

## Role of Indian Diaspora in strengthening Indo US Relations in 21<sup>st</sup> Century

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### Abstract

The Indian Diaspora has emerged in three phases in his first phase, Indian people were taken by colonial powers to work as plantation workers (like in Sri Lanka, Caribbean islands, Fiji, etc.). In second Phase, in search of better opportunities, many Indian went to countries like the US, Canada and many European countries and thirdly to gulf countries as skilled and semi-skilled laborers especially in 21<sup>st</sup> century. Today, the Indian Diaspora is both agent and the instrument of India's soft power and in developed nation; it acts as an effective player in impacting the dynamics of these nations. We can say that in spite of the small in population size it is Rich Minority Group: Indian Diaspora is one of the richest minorities in many developed countries; this helped them to lobby for favorable terms regarding India's interests. Rich Indian Diaspora not only make Indo US relations better but it also help India to change the view of Americans towards India. According to a 2013 Pew survey, In US, 2.8 million Indians may number just 1% of its population, but they are the most educated and richest minority in US .From the cultural aspect to the Trade Indian Diaspora playing a major role in strengthening the relations between India and US.

**Keywords:** Indian Diaspora, Indo U.S Relations, Soft power , Diplomacy , Trade , Culture

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### Introduction

India's big instrument in International relations is its large Diaspora through which it can share its rich cultural values, traditions and good relations with other nations. It is also called Soft power which illustrates the ability of a country to achieve coveted outcomes on international issues through attraction and co-operation and not through coercion - a decisive reality in the arena of International Affairs. The currency of soft power is cultural influence, political values and foreign policies. Similarly, India's soft power is the rising influence of Indian Diaspora on the American soil. The Indians in USA are referred as "Indo – American" as their ancestral roots are embedded in India. The US Census Bureau in 1980 in order to avoid confusion with the indigenous Americans coined an alternative term the 'Asian Indian'. Their arrival in U.S. was marked by the Luce – Cellar Act of 1946, which enabled the naturalization rights to the Indians on the soil of U.S. As per US Census 2010, the population count of Asian Indian is '4.4 million' with a growth rate of '69.37%' of a total population of 308,745,538 in America. This count makes Asian Indian as one of the fastest growing ethnic community in North America while being the third largest immigrants in the States after the Mexicans and Chinese. The Indian Diaspora has been channeled into U.S. mainly through student admission programs, beneficiaries of H-1B visa program, family – based preference and temporary worker visa programs. Currently, a high percentage of Indian immigrants are young, highly educated and well established in science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) sectors. Indian students stand as the second largest international student groups enrolled in U.S. universities. The Indian population is widely distributed across all states of the U.S with majority settled in California (20%), New Jersey (11%), Texas (9%), New York (7%) and Illinois (7%). This wide spread of Indian Diaspora not only help in strengthening the strong ties between these two nation but it also helps in strengthening Bilateral Relation between the Government of the these two Nation. As we know how the World Relations changes rapidly, it creates the conditions in which the role of these two oldest and largest democracies would be crucial in near future.

### **How Indian diaspora emerged as a powerful pressure group?**

The role of Indian Diaspora in Indo-US ties evolve powerfully in 21<sup>st</sup> century especially in the tenure of AtalVihariBajpayee, during his 1998-2004 tenure, is credited for having promoted serious engagement with the Indian diaspora to develop mutually beneficial linkages, current Prime Minister NarendraModi is getting known for his enthusiasm in expanding those earlier efforts. The prime minister's vigour in this arena has been evident since the day he took office in May 2014, and it begins with his public pronouncements. In foreign trips and outreach activities with India's expatriate communities, he persuades them to "contribute to India's growth story. The present government in India perceives the Indian diaspora as an asset. From the example of Myanmar (at that time Burma) and the Uganda during the time of dictator Idi Amin we have learnt a lot to bind them in relation with our nation so that they feel the touch of their soil. The current government's strategy is clear that it will work with Non-Resident Indians (NRIs) and Persons of Indian Origin (PIOs), by adopting a proactive diplomacy strategy, to develop what it referred to as "Brand India". It stated that "the NRIs, PIOs and professionals settled abroad are a vast reservoir to articulate the national interests and affairs globally. This resource will be harnessed for strengthening Brand India". As part of this larger strategy, it envisioned playing a role in safeguarding India's interest the government framed a foreign policy in which it view the diaspora as a tool to leverage its foreign policy goals or in the development of India. The initial outlook towards the diaspora, as shaped over the years, was influenced by non-alignment and the Cold War, which was characterised by suspicion – the Indian government had no trust for the West, which only reciprocated the sentiment – thereby creating a hostile environment for any diaspora policy. The government policy is clear when it said, "They (Indian diaspora) can be India's voice even while being loyal citizens in their belonging countries. That is the long-term goal behind the diaspora diplomacy. It is like the way the Jewish community looks out for Israel's interests in the United States". This brief examines the growing significance of the diaspora in Indian foreign policy, and the challenges and opportunities that follow.

### **How they became policy influencers?**

Indian immigrants are contributing in Science, technology and business across the US States. One thing which is a key factor in policy influencer, is the degree of political engagement and activity that Indians display. The diaspora, over recent decades, has become increasingly involved in US politics, and a number of political action groups have sprung up, aimed at promoting the voices of their members. The nonpartisan United States India Political Action Committee was founded in 2002, and works to elevate concerns involving Indians, such as promoting the H-1B visa as a temporary specialist work permit, the US-India Civil Nuclear Agreement, global health, religious freedom and US-India trade. The beginning of the 21st century marked a huge significance in the migration trend from India to the United States. The implementation of privatization and liberalization had changed the entire outflow of migrants. The emergence of Information Technology industry in Indian cities as Bangalore, Chennai and Hyderabad led to the large number of migrations to the USA primarily from the states of Telangana, Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Kerala and Tamil Nadu in South India. There are sizable populations of peoples across the various Indian states like Telangana, Gujarat, Punjab, Karnataka, Kerala and Tamil Nadu in the United States. Indians comprise over 80% of all H-1B visas. Indian Americans have risen to become the richest ethnicity in America, with an average household income of \$126,891, almost twice the US average of \$65,316. In the last twenty years, a large number of students have started migrating to the United States to pursue higher education. A variety of estimates state that over 500,000 Indian American students attend higher-education institutions in any given year. As per Institute of International Education (IIE) 'Open Doors' report, 202,014 new students from India enrolled in US education institutions. On January 20, 2021, Kamala Harris, an Indian American, made history as the first female Vice President of the United States. She was

elected Vice President as the running mate of President Joe Biden in the presidential election the previous November. This was a major milestone in Indian American history, and in addition to Harris, another 20 Indian Americans were nominated to key positions in the administration.

### **How cultural and traditional diplomacy helps in promoting Indo- US Relations?**

It is internationally recognised that one of India's significant global contribution has been the exercise of its soft power, drawing on its ancient cultural and civilizational roots. 'VasudhaivaKutumbakam'(concept of Global Village) was among the first precursors of Global Citizenship as it is understood today – the concept that all individuals are collectively responsible towards each other and their shared future. It forms the basis of UNESCO's ongoing dialogue between cultures, religions and civilisations. Today, India's soft power as represented through her vibrant cultural and civilizational heritage and through her Diaspora spread worldwide, serves as a powerful reminder that India's values of secularism, tolerance, inclusiveness and cross fertilisation of cultures which are an intrinsic part of our civilisation, are more relevant than ever before in the uncertain international scenario of today. Cultural diplomacy is therefore an important dimension of a country's soft power. The international impact of India's soft power was felt long before the term found place in popular parlance in the 21st century. Indian arts, culture and spiritualism have attracted people from all around the world for centuries. The vision of current government is to reorient the Indian diplomacy by combining new elements of soft power. The five pillars of this soft power, used in a strategic sense are Samman (dignity), Samvaad (dialogue), Samriddhi (shared prosperity), Suruksha (regional and global security), and Sanskritievam Sabhayata (Cultural and civilizational links). These are interlinked with India's broader political and economic goals of the country.

Cultural bonding can be one of the ways to prevent conflict and promote peace. The pursuit of cultural diplomacy and soft power in India is underpinned by MEA's iconic institutional structure, the Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR) which was established in 1950 with the objective of reviving and strengthening India's cultural relations with rest of the world. This reorientation of our foreign policy was indeed timely and intrinsic to a successful foreign policy initiative, not just in our neighbourhood but also with our strategic partners and new dialogue partners in Africa and Latin America. Indian spirituality has had a global presence for centuries. One of its important manifestations in today's world is the large number of Yoga centres spread across the world. At the personal initiative of PM Modi soon after his election in 2014, the UN General Assembly recognised 21st June as International Day of Yoga. It has been commemorated on that day across the world since 21st June 2015. Cultural diplomacy and soft power are important instruments in regional and international cooperation and are of particular relevance in our region i.e. South Asia. Culture and cultural diplomacy have emerged as the force to connect, to build bilateral relations and to heal the raptures created by history and politics. It may take time for such a process to mature since some of our neighbours continue to be apprehensive of cultural connectivity across states and frontiers. The process, however, as far as India is concerned, continues and will continue. The internet, the social networking sites, our television channels, Indian movies, especially Bollywood, and visits by acclaimed musical and cultural troupes and theatre groups have contributed to the cultural connectivity across borders. Another important element of soft power is India's tangible and intangible cultural heritage. Intangible heritage includes traditions or living expressions inherited from our ancestors and passed on to our descendants, such as oral traditions, performing arts, religious and cultural festivals and traditional crafts. This includes Vedic chanting and the Kathakali (dance drama).

### **Findings**

The role played by Indian Diaspora in strengthening Indo US relations is increasing day by day between both the nations. From Trade to technology they are building a strong relationship between these two

nations. In 21<sup>st</sup> century especially after the 2001 World Trade Centre terrorist attack US dynamically changed its policies and made India a Strategic Partner in the Indo Pacific Region. During the time of Trump we saw the Mega Events like Howdy Modi and Namaste Trump which was the first mega event of this kind. It shows the powerful rich cultural and strong ties of Indian Diaspora in USA. President Donald Trump and Prime Minister Narendra Modi have built their politics on the promise of making their countries 'great again'. Placing India and the US as leaders on the world stage is the stated objective of their respective foreign policies, based as they are on the assumption that both inherited a mess from their predecessors. Both are trying to re-litigate the notions of self, enemy and allies in their respective countries. Varghese K. George, in *Open Embrace*, provides an overview of the changes occurring in America's relations with the world under the Trump presidency and what it means for India. While Presidents Barack Obama and George W. Bush emphasized that the US's relations with India would shape the twenty-first century, Trump's 'America First' politics is a repudiation of the nation's strategic culture. Now Biden administration also looking forward towards the strengthening the relation between India and USA. The Indian Diaspora has rapidly, almost unprecedentedly developed from a rather small and apolitical group of first-generation immigrants in the 1960s and 1970s to an economically and socially well-established part of American society in 21<sup>st</sup> century. The Diaspora has undoubtedly traversed a long distance from the pioneering, uneducated and low-skilled Punjabi farmers to what is now a highly skilled over three million-strong community. Indian Americans are the wealthiest (with household incomes almost double of the American average), most educated and law-abiding ethnic community in the US, a "model minority". The community is also highly organized. A good proportion makes regular visits to India and many send remittances back to the country. The rich civilization and cultural ethos of the Indian Americans have become a part of American fabric with both countries recognizing Indian Diaspora as mutually benefitting. The role of ID in disseminating India's culture is also contributing in nation branding through non-governmental public diplomats and cultural diplomats. Indian Diaspora shows their love for their motherland and wherever they are they support our culture and traditions and help in strengthening the relation between both the countries.

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