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PRAVASI PULSE



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AN INITIATIVE OF INDIAN DIASPORIC NETWORK



Letter from the *Editor*



Dear Readers, Contributors, and Esteemed Members of Our Diaspora

As we bring you the October 2024 edition of Pravasi Pulse, we want to extend our immense gratitude to all our contributors, readers, and the incredible team behind this magazine. It is your support and engagement that continues to drive us forward, allowing us to cover the stories and issues that shape the lives of the Indian diaspora around the world.

Our mission has always been to highlight the most pressing concerns of our global community, and with each edition, we strive to bring fresh insights from the field.

This commitment has allowed Pravasi Pulse to expand and reach new heights, where we not only cover the real-world issues facing the diaspora but also dive deeper into the complexities and nuances that affect our community globally.

Looking ahead, we are excited to announce some new developments. In the near future, we will be launching a travel blog as part of our ongoing field visits, and we plan to expand our team with members from different parts of the world. This growing team will not only consist of those in academia but will also

include individuals who are passionate about the stories of people who left India during various periods of history, the true fabric of the Indian diaspora.

At Pravasi Pulse, we are more than a think tank or research institution that deals with numbers, theories, and literature. We aim to breathe life into these facts and figures, engaging in meaningful discussions and presenting compelling arguments that reflect the lived realities of our community. As the official voice of the Indian Diasporic Network, we are committed to staying true to our vision and mission, and we will never compromise on our core principles.

Lastly, we are thrilled to share that from next month onward, we will be welcoming voluntary contributions from those who believe in our mission and vision. Your support, whether in the form of stories, insights, or resources, will help us continue this important work. Together, we can make a difference.

Thank you for being a part of this journey with us. We look forward to the continued collaboration and shared successes.

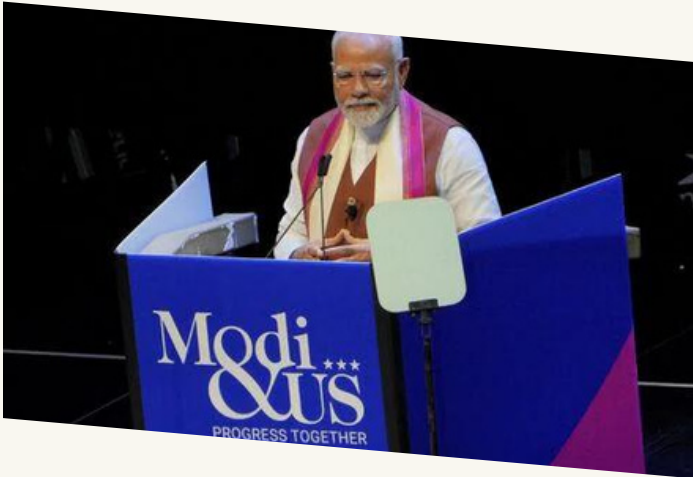
Warm regards,

Prakash Kumar Jha

Editor-in-Chief, *Pravasi Pulse*

The journey of the Indian diaspora is one of perseverance, integration, and maintaining a deep connection to its roots, serving as a model for communities around the world.

Pravasi News Digest



Prime Minister Narendra Modi recently announced that India's 5G market has surpassed that of the United States within just two years. Speaking to the Indian diaspora in New York, he highlighted India's rapid technological advancements and expressed optimism about the development of home-grown 6G technology. Modi emphasized that India is no longer just following global trends but is now leading in tech innovation, with almost every major mobile brand in the world being manufactured in India.

Members of the Indian diaspora in the United States recently crafted a miniature statue of Prime Minister Narendra Modi adorned with thousands of lab-grown diamonds. Inspired by Modi's gift of lab-grown diamonds to US First Lady Jill Biden, Rajkumar and Asrit, along with 30-40 other community members, spent over a year perfecting the glittering tribute. They hope to present the statue to Modi himself, or if not, they plan to take it to India in December.



A recent study by the Migration Policy Institute (MPI) revealed that Indian migrants constitute the largest group of educated immigrants in the United States, making up 14% of the global pool of educated immigrants. As of 2022, there were over 14 million college-educated migrants in the US, with Indians accounting for 2 million of this group. The report also highlighted that 48% of migrants who arrived between 2018 and 2022 held a college degree.



Prisha Tapre, a 16-year-old British Indian from Watford, Hertfordshire, recently became one of the youngest swimmers to cross the English Channel. On September 4, 2024, she swam the 21-mile stretch from Dover to Cap Gris Nez in France, completing the swim in 11 hours and 48 minutes. Prisha undertook this remarkable feat to raise funds for a charity mission aimed at alleviating child hunger in India and the UK. Her achievement is a testament to her perseverance and dedication to making a positive impact.

Suhas Subramanyam, a 37-year-old Indian American politician, is on the brink of making history once again. A former technology adviser to President Barack Obama, Subramanyam currently serves as a State Senator in Virginia and is the leading candidate for the U.S. House of Representatives from Virginia's 10th Congressional District. If elected in November, he will be only the seventh Indian American to join the U.S. Congress and the first from the East Coast.



Prasanthi Ram, an Indian-origin lecturer at Nanyang Technological University, has won the Singapore Literature Prize for English fiction with her debut work, "Nine Yard Sarees." Published in late 2023, the short story cycle explores the lives of generations of a Tamil Brahmin family spread across Singapore, Sydney, New York, and Connecticut.

Rinson Jose, a 37-year-old Indian-born entrepreneur and Norwegian citizen, has emerged as a key figure in the investigation surrounding the recent pager explosions in Lebanon, which reportedly killed nearly 20 people and injured thousands of Hezbollah members. Jose is the sole owner of the Bulgaria-based company Norta Global Limited and is suspected of being involved in the supply chain for the pagers that detonated during the incident. An international arrest warrant has been issued for Jose, who has been missing since the blasts.

Indian-origin professor Bantval Jayant Baliga has been awarded the prestigious \$1 million Millennium Technology Prize for his groundbreaking work in reducing global electrical energy and petrol consumption. A professor at North Carolina State University, Baliga invented the Insulated Gate Bipolar Transistor (IGBT), which is essential in many modern appliances and vehicles. His innovation has significantly improved energy efficiency and reduced pollution, contributing to the worldwide green transition.



During his recent visit to the United States, Union Commerce Minister Piyush Goyal engaged with business leaders and members of the Indian diaspora to discuss investment opportunities and strengthen bilateral ties. He met with US Secretary of Commerce Gina Raimondo to explore tech and R&D collaboration in sectors like defense, space, semiconductors, AI, and clean energy. Goyal also highlighted the transformative reforms under Prime Minister Narendra Modi's leadership and pitched investment opportunities in 20 new industrial cities in India.



External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar recently praised the contributions of the Indian diaspora in developing the Viksit Bharat (Developed India) initiative during the launch of the PanIIT Alumni Foundation in New York. Speaking alongside the 79th United Nations General Assembly session, Jaishankar highlighted the significant role played by the Indian community abroad in fostering technological and manufacturing ecosystems in India. He expressed his appreciation for their efforts and contributions, emphasizing the importance of their support in achieving India's development goals.

Indian Americans have made a significant impact through their philanthropic efforts, both in the United States and in India. In 2023, Indian American households contributed over \$1.5 billion to charitable causes in the US. Since 2008, individuals of Indian origin have donated around \$3 billion to US universities. Additionally, Indian Americans have contributed \$830 million to Indian organizations between 2018 and 2019, with 35% of these donations directly supporting initiatives in India.

Former Singaporean Transport Minister S. Iswaran, of Indian origin, has been sentenced to one year in jail for corruption and obstructing justice. Iswaran pleaded guilty to five charges, including improperly receiving gifts and blocking justice. This case is particularly notable as it marks the first prosecution of a high-ranking official under Singapore's Penal Code Section 165 in over 50 years. Justice Vincent Hoong emphasized the severity of Iswaran's offenses, which eroded public trust in government integrity.

South African Indian-origin scientists Salim and Quarraisha Abdool Karim have been honored with the 2024 Lasker-Bloomberg Public Service Award for their pioneering HIV/AIDS and Covid-19 research. The couple, married for 36 years, played pivotal roles in shaping global AIDS programs and significantly impacting public health policy. Their work has been instrumental in developing life-saving approaches to prevent and treat HIV, earning them this prestigious recognition and a \$250,000 award.



Padmini Pillai from Boston and Nalini Tata from New York have been appointed to the prestigious 2024-25 class of White House Fellows. Pillai, an immuno-engineer known for her work in cancer research, and Tata, a neurosurgery resident focused on public service and healthcare policy, are among 15 exceptional individuals selected for this program. The fellowship provides them with the opportunity to work closely with senior White House officials and gain firsthand experience in government leadership.

Indian-origin executive Ravi Ahuja has been appointed as the new CEO of Sony Pictures Entertainment (SPE), effective January 2, 2025. Ahuja, who currently serves as the Chairman and Chief Operating Officer of Sony, will succeed Tony Vinciguerra, who will transition to the role of non-executive chairman until December 2025. Since joining SPE in March 2021, Ahuja has been instrumental in overseeing the company's daily operations and driving its growth.

Australia's Indian-origin leg-spinner Vishwa Ramkumar has been making waves in the ongoing Youth Test against India U-19. Playing at the MA Chidambaram Stadium in Chennai, Ramkumar picked up four crucial wickets on the second day, helping to restrict India to 296 in response to Australia's first innings total of 293. His impressive performance has put Australia in a commanding position in the match.



An Indian-origin techie recently went viral on social media after sharing his dissatisfaction with his Rs 70 lakh (approximately CAD 115,000) annual salary in Canada. In the video, he explained that the high cost of living in Toronto, particularly the CAD 4,000 monthly rent, makes it difficult to live comfortably on his income. His candid confession resonated with many viewers, sparking a discussion about the challenges of managing expenses in expensive cities.



Indian-origin entrepreneur Advait Paliwal has introduced a groundbreaking wearable device called Iris, which he claims offers users an "infinite memory" of their lives. The AI-powered device captures a photo every minute, storing them either on the device or in the cloud. These photos are organized into a timeline, with AI-generated captions to help users recall forgotten details. Iris also features a "focus mode" that detects distractions and gently reminds users to stay on track.

Indian-origin billionaire Vinod Khosla recently found himself in a public spat with tech mogul Elon Musk over a controversial beach access issue in California. Musk shared an image of a sign reading "No plebs allowed" on Khosla's property, which Khosla claims is a fabricated AI-generated image. Khosla demanded an apology, and Musk sarcastically complied, saying, "Sorry I made a sign about you restricting access to a public beach. That was so extremely terrible. Please forgive me."

Indian-origin pitcher Kumar Rocker made history on September 12, 2024, by becoming the first player of Indian heritage to play in Major League Baseball (MLB). The 24-year-old debuted for the Texas Rangers against the Seattle Mariners. Rocker, who has an African American father and an Indian mother, showcased his talent and resilience, especially after undergoing Tommy John surgery. His parents were present to witness this historic moment, highlighting the increasing diversity in American sports.



British tech YouTuber of Indian origin Mrwhosetheboss (real name Arun Rupesh Maini) recently set a Guinness World Record for building the world's largest iPhone Pro Max replica. The impressive structure stands at 6.74 feet tall and is a scaled-up version of the iPhone 15 Pro Max. Maini teamed up with Matthew Perks (DIYPerks) for this ambitious project, which required the oversized phone to be fully functional, including a working camera.

Indian-origin candidates are making significant strides in Canadian politics, particularly in the upcoming British Columbia (BC) legislature elections. There has been a 50% increase in Indian-origin candidates compared to 2020, with notable figures like climate scientist Baltej Dhillon challenging Premier David Eby, and Raj Chouhan, the first Assembly Speaker of color in North America and the first turbaned MLA in Canada. The surge in Indian candidates reflects the growing influence of the Indian community in Canada, especially from Punjab.



Indian-origin all-rounder Simi Singh, who has played 35 ODIs and 53 T20Is for Ireland, is currently battling for his life due to acute liver failure. He is in the ICU of a Gurugram hospital and is awaiting a liver transplant. Singh, who was born in Mohali, played for Punjab at the U-14 and U-17 levels but moved to Ireland after failing to make the U-19 team.

Indian-origin former South African minister Pravin Gordhan passed away at the age of 75 after battling cancer. Gordhan was a prominent anti-apartheid activist and a high-ranking member of the African National Congress. He held several key positions in the South African government, including Finance Minister and Minister of Public Enterprises. Gordhan was known for his integrity and his efforts to combat corruption, especially during Jacob Zuma's presidency. His death has been widely mourned, and he is remembered for his significant contributions to South Africa's political landscape.

Indian-origin cosmetics tycoon Mike Jatania has rescued The Body Shop from administration, saving its 113 UK stores and 1,300 jobs. Jatania's investment firm, Aurea, acquired the brand's assets, including stores in Australia and North America. The new owners plan to focus on product innovation while maintaining the brand's ethical values.

Three Indian-origin engineers, Piyush Pratik, Paulom Shah, and Sribalan Santhanam, played pivotal roles in developing the newest features of the iPhone 16. During the Apple keynote, their contributions were highlighted, showcasing their work on the phone's cutting-edge technology, including enhanced camera control and advanced silicon engineering. Their achievements were celebrated as they took center stage at Cupertino Park.



CELEBRATING INDIAN WOMEN IN THE DIASPORA WHO ARE SHAPING GLOBAL NARRATIVES

Indian-origin men leading global organizations has become a familiar narrative. However, it's time to shine a light on the equally impactful contributions of Indian women in the diaspora, who are playing transformative roles in shaping cultural, political, economic, and social landscapes worldwide. Whether steering multinational corporations, driving global economic policies, or advancing political diplomacy, Indian women in the diaspora are rising as powerful global changemakers, redefining leadership and influence on the world stage.

Several of these women leaders have been pioneers and often the “first females” in the top leadership of their organisations. They have all won several awards in recognition of their achievements and featured in various lists of the Most Powerful women in the world, over the years.

Many of them are at the forefront of social justice movements, addressing issues such as gender inequality, racism, and caste-based discrimination. Indian women in the diaspora are especially proving to be role models for

women and girls and have undertaken various initiatives to use their platforms to advocate for empowerment of women around the world. They bring awareness to issues such as gender-based violence, economic inequities, and reproductive rights, framing these challenges within an intersectional perspective that acknowledges race, class, and migration status.

Here I list down the achievements and impact of some of these women across various spheres of policymaking, business and culture:

Indian-Origin Women Making a Mark in Political Leadership

The 2021 Indiaspora Government Leaders List highlighted over 200 leaders of Indian descent who have ascended to various high-ranking positions in government across 15 countries – unsurprisingly most of them being men. Figures like Rishi Sunak represented the pinnacle of Indian-origin leadership in global politics.

However, the spotlight is increasingly turning towards women of Indian descent who can reshape political narratives in the coming future. **Kamala Harris**, the current Vice President of the United States and a Democratic nominee for the 2024 Presidential election, has become the quintessential “poster girl” of the leadership potential of Indian women in the diaspora. Born to an Indian mother, Dr. Shyamala Gopalan, a renowned breast cancer researcher, Harris has broken multiple barriers as the first female, African American, and Asian American Vice President. Her legal career was marked by significant efforts to reduce crime and improve public safety as District Attorney of San Francisco (2004-2011), followed by her work protecting homeowners and fighting for veterans and students as Attorney General of California (2011-2017). As a U.S. Senator (2017-2021), she championed healthcare reform, education, and immigration, and continues to advocate for families and fundamental freedoms as Vice President.

Harris is not alone in exemplifying the rising influence of Indian-origin women in politics. In Canada, **Anita Indira Anand** serves as President of the Treasury Board after a distinguished tenure as Minister of National Defence, while **Kamalpreet Khara** holds the role of Minister of Diversity, Inclusion, and Persons with Disabilities. These women are redefining the political landscape, advocating for more inclusive and equitable governance, and reinforcing the critical role that Indian-origin women play in advancing global political discourse. Their leadership promises to impact generations to come, cementing their legacies as pioneers of change.

Women Leading International Organizations and Economic Policymaking

While prominent figures like Ajay Banga, President of the World Bank, and Dr. Raghuram Rajan, former Chief Economist at the International Monetary Fund (IMF), have made significant strides in global economic policymaking, an increasing number of women are emerging as leaders in multilateral organizations. These women are not only breaking barriers in traditionally male-dominated fields but are also shaping the future of global economic policy and development. Their leadership and expertise are advancing the causes of inclusion, sustainability, and international cooperation, ensuring that women's voices are heard at the highest levels of global decision-making.

At the forefront is **Gita Gopinath**, an Indian American economist and the first woman to serve as Chief Economist of the IMF. Gopinath has played a pivotal role in shaping the IMF's economic policy and research agenda, particularly with her work on exchange rate fluctuations through the concept of the “dominant currency paradigm.” Her research extends to the impact of trade policies on economic growth and the effects of monetary policy on emerging markets. Beyond her technical contributions, Gopinath is a strong

advocate for diversity and inclusion in economics, and for enhancing international cooperation to address global economic challenges.

Another leading figure is **Anshula Kant**, an accomplished Indian banker who has been the Managing Director and Chief Financial Officer of the World Bank since 2019—the first woman to ever hold this role. Kant is responsible for overseeing the World Bank's financial strategies, risk management, and policy development. Her contributions to global finance have earned her recognition, including being named one of the "Top 100 Most Influential Women in Finance" by Financial News in 2020.

Dr. Soumya Swaminathan also made a significant global impact as the former Chief Scientist at the World Health Organization (WHO) during the COVID-19 pandemic. She played an instrumental role in shaping the WHO's pandemic response, coordinating efforts on vaccine development, data sharing, and global health guidelines. Swaminathan had been a powerful advocate for equitable access to vaccines and treatments, as well as science-driven decision-making. Her leadership during the pandemic was widely recognized by major media outlets, including *Time*, the *BBC*, and *The Lancet*.

Equally notable are **Kalpana Kochhar**, now the Director of Development Policy and Finance at the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, and **Nisha Agrawal**, former CEO of Oxfam India, who have made significant contributions to global policy and advocacy work, focusing on issues such as poverty alleviation, healthcare access, and sustainable development.

Women Breaking the Glass Ceiling in Business and Technology

While leaders like Sundar Pichai (CEO of Alphabet), Satya Nadella (CEO of Microsoft), Shantanu Narayen (CEO of Adobe), and Arvind Krishna (CEO of IBM) have garnered much

attention for their roles in driving technological and corporate innovation, a growing number of Indian-origin women are also making significant strides in global business, technology, and finance. Their leadership, innovation, and advocacy are reshaping industries and creating more inclusive workplaces across the globe.

Indra Nooyi, former CEO of PepsiCo, stands out as one of the most iconic business leaders of her generation. Known for her strategic vision, Nooyi transformed PepsiCo with her "Performance with Purpose" initiative, focusing on healthier products, sustainability, and social responsibility. Her leadership not only drove corporate growth but also promoted diversity and inclusion in the workplace. Since stepping down, Nooyi continues to influence both corporate and philanthropic sectors, and her memoir *My Life in Full* offers insights into her leadership journey and advocacy for policies that support working families.

Leena Nair is another trailblazer, becoming the first female CEO of Chanel in 2022. Previously, she served as the Chief Human Resources Officer at Unilever, where she was celebrated for her commitment to diversity and inclusion. Recognized as one of Fortune India's Most Powerful Women, Nair has redefined leadership in the fashion and consumer goods industries.

In the advertising world, **Devika Bulchandani** has made waves as the Global CEO of Ogilvy, one of the world's leading marketing agencies. She is the first Indian-American woman to lead a global advertising network, and her appointment marked a significant milestone for women of colour in the industry. Bulchandani has driven growth for Ogilvy's North American operations and is a strong advocate for diversity, equity, and inclusion in the creative sector.

Kirthiga Reddy, the first employee and Managing Director of Facebook India, transitioned to Silicon Valley to take roles at Facebook's global headquarters and later became a partner at SoftBank's Vision Fund, one of the largest technology investment funds in the world. Reddy has been at the forefront of driving digital transformation and advocating for women in technology. Reshma Saujani, founder of Girls Who Code, has been a pioneering advocate for closing the gender gap in technology. Through her nonprofit, she has empowered thousands of young women to pursue careers in computer science. Her "Marshall Plan for Moms" initiative, launched during the COVID-19 pandemic, advocates for policies that support working mothers, such as paid parental leave and affordable childcare.

Sonia Syngal, former CEO of Gap Inc., oversaw the company during a period of significant growth and transformation. **Meghana Pandit**, the first female Chief Executive Officer of Oxford University Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust, is making history in the UK's healthcare system. As the first person of colour to lead a Shelford Group NHS trust, Pandit overseas some of the country's largest teaching hospitals and has been instrumental in advancing clinical strategies and medical excellence.

In the tech space, **Anjali Sud**, the CEO of Vimeo, has transformed the company from a video-hosting platform to a software-as-a-service (SaaS) company focused on creators and businesses. Under her leadership, Vimeo expanded globally and strengthened its position as a leading platform for video creators. **Revathi Advaiti**, as the CEO of Flex (formerly Flextronics), leads a global manufacturing and technology company, driving its digital transformation and strategic growth through key acquisitions and partnerships. Advaiti is also recognized for championing women in engineering and technology.

Amrapali Gan, CEO of OnlyFans, has led the subscription-based social media platform to new heights, empowering content creators and reshaping digital content monetization. **Sharmistha (Shar) Dubey**, former CEO of Match Group, revolutionized the online dating industry, steering the company through the pandemic and expanding its portfolio of brands, including Tinder and OkCupid. Meanwhile, **Padmasree Warrior**, founder and CEO of Fable, a mobile-first storytelling platform, has been a prominent figure in the tech industry, previously holding senior leadership roles at NIO Inc., Cisco, and Motorola. **Jayshree Ullal**, CEO of Arista Networks, has been a force in cloud networking, growing Arista's revenues tenfold during her tenure.

Cultural and Media Icons Shaping Global Development Narratives

Many Indian women in the diaspora have emerged as powerful cultural ambassadors and role models, blending Indian traditions with global contexts through arts, literature, film, and media. Together, these cultural and media icons are not only shaping global narratives but also driving important conversations on social justice, diversity, and inclusion. Their influence extends far beyond entertainment and literature, as they continue to inspire positive change and bridge cultural divides.

Leading the charge is **Priyanka Chopra Jonas**, a multi-faceted global icon recognized for her achievements as an actress, singer, producer, and philanthropist. After winning Miss World, She transitioned from Bollywood to Hollywood, where she became the first South Asian actress to lead an American drama series, Quantico. A dedicated philanthropist, she has served as a UNICEF Goodwill Ambassador since 2016, advocating for child rights, education, and gender equality. Her global influence extends through her work with the UN's "Girl Up" campaign and her

advocacy for refugee children. Chopra consistently uses her platform to champion social causes, particularly those benefiting girls and vulnerable communities worldwide.

Padma Lakshmi, an Emmy-nominated producer, television host, and *New York Times* best-selling author, is another influential figure. As an American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) Artist Ambassador for immigrant and women's rights, and a Goodwill Ambassador for the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), Lakshmi has been a powerful advocate for marginalized communities. She co-founded The Endometriosis Foundation of America (EndoFound) and has made significant strides in advancing women's health, including helping pass a bill related to teen health in the New York State Senate. In 2023, *Time* magazine named her one of its 100 Most Influential People, recognizing her relentless advocacy.

Renowned filmmaker **Mira Nair** is celebrated for her impactful storytelling that delves into themes such as identity, culture, social justice, and human connection. Her films, such as *Monsoon Wedding* and *The Namesake*, explore the complexities of immigrant life, family dynamics, and societal inequities. Nair's work has redefined Indian-American representation in cinema and has been instrumental in empowering marginalized voices, especially women, through her unique lens on human relationships and social justice.

In the literary world, female authors offer rich perspectives on immigration, identity, and belonging. **Jhumpa Lahiri**, a celebrated Indian-American author, is known for her evocative explorations of cultural heritage, identity, and the immigrant experience. Her books, such as *The Namesake* and *Interpreter of Maladies*, have not only shaped Indian American literature but also resonated with readers worldwide, offering profound insights into the complexities of belonging.

Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, an award-winning author, poet, and educator, has significantly contributed to Indian-American literature with her captivating stories that weave together themes of identity, mythology, culture, and the human condition. As the co-founder of Maitri, a nonprofit organization supporting South Asian women, Divakaruni's work extends beyond literature to social advocacy. She is a frequent speaker at literary festivals and universities, where she discusses identity, social justice, and women's empowerment. Her academic contributions also include her role as a professor of creative writing at the University of Houston.

Concluding thoughts

These are just a few names but it is time to recognize and showcase the remarkable impact that women of the Indian diaspora are making in driving global change and shaping critical narratives. From leadership roles in technology, business, and politics to advocacy for social justice and gender equality, Indian-origin women's contributions not only highlight the power of diversity but also emphasize the essential role women play in fostering innovation, inclusivity, and transformative progress worldwide. Their stories are reshaping global narratives and must inspire future generations of Indian women to pursue their dream and conquer the world.

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CULTURAL CONVERGENCE: INDIAN K-POP IDOLS AS A MEDIUM OF DIPLOMATIC ENGAGEMENT BETWEEN INDIA AND SOUTH KOREA

Prerna Guha,
Independent Researcher

Cultural as well as diaspora diplomacy has undergone a radical transformation in the rebranding of the world system's functionality in which globalisation has led to an accelerated transitional interaction and movement of people and their ethnic identities as well as traditionally backed information. Though diplomacy has been an age-old system that was followed and utilized by policy makers, it was recently acknowledged by government and policy makers as a potent source of soft power. Originally, it was regulated by the government, however, among the stakeholders of such power are now also the citizens of their country of origin.

Cultural diplomacy was initially categorized into the "Track One, Track Two" paradigm according to which, Track One Diplomacy is official government diplomacy wherein communication and interactions are held between the governments and Track Two Diplomacy consists of the unofficial interaction of non-state actors. Nevertheless, the lack of an interpersonal approach in addition to government mediation prompted the expansion of a few other all-encompassing tracks in order to incorporate all aspects of mediation. Thus, multi-track diplomacy was propagated by Dr. Louise Diamond, a co-founder of the Institute for Multi-Track Diplomacy. The lack of people's involvement in the struggle to build a new social order makes any peace-making process unstable, fragile, vulnerable, and incomplete.

Therefore, Track Three diplomacy was and continues to be an endeavour that operates and mediates in the field within a divided society, trying to reconcile it. The diasporic digital influencers, therefore, fall under this track. In general, it has to do with interpersonal communication. They do not explicitly seek to resolve the larger conflict but instead, focus on the concepts of harmonious exchange or sharing and understanding of cross-cultural sets of values, traditions, and societal beliefs as a way of building dynamic relationships between two divergent countries or groups between whom a gap certainly persists.

The wake of Hallyu 2.0 (the Korean wave) saw a new dawn with globalisation at its peak, ushering in a new era. The Korean wave, Hallyu 1.0, had restricted engagement with a handful of Asian countries such as Japan, China, and Thailand. However, the Korean wave, or Hallyu 2.0 recognised the advancement of digital technologies and their vital as well as far-reaching role in cultural exchange between countries. Thus, the culture became accessible by breaking down geographical barriers. As the South Korean culture, popularly identified as the K-culture, started being accepted and celebrated all around the globe with open arms, K-pop too opened pathways into their entertainment business by embracing talented artists from all across the world regardless of their ethnicity such as Sriya Lenka.



Sriya Lenka, then eighteen years old, hailed from Odisha, India when she debuted under a South Korean label as India's first K-pop idol in South Korea in 2020. Her passion for dance and music led to her fascination with K-pop. During the imposition of COVID-19 nationwide lockdown restrictions, Sriya auditioned for many K-pop groups and agencies. After several attempts, she was successful in gaining the attention of DR Music agency, when their global auditions of the girl group "Blackswan" commenced. Camillia Dass underlines in an article written in Tatler, "After progressing through multiple rounds of auditions, Shreya was invited to South Korea in December 2021 for a six-month-long training programme at DR Music." (Dass) Throughout these six months, Sriya received intensive training not only to hone her dancing skills but also to work on her standard linguistic, vocal, and rap proficiencies. She underwent rigorous training to mold herself into an ideal K-pop idol. When the opportunity surfaced, Blackswan, a K-pop idol of Indian descent, was invited to perform at the 2023 Men's FIH Hockey World Cup.

Prior to this event, there had been only one K-pop concert that was organized by yet another K-pop band named KARD as part of their World Tour. It was right after the performance, that in October 2023, Blackswan made its comeback with an EP album with its title track called "That Karma", also serving as the official debut of Sriya. Utilising the girl group Blackswan's greatest advantage of consisting of members with multi-ethnic backgrounds, the agency took the liberty of the same. The official MV (music video) of the song was filmed at numerous locales in Odisha, the home state of Sriya. Bhavna Agarwal highlighted the vibrancy of Indian culture portrayed in the music video, "in the music video, the members of BLACKSWAN are seen embracing the Indian culture and paying homage to the culture in ways." (Agarwal) Philip YJ Yoon, Managing Director of DR Music, Blackswan's label, expressed his desire to film the music video in locations that reflected the rich cultural heritage and legacy of Odisha. Thus, the music video captured the magnificence of locations such as the Lingaraj

temple, Dhauli Giri, and houses-built decades and centuries ago across the state that echoed spiritual relevance as well as held the significance of age-old yet timeless heritage. He adds in an interview with Rolling Stone India, “So we really wanted to introduce all these to our fans and global audiences. Odisha deserves to be well known universally, in my opinion.” (“Exclusive: How K-pop Group Blackswan Filmed their Video for ‘Karma’ in India”) Lenka’s sprawling career is a testament to her success as a K-pop idol. Her influence cements the bridge between both cultures and highlights the scope and impact of a recently formed union between the two countries that were stagnant for ages.

The misconception that K-pop bands exclusively consist of South Korean citizens and immigrants is wrongly alleged if not fundamentally perpetuated. K-pop groups such as Seventeen, NCT, GOT7, and Enhypen have members from other East Asian countries such as China, Thailand, and Japan. Though K-pop originated in the Asian continent, its influence could only spread to a portion of the continent. The gateways to the world of K-pop remained closed for South Asian countries such as India, Pakistan, Nepal, Bangladesh, and so on. K-pop made an accidental breakthrough in north-east India in the late 2000s when due to the militants’ prohibition on satellite Hindi TV networks and the distribution of Hindi films in state-run theatres and homes. Consequently, this resulted in the emergence of an alternative source of entertainment in the region. The public’s indulgence in South Korean entertainment developed and intensified after they discovered Korean culture through DVDs, CDs, and broadcasting channels such as Arirang TV. Nevertheless, the concept of entertainment for the people of the northeast massively differed from the people of the mainland. Hence, this cultural influence ceased to spread any further. When Hallyu 2.0, or the Korean Wave, was rampantly taking over the world like a pandemic in 2017—nearly a decade later—it successfully grabbed the attention of the whole stretch of the Indian subcontinent.

Soon after following Lenka’s footsteps, Gauthami, also known as Aria (stage name and formerly known as Ami),

made her debut in the K-pop girl group X:IN, thus, carrying forward the legacy of Indian K-pop idols. She made her debut on April 11, 2023, under ESCROW Entertainment. Prior to that, she was enrolled as a trainee under GBK Entertainment in the online training platform called Universe which was responsible for casting and launching prospective female artists holding the capabilities to become a member of a K-pop girl group. However, she walked out of the group MEP-C before the group debuted. The five-member female group is multinational with Aria representing India in the group. Right after their debut, the debutants of X:IN got the opportunity to familiarize themselves with their Indian fans at the K-Wave Festival 2023 on October 28, 2023, held in Bangalore, India. Aria acted as a catalyst in uniting the members and the K-pop enthusiasts of her country. In an interview with the Hindustan Times after their first stage performance in India, the members of the girl group were very pumped.

They added, “We look forward to coming back again. We will take any invitation that comes our way. We also want to visit Aria’s hometown in the state of Kerala.” (Parekh) Thus, X:IN members seemed keen to put forth a willing prospect and desire for any further chances of fan intimation through stage performances. Additionally, the main vocalist of the team E.sha excitedly mentioned how she was aware that India has some of the biggest K-pop fandoms and that “they have so much passion and energy; I just love them.” (Parekh) Much to their manifested delight and their Indian fans’ pleasure, X:IN’s second performance in India came right forth in a few months. The ensemble poised their grace through their electrifying performance in one of India’s biggest Korean cultural events called ‘Rang de, Korea’ in December 2023 in Delhi, India. This performance was a part of the celebrations to mark the 50th Anniversary of diplomatic relations between South Korea and India. As remarked by Singh, “Their return to India signifies not only their growing international presence but also underscores the deepening cultural exchange between South Korea and India.” (Singh) Intendedly so, the event promoted its agenda of celebrating the existing diplomatic ties between the two countries.

Additionally, by providing a unique opportunity and platform for X:IN to showcase their musical pursuits, the event illustrated and solidified a promising tomorrow between India and South Korea in terms of their cultural appreciation and understanding.

In 2023, Hybe Entertainment, a once small South Korean entertainment company and now a mogul in the sea of entertainment agencies with artists signed under their contract such as BTS and Seventeen, announced a talent competition, The Debut: Dream Academy with Geffen Records. The aimed outcome was to compile a line-up for KATSEYE, a global girl group. Among the six girls who made it to the final line-up was Lara Rajagopalan (stage name Lara Raj), a Los Angeles-based Indian American musician. She introduced herself during a press conference saying, “Hi, I am Lara Raj. I am seventeen and I am Indian from LA.” (Srivastava) From the beginning of her appearance and presence on the show, Lara Raj was seen to be proudly representing her ethnic origins by customizing her daily outfits with Indian adornments with “bindi” being a constant part of the get-up. A “bindi” is a significant signifier of the integrity of Indian culture. Lara Raj is consistently spotted donning a “bindi” in all her stage shows, press conferences as well as fan-meets both in the USA as well as South Korea which she accessories with her modern or Western-influenced outfits. Hence, her fashion is a harmonious and tasteful amalgamation between the two cultures. Lara’s sister, Rhea Raj, who is also a pop star speaks for both and explains to Sanghvi in a conversation about how the frequent trips taken by the sisters to India to visit their paati (Tamil word for grandmother) helped them comprehend and immerse themselves in the local culture. She reminisces, “She would always buy me fun bindi packs of different colors, shapes, and patterns to play around with and style with my jeans and tank tops. It kind of organically became a part of my style from a really young age and, as I’ve grown older, wearing my bindi makes me feel really empowered and connected to that part of my culture and childhood.” Both the sisters seize the golden opportunity of their digital and stage presence

to empower more people of their generation as well as people from Indian immigrant families to confidently own their cultural identity, “we hope to continue breaking boundaries and be an inspiration to our audiences.” (Sanghvi)

Thus, in this context, these agents of the diplomatic diaspora are actively striving towards a cultural strengthening of the polylateral relationships between India and South Korea. As K-pop idols of Indian origin, artists such as Sriya Lenka, Aria, and Lara Raj are breaking down unattended and forgotten barriers between these two Asian countries by portraying themselves as symbols of a cultural bridge between India and South Korea. Therefore, it is rather a fair and safe claim to make that their success so far has forged the path for a new wave of Indian creators in the global entertainment industry to showcase their talent on the stage of the world.

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As we prepare for the November 2024 edition of Pravasi Pulse, we continue to explore the ever-evolving landscape of the global Indian diaspora. We invite scholars, writers, community leaders, and diaspora members to contribute their unique perspectives to help us shine a light on the stories, challenges, and achievements that define our community.

For this upcoming issue, we are excited to delve into the following key themes:

- **Diaspora Leadership in Crisis:** How the Indian diaspora is stepping up in times of global challenges (pandemics, conflicts, etc.)
- **Cultural Fusion:** How Indian traditions are blending with local cultures across the globe
- **Diaspora Youth Voices:** Exploring the role of young Indians abroad in shaping future leadership
- **Home Away from Home:** The mental health challenges faced by the Indian diaspora and the resources available
- **Diaspora & Global Advocacy:** Indian communities advocating for social justice and environmental sustainability
- **Art as Resistance:** How Indian diaspora artists are using their craft to challenge stereotypes and fight for change
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- **Diaspora Literature:** How Indian authors abroad are shaping global literary landscapes

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THREADS OF CONNECTION: THE ROLE OF THE INDIAN DIASPORA IN INDIA-JAPAN RELATIONS

Introduction

According to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, the Indian community in Japan consists of 46,262 individuals, primarily centred in Tokyo. This Indian diaspora is critical in fostering a closer and stronger connection between the two nations, acting as a bridge for economic, cultural and strategic cooperation. As Japan continues to play the role of a key partner for India in areas such as technology, infrastructure and regional security, the presence of a thriving Indian community in Japan is crucial for the enhancement of these existing as well as future bilateral arrangements. The article delves into the historical roots of Indian migration to Japan, provides a comprehensive overview of the current state of the Indian diaspora in Japan and also explores potential future dynamics as well as opportunities for enhancing India-Japan relations through effective diaspora diplomacy.

The Indian Presence in Japan: A Historical Perspective

One of the earliest recorded interactions between India and Japan dates back to the 6th century, when

the Indian Buddhist monk, Bodhisena, travelled to Japan and played a pivotal role in the spread of Buddhism within Japanese society. While this spiritual connection laid the foundation for cultural exchanges between the two nations, the modern era saw a more tangible Indian presence beginning in the late 19th century, with Indian traders (Sindhis and Parsis) and their families settling in Yokohama and Okinawa. By 1891, Tata, a small firm at that time, established a branch in Kobe and Japanese government records noted 30 individuals from British India living in Japan by 1901. The population increased to 59 in Hyōgo Prefecture by 1905, primarily composed of men. Following the 1923 Great Kantō earthquake, many Indian traders relocated to Kobe, which subsequently became the hub of the Indian community. Despite a decline during World War II—dropping to just 114 by 1942 due to British sanctions and shipping halts—numbers rebounded to 255 after India's Partition in 1947. Up until 1990, the Indian community remained concentrated in Kobe, but post-1990 saw a significant rise in

population in Tokyo, fuelled by the arrival of industrial trainees from Japanese car manufacturers in India.

By the early 2000s, the Indian IT professionals started settling in Japan, primarily in Setagaya and Minato wards. This led to a rise in the number of Indians to 10,000 by the year 2001. Since then, the demand for Indian IT engineers in Japan has steadily increased, leading to a shift from project-based visits to long-term employment for many Indian families. The Indian community in Tokyo now includes over 1,000 school-age children attending Indian and international schools, although educational challenges persist due to language barriers. This growing presence has led to more Indians purchasing homes and applying for permanent residency and citizenship. Various regional Indian communities are active, and the All-Japan Association of Indians (AJAI) aims to provide social support and vital information. As of 2016, 28,677 Indians lived in Japan and about 40% of them were permanent residents/long-term residents/dependents of those. By 2018, around 39,000 Indians were residing in Japan, reflecting a deepening integration into Japanese society and fostering closer ties between the two nations. By 2022, the number reached 44,000. This evolving relationship not only enhances cultural exchange but also strengthens economic collaboration, marking a promising future for India-Japan relations. The continued presence and contributions of the Indian diaspora are vital to sustaining these positive developments.

A Thriving Diaspora: Current Dynamics of the Indian Community in Japan

In the twenty-first century, present-day Indians in Japan are elevating the historical and cultural connections between the two nations to a new level. They have not only captivated the Land of the Rising Sun with their talent, entrepreneurship, hard work, and

business culture but are also continually introducing Japan to the vibrancy of Indian culture and the various possibilities that India holds. Indian nationals in Japan are working in several fields such as engineering, management, scientific research, information technology, finance and creative sectors.

Indian residents in Japan are primarily concentrated in the Tokyo metropolitan area, particularly in the Edogawa Ward, which has become home to around 6,700 Indians. This growing community, many of whom are IT professionals residing with their families, has contributed to the development of "Nishi Kasai," also known as "Little India." The increasing presence of Indian residents in Edogawa Ward has fostered a multicultural environment and encouraged further Indian migration to the region. Local volunteer initiatives, such as Kondo's "Home Visit Program," have strengthened cultural exchange between the Indian and Japanese communities. This program, launched post-COVID, allows Japanese residents to experience Indian culture firsthand by spending time with Indian families, participating in activities like cooking Indian dishes, trying traditional attire, and exploring Indian stores. The interactive initiative has enriched cultural understanding and deepened ties between the two communities in Edogawa.

On February 25, 2023, the Embassy of India in Japan hosted an event titled "Indian Diaspora in Japan – Towards Amrit Kaal," where Ambassador H.E. Sibi George praised the Indian community for their contributions to strengthening India-Japan relations. He urged them to serve as ambassadors of India's progress and announced the launch of the Indian Cultural Network (ICN), Indian Professional Network (IPN) and Indian Business Network (IBN), with presentations from embassy officials. The Indian Cultural Network (ICN) serves as a platform to showcase our cultural diversity and art forms, while also

recognizing and promoting the artistic talents within our diaspora and among our Japanese friends. The Indian Professionals Network (IPN) aims to facilitate learning from the expertise and experiences of our distinguished professionals, allowing us to adopt best practices. The Indian Business Network (IBN) provides a platform to highlight India's economic and scientific advancements, showcasing the vast opportunities available for business partnerships. Additionally, we have initiated a Thematic Library project to further promote Indian culture and our rich literary heritage.

During the event, Ambassador George honored Ms. Maqsooda Sarfi Shiotani, President of the Ishikawa Indian Association, for receiving the Pravasi Bhartiya Samman Award 2023. He also recognized students from Indian schools in Tokyo for their participation in Embassy events and quiz competitions. A G20 quiz and performances of Indian dance and music added to the celebrations, which were live-streamed and well-received by the Indian diaspora in Japan.

The geographical distance between Japan and India, along with challenges related to food and language, are often cited as reasons for the relatively small number of Indian residents in Japan. However, the recent sharp increase in the Nepali population suggests that the Indian community could grow despite these constraints.

The multicultural exchange between the Indian community in Edogawa Ward and local Japanese residents, facilitated by initiatives like Kondo-San is just one example of the deepening ties between the two nations. On a larger scale, Nupur Tewari, a key figure in fostering India-Japan relations, is working with a focus on strengthening the strategic partnership between the two nations.

Through her consultancy, Connect India Japan, she works to bridge cultural gaps, create job opportunities and support businesses, while also promoting bilateral cooperation. In addition to her role as a motivational speaker and performance coach, Nupur produces The Nupur Tewari Show on YouTube, where she highlights the sacrifices of the Indian Army and explores defense issues. The "Rising Sun Conclave," an annual event she organizes, features discussions not only on defense collaboration with high-ranking military officials but also explores a range of topics, including the soft power influence of Bollywood, business opportunities, cultural exchange and people-to-people connections. Now based in Tokyo, Nupur's work continues to inspire and strengthen ties between India and Japan across various sectors, highlighting the multifaceted nature of their relationship.

It is essential to recognize another influential figure, Yogendra Puranik, who has made remarkable contributions as the first person of Indian origin to win an election in Japan. He is also celebrated as the first Indian-origin gazetted officer in the country and the first foreign-born principal of a public school in Japan. Born in Mumbai, India, Yogendra moved to Japan to pursue his aspirations after learning Japanese during his undergraduate studies in Pune.

Starting his career as a data analyst, he became a Japanese citizen in 2012 and distinguished himself through his volunteer work, demonstrating unwavering dedication to the community. He has played a pivotal role in assisting those unfamiliar with the Japanese language in navigating visa processes, education, and healthcare. In 2016, Yogendra was presented with an opportunity to engage in Japanese politics. In 2019, he was elected, becoming the first Indian-born Japanese politician. His

journey exemplifies the potential for cross-cultural integration and the positive impact of the Indian diaspora in Japan.

Looking Ahead: Future Prospects for Indian Students and Professionals in Japan

The similarities between India and Japan, such as shared values and mutual geopolitical concerns, serve as a solid foundation for their friendship, positioning them as natural partners. Despite Japan's world-class universities, the current number of Indian students remains disappointingly low at only 1,500, especially when compared to the larger populations from countries like China, Nepal and Korea. This gap highlights an opportunity for growth. Although Japan has invested in deepening people-to-people contact through skill development, the IRIS program and capacity building, there is still a long way to go in achieving greater collaboration in various fields.

There are over 1 million job opportunities available for Indians in Japan, with media reports indicating that Japanese trade bodies are actively seeking Indian employees. Recently, students from the Indian Institute of Technology in Hyderabad were selected on the spot for internships with Japanese companies, showcasing the demand for talent. Japanese firms are particularly interested in engineers to help set up automation processes in the semiconductor electronics sector. Additionally, there is a growing need for nurses, further broadening the employment landscape for Indians in Japan. Recent relaxations for Indians in the visa requirement to enter Japan and the increasing exchanges in tourism are fostering a positive outlook for future bilateral engagements.

Cultural elements such as anime, manga, cherry blossoms, ikebana, tea ceremony, Bollywood and Tamil films and the popularity of Japanese and Indian cuisines are helping to bridge gaps between the two nations. The celebration of festivals, along with the promotion of Ayurveda and yoga, enriches cultural ties and encourages a deeper appreciation for Indian traditions among the Japanese. These cultural exchanges allow the Japanese to explore more than just the traditional perceptions of Indian culture, fostering a more nuanced understanding of India's rich heritage.

By combining India's spirit of 'jugaad'-improvisation, with Japan's pursuit of 'kodawari'-perfection, this partnership can become exceptionally robust. Overcoming language barriers, understanding cultural nuances and doing away with stereotypes through local support are essential for fostering enduring ties. Increased engagement across various sectors, be it business, education or research, will facilitate stronger connections between the two nations. It is crucial to showcase the myriad possibilities that exist to both Indians and Japanese, as this will enhance their collaboration and engagement effectively, paving the way for a brighter future together.

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BRAND AMBASSADORS OF INDIA: THE ROLE OF DIASPORA IN SHAPING INDIAN FOREIGN POLICY

Bhasker Rawat

Introduction

Diaspora diplomacy refers to the strategic engagement of expatriate communities to achieve foreign policy goals and enhance bilateral relations. This concept has become increasingly vital in modern international relations, as diasporas serve as an essential bridge between their countries of origin and host nations. The Indian diaspora, one of the largest and most influential globally, plays a significant role in strengthening India's relations with various countries. As of 2023, this diaspora comprises over 35 million individuals across more than 100 nations, including expatriates, professionals, students, and multiple generations of emigrants (MEA, 2024).

The historical roots of the Indian diaspora date back to the British colonial era, when many Indians were transported as indentured laborers to regions such as Sri Lanka, Fiji, Kenya, and the Caribbean (Challagalla, 2018). Despite enduring hardships, these laborers contributed significantly to their host countries while maintaining strong ties to India. In the early 20th century, nationalist leaders like Gopal Krishna Gokhale recognized the diaspora's potential in mobilizing support for India's independence, as seen in movements like the Gadar Movement in the United States.

In the post-independence era, the Indian government's relationship with its diaspora varied and initially lacked a clear engagement policy. The migration waves to countries like the United Kingdom and the United States, particularly during the 'brain drain' of the 1960s, revealed a widening gap between skilled professionals and their homeland. However, the 1990s brought a crucial shift in perception, coinciding with economic liberalization. Expatriates began to be recognized as valuable assets for India, formalized through frameworks like the Pravasi Bharatiya Divas (PBD) in 2003 and the Ministry of Overseas Indian Affairs (MOIA) in 2004. Here, we'll explore how the Indian diaspora has evolved, focusing on their contributions to strengthening India's bilateral relations through remittances, cultural diplomacy, and political advocacy.

Literature Review

Cohen (2022) traces the Indian diaspora's origins to the colonial era, when British practices facilitated the migration of Indian labourers to locations such as Fiji, Trinidad, and Africa. The early research on diaspora communities often focuses on themes of suffering, migration, and identity. Mishra (2016) emphasized that experiences of indentured labourers and enslaved

individuals, framing these communities through a lens of victimhood that perpetuated negative stereotypes. However, Sharma (2021) highlights that more recent studies aim to reframe these narratives, spotlighting influential figures like Mahatma Gandhi, who was pivotal in establishing a foundation for diaspora engagement, advocating for the rights of indentured Indian labourers.

Nye (2021) notes that diaspora is important in supporting multilateral cooperation among States and political actors. Diaspora have emerged as important sources of soft power, acting as cultural ambassadors for their home nations. Successful diaspora diplomacy involves active participation from both home and host countries. Varadarajan (2010) explains the new approach of the Indian government towards its diaspora following India's economic liberalization in 1991, viewing diaspora as "valorized subjects" rather than merely remittance providers. Remittances, which amounted to approximately \$111 billion in 2022, underscore the importance of effective governmental engagement with the diaspora community (Ghosh, 2024).

Kirk (2008) highlights that political engagement within the diaspora has gained significant attention, particularly in its influence on bilateral relations. For example, the US-India Civil Nuclear Agreement was partially facilitated by lobbying efforts from the Indian diaspora. Kapur (2010) navigates the role of Indian diaspora in economic diplomacy, particularly in high-tech sectors like Silicon Valley, where Indian professionals foster economic ties between India and the U.S. This shift has re-defined the diaspora from a 'brain drain' to a source of 'brain gain'. Tharoor (2012) notes the aspects of cultural diplomacy and influence of Bollywood and Indian festivals in promoting cultural ties, while Appadurai (1996) emphasizes the dual identities maintained by diaspora communities, which impact politics in both their home and host countries.

Defining Diaspora

The term diaspora originates from the Greek words 'dia' (meaning through or over) and 'sperio' (meaning dispersal or to sow), translating to "scattering" or "dispersion."

Initially, it described Greek citizens colonizing conquered territories but today, it includes a wider range of groups like immigrants, expatriates, refugees, and exile communities (Kaya, 2005). The Indian diaspora comprises Non-Resident Indians (NRIs), Persons of Indian Origin (PIOs), and Overseas Citizens of India (OCI). In 2015, the Indian government merged PIO and OCI into a single OCI designation for better recognition.

Acknowledging diaspora communities as valuable assets has shifted foreign policy toward soft power strategies, moving away from traditional methods (Patel, 2017; Rajagopalan, 2021). The launch of 'Diaspora: A Journal of Transnational Studies' in 1991 by William Safran called for a more sophisticated attention to the study of diasporas. This sparked academic discussions that highlighted the diverse experiences of the Indian diaspora and underscored the necessity for nuanced engagement by the government (Safran, Sahoo & Lal, 2009).

Historical Evolution of Diaspora Diplomacy: From Nehru to Modi

India's diaspora diplomacy has transitioned from a passive to an active engagement strategy, prioritizing cultural, political, and economic ties with the diaspora community. The following overview reflects the distinct policies of successive Prime Ministers from Nehru to Modi.

A. Nehru Era

Jawaharlal Nehru's approach to diaspora diplomacy was cautious, he believed that Indians living abroad should integrate into their host countries. He preferred to prioritize non-interference in the internal affairs of other nations. For example, the 1964 expulsion of the Indian diaspora from Burma, where Nehru chose not to intervene directly. In a 1957 Lok Sabha speech, he stated, "We want to have no vested interests at the expense of the population of those countries... if they adopt the nationality of that country, we have no concern with them" (Mahalingam, 2013).

B. Rajiv Gandhi Era

Rajiv Gandhi followed a more assertive approach in engaging the diaspora, recognizing their growing economic and political influence. His response to the 1987 military coup in Fiji,

which involved trade sanctions and protests to protect Persons of Indian Origin (PIOs), marked a shift in India's approach (Rana, 2009). Gandhi's policies encouraged technology transfer and trade, with initiatives like the introduction of NRI bonds to boost India's economy.

C. P.V Narasimha Rao Era

Following the Cold War, Narasimha Rao re-evaluated India's diaspora strategy, aligning it with economic reforms focused on Liberalization, Privatization, and Globalization. His government acknowledged the diaspora's importance and introduced specific provisions for NRIs in the 1991 budget, viewing them as key assets in India's economic resurgence (Mani & Varadarajan, 2005).

D. Atal Bihari Vajpayee Era

Atal Bihari Vajpayee's government significantly advanced diaspora diplomacy by emphasizing the integration of the Indian diaspora into the national narrative. He advocated for "partnership among all children of mother India," leading to the launch of the Pravasi Bharatiya Divas (PBD) in 2003, celebrating diaspora contributions (PIB, 2001).

E. Manmohan Singh Era

Initially, Singh's approach to diaspora centred on enhancing economic engagement and attracting Foreign Direct Investment. Eventually, the government recognized the Indian diaspora's strategic importance within the "knowledge economy." Singh noted that their contributions went beyond capital inflows, acting as a "brain bank" of talent. (Baru, 2008). His policy aimed to utilize the diaspora's skills and networks to foster economic growth in India. A notable achievement of his administration was the lobbying for the Indo-US Nuclear Deal, signed in 2008.

F. Narendra Modi Era

Narendra Modi redefined India's diaspora engagement by branding them as 'Bharat's Rashtrdoot'. Important aspect of Modi's foreign visits includes addressing huge outreach events, such as Modi's addresses at Nassau Coliseum, Madison Square Garden, Wembley Stadium, have celebrated diaspora

achievements while encouraging them to invest in India's future (The Economic Times, 2024). His government has also prioritized the welfare of Indians abroad and has been proactive in responding to international crises involving the diaspora.

Engaging the Indian Diaspora: Key Government Initiatives and Programs

The Indian government has initiated numerous programs aimed at engaging the diaspora, which plays a critical role in fostering India's development and international relations. The government has adopted a dual approach by focusing both on providing essential services to Non-Resident Indians (NRIs) and Overseas Citizens of India (OCIs) and encouraging diaspora to contribute to India's growth (Challagalla, 2024).

One such initiative is the Scholarship Programme for Diaspora Children (SPDC), offering 150 scholarships annually for undergraduate studies to the children of Indian expatriates, thus promoting education and strengthening ties to India. (MEA, 2023) Additionally, the Know India Program (KIP), launched in 2003, connects Indian-origin youth (aged 21–35) with their heritage through a week-long orientation program, enhancing their understanding of India's cultural and economic developments.

To protect Indian workers abroad, the government came up with Minimum Referral Wages (MRW) policy to ensure fair wages, while the E-migrate system improves employer accountability by requiring foreign employers to register, safeguarding the welfare of Indian emigrants. For grievance redressal, the MADAD Portal and Kshetriya Pravasi Bhartiya Sahayta Kendra offer prompt assistance to Indian citizens facing issues abroad. The Indian Community Welfare Fund also supports various welfare initiatives for the diaspora (ICMPD, 2022).

The Pravasi Bharatiya Divas (PBD), held biennially, honors the contributions of the diaspora and recognizes achievements through the Pravasi Bharatiya Samman Awards. Programs such as the Pravasi Teerth Darshan Yojna and the Pravasi Kaushal Vikas Yojana (PKVY) further foster cultural exchange and

skill development. These efforts, alongside tax incentives and reserved educational seats for NRIs, help solidify the government's commitment to building strong ties with the global Indian community.

Significance of the Indian Diaspora

With over 35 million members, the diaspora serves as a vital link between India and the international community, making significant contributions to diplomacy, economics, and cultural exchange. One of the most tangible benefits of the diaspora is its economic impact, particularly through remittances. In 2022, remittances from the Indian diaspora amounted to over \$111 billion, providing a stable income source and significantly boosting India's GDP. These contributions have risen notably since the 1990s, especially from regions like West Asia. Additionally, diaspora investments through NRI bank deposits and stock market participation have strengthened India's foreign exchange reserves. For example, the Resurgent India Bonds initiative raised \$2.3 billion after the 1998 sanctions, reflecting the diaspora's commitment to supporting India during times of need (Singh & Koiri, 2018).

The Indian diaspora's influence extends beyond economics. In the U.S., over 130 Indian origin Americans hold key roles in the Biden administration, showcasing their political significance (Jha, 2022). Organizations such as the United States India Political Action Committee (USINPAC) and establishment of the India Caucus in the U.S. Congress in 1993, have played an instrumental role in advocating for Indian interests, particularly during critical events like the Indo-U.S. Nuclear Deal (Kirk, 2008). Additionally, the diaspora enhances India's cultural diplomacy through soft power initiatives such as developing Buddhist Circuit, yoga, Indian cuisine, Bollywood, etc. Projects like the Indian Pride Project have successfully campaigned for the return of cultural artefacts, highlighting the diaspora's role in repatriating Indian cultural artefacts.

Challenges in Diaspora Diplomacy

The Indian diaspora offers considerable potential for enhancing India's global

presence, but it also presents several challenges. One significant issue is that diaspora support is not guaranteed, as their interests may not align with the priorities of the Indian government. Another concern involves the possible misuse of remittances, with some funds being associated with extremist groups such as the Khalistan movement, which poses national security risks (Fair, 2005).

Political instability in the host state such as Middle Eastern countries create challenges for Indian workers, often resulting in costly rescue missions by diplomatic teams. The diaspora's diversity complicates collective action, as varying linguistic, religious, and regional identities make it hard to unite for India's interests. Wealthy expatriates in Western countries frequently advocate for dual citizenship and voting rights, while labour migrants in Gulf nations face legal restrictions that limit their political engagement (Challagalla, 2024).

The increasing anti-globalization sentiments, xenophobia and stricter immigration policies in host countries create additional challenges, restricting the diaspora's participation in political and diplomatic activities. To tackle these issues, the Indian government needs to establish strong and flexible strategies that effectively engage its diverse diaspora, ensuring their involvement in various initiatives and fostering better connections between them and the Indian state.

Recommendations

To effectively engage the Indian diaspora and boost India's global influence, a comprehensive strategy is essential. Key recommendations from the Singhvi Committee Report (2000) can help strengthen these connections, such as increasing funding for the NRI and PIO division within the Ministry of External Affairs and offering dual citizenship to enhance ties.

Establishing more Indian cultural centres worldwide and expanding educational scholarship programs would encourage cultural exchange and reinforce connections to India. Additionally, implementing targeted strategies to manage labour migration can safeguard the rights of blue-collar workers while attracting skilled professionals to contribute to India's development.

Utilizing digital platforms to enhance communication and creating programs for skills transfer would deepen ties between India and its expatriates. A well-defined diaspora policy focusing on welfare mechanisms and addressing legal issues would protect diaspora rights and security.

Promoting tourism for younger members of the diaspora and enhancing educational exchange initiatives would help solidify long-term relationships. Furthermore, supporting political organizations within the diaspora and establishing a Parliamentary Standing Committee on the Indian Diaspora would enhance political representation and strengthen ties with Indian-origin parliamentarians around the world. These measures collectively would create a more integrated and engaged global Indian community, benefiting both the diaspora and India.

Conclusion

The evolution of diaspora diplomacy in India marks a significant shift towards recognizing diaspora as strategic assets crucial for enhancing foreign policy and bilateral relations. The Indian diaspora influences politics, business, and culture while contributing to economic development through remittances. To fully harness this potential, India must address challenges such as past policy inconsistencies and geopolitical sensitivities. By fostering a sense of belonging, celebrating cultural ties, and encouraging investment, India can strengthen bilateral relations and solidify its image as a global player. Ultimately, effective diaspora engagement will create a more interconnected future for both India and its diaspora community.

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CULTURAL DIPLOMACY AND NEW PUBLIC DIPLOMACY IN THE LENS OF DIGITAL AGE: THE IMPACT OF THE INDIAN DIASPORA ON GLOBAL SOFT POWER

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Introduction

Cultural diplomacy has traditionally been defined as the use of cultural assets to promote mutual understanding and improve international relations. With the advent of digital technologies, new public diplomacy strategies have emerged, particularly through the active engagement of Diaspora communities. In the digital age, this practice is evolving rapidly driven by technological advancements and the globalization of communication. The Indian Diaspora, which spans over 32 million individuals worldwide, serves as a vital conduit for cultural diplomacy. This paper explores how the Diaspora utilizes digital tools to promote Indian culture, values, and identity, ultimately enhancing India's global soft power. The Indian Diaspora, one of the largest and most influential in the world, plays a pivotal role in shaping India's soft power by utilizing digital platforms to disseminate cultural narratives globally (Nye, 2004).

The concept of soft power, introduced by Joseph Nye, refers to the ability of a country to influence others through attraction rather than coercion (Nye, 1990). In the context of cultural diplomacy, the Indian Diaspora functions as a crucial bridge, facilitating cultural exchanges that enhance India's global

image. This paper looks into the Nye's framework of soft power to analyze the impact of digital engagement by the Indian Diaspora on international perceptions of India.

The digital age has fundamentally transformed the landscape of international relations, ushering in new paradigms of diplomacy (Telecoming, 2023). Among these, cultural diplomacy and new public diplomacy have emerged as crucial tools for nations to project their soft power and influence on the global stage (Viswanathan, 2019). The Indian Diaspora, with its vast network and global reach, has played a pivotal role in shaping India's image and enhancing its soft power. This article explores the intersection of cultural diplomacy, new public diplomacy, and the Indian Diaspora in the digital age.

According to a report by the Ministry of External Affairs, India actively encourages Diaspora engagement as a means to strengthen cultural ties and foster global understanding (Ministry of External Affairs, 2021).

A Prelude

Cultural diplomacy, as a concept, has been practiced for centuries. Ancient civilizations

engaged in cultural exchanges to foster understanding and cooperation. However, the modern understanding of cultural diplomacy as a deliberate state strategy emerged in the mid-20th century, particularly in the context of the Cold War. Nations sought to influence public opinion and build alliances through cultural exchange programs and public diplomacy initiatives. These Diaspora communities have played a significant role in India's history, contributing to the country's economy, culture, and political discourse.

The digital revolution has transformed the way nations interact with each other and with global audiences. The rise of social media, online platforms, and global communication networks has created new opportunities for cultural exchange and public diplomacy. Digital technologies have lowered the barriers to entry, making it easier for individuals and organizations to engage in international discourse.

Cultural Diplomacy is the use of cultural assets to build bridges, foster understanding, and enhance a nation's international image. It involves promoting a country's culture, arts, language, and traditions abroad (UNESCO, 2023).

New Public Diplomacy is a more proactive and strategic approach to public diplomacy that leverages digital technologies to engage with global audiences. It involves using social media, online platforms, and digital storytelling to communicate a nation's message and build relationships.

The Indian Diaspora as a Catalyst for Cultural Diplomacy

The Indian Diaspora, with its diverse range of cultural expressions and global connections, has become a powerful force in promoting Indian culture worldwide. Diaspora members often serve as cultural ambassadors, sharing their heritage and traditions with their host communities. This can include organizing cultural events, festivals, and exhibitions, as well as engaging in dialogue and exchange programs (Mukherjee, 2019).

The Role of Digital Technologies in New Public Diplomacy

Digital technologies have revolutionized the way nations engage with the global public. Social media platforms, websites, and online content have become powerful tools for new public diplomacy. The Indian government has been actively leveraging these platforms to promote India's culture, heritage, and achievements. Additionally, the Indian Diaspora has been instrumental in using digital channels to amplify India's message and connect with global audiences (Mohilay, 2023).

The Impact of the Indian Diaspora on Global Soft Power

The Indian Diaspora's contributions to cultural diplomacy and new public diplomacy have significantly enhanced India's global soft power. By showcasing India's rich cultural heritage and promoting its values, the Diaspora has helped to create a positive and favorable image of India in the world. This has led to increased international cooperation, trade, and investment.

The Role of the Indian Diaspora

The Indian Diaspora is diverse, comprising various ethnic, linguistic, and cultural backgrounds. This diversity enriches the cultural narratives shared globally and enhances India's soft power. The Diaspora engages in cultural diplomacy through various means:

- **Cultural Ambassadorship:** Members of the Indian Diaspora often take on the role of cultural ambassadors, representing India through various cultural events, educational initiatives, and community outreach programs. Their efforts help bridge cultural divides and promote mutual understanding (Ministry of External Affairs, 2021).
- **Economic Influence:** The economic contributions of the Diaspora also strengthen India's soft power. Many Diaspora members hold influential positions in their host countries contributing to economic growth and fostering business ties that reflect positively on India (Bhandari, 2019).

Digital Engagement Strategies

Leveraging Social Media

Digital platforms have transformed the landscape of cultural diplomacy. Social media allows Diaspora communities to share their cultural heritage in real-time, engage with broader audiences, and facilitate cultural exchanges. Popular platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter have been instrumental in organizing events and spreading awareness about Indian culture.

- **Online Campaigns:** Initiatives such as India at 75, celebrating India's 75 years of independence, showcase how the Diaspora utilizes social media to engage with global audiences, sharing stories and cultural practices that reflect India's diversity (Sinha, 2020).
- **Content Creation:** The rise of influencers from the Diaspora, who create content related to Indian culture, cuisine, and traditions, has further enhanced cultural visibility. These influencers often collaborate with brands and organizations, amplifying their reach and impact.

Digital Cultural Festivals

Cultural festivals organized by Diaspora communities have become increasingly popular, providing platforms for cultural expression and exchange. These events often incorporate digital elements, allowing participation from individuals across the globe.

- **Virtual Celebrations:** Festivals such as Diwali and Holi are celebrated virtually, with online events that include performances, workshops, and discussions. This digital engagement not only preserves cultural practices but also fosters community among Diaspora members and promotes Indian culture to a wider audience (Kumar, 2021).
- **Collaborative Platforms:** Websites and apps dedicated to cultural exchange have emerged, allowing users to share experiences and resources related to Indian culture. These platforms encourage learning and appreciation of diverse cultural practices.

Successful Initiatives by the Indian Diaspora

- **Bollywood's Global Influence:** Indian cinema, particularly Bollywood, has gained immense popularity worldwide. Bollywood films are a significant cultural export, shaping perceptions of India around the world. The Diaspora has played a crucial role in promoting Bollywood films and introducing Indian culture to global audiences. For instance, the South Asian Film Festival in New York attracts large audiences, showcasing Indian cinema and its cultural nuances (Ghosh, 2019).
- **Culinary Diplomacy:** The popularity of Indian cuisine has also been propelled by the Diaspora. Culinary events and cooking classes organized by Diaspora members serve as platforms for cultural exchange, highlighting the richness of Indian culinary traditions while fostering community engagement (Patel, 2022). Indian cuisine has become a global phenomenon. The Diaspora has played a significant role in introducing Indian food to new markets and promoting Indian culinary traditions.
- **Educational Initiatives:** Online platforms dedicated to teaching Indian languages and culture have proliferated, allowing Diaspora members to share their heritage with younger generations and interested individuals globally. Initiatives like "Learn Hindi Online" have gained traction, fostering cultural appreciation (Bansal, 2021).
- **Yoga and Meditation:** India's ancient practices of yoga and meditation have gained global recognition. The Diaspora has been instrumental in spreading these practices and promoting Indian wellness traditions.

Challenges and Opportunities

While the Indian Diaspora has made significant contributions to cultural diplomacy and new public diplomacy, there are also challenges to be addressed. This paper includes the potential for cultural appropriation, the need for coordination among different Diaspora organizations, and the challenges of navigating diverse cultural contexts. While the Indian Diaspora offers immense potential for strengthening bilateral ties, it also faces certain challenges.

These include the diversity of experiences within the Diaspora, the varying levels of integration in host countries, and the potential for political sensitivities. However, these challenges can be overcome through effective engagement, coordination, and a shared commitment to fostering positive relationships. However, by addressing these challenges and leveraging the opportunities presented by the digital age, the Indian Diaspora can continue to make a significant contribution to India's global soft power.

In this context, the digital age presents numerous opportunities for cultural diplomacy, several challenges persist. Misrepresentation of cultural narratives can occur, particularly when cultural elements are extracted and commodified without proper context. Additionally, the digital divide may prevent certain segments of the Diaspora from participating fully in these initiatives, leading to uneven representation (Bhattacharya, 2021).

Conclusion

The Indian Diaspora, in conjunction with the power of digital technologies has emerged as a powerful force in shaping India's global image and enhancing its soft power. By effectively leveraging cultural diplomacy and new public diplomacy, the Diaspora can continue to play a vital role in promoting India's interests and building positive relationships with other nations. The Indian Diaspora has emerged as a powerful force in international relations, playing a crucial role in strengthening bilateral ties. Their contributions to economic diplomacy, cultural diplomacy, and political diplomacy have significantly enhanced India's global standing and influence. By leveraging the unique advantages of the Diaspora, India can continue to foster strong relationships with other nations and promote its national interests.

Through digital engagement strategies, Diaspora communities not only strengthen ties with their homeland but also play a vital role in shaping international perceptions of India. Future research should continue to explore the long-term impacts of these digital initiatives on global diplomacy and cultural representation.

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THAIPUSAM: A FESTIVAL OF TAMIL DEVOTION, IDENTITY AND COHESION IN SOUTHEAST ASIA

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Thaipusam is one of the biggest and carnival-like festivals of the Tamil Hindu community in Malaysia and Singapore. It is celebrated in the month of Thai (January-February). It's a festival of devotion, sacrifice, and thanksgiving dedicated to the Hindu god Murukan, commemorating his conquest over passions and malevolence. The festival marks the day Murukan received the vel (lance of wisdom) from his mother, Parvathi.

Over time, Thaipusam has evolved into a significant national festival and tourist attraction in Southeast Asian countries like Malaysia and Singapore. For believers, Murukan symbolises bravery, power, and virtue. Devotees perform the kavadi attam, which entails dancing (adu) with a pole (kavu). It is a way of appealing to Murukan for divine assistance or to express gratitude. The festival is known for its extravagant displays of penance through self-mortification practices, such as body piercing and head shaving, which can be a cultural shock for first-time observers. Devotees view these acts as expressions of atonement.

The myth of Murugan and the demon Idumban has a deep root in Thaipusam. The legend says how Idumban, on a quest to fetch two hills for his master, encountered Murugan disguised as a child. After a confrontation, Idumban recognised Murugan's divinity and became his disciple. Murugan decreed that those who carried kavadi to his shrine would be blessed, establishing the tradition that continues today. Therefore, people believe that kavadi carriers are re-enacting Idumban's submission to Murugan.

Murugan Worship and Social Cohesion among Tamil Diaspora

Murugan holds a special place in Tamil culture. Clothey observes that people frequently refer to him as the "god of Tamil," the "god of the Pantiyas," and the "lord of the Palani Hills," underscoring his deep ties to Tamil Nadu (Clothey, 1978, p. 108). For many Tamils, Murugan remains the 'Lord of Time,' with devotion to him enriching their daily and yearly cycles (Clothey, 1978, p148). Some considered Murugan as the god of war, while others believed that he may have been the patron god of hunting tribes known as Karuvars. The Murugan cult provides devotees with a sense of Tamil identity and a connection to both their past and the broader Indian culture (Clothey, 1978).

Murugan worship practices in British Malaya were closely tied to the Indian diaspora of the nineteenth century. Most of them were plantation workers who brought these folk practices from Tamil Nadu villages and the Coromandel coast. The nineteenth century was characterised by constant circulation between South India and Southeast Asia, with cultural symbols and religious practices shaping the urban landscape of Straits port cities (Amrith, 2009), facilitated by colonial policies and new technologies (Bhattacharya, 2020).

Migration was largely involuntary. However, there were also some voluntary migrants, including merchants, traders, professionals, and activists. Under the colonial era, workers were mainly employed in the rubber plantations and railways in the Malay Peninsula. This led to cooking up of several stereotypes towards Tamils as they are uneducated, illiterate and low born labourers. Nonetheless, Tamils have persistently tried to alleviate their social status by actively engaging in religious and political activities (Lee, 1989). Chettiar merchants established numerous temples dedicated to South Indian deities in Singapore and Penang in the early nineteenth century.

Elegance of Kavadi and a Spectacular Procession

A prevalent votive ceremony in Tamil culture is kavadi. The procession of penitents to the sacred place has shown almost ten varieties of kavadi. The varieties may include Pal Kavadi, Thol Kavadi, Alagu Kavadi, Alavu Kavadi, Ratha Kavadi, Vel Kavadi, Puspam Kavadi, Mayil Iraku Kavadi, and Pavalm Kavadi. The piercings on kavadi-bearers' skin often leave no blood, attributed to the ritual's spiritual essence and the skill of the piercers themselves.

The majority of the devotees who pierce themselves are male. The reasons behind such vow-making are diverse subjected to the kind of problems faced by the Indian diaspora in the overseas countries. It may include illness, educational pursuits, occupational interests, financial difficulties, family issues, etc. Contrary to the general perceptions, devotees do not see piercing as self-mortification but as a test of their faith for which they invoke Idumban's strength. The uniqueness of Murukan kavadi is that devotees carry any Hindu deity as their ishtadevata (chosen personal god) and draw strength from the deity. The kavadi bearer not only carries a gift to the god but, in a sense, carries the god himself. Most bearers have three small skewers, representing Murugan's vel, inserted into their flesh: one through the forehead, one through the tongue, and one through the cheeks.

Although Thaipusam is a three-day festival, the focus is generally on vow fulfillment and *kavadi* bearing on the second day. Early morning, the devotee goes for a ritual bath, puts on yellow clothing symbolizing purity, and presents offerings of coconut, banana, flowers, lime, milk, incense, and betel nut. Purification, prayers, and offerings are practiced. Then the devotee is provided with a *kavadi* to carry from the temple where the vows are made to Murugan's seat at Penang's Waterfall Temple. Devotees are attended by several helpers who provides physical and emotional support because the *kavadi* bearer may experience hysteria or ritual trance. Throughout the route, volunteers at numerous *thaneer panthal* (water spots) sprinkle water on the feet of kavadi-bearers to alleviate the discomfort of walking barefoot on the heated ground, while also providing food and water to the broader community ("A Journey of Devotion: Celebrating Thaipusam in Singapore," n.d.).

Music plays a vital role in the Thaipusam procession. *Kavadi cindu* is an essential component of the festival and involves devotees accompanied by drummers and singers. Choirs perform devotional songs dedicated to Murukan and other deities, with 'Vel, vel' (lance, lance!) being a common chant. The repetitive drumming and chanting create an atmosphere that supports transcendent experiences, connecting individual bodies to the social and political body (Scheper-Hughes and Lock, 1997). Another scholar concluded this environment fosters a democratic tone that emphasises both individual liberation and group cooperation (Kent, 2004). Additionally, Thaipusam is a colourful celebration with a myriad of spectators, chants, music, and food stalls. As Thaipusam attracts numerous tourists, it contributes to the development of local businesses and creates temporary jobs in different sectors starting from event management, food distribution to the sanitation jobs.

Multicultural Fabric of Thaipusam

The procession is attended by a diverse mix of devotees, showcasing the festival's multicultural fabric. Even Chinese Buddhist or Taoist devotees participate in this festival by carrying kavadis and palkudams. This coming together of people from diverse cultural backgrounds exemplifies the festival's inclusive spirit and harmonious coexistence of different communities on the island. Moreover, it is a festival where old kampong people gather around their kampong kavadi, a cherished memory from a village near Singapore's port. Despite the disappearance of old kampongs due to housing board flat development, festivals like Thaipusam help renew ties through collective prayers and festivals (Krishnan, 2015). Some Europeans also have returned to Batu Caves for several consecutive years to carry kavadi (Lee, 1989).

The number of Chinese kavadi bearers during Thaipusam in Penang is increasing annually. This involvement could be seen as a way for Chinese and Indian Hindus to assert their religious presence in Muslim-dominated Malaysia (Ann, 2022). The Chinese community has been a major donor to the Chettiar temples, especially during Thaipusam. Shared celebrations like Deepavali or Pongal have brought communities closer, despite pronounced regional and caste identities (Bhattacharya, 2020). Ann (2022) argues that Thaipusam in Penang contributes to inter-rituality between Chinese and Hinduism in Malaysia, drawing on Carrithers' (2000) concept of polytropy. This exchange has led to modifications in rituals, notably in coconut breaking, kavadi worship, and arccanai offering. It transcends beyond rigid cultural boundaries. Tamil veterans often offer free services to devotees during Thaipusam. This mutual support and coexistence reflect the sense of belonging and shared expectations in diasporic communities.

As a primarily non-Brahmin festival, Thaipusam's major religious functionaries are non-Brahmin pantarams. This challenges Srinivas' model of Sanskritization, instead representing a 'plebianization' of Tamil Hindu identity by reconnecting with village roots (Lee, 1989).

Uniting Power of Thaipusam

Thaipusam even welcomes non-Hindu practitioners and doesn't impose specific mythological or theological understandings. The event brings together conflicting religious representations into a cohesive ritual, fostering camaraderie and cooperation among Indians and non-Malays alike (Kent, 2004). Similarly, "among Singapore's Hindus, Thaipusam is such a site. It is synthetic; it unifies the apparently diverse" (Babb, 1976, p. 11). Devotees are free to interpret the event and its imagery according to their own perspectives, whether rooted in Hindu tradition or not. This approach challenges the notion of rigid cultural boundaries, both in Malaysia and globally (Kent, 2004). This echoes Fred Clothey's observations about the eclectic nature of the Murukan devotional cult in Tamil Nadu, which appeals to Tamilians with varying viewpoints (Clothey, 1978).

The celebration also provides a liberating space for women and transcends caste, class, and gender barriers. It somehow facilitates an opportunity for Hindu women to publicly display their finery and for all Indians to gather in a festive atmosphere. In other words, Thaipusam represents "a repeated enactment and celebration of a growing social body" (Kent, 2004).

Thaipusam Celebrations in Malaysia and Singapore

Thaipusam is one of the largest celebrations in Malaysia, a multi-religious and multi-ethnic society where Indians constitute just over 6.5% of the population, after the ethnic Malays and the Chinese, with about 80% of them being Hindu, especially Tamil (Statista, 2024). The Thaipusam celebration began in Malaysia in 1892 (Belle, 2017), closely resembling the celebration at the Palani hill temple in Tamil Nadu (Gopal, 2023). While Thaipusam is celebrated at various Murukan temples across Malaysia, the Batu Caves shrine in Kuala Lumpur attracts the largest crowds and publicity.

The shrine's origin dates back to 1891, when K. Thambusamy, following a vision of the deity Maha Mariamman, placed a vel in the Cathedral Cave. This event set the stage for the site to become a major pilgrimage centre, using important symbols and themes from Tamil customs for worshipping Murugan.

In Singapore, Thaipusam has been a major religious event for over a century. Devotees carry kavadi from the Srinivasa Perumal Temple in Little India to the Thendayuthapani Temple in Tank Road, covering about one and a half miles. From the late 1930s, Tamil organisations influenced by the Self-Respect Movement strongly protested against self-mortification for its abolition. As a result, the Sri Thendayuthapani Temple prohibited the alagu kavadi in 1950 due to the prohibition of piercings in Madras. However, the temple retracted its decision by the end of the year in response to the overwhelming opposition from devotees (Sinha, 2013). Prominent figures, including Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew, have attended the festival, contributing to its significance at both national and ethnic levels (National Archives of Singapore, 1963). According to the reports, recently Digital Minister Gobind Singh Deo was also at the temple for the Thaipusam celebration, who conveyed that over two million visitors, both Malaysians and international tourists, joined in the celebration each day (Malay Mail, 2024). Parallely, the streets of Little India and Dhoby Ghaut in Singapore were also packed with more than 18,000 devotees (The Strait Times & Vardni V, 2024).

In a way, preparing for kavadi is a temporary renunciation of the world. In the context of Thaipusam, Arnold van Gennep's three phases of rites of passage—separation, liminality, and incorporation—can be applied (Van Gennep, 1960). The separation phase begins with devotees engaging in spiritual and physical preparation, including fasting, following a vegetarian diet, and practicing celibacy. On the day of Thaipusam, they leave their homes, symbolising a departure from their routine lives and a commitment to the forthcoming spiritual journey. During the liminality phase, devotees participate in the procession carrying kavadis or pots of milk, often undergoing acts of self-mortification such as skin piercings, which induce a trance-like state in which the devotee is exposed to the deity's power and messages and knowledge are transferred (Belle, p. 343). This phase refers to their transitional state, which stands between their prior and transformed selves. The pilgrimage to significant temples, like Batu Caves or Sri Thendayuthapani Temple, is a testimony of their keen endurance and collective devotion. Lastly, the incorporation phase is marked by the presentation of offerings to Lord Murugan at the temple, signifying the devotees' reintegration into the community with a renewed spiritual identity. The festival concludes with a communal celebration that reaffirms their return to everyday life, enriched by a deeper sense of spiritual fulfilment and social cohesiveness.

The Socio-Psychological Perks of Thaipusam Celebration

Some scholars have argued that since group attitude is there, ceremonial occasions often increase an individual's ability to tolerate pain (Wissler, 1921; Kosambi, 1967; Ward, 1984). These researchers came to the conclusion that vow fulfilment, like psychiatric abreaction, delivers a new meaning to life, self-fulfilment, and therapeutic consequences through the release of repressed emotions. It is not confined to the individual but also has an impact on the larger community. According to Wiebe and Mariappen (1979), these celebrations are congruent with the need to bring attention to the Indian diaspora as a minority group. Thereby, group relationships are reaffirmed, and the primary social identity of the devotee is ritually established once again. Little India serves as a hub for 'Indian' events like weddings and festivals such as Thaipusam, symbolising a space for 'Indian' identity within Singapore's multiracial model (Purushotam, 2016).

For visitors all around the world, the piercing of the skin of devotees is the most astonishing but shocking feature of Thaipusam. Many of the penitents generally agree that they experience an ecstatic trance by intensively focussing on the deity.

Standard Shaivite markings and sacred ash are also applied to the devotee's body at the points of insertion after piercing. All agree that something happens that is quite out of the ordinary, and the experience is evidently an extremely vivid one. Tamil-speaking informants in Singapore use the word *arul* to denote trance, which means blessing or grace and is a sign of the god's favor. An additional rite known as *itumpan pujai* may also be performed by the devotee at some point after *Thaipusam*. Interestingly, it involves offerings of liquor and animal sacrifice, and in consequence is thought to be somewhat disreputable by some informants (Babb, 1976).

The *Kavadi* ritual involves symbolic transformations. A votary carrying a peacock-adorned *kavadi* becomes a humble devotee of *Murugan*, while the *vel* piercing symbolises *Murugan*'s victory over demonic enemies. These transformations represent sacrifice and submission to the deity (Tanaka, 2003). Babb, who extensively writes on *Murugan*, opined that *Murugan* is considered a deity of the Hindu community in Singapore as a whole, but he is also worshipped and accepted by smaller, more bounded social units (Babb, 1976, p. 13). Further, he fascinatingly argues, "It is both celebration of his relationship with the god and celebration of himself" (Babb, 1976, p. 19). Thus, *Thaipusam* represents a unique blend of culture, faith, and practices, showcasing the rich traditions of the Tamil Hindu community in Malaysia and Singapore. *Thaipusam* is a phenomenal festival that connects diasporic communities, extending beyond ethnic and religious boundaries and holding significant historical, cultural, and social significance.

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Language and Identity: How Hindi Strengthens Cultural Ties Among Indian Diaspora in Africa

In bustling cities across Africa, from Nairobi to Johannesburg, the Indian diaspora has established vibrant communities that are intricately linked by the Hindi language. This linguistic connection serves as a key pillar of identity, transcending mere communication to become a vital bridge to ancestral roots and a repository of cultural values. With over 2.6 million people of Indian origin residing in Africa, Hindi plays a crucial role in maintaining cultural bonds, preserving traditions, and fostering a sense of belonging among these communities. As families engage in cultural practices and celebrations, Hindi facilitates the transmission of stories and values across generations, ensuring that the rich heritage of the Indian subcontinent remains alive and relevant in their daily lives. Through language, the diaspora not only connects with its past but also strengthens its identity in the diverse cultural landscape of Africa.

Background and Historical Context

The history of Indian migration to Africa is marked by significant waves that began long before colonial times and continued through the 19th and 20th centuries. Initial interactions can be traced back over three thousand years, with Indian traders establishing commercial ties along the eastern coast of Africa. However, the most notable migration occurred between 1829 and 1924, when approximately 769,437 Indians were brought to various regions



including Mauritius, South Africa, and East Africa, primarily as indentured labourers under British colonial rule. This migration was largely driven by the demand for labour in plantation economies, where Indians replaced freed enslaved Africans. Alongside their skills and labour, these migrants brought their language—Hindi—which became a crucial element of community life. Hindi was carried to Africa through cultural institutions, religious practices, and community gatherings, evolving into a vital tool for preserving traditions and fostering connections among generations. As Indian communities established temples, cultural organizations, and schools, Hindi remained a cornerstone of their identity, enabling them to maintain their heritage in a foreign land.

Language as a Marker of Identity

For many families in the Indian diaspora, Hindi is more than just a language; it is the vessel through which values, stories, and traditions are passed from one generation to the next. It serves as a bridge that connects younger generations to their cultural heritage, enabling them to relate to their ancestral roots despite living far from the Indian subcontinent. Hindi is the language of prayer, of Bollywood songs, and of shared memories rooted in Indian customs, reinforcing the diaspora's cultural identity and fostering a sense of belonging. Through Hindi, the diaspora maintains a strong connection to their Indian heritage, ensuring that the richness of their culture continues to thrive in their adopted homelands.

There is a famous saying in Hindi by Bhartendu Harishchand that is *Nij bhasha unnati ahai, sab unnati ko mul, bin nij bhasha-gyan ke, mitat na hiya ko sul* that means "The advancement of one's mother tongue is the foundation of all progress. Without knowing one's own language, the heart's sorrow will remain."

The Role of Hindi in Community Building

Hindi serves as a vital connector within Indian diaspora communities across Africa, fostering unity and cultural identity despite geographical distances. Through Hindi-language schools and cultural organisations, such as the Hindu Sevashram Sangh in South Africa, families come together to celebrate festivals like Diwali, Navratri, and Holi, reinforcing their ties to Indian heritage. Religious institutions also incorporate Hindi in prayers and sermons, further strengthening spiritual connections. During cultural events and social functions, Hindi becomes a common language that enables individuals from diverse backgrounds to communicate and share their traditions. Ultimately, Hindi is not just a means of communication; it is a crucial

element in building community and preserving the rich tapestry of Indian culture in the diaspora.

The Impact of Media and Pop Culture

The influence of Bollywood movies, Hindi TV channels, and radio programs has been instrumental in keeping the Hindi language alive and thriving among the Indian diaspora in Africa. These media outlets serve as powerful cultural ambassadors, connecting people of Indian origin across borders and fostering a deep engagement with their ancestral roots. The popularity of Bollywood in African countries, in particular, has been a significant force in sustaining the Hindi language. From catchy dance numbers to iconic dialogues, these movies offer a nostalgic connection to India and help younger generations stay attuned to the language, even if they were born and raised in Africa. Hindi media also provides a platform for cultural exchange, allowing the diaspora to share their traditions and values with their African neighbours. Through these channels, the richness of Indian culture continues to resonate across the continent, ensuring that the Hindi language remains a vibrant part of the diaspora's identity.

Role of Indian Culture Centre in Promotion of Hindi

Indian Cultural Centres play a pivotal role in promoting Hindi among the Indian diaspora in Africa, serving as vital hubs for cultural exchange and education. These centres, established under the Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR), facilitate the teaching of Hindi through various programs, including language classes, cultural performances, and workshops. For instance, the Indian Cultural Centre in Johannesburg actively organizes Hindi language courses and cultural events that engage local communities and the diaspora alike.

According to ICCR, there are currently 36 Indian Cultural Centres worldwide, with several located in Africa, such as those in South Africa and Egypt, which host festivals and seminars that highlight Hindi literature, music, and dance. In 2018, the Maulana Azad Centre for Indian Culture in Cairo attracted over 14,000 schoolchildren to participate in cultural activities, showcasing the significant interest in Hindi and Indian culture. Through these initiatives, Indian Cultural Centres not only keep the Hindi language alive but also reinforce cultural ties, ensuring that the younger generations remain connected to their heritage while fostering a sense of community among people of Indian origin across the continent.

Challenges and Adaptations

Maintaining Hindi in the Indian diaspora across Africa presents several challenges, primarily due to the influence of dominant languages such as English and local African languages, which can lead to a gradual dilution of linguistic ties across generations. Despite these pressures, the diaspora has adopted innovative methods to keep Hindi relevant and vibrant. Virtual classes and social media groups have emerged as crucial tools for language preservation, allowing families to engage with Hindi from the comfort of their homes. For instance, online platforms offer Hindi lessons that cater to various age groups, ensuring that younger generations can learn the language while connecting with their cultural heritage. Additionally, virtual cultural events, such as online Diwali celebrations and Hindi poetry readings, foster community engagement and reinforce the importance of the language.

These adaptations not only help combat the challenges of linguistic assimilation but also create a dynamic environment where Hindi can thrive, ensuring that the language remains a vital part of the diaspora's identity.

Conclusion

In Africa or any other country, language not only symbolizes Indian identity but also plays a crucial role in uniting diverse communities. Just as a South Indian in India communicates in Hindi, similarly, encountering a Hindi-speaking person abroad brings a sense of fulfilment and connection. During India's struggle for independence, Hindi was instrumental in fostering national unity and integrity, and it continues to serve that purpose today. Despite linguistic diversity, India holds a prominent position on the global stage, and the Hindi language significantly contributes to this standing. "Hindi is the 'great language' of everyday speech-George Grierson." Hindi plays a crucial role in strengthening cultural ties among the Indian diaspora in Africa, serving as a bridge to ancestral roots and a means of preserving identity. Despite challenges such as linguistic assimilation and the dominance of local languages, innovative approaches like online classes and social media engagement have emerged to keep the language vibrant and relevant. Ultimately, the resilience of Hindi within these communities not only enriches individual lives but also fosters a strong sense of belonging, ensuring that the rich cultural heritage of the Indian diaspora continues to thrive across generations.

CALL FOR ARTICLES



As we prepare for the November 2024 edition of Pravasi Pulse, we continue to explore the ever-evolving landscape of the global Indian diaspora. We invite scholars, writers, community leaders, and diaspora members to contribute their unique perspectives to help us shine a light on the stories, challenges, and achievements that define our community.

For this upcoming issue, we are excited to delve into the following key themes:

- **Diaspora Leadership in Crisis:** How the Indian diaspora is stepping up in times of global challenges (pandemics, conflicts, etc.)
- **Cultural Fusion:** How Indian traditions are blending with local cultures across the globe
- **Diaspora Youth Voices:** Exploring the role of young Indians abroad in shaping future leadership
- **Home Away from Home:** The mental health challenges faced by the Indian diaspora and the resources available
- **Diaspora & Global Advocacy:** Indian communities advocating for social justice and environmental sustainability
- **Art as Resistance:** How Indian diaspora artists are using their craft to challenge stereotypes and fight for change
- **The Silent Revolution:** Indian women in the diaspora breaking barriers in STEM, business, and politics
- **Global Citizenship:** The role of the Indian diaspora in shaping global policies on migration, citizenship, and human rights
- **Entrepreneurs Across Borders:** Success stories of Indian-origin entrepreneurs building businesses that connect India with the world
- **Diaspora Literature:** How Indian authors abroad are shaping global literary landscapes

IMPORTANT DATE

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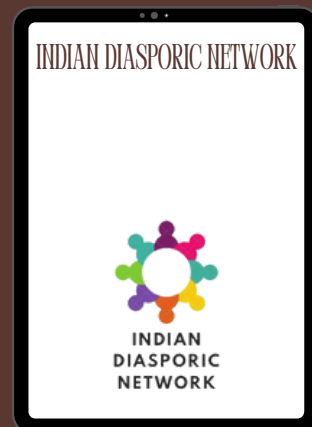


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