal, a prominent member of Congress, have utilized their unique cultural perspectives to advocate for policies that benefit both Indian and American communities. Similarly, in the United Kingdom, the presence of influential figures like Rishi Sunak, the Prime Minister, underscores the significant role of the Indian diaspora in shaping political landscapes and fostering bilateral relations. In Canada, Jagmeet Singh, the leader of the New Democratic Party, exemplifies how the Indian diaspora can influence national politics while maintaining strong ties to their heritage.

### **Way Forward**

To further harness the potential of the Indian diaspora's political engagement, several steps can be taken. First, enhancing educational and leadership programs tailored for diaspora youth

can cultivate the next generation of political leaders. Second, fostering stronger partnerships between diaspora organizations and Indian government institutions can streamline advocacy efforts and policy initiatives. Third, addressing issues of discrimination and promoting inclusivity within host countries can ensure that Indian-origin individuals have equal opportunities to participate in political processes. Additionally, leveraging technology and social media can amplify the voices of the diaspora, enabling more effective mobilization and communication. Finally, sustained diplomatic efforts and targeted outreach by the Indian government can strengthen diaspora ties, encouraging greater contributions to India's development and enhancing its influence on the global stage. By implementing these measures, the Indian diaspora can continue to play a pivotal role in shaping global political landscapes and promoting India's strategic interests worldwide.

## Conclusion

The Indian diaspora's political engagement has profoundly shaped political landscapes across the world, contributing to India's emergence as a leading global political influencer. From the historical context of indentureship to contemporary examples of political leaders and activists, the diaspora's impact is evident in various domains, including diplomacy, economics, and culture. Through educational and professional success, strong community networks, strategic alliances, and a bicultural identity, the Indian diaspora continues to enhance India's global stature, fostering a mutually beneficial relationship between India and its diaspora. Through strategic initiatives, strong community networks, and active political participation, the Indian diaspora continues to enhance India's global stature, fostering a mutually beneficial relationship between India and its overseas communities. As the diaspora grows and evolves, its political engagement will undoubtedly remain a vital force in global politics, contributing to the dynamic interplay of cultures, economies, and nations.

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# DRIVING GROWTH: THE ECONOMIC IMPACT OF THE INDIAN DIASPORA

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## **Introduction**

The Indian diaspora is one of the largest and most influential diaspora communities around the world. It has had a profound economic impact on both their host countries and India over the period. This community, spread across continents, includes high-skilled professionals, entrepreneurs, and labourers who contribute significantly to the development of various sectors. The economic implications of the Indian diaspora are multifaceted, encompassing remittances, trade, investment, technology transfer, knowledge exchange and cultural influence. It should be noted that a major chunk of the Foreign Direct Investment has been contributed by the diaspora community in India. The community has also made substantial contributions to tourism, charity, philanthropic activities and NGOs.

Diaspora refers to individuals who have spread out from one country to the rest of the world. In the context of India, diaspora can be referred to as a community of migrants living or settled permanently in a foreign land, aware of their origins and identity. They also continue to maintain some form of connection with their native land. The impact of such a spread of people could be on social, political and

administrative aspects which can lead that country onto an altogether different path of growth and development.

## **Historical Context**

The Indian diaspora has a long history dating back to ancient times when traders and labourers migrated to different parts of the world. However, significant waves of migration occurred during the British colonial period, particularly in the 19th and early 20th centuries, when many Indians were transported as indentured labourers to work on plantations, mines, and railways in various parts of the British colonies such as Fiji, Mauritius, Sri Lanka and Guyana. The post-independence period saw a new wave of migration driven by economic opportunities, particularly to the United States, Canada, the United Kingdom, Southeast Asia, and the Middle East. After Independence, India's economic policies and the global demand for skilled labour by liberal economies fuelled new migration trends. The 1960s and 1970s saw a significant outflow of professionals, particularly engineers, doctors, and scientists, to developed countries. This "brain drain" was driven by better career opportunities, higher salaries, and improved living standards abroad. However, over time, this migration evolved into a "brain gain" as many Indian professionals started contributing to both their host countries and India.

According to the United Nations, there are about 18 million Indians who now live overseas. The advent of globalisation and integration of the world economy led to the emergence of a concept called Diaspora capital, which refers to the influence and impact of the diaspora community over a country's economy. Economists have quoted that amid this growth, the economic power of Indians has spread beyond their native borders, leaving a major global economic mark.

### **Remittances: A Lifeline for the Indian Economy**

One of the most direct economic impacts of the Indian diaspora on the Indian economy is through remittances. According to the World Bank, India has been the largest recipient of remittances for several years. In 2020, India received approximately \$83 billion in remittances, accounting for about 3.4% of its GDP. These funds are crucial for millions of Indian households, who are dependent on these remittances to support their family's education, healthcare, housing and other necessities. They also contribute to the country's foreign exchange reserves, providing a buffer against economic instability. These Remittances have a multiplier effect on the economy as the money sent back home is often invested in small businesses, or utilised for other productive purposes, contributing to the economic growth at the grassroots level. Moreover, remittances also help alleviate poverty and reduce income inequality in rural areas, where many of the recipient families reside. Families with members working abroad often invest in the education of their children, leading to higher literacy rates and better job prospects in the future. For instance, in states like Kerala and Punjab, remittances form a significant part of the local economy, driving consumer spending and infrastructure development. It has resulted in the development of the standard of living among low-income households in various parts of India. Apart from monetary remittances, the diaspora community also brings in social remittances to Indian society in the form of ideas, identities, behaviours and social capital.

### **Trade and Investment**

The Indian diaspora has played a pivotal role in boosting trade and investment between India and their host countries. Diaspora networks facilitate business connections, promote Indian products and services, and help navigate the complexities of international trade. For instance, Indian entrepreneurs in the United States and the United Kingdom have established strong business links with India, leading to increased bilateral trade.

The Indian diaspora continues to contribute significantly towards the Indian economy through Foreign direct investment and Foreign portfolio investment. The aspect of India being a society with deep family ties, community and traditions which focuses on the concept of sharing and giving has had a long profound effect on the psychological mindset of the diaspora community to give back something to their native country of origin. Hence, the influx of opportunities in the form of establishing subsidiaries of multinational corporations or opening up new businesses in India has bolstered the relationship between the government and the diaspora.

Trade relations between India and countries with significant Indian diaspora populations have seen substantial growth. The United States, for instance, is one of India's largest trading partners. Indian-American entrepreneurs and professionals have been instrumental in promoting Indian goods and services, from IT solutions to pharmaceuticals and textiles. The investment in Indian companies through the Indian stock market also portrays the intention to support Indian businesses and the ensuing commitment of the government to promote its investment avenues.

The Indian government has introduced several schemes and incentives to attract diaspora investments, such as the Overseas Citizen of India (OCI) card and special investment zones. The diaspora has played a crucial role in the growth of the world's IT sector, with many Indian tech entrepreneurs establishing companies in Silicon Valley and subsequently investing in India's tech ecosystem.

## **Human Capital and Knowledge Transfer**

The Indian diaspora is known for its high levels of education and professional expertise. Many Indians who migrate to developed countries excel in fields such as information technology, medicine, engineering, and academia and are known for their high levels of education and professional expertise. Indian-born scientists and engineers account for a large proportion of the workforce in the technology and innovation sectors. This brain gain has had a substantial impact on the global economy, where Indian professionals hold key positions in major corporations, universities, and research institutions. Prominent figures like Amartya Sen, and Abhijit Banerjee have all made major academic contributions to the world through their knowledge. Whereas, there is also a rise in the proportion of Indian diaspora holding high positions in top Multinational companies like Google CEO Sundar Pichai, Microsoft CEO Satya Nadela, Adobe CEO Shantanu Narayen and many more. These people have made enormous contributions to their field which has profoundly benefited the global economy. The scientific and technological diaspora community has also helped India and other developing countries in bridging their technology gap through collaboration efforts by bringing in innovation and ideas from their professional experience. The host country has also gained in the field of education from the continuous measures of establishing industry-academia ties and joint ventures. For example, the establishment of Centres for excellence in the prestigious institutions of IITs in India. This human capital of professionals and labourers working abroad has enabled a sense of network and connectivity which has multiple levels of scope to get things done more efficiently. The concept of Reverse Brain Drain is gaining traction lately, with increased involvement of the Indian diaspora's contribution in all major sectors like tourism, education, health, research and development, technology and entrepreneurship. The Indian diaspora has a strong entrepreneurial spirit, contributing significantly to innovation and job creation in their host countries. In Silicon Valley, for instance, Indian entrepreneurs have founded numerous successful startups, driving technological advancements and economic growth. Programs like the Global

Innovation and Technology Alliance (GITA) encourage such knowledge transfer, fostering collaboration between Indian and foreign institutions.

## **Startups and Venture Capital**

Diaspora entrepreneurs also play a crucial role in fostering startup ecosystems in India. They provide mentorship, funding, and market access to Indian startups, helping them scale and compete globally. Indian startups have benefited from the expertise and capital of diaspora investors, leading to the rise of successful companies like Flipkart, Ola, and Zomato. Bangalore, the innovation hub of India is an example in this regard. Returning entrepreneurs and professionals bring with them best practices and cutting-edge technologies from Silicon Valley and other global tech hubs. These returnees often establish new ventures, join existing firms, or invest in local startups, fostering an environment of innovation and growth.

## **Political influence and Host country's growth**

The development of political links with other countries through diplomatic engagement has helped in fostering bilateral relations and cooperation. The vast presence and prominence of the Indian diaspora in the political and administrative affairs of the state has helped corroborate better diplomatic ties in moments of crisis. It can also be beneficial in advocating for policies from the host country in favour of the home country. The emergence of world leaders like Kamala Harris, SR Nathan and Rishi Sunak is seen as an opportunity with great potential to develop better relationships among other world powers. It has also enhanced India's image as an emerging world power. It should be noted that a political and economically influential diaspora can be used to leverage economic opportunities in favour of the native country.

The Indian diaspora has not only favoured the interests of the home country but has also been instrumental in the development of the host country. It can be said evidently that the diaspora community has significantly contributed to the economic growth of the host country through various spheres.

The professional knowledge and expertise have brought in innovation and best practices of technical skill sets. The Indian diaspora pays taxes and increases overall demand through their high consumption expenditure. They also act as catalysts in promoting the culture of the country in which they reside.

### **Cultural Influence and Soft Power**

In today's agenda of India, the enhancement of its soft power is a vital priority for promoting India's development story to the world. The Indian diaspora has significantly influenced global culture by enhancing India's soft power. Indian cuisine, music, films, and festivals have gained immense popularity worldwide, promoting cultural exchange and understanding. Indian cinema, in particular, has a massive global following, and Indian film festivals are celebrated in many countries. Traditional practices like Ayurveda and yoga have also gained international recognition. Likewise, there is also a cultural exchange of values and traditions by inculcating other cultural values brought in by the Indian diaspora from their residence country. It has been enabled majorly through forums of cultural organisations and events, thereby creating a space for the universal integration of worldly values. This idea also acts on par with India's global agenda of 'Vasudeva Kutumbakam'.

### **Indian Government Initiatives**

The Ministry of External Affairs has initiated the implementation of various schemes like Pravasi Kaushal Vikas Yojana and Pravasi Bharathiya Bima Yojana by targeting the diaspora community. The Pravasi Bharatiya Divas is celebrated on January 9, acknowledges the contributions of the Indian diaspora and serves as a platform for dialogue. The government has also introduced The OCI card, which grants overseas Indians several privileges, including lifelong visa-free travel to India and parity with Non-Resident Indians in economic and educational matters.

### **Conclusion**

Despite its numerous contributions, the Indian diaspora faces several challenges. Discrimination, visa restrictions, and integration issues are common in many host countries. Additionally, the COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the vulnerabilities

of migrant workers, many of whom lost their jobs and faced significant hardships during the crisis. The working conditions of labourers in the Middle East and South Asian countries are poor and lack any social security benefits, making them vulnerable to exploitation and inhumane treatment. To harness the full potential of the diaspora, India needs to address these challenges and create a conducive environment for diaspora engagement. The Indian government must draft a framework for social security measures for migrant labourers working abroad and a proper diaspora engagement policy. Policies that facilitate easier movement of people, protect migrant rights, and encourage diaspora investments can strengthen the economic linkages between India and its global community. The prospects of the Indian diaspora's economic impact are promising. With the increasing globalisation and interconnectedness of economies, the diaspora's role is likely to expand further. The growing emphasis on innovation, technology, and entrepreneurship provides new opportunities for the diaspora to contribute to global and Indian economic growth.

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One should not be over-critical about the cultural isolation of these small communities, because this is how they protected their cultural heritage during their stay in colonial India. There is an interesting book *Jewish Portraits, Indian Frames: Women's Narratives from a Diaspora of Hope* written by Jael Silliman, it talks about the history and legacies of Baghdadi Jews in Calcutta. However, the number of resident Armenian and Baghdadi Jews declined rapidly after the independence of India. For example, the formation of the Israel state streamlined the outward migration of Jews to Israel. Today, only a handful of them remain in the city. Architectures such as the Maghen David Synagogue, and Beth El Synagogue are of Jews and the Armenian Church of Armenians are the standing witness to their history. It is a history of forgotten legacies.

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# THE EVOLVING ROLE OF DIASPORAS IN THE 21ST CENTURY: THE AGENTS OF CHANGE AND THE IMPACT OF DIGITAL TECHNOLOGIES ON DIASPORIC ACTIVISM AND SOCIAL MOVEMENTS

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Historically defined by displacement and physical separation from their homelands, diasporic communities are undergoing a transmutation in the 21st century. They are transcending their traditional role as passive observers to become potent catalysts for change. The last two decades have witnessed a remarkable reconfiguration of the diaspora experience. While scholars like Brubaker (2008) viewed diasporas as fragmented entities, the 21st century narrative presents a more dynamic picture. Diasporas are now recognized as transnational networks, actively shaping their identities and influencing their ancestral homelands through constant interaction with both (Vertovec, 1999). This continuous engagement translates as a sense of agency, exemplified by the rise of diasporic activism and social movements.

However, the true catalyst for this transformation lies in the ubiquitous nature of digital technologies. Diasporic communities are now leveraging its power to forge a new path of transnational engagement and social justice advocacy. Platforms like social media, online fundraising tools and collaborative communication apps have empowered diasporas in unprecedented ways.

This paper attempts this dynamic shift, examining how these platforms are empowering diasporas to organize and mobilize. Diasporas can now bypass traditional media restrictions and geographical limitations to rapidly organize supporters around the world in order to amplify voices and counter narratives by providing a powerful megaphone to share their experiences and challenge dominant narratives. The emergence of digital technologies has fundamentally reshaped diasporic activism. Social media platforms, as examined by scholars like Freyer (2023) in the context of the Rohingya crisis, have fostered the creation of online communities. Facebook and Twitter became crucial tools for disseminating information about the atrocities faced by the Rohingya. Graphic images, videos and firsthand accounts bypassed traditional media filters and brought the crisis to the attention of a global audience. This pressured governments and international organizations to take action.

Social media facilitated mobilization for the Rohingya cause. Online platforms were used to organize petitions, boycotts and fundraising campaigns. This generated financial support for relief efforts and pressured corporations to sever ties with companies linked to the Myanmar government. Social media instilled a sense of community and solidarity among geographically dispersed Rohingya diaspora groups. They could connect, share information and coordinate actions in support of those affected by the crisis. However, restricted internet access within Myanmar itself limited the Rohingya population's ability to directly utilize social media platforms. The crisis often unfolded primarily through the lens of external actors sharing information about the Rohingya, raising concerns about the narrative control.

While they raised awareness and facilitated mobilization, they also presented challenges. The Myanmar government actively cracked down on dissent, including online activism. This restricted the ability of those within Myanmar to document and share information about the crisis on social media platforms. Thus, virtual spaces enable geographically dispersed diasporas to connect, share information, and mobilize around common causes. Diasporic activists can now bypass traditional media gatekeepers, disseminating uncensored narratives and garnering international attention for their struggles.

The Indian diaspora, estimated at over 32 million strong, is a powerful force on the world stage. Traditionally, their influence on India has been felt through financial remittances, cultural preservation efforts, and lobbying governments in their host countries. However, the 21st century presents a unique landscape for diasporic engagement, marked by the transformative power of digital technologies. Prior to the digital revolution, geographical distance often limited the Indian diaspora's ability to directly participate in social movements on the ground. Studies by scholars like Adrian McGregor (2017) highlight this challenge in the context of the Narmada Bachao Andolan (Save the Narmada Movement). While the diaspora expressed solidarity, their physical absence from protests hindered their direct impact. However, the rise of digital platforms has empowered the Indian diaspora to bridge this gap. They have become crucial tools for mobilization. During the 2018 Kerala Floods, the Indian American Kerala Association (IAKA) effectively utilized these platforms to coordinate relief efforts across the globe and served as a bridge between IAKA chapters across the globe. Sharing compelling stories and visuals of the devastation resonated with the global audience, encouraging them to donate to support flood relief efforts. This enabled them to share resources, coordinate fundraising efforts and ensure a unified approach to relief work. Research by Seetha et al. (2020) explores this phenomenon, demonstrating how social media facilitated transnational networks of support and resource sharing.

Furthermore, these platforms allow Indian diaspora activists to bypass traditional media gatekeepers in India. Kavita Arora's work (2020) on the #MeToo movement in India emphasizes the role of social media in amplifying marginalized voices and holding those in power accountable. Traditionally, victims of sexual harassment and assault in India faced societal stigma and pressure to stay silent. Social media provided a platform for victims to share their experiences anonymously or publicly, breaking the cycle of silence and shame. High-profile cases, like those against actors and journalists, gained widespread attention on platforms like Twitter and Facebook. This domino effect encouraged other victims to come forward and share their stories and were instrumental in bringing attention to sexual harassment cases, sparking national conversations and prompting legal reforms. Hashtags like #MeTooIndia facilitated conversations, allowing survivors to know they were not alone and encouraging others to speak up.

Digital tools have not only enhanced communication but also enabled new forms of activism. Fundraising platforms like GoFundMe have empowered the diaspora to rapidly mobilize financial resources in support of social causes in India. The Sikh Coalition's online campaign after the 2012 Wisconsin Sikh Temple Shooting exemplifies the power of fundraising platforms like GoFundMe in mobilizing the global Sikh diaspora in times of crisis. In the aftermath of the tragic shooting, the Sikh Coalition launched an online campaign on GoFundMe. This platform provided a quick and convenient way for the geographically dispersed Sikh diaspora to contribute financially. Donations poured in from around the world, offering immediate financial assistance to the victims' families and the Oak Creek Sikh community. These funds helped with funeral expenses, medical bills and rebuilding efforts at the temple. Donations from the global Sikh diaspora, facilitated by online platforms, provided crucial support to the victims and their families. The online campaign wasn't just about raising money. It served as a powerful tool for spreading



awareness about the tragedy and garnering global support for the Sikh community. Overall, the Sikh Coalition's online campaign serves as a powerful testament to the effectiveness of fundraising platforms like GoFundMe. It demonstrates how the diaspora can rapidly mobilize financial resources, spread awareness and foster solidarity in the face of tragedy.

BringBackOurGirls campaign, ignited by the Nigerian diaspora, showcased the mobilizing power of social media in raising global awareness about human rights abuses. The hashtag was created on the 23rd of April 2014 by Ibrahim M. Abdullahi, a Nigerian lawyer, to draw the world's attention to the kidnapping of 276 girls from a school in Chibok in the State of Borno in NorthEastern Nigeria. Many public figures joined the campaign from around the world. These included: Michelle Bachelet (Chilean politician); Michelle Obama (President Obama's wife), Malala Yousafzai (a Pakistani activist); Ellen DeGeneres and Angelina Jolie (actresses), who played key roles in spreading word of the Twitter campaign abroad, giving it a much higher profile as they demanded the freeing of the kidnapped girls. Social media have been used in other conflicts since then, including in 'The Anglophone Crisis' in Cameroon in 2016 (Oriola, 2017). On similar lines, the #BlackLivesMatter movement, where the African diaspora leveraged social media to amplify marginalized voices and galvanize global support against racial injustice.

Despite the immense potential of digital tools, the online landscape presents challenges for Indian diasporic activism. The Indian government's efforts to control online content, documented by Human Rights Watch (2023), raise concerns about digital repression. This can stifle dissent and limit the ability of diaspora activists to freely express their views and advocate for change. Furthermore, the spread of misinformation and the creation of echo chambers within online communities pose a significant threat. Research by Rao et al. (2018) examines this phenomenon in the context of the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) protests. The proliferation of fake news and biased narratives online can hinder productive dialogue and strategic action within the diaspora and in India. By delving into these transformative applications of digital technologies, this paper argues that diasporas are no longer bystanders, but rather active agents of change shaping the social and political landscapes of their homelands and the world. While scholars like Shapiro (2009) recognized the role of diaspora in advocating for human rights and development, earlier perspectives often overlooked the full spectrum of their contributions. Today, diasporas are emerging as powerful transnational changemakers, leveraging their global networks and cultural bridges to foster social transformation on a grand scale. Their advocacy for human rights extends beyond pronouncements, with diasporas utilizing online platforms to expose abuses and rally international support (Tilly, 2005).

The cultural exchange transcends traditional folk festivals. Diasporas leverage digital tools to curate online platforms showcasing their rich heritages, fostering a sense of global community and appreciation for diverse cultures. Economically, diasporas are no longer simply sources of remittances. Digital technologies empower them to invest directly in businesses back home, fueling entrepreneurship and innovation. The rise of crowdfunding platforms have enabled diasporas to collectively fund development projects in their ancestral lands, bypassing traditional financial institutions and fostering a sense of collective ownership. However, these transformative contributions were previously limited by traditional communication methods that restricted their reach and effectiveness. This digital revolution has made them hyperconnected, transnational entities – dubbed “networked diasporas” (Espiritu, 2014). This paradigm shift transcends mere technological advancement; it represents a fundamental reconfiguration of power dynamics, identity formation, and the very essence of “home” for diasporic populations in the 21st century. Social media platforms like Twitter and Facebook function as powerful advocacy hubs, enabling diasporas to disseminate information directly to a vast and engaged audience. This empowers them to expose human rights abuses in real-time, fostering international outrage and pressuring governments to act.

Online collaboration tools like Zoom, Slack, and Google Docs empower networked diasporas to transcend geographical limitations and forge a new kind of collective agency. Diasporic professionals can now pool their talents and expertise on a global scale, tackling critical issues facing their homelands. For example, healthcare professionals in the Indian diaspora leverage telemedicine platforms to provide remote consultations and training to rural Indian communities, bridging the gap in access to quality healthcare. Beyond exposure, social media allows diasporas to document and amplify social injustices within their homelands. The #EndSARS movement in Nigeria serves as a potent illustration. Young Nigerians, both domestically and in the diaspora, utilized social media to share raw footage of police brutality by the Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS). These unfiltered accounts galvanized public outrage and international pressure, ultimately leading to the disbandment of SARS. This case highlights the power of digital tools in fostering transnational solidarity, enabling geographically dispersed communities to unite behind a common cause.

The digital revolution has woven a transformative web of connectivity, empowering diasporas to transcend geographical limitations and forge meaningful partnerships with activists and organizations back home. Online forums, virtual meeting spaces, and collaborative platforms function as vibrant digital bridges, fostering knowledge exchange, strategic planning, and coordinated action (Landolt, 2016). This increasing transnational collaboration unlocks a treasure trove of resources, expertise and networks within diasporic communities, ultimately enhancing the effectiveness of social movements across the globe. However, the landscape of social movements is constantly evolving, and diasporas are at the forefront of this transformation through their digital engagement.

Beyond traditional fundraising methods, diasporas are wielding the power of crowdfunding platforms to bypass bureaucratic hurdles and support grassroots movements directly. The ongoing fight for LGBTQ+ rights in Eastern Europe provides a compelling example. Polish and Hungarian LGBTQ+ diasporas have utilized crowdfunding platforms to raise funds for local activists facing persecution and support organizations providing safe spaces and legal aid. Social media platforms like Instagram and TikTok are transforming how diasporas raise awareness about social issues. Diasporas are creating powerful narratives through compelling visuals and storytelling, garnering international attention for underreported struggles. The environmental justice movement has seen a surge in diasporic engagement through digital storytelling. For instance, the Amazon rainforest fires of 2019 saw a surge of social media campaigns spearheaded by Indigenous diasporas in North America and Europe, raising global awareness about the environmental crisis and pressuring governments to take action.

Despite the immense potential, it's crucial to acknowledge the limitations of the digital realm. As previously mentioned, the digital divide can create a barrier to participation, limiting the reach and inclusivity of online cultural exchange initiatives. Diaspora organizations must prioritize initiatives that bridge this gap and ensure equitable access to technology for all members of the community. The curated nature of online platforms can create an idealized and potentially inauthentic representation of culture. It's important to be mindful of this limitation and strive to present a more nuanced and multifaceted portrayal of cultural heritage that reflects the complexities of lived experiences. Furthermore, online communities can inadvertently become echo chambers, reinforcing existing cultural biases and hindering exposure to diverse perspectives within the diaspora or the host society. Promoting open dialogue, critical thinking skills, and a willingness to engage with opposing viewpoints is crucial to mitigating this risk. The Indian diaspora, empowered by digital technologies, is poised to play a transformative role in shaping India's future. However, navigating the digital landscape requires a nuanced approach. Developing ethical frameworks for online engagement is crucial.

These frameworks, as discussed by scholars like Chadwick (2013) and Papacharissi (2015), should emphasize factchecking, respectful dialogue, data privacy and cultural sensitivity. Investing in digital literacy programs within Indian diaspora communities is also essential. As highlighted by Robinson and Schulz (2019), equipping individuals with the skills to critically evaluate information and engage strategically online will maximize the effectiveness of their activism. In conclusion, the digital age presents a complex landscape of opportunities and challenges for diasporas. By acknowledging the limitations and proactively addressing them, diasporas can leverage the power of technology to amplify their voices, advocate for social change, preserve their cultural heritage, and forge a more unified and vibrant identity in the 21st century. The digital revolution has empowered diasporas to transcend the limitations of geography and become architects of change. They are no longer passive observers; they are active participants shaping the future of their homelands and the global landscape. As technology continues to evolve, we can expect even more innovative forms of diasporic engagement to emerge. Diasporas will undoubtedly play a critical role in defining the future of social movements, cultural exchange, and the very notion of what it means to belong to a community in the digital age.

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