

Indian Diaspora in United Kingdom **Research report**



Pravasi Setu Foundation

Prepared By- Vidhi Jakhmola
(Research Intern)



Table of Contents

Abstract.....	4
Introduction.....	4-5
Literature review.....	5
Methodology.....	6
Contributions to Civic Life: Roles and Influence.....	6
Economic Contributions.....	7
<i>Figure 1: Age profile of Indian and White British people.....</i>	<i>7</i>
<i>Figure 2: Educational attainment among Indian and White British pupils.....</i>	<i>8</i>
<i>Figure 3 Income distribution among Indian, White British and all Asian households..</i>	<i>8</i>
<i>Figure 4: Remittances survey 2021 India, country-wise depiction.....</i>	<i>9</i>
Cultural and Social Contributions.....	9-10
Political Engagement.....	10
<i>Figure 5: Indian nationals resident in the United Kingdom.....</i>	<i>11</i>
Cultural Diplomacy: Evolution and Contemporary	
Trends.....	11-12
<i>Figure 6: India-UK celebrating ‘Fusion of two cultures’</i>	<i>11</i>
Policy Initiatives and Analytical Perspectives.....	12-
15	
<i>Figure 7: India-UK Bilateral trade growth projection.....</i>	<i>13</i>

<i>Figure 8: Top five nationalities for study visas granted for the years ending September 2017 to 2022.....</i>	<i>14</i>
Persistent Challenges Faced by Diaspora.....	15-
17	
<i>Figure 9: Diaspora's Connection to Indian roots.....</i>	<i>16</i>
<i>Figure 10: Yearly instances of religious hate crimes in England and Wales.....</i>	<i>17</i>
Recommendations and Strategic Pathways.....	17
<i>Figure 11: Official statistics on registered places of worship in England and Wales, 1999-2009.....</i>	<i>18</i>
Conclusion: Insights and Future Outlook.....	19

Abstract

The Indian diaspora, with a population expanding over 35 million according to the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA), is one of the world's largest and most dynamic global communities. The United Kingdom has long served as a significant home ground for the Indian diaspora. This report explores the multifaceted dimensions of the Indian diaspora in the United Kingdom including their contribution to civic life, migration trends, Cultural resilience and policy initiatives. While acknowledging success, the central research question that drives the study is what policy gaps are behind this alarming increase in attacks and xenophobia and how these challenges can be overcome. The report uses secondary data and government policy documents through a socio-political lens while using concepts like soft power and cultural resilience as tools of analysis. The primary findings suggest that despite the successful socio-cultural integration the diaspora continues to face increasing vulnerabilities due to policy gaps. Therefore this study explores the ways in which the Indian diaspora manages these challenges while reflecting upon the pathways that can be taken to avoid such vulnerabilities.

Key words: Indian diaspora, United Kingdom, cultural identity, Xenophobia, socio-economic contributions, British Indians,

Introduction

The Indian diaspora is a global community of over 32 million people of Indian origin living abroad. The community largely affects the dynamics in the host country through various aspects. Out of all host nations the United Kingdom holds a special position due to its significant amount of Indian diaspora and colonial past. Being one of the largest ethnic minority groups, the Indian diaspora is an impactful socio-cultural, political and economic force in British civic life. The Indian diaspora plays a vital role in the cultural landscape of the UK while succeeding in a variety of fields including politics, business, tech and medicine. Regardless of the narrative of effective integration of the diaspora, there has been a rise in the instances of racism and xenophobia against individuals of Indian origin, highlighting the significant knowledge gap about the challenges faced by the diaspora. The goal of this report is to provide a nuanced and in-depth analysis of the Indian diaspora in the United Kingdom while trying to trace the reason behind the alarming increase in hate crimes. The primary objective is to analyse the community's

historical development and the profound socio-economic impact they leave on British civic life. By examining socio-political analysis, historical data, government reports and qualitative data including scholarly works and articles, this report attempts to provide a deeper insight on how the community manages the contemporary gaps of policy while preserving their cultural heritage and sense of identity. Cultural diplomacy and its current trends are also an area of discussion in our report. In addition to drawing attention to the policy gaps and enduring difficulties, it offers recommendations and strategic solutions for resolving these problems.

Literature Review

The study of the Indian diaspora in the United Kingdom is a multi-layered and complex academic field addressing a multitude of factors like political, social, economic and cultural. The Initial scholarly inquiries primarily addressed the waves of migration from the Indian sub continent to the British Empire. The foundational literature delineates the distinct waves of migration, from 18th century students and lascars to post war recruitment of labor to fill the shortages in industries. Early scholarly works like those by Ballard (1994) offer critical historical context about the causes behind migration and early difficulties in settling down. More recent research focuses on cultural hybridity, identity and integration rather than concentrating only on the historical trajectory of migration. There is an evident debate among scholars regarding what exactly "integration" means. According to Stuart Hall (1990) integration is a process of developing a distinctive bicultural identity.

Recent researchers have attempted to examine how the newer generation balances their cultural heritage with British upbringing using terms like British-Indians and British-Asians in order to balance out their hybrid/dual identity. Alongside the concept of cultural hybridity, scholars have examined the Indian diaspora community through a socio-political lens of identity politics and the diaspora as a political interest group. They have emphasised on how the diaspora mobilizes recognition and rights in host societies (Werbner 2002; Jaffrelot & Therwath 2007). Additional research in the domain establishes how the racial discrimination and xenophobia continues to influence diasporic relations more so after Brexit.

Methodology

This report uses qualitative research methodology based on a systems review and documentary analysis of secondary sources. The research design is based on interpretivist methodology which aims to comprehend complex socio phenomenon through analysis of already-existing information and sources. I determined this methodology to be optimally suited for the objectives of this report, as it allows us to take findings from a broad academic, historic and governmental materials making it especially well suited for extensive study of the Indian diaspora. An in-depth review of academic texts, government records and data, historical documents and scholarly articles will be used to gather the primary data of this report. This includes data from the Office of National Statistics, reports from think tanks and scholarly articles that focus on migration, diaspora studies and historic data related to immigration policies. By examining and collating data from these varied sources, this report will be able to give a fact based insight on social, economic and political aspects of the diaspora. Further, the collected data would be analysed using thematic analysis. Followed by review of each source to identify key trends, ideas and information. This approach will make sure the report's findings are based on existing official research data, creating a nuanced, analytical and comprehensive report on the Indian diaspora in the United Kingdom.

Contributions to Civic Life: Roles and Influence

According to the government of the UK, 1.4 million people in the United Kingdom belong to the Indian diaspora community, making up 2.5% of the total population. The age profile of the Indian diaspora is younger than the age profile of British whites (as indicated in figure 1) underscoring the diaspora's potential to shape future developments in the UK. From being a group of immigrants from a colony to significant players in all aspects of British society the Indian diaspora has come a long way. The Indian diaspora impacts British society and civic life in various aspects like political, social, cultural and economical which we will analyze further in our report.

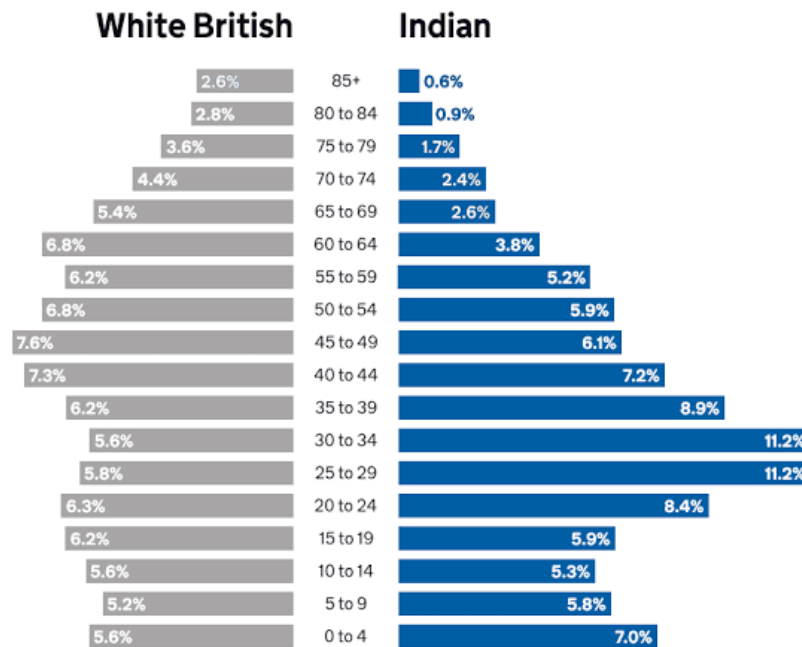


Figure 1: Age profile of Indian and White British people

(Source: gov.uk)

Economics Contribution

The economic background of the Indian diaspora in the UK is a compelling proof of high achievement, strategic investment and overall considerable community aspirations. There is a generational emphasis put on education and career advancement which is considered to be a major causing factor behind the upward graph of educational attainment among the Indian diaspora. According to the graph by gov.uk Indian pupils outperform white pupils in every key stage of education. The success in career and economic prosperity is directly influenced by the high level of education attainment. In comparison to other ethnic groups in the UK Indian workers are more likely to be involved in professions like lawyer, engineers and teachers with an account of 31%. The diaspora excels in employment rate with the highest percentage of employed in fields like public administration, health, education and most importantly finance.

The health care sector particularly is the most impacted by people of Indian descent (Sheetal Sharma,2012).

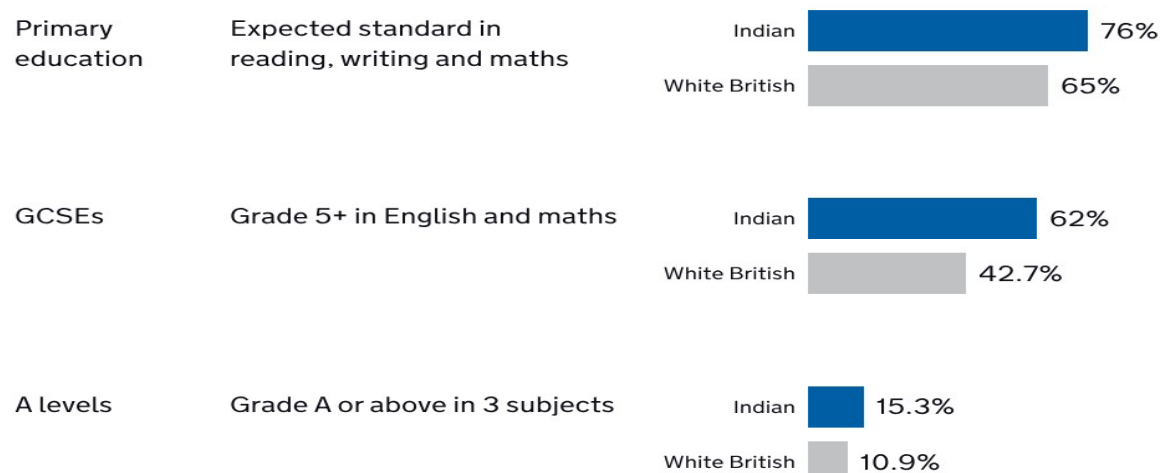


Figure 2: Educational attainment among Indian and White British pupils, Source: gov.uk

At all key stages, Indian pupils' attainment was above the national average. Indian pupils had a higher attainment than White British pupils but not as high as Chinese pupils.

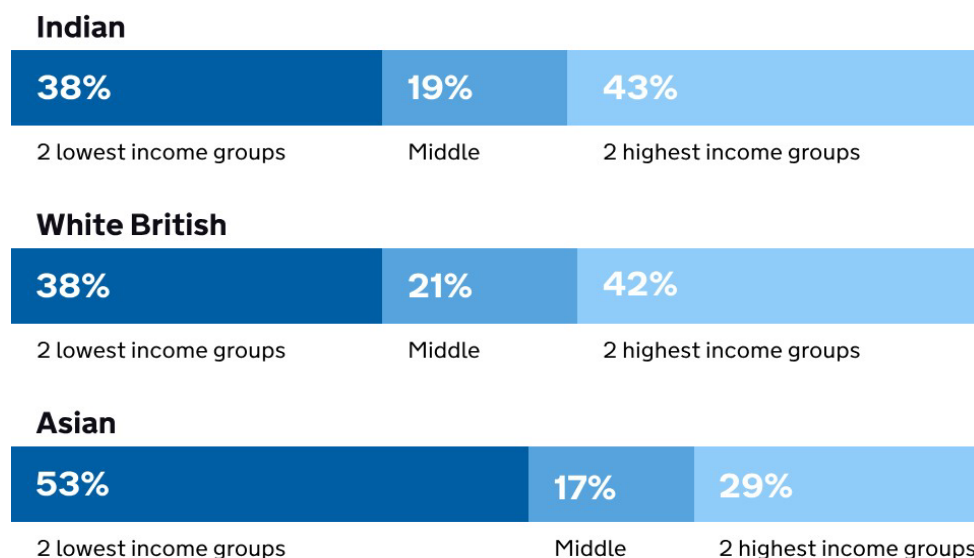
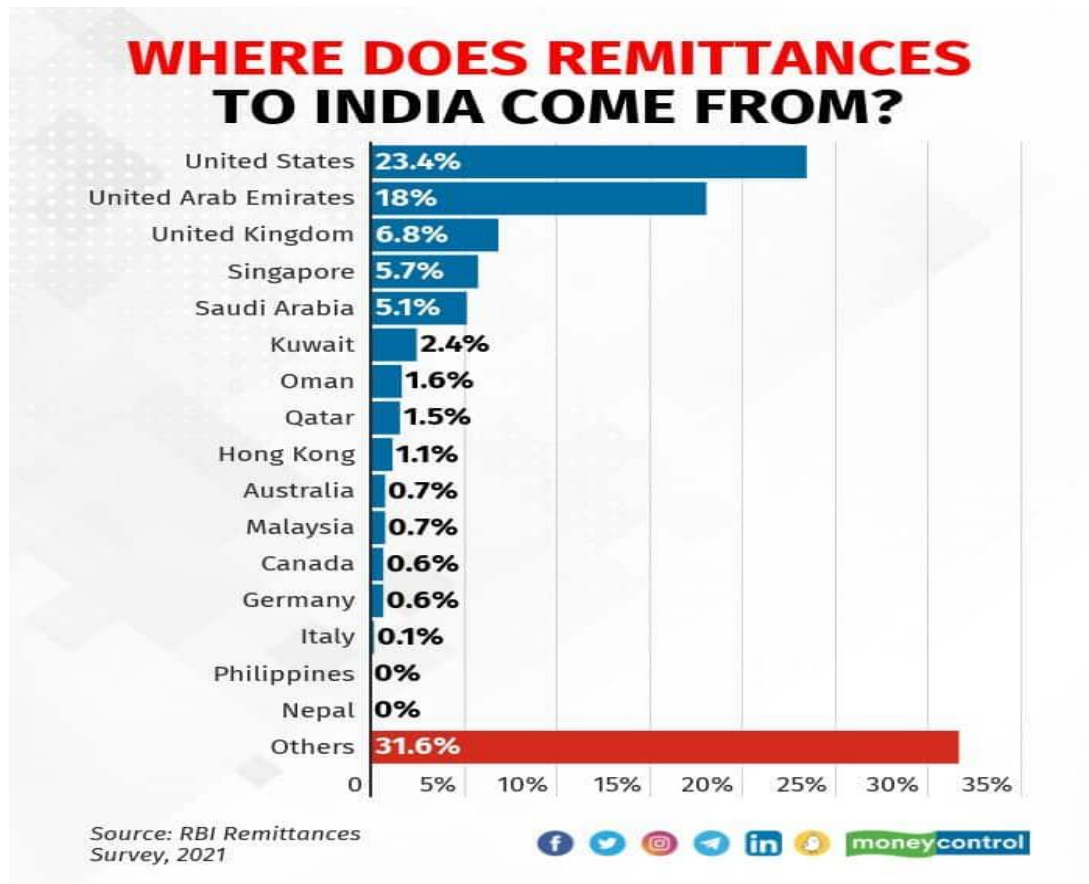


Figure 3: Income distribution among Indian, White British and all Asian households, Source: gov.uk

India's economy has largely benefited from remittances received from the UK and entrepreneurs from the diaspora community who frequently help with start-up collaboration and technology transfers. According to the Reserve Bank of India the UK contributes 6.8% of the total inward remittances in India making it the third major source of inward-remittance for India as indicated in figure 4.



(Figure 4: Remittances survey 2021 India, country-wise depiction)

Source: Moneycontrol, RBI remittances survey

Cultural and Social Contribution

The prevailing cultural influence is evident through cultural and community organizations. Institutions such as the national council of British Indians and Indian league advocate for the interests of the diaspora while the Nehru centre in London promotes Indian art, film and literature

facilitating cultural preservation. The cultural ties between the diaspora and India are reinforced by investments, digital and grassroot activism. Government initiatives like the UK-India Year of culture with engagement of over 7.7 million people face-to-face and 75 million people through online/social media sources (British Council, 2018.) highlights common heritage through exhibitions, art, academic exchange etc epitomises cultural diplomacy which is discussed in the latter part of the report at its core. Other than cultural contributions, the diaspora has significantly contributed to the social arena. The Indian diaspora and faith groups collectively organize various charitable initiatives including health camps and elderly services. The faith groups often encourage a multicultural societal norm fostering peace and social cohesion. Government funded exchange programmes such as UKIERI facilitates over 25,000 academic exchanges, and scholarship schemes, further bringing the people of the two countries even closer by connecting people, scholars at an academic level while creating a collaborative and sustainable environment for research and education.

Political Engagement

The political engagement of the Indian diaspora in the United kingdom has grown to be a transformative and influential force. People of Indian descent currently hold prominent political positions, including cabinet portfolio roles such as home secretary Suella Braverman and Prime Minister Rishi Sunak. Holding these Political positions is only one aspect of the engagement, the diaspora also actively influences and shapes policy making. This political involvement in the civic life of Britain goes beyond mere representation impacting migration laws in the UK and facilitating closer ties with India. According to Carnegie (2021), the Indian diaspora affects the electoral process and has come to become an important target group for political parties as they appear to be the new “swing voters” of the United Kingdom.. This political engagement is the evidence of integration of the Indian diaspora in the United Kingdom making them an important contemporary political force.

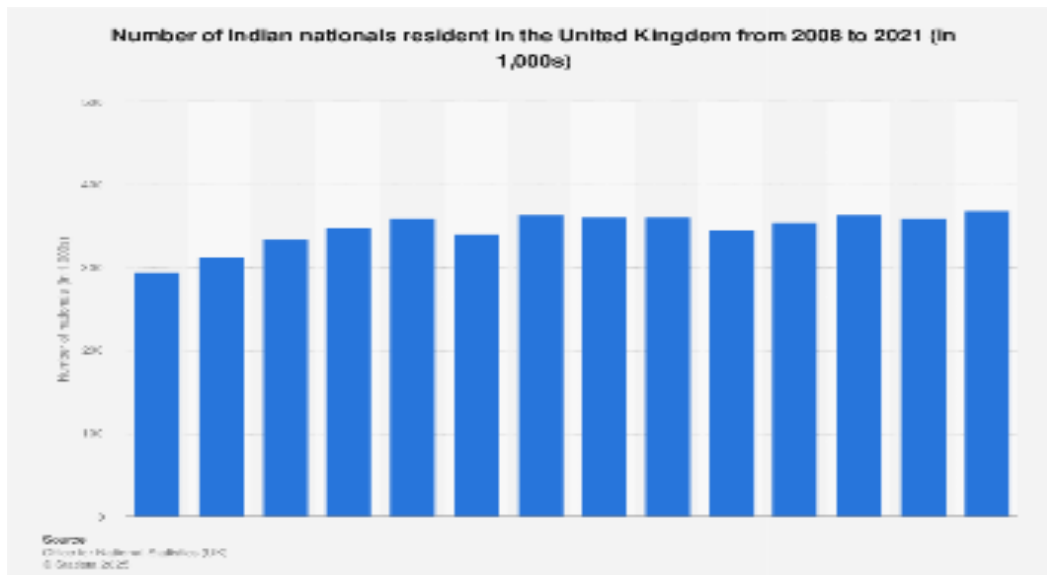


Figure 5: Indian nationals resident in the United Kingdom

Source: gov.uk

Cultural Diplomacy



Figure 6: INDIA–UK: Celebrating a ‘Fusion of Two Cultures’

Source: Diplomacy and Beyond

“Cultural diplomacy may be defined as the deliberate and strategic exchange of ideas, values, traditions, and other cultural elements with the aim of fostering mutual understanding, strengthening relationships,

advancing socio-cultural cooperation, and promoting national or international interests” (Institute of cultural diplomacy, 2025). In the era of complex interdependence (Keohane and Nye) the role and relevance of cultural diplomacy has heightened. In the context of India and the UK the concept of cultural diplomacy is demonstrated through official state-led initiatives as well as the grassroots and impactful efforts of the Indian diaspora.

India's approach to cultural diplomacy is managed by ICCR (The Indian Council for Cultural Relations), an autonomous agency under the Ministry of External affairs. The ICCR runs various cultural centres abroad, including the Nehru Centre in London which promotes Indian art, film and literature facilitating cultural preservation. The Indian Diaspora serves as a potent unofficial diplomatic force through community led projects that foster cross culture understanding. The diaspora serves as bridge builders between the host country and India (K.S Rana, 2009) granting India a huge diplomatic advantage at a global level. Several policy initiatives are embedded in the framework of cultural diplomacy, underscoring how diaspora engagement is mobilized as a tool of soft power. The subsequent discussion focuses on a select set of policies that illustrate this dynamic.

Policy Initiatives and Analytical Perspectives

The policy landscape governing the Indian diaspora in the UK is meticulously formulated. This intricate web of policies is shaped by a combination of strategic bilateral frameworks, sectoral agendas and community focused initiatives. These policies demonstrate how the diaspora functions as a living bridge between the host country and country of origin. The next section of the report looks at important projects at local, educational and strategic levels while evaluating the present policy gaps and advantages.

UK-India 2030 Roadmap

The UK-India 2030 Roadmap is a comprehensive framework unveiled by Prime minister Narendra Modi and Boris Johnson in May 2021 (Gov.uk, 2021). The major aim of this roadmap is to enhance bilateral relations across 5 core areas of focus: Trade and economic cooperation, defense and security, climate, health and people to people links. One of the central objectives is

to double bilateral trade by 2030 through trade partnerships and Free Trade Agreements. From an economic viewpoint the FTA is expected to create a more accessible market for British products by removing India's high tariffs.

The Indian diaspora is kept in a strategic position with consistently being referred to as a "living bridge". This term positions the diaspora as an impactful yet enabler of diplomatic and commercial goals. A central mechanism of Migration and Mobility Partnership (MMP) is the Young Professional Scheme (YPS) according to which there is a non-extendable, ballot based visa, no residency pathway up to 2 years for Indian professionals. The policy gap to address here is the short term acquisition of talents which shows the disconnect between the goal of fostering long term relationships with a policy that is at its core short-term and non-committal.

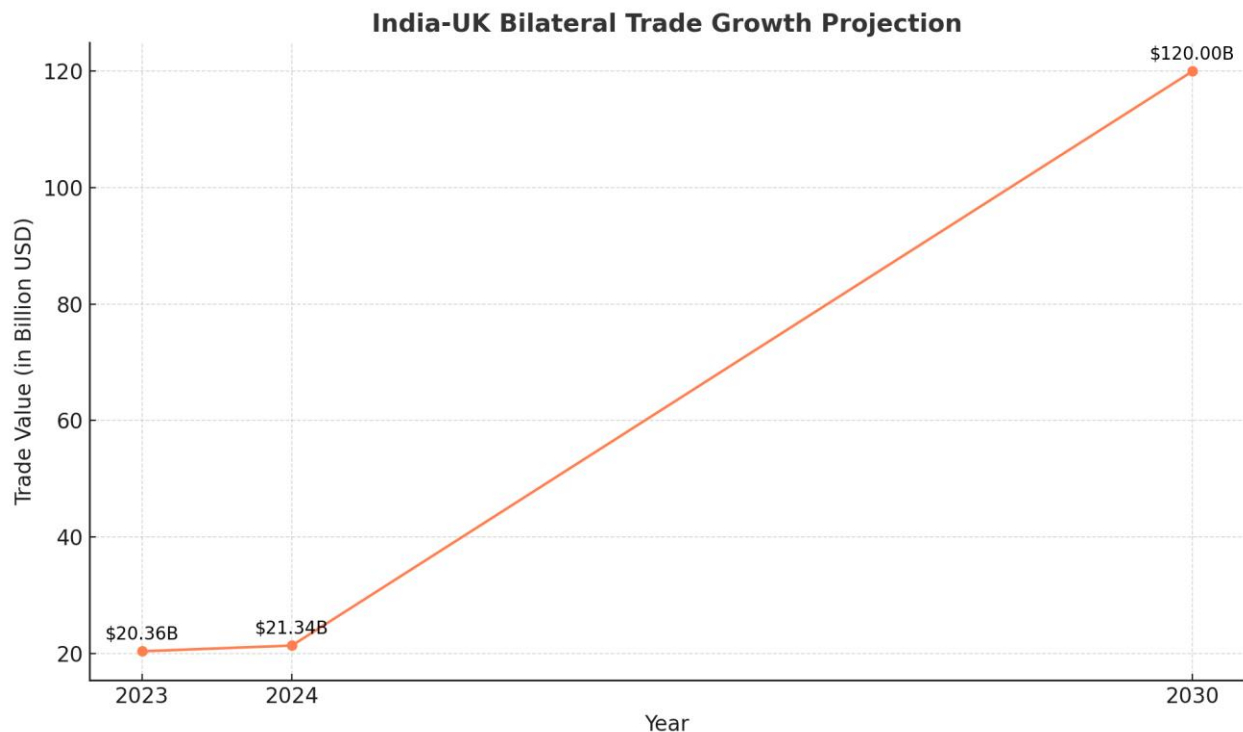


Figure 7: India-UK Bilateral trade growth projection

Source- IAS Express

International education strategy 2019

The UK's international education strategy, 2019 has posed higher education as a tool for soft power as well as an engine of economic growth. With ambitious targets like hosting 600,000 students a year and exporting education worth £35 billion by 2030 (Department for International Trade and Department for Education 2019). This strategy is jointly managed by the department of education and the department of international trade, with their focus shifting onto the Indian students with more than 116,000 student visas granted in a single year. In the previous year India surpassed China in terms of student visas. This increase in Indian students has been a financial boon for the United Kingdom with Indian students spending on living expenses, tuition and eventual participation in the work force. This expansion is largely due to the graduate visa, which permits unsponsored students to stay in the United Kingdom for two years following graduation. According to the immigration advice service the graduate visa has a rejection rate of less than 2% making it more appealing to students (Immigration Advice Service, 2023.). However the recent changes in the policy have been under question as they try to limit the long term social cost while ensuring steady inflows of talent and revenues depicting the short-term integration.

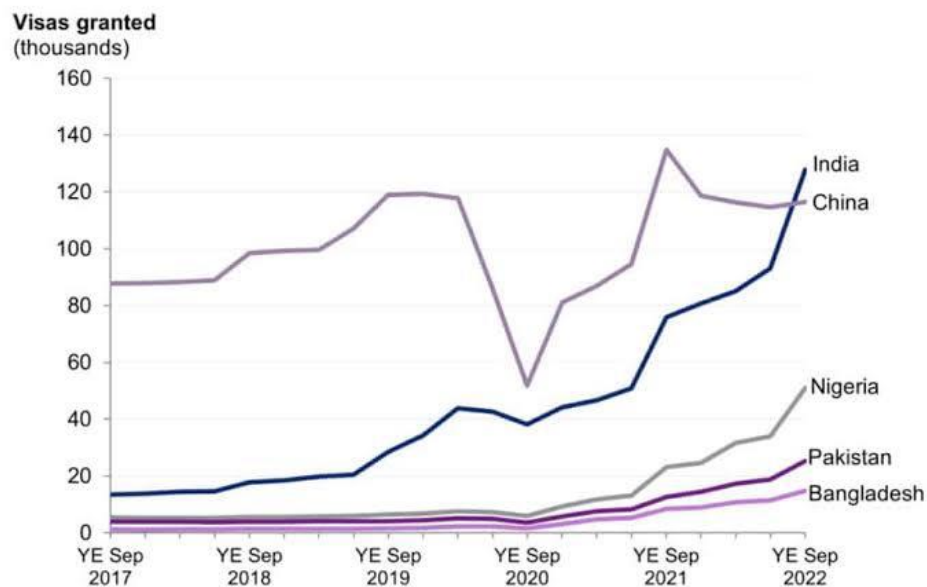


Figure 8: Top five nationalities for study visas granted for the years ending September 2017 to 2022.

Source: UK Home Office

Equality Act 2010 & Integrated Communities Action Plan 2019

The Indian diaspora in the United Kingdom functions under a legal and social framework that fosters equality and social integration. The Equality act of 2010 is a cornerstone legislation that forms a base for all the future anti- discrimination and integration plans and policies. The Equality Act provides protection to all communities from discrimination based on 9 grounds including race and ethnicity which deeply affects the Indian diaspora.

Many government policies that foster social cohesion and cultural integration stem their origin from this very act, one of such policies is the Integrated Communities Action Plan (2019) which focuses on social integration at local level. This plan primarily focuses on five broad areas:

- 1) Youth centric opportunities
- 2) Fostering trusting and peaceful relationships between people from different communities
- 3) Encouragement of working professionals
- 4) Building a more capable, fostering and welcoming community
- 5) enhancing english speaking skills. (Integrated Communities Action Plan, 2019.)

These initiatives might not exclusively be for the Indian diaspora but continue to affect their day to day life by promoting multiculturalism, language access etc.

Persistent challenges faced by the Diaspora

The Indian diaspora, despite its active contribution and notable success in British civic life faces persistent challenges. These concerns range from identity struggle to extreme anti-hindu sentiment. In the following discussion, these challenges are examined alongside the factors that lead to their generation.

Identity crisis: The Indian diaspora community is largely celebrated for its social integration in the United Kingdom yet the living experiences of many individuals, particularly the younger generations reveal a more intricate web of layers present in this integration. The younger generation usually struggles with managing the dual identity i.e retaining their Indian heritage while also adopting British culture. Such hybrid identity can often lead to rise in partial sense of

belonging, the feeling of being a part of both communities yet none at the same time (Kumari, 2023).

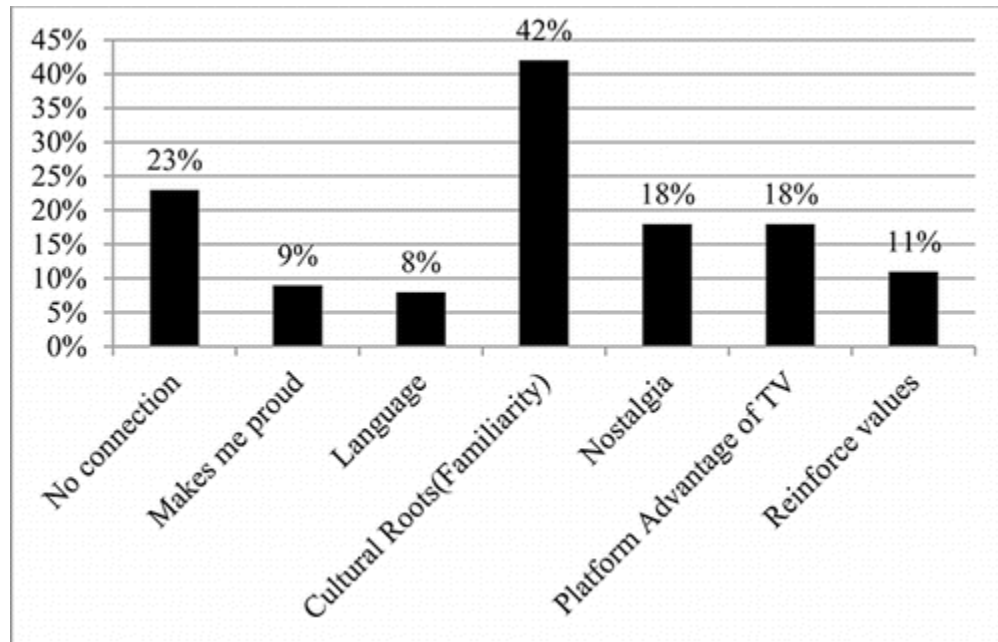


Figure 9: Diaspora's Connection to Indian roots

Source: Howard journal of communications

Rise in racism and xenophobia

The Indians diaspora is considered to be one of the largest minority groups in the United Kingdom yet they have seen an alarming rise in hate-crimes often driven by anti-hindu and racial hate sentiments. In the UK the criminal data shows a sudden rise in religious hate crimes after the year 2020 (as indicated in figure: 10).

In western countries there have been instances of such attacks towards Indian people in the past, ranging from the 1987-88 'dotbusters' to the current derogatory terms like 'curry man'. According to The Irish Independent this wave of disturbing and racially motivated sentiments is not exclusive to one country but can be seen in the western Europe as a whole (Riaz,2025.) Dutta (2023) links this rise to the spread of extremist, polarized content on various social media platforms majorly consumed by Western contexts. This extremist content amplifies the sense of

cultural threat and normalizes hatred towards the minority community. This sense of one's culture being threatened leads to individuals taking extreme positions as well as resentment towards immigrants.

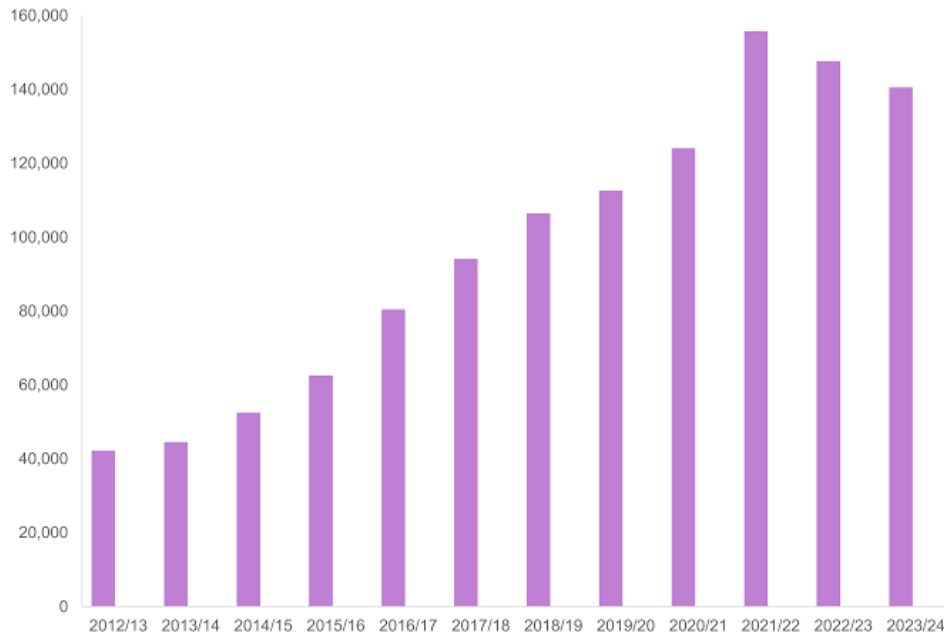


Figure 10: Yearly instances of religious hate crimes in England and Wales

Source: Gov.UK

Recommendations and strategic pathways

The future of UK-India relations and its effects on diaspora are prominent as established through this report till now. These relations are affected by the strategic management framework adopted by both countries. The system while robust in design provides opportunities for modifications in order to address emerging challenges. This section of the report will explore a series of strategic pathways, offering a framework for a more resilient and sustainable future for both countries and the diaspora.

Shifting from transactional nature to permanent integration

The current United Kingdom's visa policy is largely transactional, treating high skilled Indian professionals and Indian students as short term economic resources often avoiding long term

integration of the community. This approach hugely affects the current situation of the Indian diaspora as it hinders the long term integration and fails to allow the diaspora to contribute to the fullest. According to a report article by The Institute of Public Policy Research (IPPR) this problem could be solved by revision of the visa policy in order to create a more accessible route for long term integration using Indefinite leave to remain (Morris,2020.) This can be accomplished through replacing the point based model with a more sustainable and effective framework which rewards long term commitments and contributions The implementation of these reforms would generate positive outcomes not only for the diaspora but also the United Kingdom as a whole through talent retention, fostering long term peace, communal harmony and increased civic engagement

Ensuring Equitable Protection for All Communities

The UK government needs to explicitly acknowledge and combat the anti-hindu sentiment as a particular religion based hate crime. The acknowledgement of these sentiments being present in the society largely affects the security, dignity and safety of the Hindu community. Hindu students often face these discriminatory actions and institutions are mostly poorly equipped to deal with such issues (Littlewood, 2023.)

This clearly depicts the urgent need for reform in the safety and security framework.

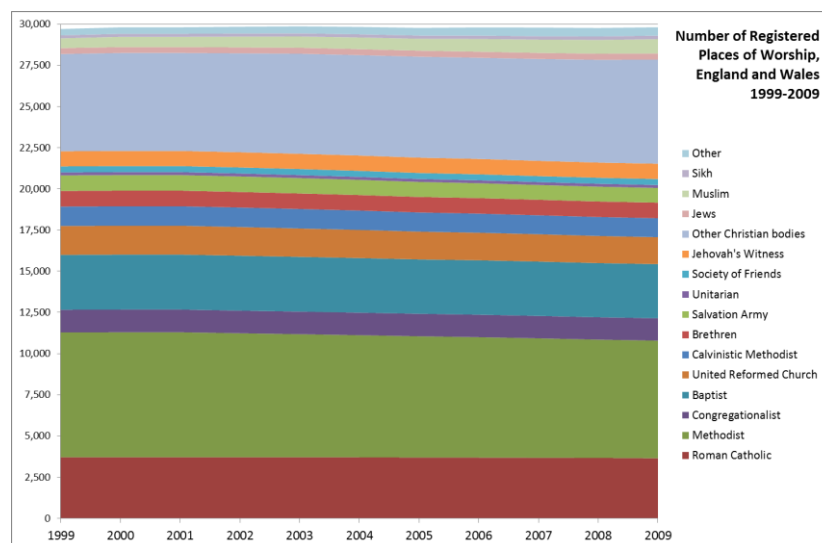


Figure 11: Official statistics on registered places of worship in England and Wales, 1999-2009.

Source: General Register Office, (X=Year, Y= Number of places of worship)

A more resilient safety framework can be achieved by acknowledging the anti hindu hate and updating the guidelines. There is also a need for restructuring the places of worship security fund in order to ensure that the diaspora places of worship receive the same level of funds and protection as other places of worship.

Conclusion

The Indian diaspora in the United Kingdom is a multifaceted community that has developed into an integral part of British society. As established by this report the diaspora scaled its journey from being a group of immigrants from a colony to significant players in British civil life. Their contribution to civic life spans various aspects from socio-cultural to economic impact, best exemplified by high rates of entrepreneurship and educational attainment.

The concept of the Indian diaspora as the 'living bridge' between India and the United kingdom clearly depicts the extent of cultural diplomacy between the host nation and country of origin. Initiatives like the UK-India 2030 roadmap, Migration and mobility partnership, young professional scheme and International education strategy 2019 etc are designed to facilitate the movement of people and ideas. On a country level frameworks like the Equality Act 2010 and the Integrated Communities Action Plan (2019) aims to provide a supportive and equitable functioning ground for all communities (Integrated Communities Action Plan,2019.)

As highlighted in the report the path forward is not without challenges. The diaspora faces persistent challenges like identity crisis, alarming increase in racism and xenophobia towards the community despite these challenges the diaspora continues to be notable and successful in British civic life.

From our report it becomes evident that the diaspora lives a dual reality of opportunities and challenges in the United Kingdom. The diaspora depicts a legacy of resilience, diplomacy, multi

culturalism and civic engagement across generations. Through the several policies discussed the diaspora emerges as an important and enduring pillar in shaping the diplomatic relational ties between India and the United Kingdom.

References

- “Population of Overseas Indians | Ministry of External Affairs.” n.d. *Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India*. <https://www.mea.gov.in/population-of-overseas-indians.htm>.
- Ballard, Roger. 1994. *Desh Pardesh: The South Asian Presence in Britain*. Desh Pardesh: The South Asian Presence in Britain. <https://fid4sa-repository.ub.uni-heidelberg.de/249/1/deshpardesh.pdf>.
- Hall, Stuart. 1990. “Cultural Identity and Diaspora.” <https://warwick.ac.uk/fac/arts/english/currentstudents/postgraduate/masters/modules/asiandiaspora/hallculturalidentityanddiaspora.pdf>.
- Werbner, Pnina. 2002. “The Place Which Is Diaspora: Citizenship, Religion and Gender in the Making of Chaordic Transnationalism.” *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 28 (1): 119–33. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13691830120103967>.
- Jaffrelot, Christophe, and Ingrid Therwath. 2007. “The Sangh Parivar and the Hindu Diaspora in the West: What Kind of ‘Long-Distance Nationalism’?” *International Political Sociology* 1 (3): 278–95. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1749-5687.2007.00018.x>.
- GOV.UK. 2021. “Ethnicity Facts and Figures.” *Service.gov.uk*. 2021. <https://www.ethnicity-facts-figures.service.gov.uk/>.
- Sharma, Sheetal. 2012. “Immigrants in Britain: A Study of the Indian Diaspora.” *Diaspora Studies* 5 (1): 14–43. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09739572.2013.764123>
- “About UK – India Year 2017 | British Council.” 2013. *Britishcouncil.in*. 2013. <https://www.britishcouncil.in/programmes/uk-india-2017>.
-

“Britain’s New Swing Voters? A Survey of British Indian Attitudes.” n.d.

Carnegieendowment.org. <https://carnegieendowment.org/research/2021/11/britains-new-swing-voters-a-survey-of-british-indian-attitudes?lang=en>.

Prime. 2015. “Prime Minister Announces 2017 UK-India Year of Culture.” *GOV.UK*. November 12, 2015. <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/prime-minister-announces-2017-uk-india-year-of-culture>.

Keohane, Robert O., and Joseph S. Nye. 1996. “Realism and Complex Interdependence.” *In Power and Interdependence*, 53–63. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-349-24443-0_5.

Rana, Kishan. 2009. “India’s Diaspora Diplomacy.” *The Hague Journal of Diplomacy* 4 (3): 361–72. <https://doi.org/10.1163/187119109x455955>.

Department for International Trade. 2019. “International Education Strategy: Global Potential, Global Growth.” *GOV.UK*. March 16, 2019. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/international-education-strategy-global-potential-global-growth>.

Service, Immigration Advice. 2023. “Graduate Visa Refusal UK.” *Immigration Advice Service*. May 9, 2023. <https://iasservices.org.uk/graduate-visa-refusal-uk/>.

“Integrated Communities Action Plan.” 2019.

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5c628e8bed915d043966be2f/Integrated_Communities_Strategy_Govt_Action_Plan.pdf.

Riaz, Azmia. 2025. “‘This Kind of Racism Used to Shock Us, Now It’s Part of Normal Life’ – Indians in Ireland Living in Fear Amid.” *Irish Independent*, August 10, 2025.

<https://m.independent.ie/irish-news/crime/this-kind-of-racism-used-to-shock-us-now-its-part-of-normal-life-indians-in-ireland-living-in-fear-amid-spate-of-violent-attacks/a1051119894.html>.

Dutta, Mohan J. 2024. “Digital Platforms, Hindutva, and Disinformation: Communicative Strategies and the Leicester Violence.” *Communication Monographs*, April, 1–29.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/03637751.2024.2339799>.

Morris, Marley. 2020. "Building a Post-Brexit Immigration System for Economic Recovery.” *IPPR*. <https://www.ippr.org/articles/post-brexit-migration>.

Littlewood, Charlotte. 2023. “Anti-Hindu Hate in Schools.” *Henry Jackson Society*. April 19, 2023. <https://henryjacksonsociety.org/publications/anti-hindu-hate-in-schools/>.