Indian Diaspora

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1 Background

The Indian Diaspora is a generic term to describe the people who migrated from territories that are currently within the borders of the Republic of India. It also refers to their descendants. The Diaspora is currently estimated to number over twenty million, composed of "NRIs" (Indian citizens not residing in India) and "PIOs" (Persons of Indian Origin who have acquired the citizenship of some other country).

Distribution:

India has the second largest Diaspora in the world. The overseas Indian community estimated at over 25 million is spread across every major region in the world. The major concentration of Indian diaspora is in Middle East, U.S.A, U.K, Canada, Malaysia, Sri Lanka, and South Africa respectively.

Trends:

The overseas Indian community is the result of different waves of migration over hundreds of years driven by a variety of reasons-mercantilism, colonialism and globalization. Its early experiences make up a saga of trials, tribulations and the eventual triumph of determination and hard work.

In the last three decades of the 20th century the character of migration began to change and a 'new Diaspora' led by high skilled professionals moving to the western world and semi-skilled contract workers moving to the Gulf, West and South East Asia emerged.

2 Significance and Contribution

1) Overseas communities constitutes a significant resource for the development of the countries of origin. It serves as an important 'bridge' to access knowledge, expertise, resources and markets for the development of the country of origin with the rest of the world.

2) Indian diaspora is an important part of India’s “soft diplomacy”, which sometimes proves to be more effective in creating news paths for the country of origin. For example, Indian diaspora played a critical in the fructification of Indo-US Nuclear deal.

3) They have also contributed to the growth and development of the country of their residence. For example, Silicon Valley represents the success of Indians. 4 out of 10 startups in the region are Indian.
About one-third of the engineers in Silicon Valley are of Indian descent, while 7 per cent of the Valley's high-tech firms are led by Indian CEOs.

4) The Indian Diaspora has played an important role in the field of Science & Technology. Indian emigration thus increasingly consisted, among others, of highly qualified scientists, engineers and other professionals, also termed as the Brain Drain.

5) Of late, it has emerged as a significant source of trade and investment in India.

6) Apart from the above, it is the source of large inflows of remittances, which has been helping balance the current account. According to the World Bank Indian diaspora is going to be the largest earner of remittances in the world in next few years.

3 Major Issues pertaining to Indian Diaspora

1) Dual Citizenship: Majority of Indian diaspora want to retain their Indian citizenship along with the citizenship of the country of their residence.

2) Consular and other issues: The commonest grievance of the Diaspora is the ill treatment, harassment and the demands for illegal gratification it encounters at the hands of our customs and immigration officials at the points of entry.

3) Culture: Indian Diaspora are deeply conscious of their rich cultural heritage. They are aware that they are the inheritors of the traditions of the world’s oldest continuous civilization. Being part of such a rich legacy they are naturally keen to maintain their cultural identity.

4) Threat to their employment (Nitgat Law): It is aims to replacing a large section of overseas workers with locals in Saudi Arabia. Because of this, overseas workers from Kerala, TN etc. affected.

5) Threat to their security: In view of the recent cases of violence in the Middle East, there has emerged a new threat the very security of oversees workers in the region. For example, the recent kidnapping of Indian workers by IS group.

4 Measures taken by the Government

1) For giving special focus to the issues pertaining to the Indian diaspora, the government set up a dedicated Ministry of overseas Indian affairs in 2004. It provides all round services to the diaspora.

2) The government has started, since 2003, the organization of Pravasi Bhartiya Diwas, to mark the contribution of the overseas Indian community to the development of India.

   a. Apart from this, a forum for issues concerning the Indian Diaspora is organized and the Pravasi Bharatiya Samman Awards are given. This has emerged an important means for bridging the link of oversees community to their place of origin.

3) The government has launched various schemes for the welfare of Indian diaspora living abroad, like Pravasi Bhartiya Bima Yojana, 2006 etc.

4) Know India Programme was launched as a three-week orientation programme for diaspora youth conducted with a view to promote awareness on different facets of life in India and the progress made by the country in various fields. KIP provide a unique forum for students & young professionals of Indian origin to visit India, share their views, expectations & experiences and to develop closer bonds with the contemporary India.

5) Oversees Citizenship of India Scheme (OCI): In response to persistent demands for "dual citizenship" particularly from the Diaspora in North America and other developed countries and keeping in view the Government's deep commitment towards fulfilling the aspirations and expectations of Overseas Indians, the OCI Scheme was introduced by amending the Citizenship Act, 1955 in August 2005. The Scheme provides for benefits comparable to citizens in certain fields, like in economic and education fields etc. However, it is not a dual citizenship in true sense, rather it only gives life time, multiple and multi-entry visa with some rights.
6) The Ministry of Overseas Indian Affairs is running a scheme known as “Tracing the Roots” to facilitate PIOs in tracing their roots in India.

7) The Swarnapravas Yojana- New Plan Scheme: This scheme has been launched for promoting the employability of Indian workers abroad, given the large supply of labor force in India, by providing them appropriate training.

8) Apart from all these, the government has signed social security agreements with many foreign countries for the protection of Indian community in those countries.

5 How Indian diaspora is different from that of the world’s largest (China)?

1) The Chinese Diaspora which numbers 55 million contributes almost 60 per cent of China’s total foreign direct investment, while Indians with 20 million contribute less than 10 per cent. China has some distinct advantage that India does not have. China started its economic reforms in 1979 whereas India’s reform started in 1991.

But the cultural-economic gap between India and the Indian Diaspora is narrowing. Although one would have welcomed faster economic policy changes, however, the Indian government is on the right track with all economic parameter in right place.

2) The greatest asset India has among the Indian Diaspora is not their capital but the abundant reservoir of scientist, professionals and intellectual talent. India can compete with China and even overtake it, provided the Indian government has appropriate policies for the NRIs/PIOs.

6 Way Forward

Though, the government has launched many a reforms and policies towards Indian diaspora. But still there is a need for certain improvements. In this regard following may be recommended:

1) To ensure that Diaspora members feel welcomed on their arrival in India and also recall warmly their visits, a friendlier reception at their point of entry; easier procedures for immigration and customs clearances that are marked by courteous service are essential.

2) To address the problems of our overseas blue-collar workers, following should be implemented at the earliest possible. These are:
   a) Establishing a welfare fund for repatriated overseas workers in distress;
   b) Negotiating a Standard Labour Export Agreements with the host countries;
   c) Monitoring and supervision of both the employment contracts, and the conditions of our overseas workers by our Missions;
   d) Launching compulsory insurance schemes covering the risks faced by our overseas workers;

3) The Diaspora can make a significant contribution to the growth of tourism in India. PIOs make frequent visits to their home state or to visit their relatives. There should be greater focus on promoting tourism among 2nd generation PIOs.

4) There is the need to further liberalize the economy for oversees Indian community.

5) A Parliamentary Standing Committee on the Indian Diaspora could be constituted. It should have in it, members with an interest in Diaspora affairs. This Committee could also act as a focal point for interaction with Parliamentarians of Indian Origin in other countries. Such exchanges are essential in order to bring about greater understanding and amity between them.
7 Conclusion

To view the Diaspora only through the looking glass of remittances and financial flows is to take a myopic view. Not all expatriates need to be investors and their development impact measured only in terms of financial contributions to the home country is to miss the larger picture.

An overseas community can and does serve as an important 'bridge' to access knowledge, expertise, resources and markets for the development of the country of origin. The success of this bridge is often predicated upon two conditions: the ability of the Diaspora to develop and project a coherent, intrinsically motivated and progressive identity and the capacity of the home country to establish conditions and institutions for sustainable, symbiotic and mutually rewarding engagement.

Home countries are now beginning to recognize the need to pursue and promote the dynamic of the Diaspora and development. India cannot be an exception.