

India and its Diaspora: Charting New Avenues of Engagement

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Abstract

The opening up of India's economy in the early 1990s brought several shifts in its policy approaches. One such definite and visible shift was in India's approach towards the Indian diaspora. Indians have been migrating since time immemorial. However, the emergence of transnational diaspora communities which had effective participation in the countries of settlement, while at the same time having strong connections with the homeland, was baffling not only for India but in general also for all the countries which had large-scale populations beyond their borders. Although the multiple belongingness of diasporas has its both perils and rewards, very soon they became valuable partners in the developmental processes of their home lands. India was a bit late in realizing this hidden potential. Since the 1990s, New Delhi has adopted a proactive policy to engage with the diaspora which has opened up vast avenues of cooperation.

Keywords

Diaspora, India, homeland, economic development, soft power

Introduction

In the past few decades, diasporas have become an endemic feature of the prevailing global conditions and a pivotal element in the understanding of present and future trends. The concept of 'diaspora' is a historical phenomenon whose origins can be traced back to the first dispersion of Jews, and for a long time, the Jew paradigm remained at the centre of description of all the later diasporas. Nevertheless, with the rise of nation states, increase in international migrations and transnational connectivity, the concept has been reconstructed and reinvented and has achieved a new prominence. Diasporic identities are shaped by both home

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and the host-land dynamics (refer Clifford, 1994; Pande, 2013; Schiller, Basch & Blanc, 1995; Sheffer, 1986) and their 'in-betweenness' moves beyond the binary constructions like citizen and foreigner, native and outsider, and centre and periphery. The multiple belongingness of diasporas resists the hegemonic homogeneities and problematize, the traditional disciplines and established concepts. One of the concepts that diasporas have intruded into is the nation state, which paradoxically plays an important role in the identity formation of the diasporas and with which diasporas engage profoundly and deeply. This article aims at critically examine India's approach towards its diaspora over the years and bring into focus the important areas of engagement between the two. The article also tries to identify and examine ways to increase the impact of diaspora participation in India's developmental process. The article also presents a theoretical discussion on diasporas and nation states and see how the Indian diaspora reinforces the Indian state and nation rather than challenging it.

Diasporas and Nation States: Challengers or Partners?

The discourse over growing transnational practices and the increasing importance of diasporas often gets centred around the diminishing importance of states/nation states and its territoriality as the source of identity and power. In the globalized modern world, the nation state is said to have encountered limits to its supremacy and challenge to its sovereignty and territoriality by various factors and one of them is the transnational existence of diasporas. The post-nationalist scholarly and intellectual discourse considers diasporic formations as a phenomenon that superimposed or transcended the national identities and challenged the established social, cultural and political trends. It signified the so-called an epochal shift in the existing nation-states system and international relations (refer Appadurai, 1996; Clifford, 1994; Cohen, 2008; Kearney, 1991). Nevertheless, the more recent scholarly riposte to counter this perspective is equally strong and emphasizes on the complex and ambiguous relationship between diasporic formations and the nation states. This set of scholars largely see the diasporas as 'an extension of the nation-state model' (Soysal, 2002), something that actually reinforces the nation state since they connect to the myth and politics of the homeland (Mishra, 1996). Diasporas underline new practices of belonging and new forms of congruence between territory, culture and identity beyond the fixed notions of national boundedness. Even the paradigmatic Jewish model did not negate the idea of territories and states. It claimed its origins from a territorial state and continues to have their attachment with it while at the same time thriving in the countries of settlement. Diasporic communities from the very beginning have not only got involved in the political process but have also claimed their rights as citizens in the countries of adoption, as well as in their home countries, reinforcing the idea of state and citizenship. Be it the Indian Indenture diaspora in various countries who fought for citizenship and equal rights in the host lands or the traditionally settled Chinese diaspora in Southeast Asian countries who continued to be overseas citizens of China and helped in furthering Chinese interests in the region. Even in the countries

like Fiji where the Indian diaspora has strained relations with the ethnic Fijians, their contribution in Fiji's development remained significant and at the same time they also acted as cultural ambassadors of India. In case of the diasporas generated out separatist movements, like the Tamils in Sri Lanka, the fight for a separate homeland too indicates the accommodation of transnational loyalties with an imaginary home state (refer Lyons 2004; Skrbis, 1999). At its best, the diasporic existences from the very beginning are an example, of the possibility of being part of two or more nation states simultaneously. The current realities also corroborate the fact that diasporas are the partners rather than challengers and instead of undermining the state and its territoriality, they reinforce it in various ways. In spite of having sociocultural, economic or political links with the homeland, the diasporic communities are well entrenched in their respective countries of settlement contributing effectively to its growth and development.

The academic discourse was slower to add this dual orientation of diasporas in its ambit. In the 'real world', however, the economic, social and cultural participation of diasporas was much faster and obvious. Nation states too were adjusting themselves through the governmental policies, multiculturalism, dual citizenships, investment incentives and streamlining the remittance transfer, to accommodate diasporic realities. It is now increasingly recognized that diasporas are not only a source of funds but are also a rich source of human capital, technology, political support and soft power. Although the transnational engagement of the diasporas exists mainly through personal networks, governments, too, play a crucial role in channelling the initiatives, energies and resources of diasporas and institutionalizing the transnational linkage with the diasporas.

The modern forms of transport and communication facilitate the transnational links and belongingness with the ancestral homeland and the co-ethnics elsewhere. The 'densening interconnectedness and interdependence through technology and cyberspace has made the transnational spaces (social, economic, or political) more real and effective so much so that the distance and territoriality do not seem to be a factor in identity formation and nationalistic orientation' (refer Pande 2017a). This growing embeddedness of social, economic and political transnational practices appears to have re-inscribed the nations as 'transnations'. In the words of Laguerre (1999, p. 646), 'State and Nation, once enclosed in the same territorial boundaries, have been decoupled through International migration and the rise of Diasporic communities'. While the state continues to exist inside its legal and jurisdictional territories, the nation has expanded to include what had been extraterritorial sites which have now been converted into transnational sites. Moreover, the connectivity permeates to the local and the familial level and this generates a sense of solidarity and attachment that is more localized and personalized (refer Pande, 2017a). This also sometimes results in 'irresponsible nationalisms' but largely national identities and belongingness connect with the diasporas across nations. Thus, transnationalization has not necessarily resulted in denationalization. What we are witnessing is the construction of transnational national identities. As Margret Walton-Roberts (2009, p. 209) puts it, 'migrant mobility and transnational connectivity, rather than undermining the power of the nation state, can enhance its autonomy and self-assuredness'.

Perhaps, what the diasporas challenge is not the nation or state or its territoriality but the idea of exclusive, homogeneous cultural/political/economic composition and hegemonic imaginaries of the nation states. They also challenge the rhetoric of 'loyalty' and 'purity' with reference to the nation states. They resist assimilationistic and homogenistic approaches based on exclusive and fixed claims of territory, culture, citizenship and boundedness in context of both the host and the homeland. Nevertheless, diasporic conditions are not static conditions (Brah, 1996) and also bring its perils. The multiple belongingness creates 'unsettled conditions' and stamps them with the mark of 'otherness' both in the host and the home lands.

In essence, the debate over the persistence of nation and nationalism against the transnational diasporas has to be constructed around the fact that instead of undermining the existence of the states/nation states, diasporas call for new readings and understandings. States continue to remain as the primary institutional agents in the global order, but its normative homogeneity is challenged by transnational movements of people, capital, ideas and various forms of cultural practice. What the diasporas challenge is the hegemonic territorial constructions of national homogeneity. In effect, bounded by the imaginaries of belongingness, common histories and cultural productions, diasporic identities tend to rejuvenate the national identities rather than challenging it. They do not stand in contrast but overlap and strengthen each other. The scope for multiple affiliations and associations has made the transnational diasporic allegiances both more open and more acceptable in the state systems.

The Indian Diaspora

The Indian diaspora is a representative case of diaspora formation and manifests a multiple belongingness that originates from the diverse Indian roots but has developed unique hyphenated, hybrid identities. It can be broadly said that India and its diaspora have largely reinforced each other. Except for instances of Khalistan movement when a section of the Sikh diaspora fought for a separate state within India and, may be, some similar activities by the Kashmiri diaspora, Indians abroad have stood by the Indian nation. India for a long time overlooked its diaspora, yet most of the groups in the Indian diaspora remained connected with India and have contributed to the motherland in various ways. The challenges that diasporic formation bring to the idea of nation state actually do not confront a country like India which is hugely diverse. India has largely remained receptive to diaspora communities from other countries such as the Parsis, Jews and Africans who got settled in India centuries ago. India is also more accommodative towards the returning migrants from various countries. Indian diaspora itself is a hugely diverse construct with equally diverse identities and affiliations with India. Hence, the multipronged strategy New Delhi has adopted to engage with the Indian diaspora too should accommodate and respond to the large and diverse diaspora.

The Historical Realities and the Complexities in the Indian Diaspora

Indian diaspora includes wide variety of people who have emigrated from India over a long period of time. The diversity in the Indian diaspora results out of many factors such as the diversity in the Indian social set-up (in terms of region, religion, language, caste, creed and so on), the heterogeneity in the phases and patterns of migration, the differences in the skill/educational/economic status and also the variations in host countries (refer Pande, 2013). Indian diasporas as categorized by the Government of India (GOI) is divided into three types—non-resident Indians (NRIs),¹ people of Indian origin (PIOs)² and overseas Indian citizens (OICs).³ This article divides the Indian diaspora in two broad categories, based mainly on history and the nature of migration. The first category is what is generally known as the ‘old diaspora’ that emerged from colonial migrations and the second category is what is known as the ‘new diaspora’ that emerged from postcolonial migrations. The ‘old diaspora’ can be further divided into another two subdivisions—first group includes ‘indentured’ labourers and migrants under similar systems and the convicts; and the second category comprises of ‘free migrants’ such as traders, professionals and employees of the British government. In the same way, the ‘new diaspora’ can also be broadly divided into different categories of people such as highly skilled/skilled and entrepreneurs who in the initial years mainly migrated to Western countries but now have spread all over Asia, Africa and Oceania; semiskilled/unskilled labourers and small time traders and retailers who initially migrated mainly to the West Asia, South East Asia and Africa but are now going to other countries too; the student migrants; and the political diaspora. Other than these, there are some groups within Indian diaspora which overlap and are common to all these groups such as the mixed races and Indian women as the diaspora (refer Pande, 2013, 2017b).

These diverse sets of people who moved out of Indian borders during different times and under different circumstances went through wide variety of experiences depending on the dynamics of the host society and patterns of their involvement. They developed distinct identities which originate from the diverse Indian roots but have developed its own unique features fed with wide variety of locations and cultures. These hyphenated, hybrid identities are stronger than the Indian identity and have its both rewards and perils. The indenture diaspora which originated out of almost a dehumanizing slavery-like system (Tinker, 1974) was started by the British to fulfil the labour shortage created in the plantation colonies after the slavery was abolished. The long British rule in India had already created strong ‘push factors’ that led to large-scale recruitment, under an agreement, for 5 years extendable again for 5 years. At the end of which the labourers were free to either settle down in the respective colonies or return back to India. Nearly 3.5 million Indians were recruited under the indentured and similar systems and went to the countries such as Grenadines, and Jamaica, Kenya, Tanzania, Mozambique, Madagascar, Zambia, Zanzibar, Uganda, Malawi, Seychelles, Reunion and Mauritius, Fiji, Caribbean, Trinidad and Tobago, Guyana, Suriname, St. Kitts and

Nevis, St. Lucia, Belize, Guadeloupe, Martinique, Grenada, Saint Vincent, and Malaysia and Burma. Majority of them, after finishing their contracts, opted to settle down in their respective colonies by taking land and starting agriculture and small businesses. The reasons for Indians opting to settle down could be varied—such as lack of finances and refusal by the British to pay for the repatriation, the long and arduous journey back to India, demand for labour in those places and problems relating to getting acceptance in the Indian social order—but it did result in the formation of the Indian diaspora for the first time in the history of India, despite overseas migrations from the Indian subcontinent being a prevalent since ancient times. While there could be no doubt about the extreme adversities and exploitations the indenture diaspora underwent, they are also the best example of human triumph against such adversities. From the humble beginnings as indentured labourers, the Indians progressed to the point where they are playing a leading role in the social, political and economic life of the countries of their settlement (refer Pande, 2013).

Apart from the government-sponsored migrations, there were also self-sponsored migrants called the 'free-passage Indians'. Majority of them belonged to the trading communities and skilled and semi-skilled professionals from all over India. Indian traders and entrepreneurs established highly successful businesses across Asian and African countries. Such migrations were largely rotational but permanent settlements followed after the Second World War, especially in colonies where the indentured, kangani or maistry labourers were present. Other than these, migration of the highly skilled to the Western countries also started during the colonial period which became frequent after India's independence. Marked by what has been termed as the 'brain drain', this process came under severe criticism because this elite, highly affluent diaspora got educated in public institutions and left India after that. Another group in the new diaspora is the skilled, semi-skilled and unskilled labour migration to the Gulf and the South East Asian countries. The oil boom in West Asia during the 1980s and the subsequent economic activities attracted large number of labourers from India. Although such migrations did not result in permanent settlements, they form a significant section under the category of NRIs and send the major share of remittance to India. Other than this student migration has also become one of the major doorways for permanent or long-term settlement leading to the formation of diaspora. India is the second largest student sending country in the world with a fourfold increase in their numbers in the last 14 years. Indian women, who have been part of almost all the sections and streams of people moving beyond Indian borders, too are an important section of the Indian diaspora. Initially, Indian women migrated mostly as part of family migrations but at present they also migrate independently as semi-skilled, skilled and highly skilled professionals. Thus, 'what we understand under the generalised rubrics of Indian diaspora is about diversities and diversities within diversities and the cross-sectionality of various factors that are at inter play' (refer Pande, 2013, 2017b).

Indian diaspora in the present is the largest diaspora in the world and although it is difficult to give exact figures, according to the Indian Ministry of External Affairs (MEA), there are more than 25 million overseas Indians. There is no doubt

that in most cases, Indians abroad have achieved astounding success contributing significantly in economic political, academic and social spheres of their respective adopted countries, at times even awarded as the ‘model minorities’ in some countries. Yet sections of the Indian diaspora are still facing adverse conditions as they lag behind economically and educationally and surviving on the fringes of the host societies (Pande, 2017c). Nevertheless, all these diaspora groups within the overarching Indian diaspora have also made considerable contribution to the homeland in their own ways be it the most affluent ones or the ones on margins. They have, mostly, brought pride and accolades for India and its people.

India’s Approach and Policy Initiatives towards the Diaspora

India’s overall policy approach towards its diaspora can be divided broadly into four phases starting from the pre-independence period (refer Pande, 2011, pp. 13–32; Pande, 2016). The phases can be termed according to the nature of India’s involvement with its diaspora. The first phase is the pre-independence period when the overseas Indians (as they were called at the time) were profoundly involved with India and the independence movement. This mainly included the ‘old diaspora’ (indentured and the free migrants) but also some revolutionaries who had migrated to the countries like Canada and were carrying on the national movement from there. Overseas Indians were connected to India economically, socially and politically and kept close watch on the development taking place in India, often shaping their own political strategies accordingly. Both Mahatma Gandhi and Subhas Chandra Bose—although very different in their approaches—always considered overseas Indians as an integral part of the national belongingness. The fight against indentured system became a part of the national movement with almost all the annual resolutions of the Indian National Congress, raising the issue. Gandhi’s non-violent activism and the ‘Quit India Movement’ had a major impact on the activities of the overseas Indians. They formed organizations like ‘*Ghadar*’ and participated whole heartedly in the Indian National Army. Overseas Indians from all over the world belonging to all walks of life became part of the fight for India’s independence. They also believed strongly that India’s liberation would also improve their conditions in the respective host countries (Pande, 2016).

However, after India gained its independence, the overseas Indians were not included in the Jawaharlal Nehru’s narrative of nation and nation-building. Apart from the ideological limitations of Nehru, there were some definite and concrete reasons behind this policy approach. New Delhi’s larger policy framework of *Panchshila* and Afro-Asian cooperation made the proposition of engaging with Indians difficult as in most of the cases they stood at odds with the African nationalist movements and the ideas of Africa for Africans (Aiyar, 2015; Taylor, 2011). In several cases like in Burma and Malaysia, the issue of compensation and citizenship for Indians appeared to be conflicting with India’s bilateral relations (refer Chaturvedi, 2015; Sudhamani, 1982). India also had its limitations as a

newly independent state to handle complex issues such as citizenship, dual citizenship and other typical cases (Lall, 2001, p. 87). Nehru insisted on the idea of 'interested in their welfare' which is 'only emotional and not political'—hence, India largely 'maintained distance from political or legal intervention' (Nehru, 1961, p. 128). This phase, which can be best termed as 'passive involvement', unfortunately created a huge gap, often called 'missed opportunity', on part of India (refer Lall, 2001).

The overall 'hands-off' policy continued till the 1980s when a slight shift occurred in India's approach. During the 1980s, the oil boom in West Asia led to a huge outflow of migrant workers, followed by an influx of remittances that benefited India in terms of foreign exchange reserves. 'For the first time the economic potential of the overseas Indians became evident to New Delhi' (Pande, 2016) and, as a result, several policy changes were initiated: for example, the welfare of migrant labourers in the Gulf countries, including their evacuation during the Gulf War; the enactment of new emigration legislation, providing for a compulsory registration of recruitment agencies; the facilitation of a banking system for foreign exchange; and the introduction of high interest rates for foreign exchange deposits. The shift in India's approach was also visible during the Fijian crisis of 1987, created by a coup against a government that was dominated by ethnic Indians in Fiji. India's response was significantly different from its previous responses relating to the crisis against Indians like in Uganda in 1972. The Fijian coup of 1987 and the security of Indo-Fijians received extensive media coverage inside India and debate was initiated about India's policy towards overseas Indians in the Parliament (*Lok Sabha Debates*, 1987). Several diplomatic initiatives were taken to isolate the new Fijian regime and getting it expelled from the Commonwealth. India also raised the issue at the 42nd Session of the UN General Assembly. However, when Fiji regained its Commonwealth membership despite implementing a highly discriminatory Constitution in place, India could do little about it (Pande, 2011).

This phase, which can best be described as a period of 'reluctant involvement', saw India become aware of the presence of the 'Other India', yet India's foreign policy less prone to changes continued largely on previous line placing more emphasis on cultural linkages (refer Pande, 2011, pp. 131–32; Pande, 2016).

India continued with more or less similar policy approach till the 1990s when a seismic shift occurred and New Delhi adopted a 'multipronged approach' to mend the long lost ties and engage with its diaspora. The Indian diaspora too had begun to realize the enormous economic potential and rising global stature of India, making for a mutually beneficial and symbiotic relationship (Pande, 2011, p. 131). Propelled by the liberalization of the Indian economy in the early 1990s, major policy changes were introduced which slowly but visibly yielded results in various ways.

The government introduced several institutional changes to pursue its goals and established Ministry of Overseas Indian Affairs (MOIA) in 2004, to look into the affairs of the Indian diaspora/overseas Indians. Apart from the specific agenda of streamline overseas migration and helping Indians (especially semi-skilled and unskilled) to obtain jobs overseas, MOIA also aims to transform

India's demographic dividend into an asset. Taking into account labour gaps and dependency ratio that will emerge in Europe and North America due to the aging of its population and shortage of work force, MOIA proposes to partner with states to develop skills through various programmes (like 'Skill India Initiative'). The MOIA also aims at building an extensive—country/city specific—database of overseas Indians, through a registration process, and designs outreach capabilities through the diaspora associations and develop customized programmes for specific regions, countries and categories of overseas Indians (MOIA, 2012, p. 14).

Some of the most significant policy changes that New Delhi has introduced in the last few years (MOIA, 2011) are listed herewith:

- Appointment of a High Level Committee on Indian Diaspora under Shri L.M. Singhvi which created a database.
- *Pravasi Bharatiya Divas*—It is an annual function organized by the Government of India to connect with the diaspora. This is an attempt to enhance the soft power potential of the diaspora.
- Overseas Indian citizenship (OIC)—It was implemented in 2005. In practice, it is not a dual citizenship. Till 2012, the Indian government had issued 1,203,613 OIC cards.
- Social security agreements (SSA)—It established to eliminate double payment of social security contributions, exempt detached workers from host country legislation, enable portability of pension and prevent loss of benefits by providing for totalization of contribution periods.
- Bilateral labour MoUs—with important destination countries to secure their cooperation in ensuring protection and welfare of the Indian workers.
- Indian Council for Overseas Employment (ICOE)—a non-profit council to serve as a 'think tank' for the government on International migration.
- Labour Mobility Partnership Agreement—It aims to diversify the overseas destination base for Indian workers and secure labour market access for them.
- Indian Community Welfare Fund (ICWF)—It provides funds to the Indian Missions in all the 17 Emigration Check Required (ECR) countries to support a wide gamut of welfare services for overseas Indian workers.
- Overseas Workers' Resource Centre (OWRC)—It operates a 24/7 helpline to provide information and assistance to potential emigrants and their families.
- Migrant Resource Centre—It established in Cochin, Kerala, Hyderabad and Andhra Pradesh to provide information and counselling services to potential migrants.
- E-governance Project—A project has been taken up by MOIA to transform the emigration process through e-governance that will help build an electronic database on the flow as well as stock of Indian migrants abroad and enable all stakeholders in the migratory process to manage their role and responsibilities in an efficient and transparent manner.
- The MOIA established the India Centre for Migration a 'not-for-profit' society established in July 2008 to serve as a think tank on all matters relating to international migration. This NGO is meant to help Indian migrants

move up the value chain and position India as a preferred source of qualified, skilled and trained human resources across a wide gamut of sectors.

- New Delhi's efforts to connect with the younger generations of the Indian diaspora through scholarships offered by the Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR) and cultural centres, organizing film and other festivals too are effective ways (refer Shukla, 2006, p. 24).

India and its Diaspora: Building Credible Partnership

With the beginning of India's engagement with the diaspora, after a period of apathy and ambiguity, the phase of a symbiotic and long-lasting relationship has begun. However, even before this policy shift, the Indian diaspora was engaging with their communities, villages, regions and even with India as a whole. All through the above-mentioned four phases, remittances were being sent by the overseas Indians through personalized channels (refer Bates, 2000; Carter, 1992) and the soft power dynamics was at work. Even during the phase of 'passive involvement', Indians abroad were active agents of 'soft power' spreading Indian culture and spirituality far and wide. Indian diaspora has also been the indirect carriers of other soft resources of India like Bollywood films, food, music, yoga, democracy, the IT industry, the idea of unity in diversity, cricket and so on.

The contribution of the Indian diaspora to the homeland is as diverse as the diaspora itself. The spread of the 'old diaspora' in the far-flung corners of the world is mainly responsible for the geographical spread of the Indian culture. Although religious and cultural forms change and accommodate to the new environment in the process of migration, the Indian cultural trends in the 'old diaspora' remained strong and very visible. The 'old diaspora' came to play major roles in the political and economic spheres of the countries they migrated to and proved their potential as the heads of states and governments.

In the case of Gulf countries, which follow policy of 'exclusion' towards the immigrants, Indians have showcased Indian culture, social values, education, language and films in those countries. Indian diaspora has played a major role in the development of the Gulf region and is a factor in India's Gulf policy. The Indian diaspora is also a crucial factor in India's Look East Policy and account for an estimated 6.7 million in the South East Asian region.

In Western countries and especially in the USA where the polity allows effective participation of the diasporas, Indians have been in the forefront in perusing India's interests. Indian diaspora used varied strategies such as directly lobbying congressmen, active role of diaspora associations, holding of seminars/discussions and educating the public (refer Blarel, 2012; Kumari, 2016). Some of the significant examples of this partnership are the Indo-US rapprochement under the Indo-US nuclear deal. Indians have given a new aura to India and its people by holding top positions in IT, commerce, banking and many other sectors that proved the scientific and professional calibre of Indians.

Importance of the diaspora in furthering foreign policy goals of India has been reiterated in government statements from time to time. According to

Rajamohan (2003), 'The biggest instrument of our soft power is the Indian Diaspora'. In future, the diaspora can also be partners in India's quest for a permanent seat in the UN Security Council. After the 1990s policy shift, there has been a substantial realization of the potential of the diaspora in terms of remittances, philanthropy, tourism and investments. The multiple belongingness of the diasporas also leads them to being soft power agents and development partners of the host countries. It opens avenues for multiple relationships between nations.

India's Economic Engagement with the Diaspora

Apart from the foreign policy, the Indian diaspora also engages with India economically in the following ways:

- Brain regain and skill transfer have emerged as one of the most important areas of diaspora contribution for homeland (refer Kuznetsov, 2011; Saxenian, 2004). New Delhi has initiated some independent programmes to attract Indian academicians and professionals from abroad on temporary basis. Transfer of Knowledge through Expatriate Nationals (TOKTEN)⁴ is also in operation. Another important initiative is the Global Indian Network of Knowledge (Global-INK) which is a dynamic electronic platform for knowledge transfer through an online web portal. It operates through the partnership of diaspora as 'Knowledge' partners, the institutions in India as 'Stakeholder' partners and the government as a 'Facilitator'. It helps generate new ideas on development, education, health care and so on (MOIA). However, India is yet to realize the full potential of its knowledge diaspora and translate the brain drain into brain regain/circulation.
- India's experience with the IT industry can be cited as one of the best example of a symbiotic partnership with the diaspora. Both India and the diaspora have reinforced each other's quantitative and qualitative growth in the IT sector over the decades. On the one hand, the Indian diaspora brought a multilayered gain to the IT industry in terms of enhanced skills; capital formation (human, social and financial); inward remittances; foreign direct investment (FDI [Foreign Direct Investment]) flows; creation of networks/markets; and a boost for India's image. On the other hand, the Indian IT industry created a strong incentive for the mobility of highly skilled professionals and provided the diaspora with the much-needed opportunity to engage with their motherland (Pande, 2014b, p. 121). The healthcare and education sectors are other successful models worth quoting in this regard. The diaspora can also be an important participant in 'Make in India' campaign.
- Remittances are another important source of diaspora contribution for India started growing significantly from the mid-1990s, mainly due to growing emigration of high-skilled migrants to the USA and switch to formal channels due to more liberal foreign exchange policies (Tumbe, 2012, p. 7). India is the highest remittance receiving country in the world. A cross-country

break-up of remittance inflows reflects that West Asia and North America accounted for about two-thirds of the total remittances (Chandrashekar, 2012). However, several of the negative impacts of remittances are also clearly visible in India's case. A break-up of the utilization figures of remittances in India reflects that they rarely go for gainful investment such as establishing new business and industries (Pande, 2014a).

- In terms of FDI, India has not been successful to attract substantially from the diaspora. In fact, diaspora investments could be more relevant with regard to small- and medium-term investments, workable through networks. It has worked well with China but in case of India, except for some sectors like diamond cutting and export, much is yet to be achieved. One of the important initiatives towards facilitating NRI investments, knowledge networking in India is the Overseas Indian Facilitation Centre (OIFC), which is in operation since 2007 and focuses on sectors such as real estate, wealth management, taxation, legal, health care, education and infrastructure (MOIA).
- A major share of investments by the Indian diaspora goes towards portfolio investment and bank deposits. Such incentives are common throughout the world (refer Terrazas, 2010), and since 1991, India too has been actively raising funds through hard currency bonds to tap diaspora resources. Various NRI deposit schemes on higher interest rates are also in place and are popular favourable interest rates and tax treatment. Indian Banks have established branches in various countries to facilitate the process. The flipside of such investments is that there is an uncertainty attached to it due to sudden withdrawal as was seen in 1991 and also that in the recent past, the NRIs have emerged as India's main source of foreign debt.
- Philanthropic contributions from the Indian diaspora are substantial and have always been there. However, the larger share of diaspora philanthropy comes through informal channels and personal links (Kapur, Mehta & Moon, 2004) and hence it goes undocumented and splintered. The government has provided platforms for such contributions like the Foundation of Overseas Indians (IDF-OI) which is headed by the Minister of Overseas Indian Affairs and helps forging partnerships between donors and receivers. Indians appear to have a great mistrust and cynicism towards the official institutions, but proper channelling of philanthropic contributions could enhance its developmental potential which can be extremely effective for campaigns like cleaning of the Ganga and 'Clean India'.
- Diaspora tourism can be one of the biggest areas for diaspora partnership. More than 25 million strong Indian diaspora can be an important tourism market. Diaspora tourism is an important tool to reinforce relationship with the diaspora, especially the younger generations. There can be distinct categories of diaspora tourism (Newland, 2011), and Indians in the diaspora being a diverse lot require tailor-made travel packages for maximum gain in this sector. A combination of heritage tourism; medical tourism; business tourism; genealogy or root tourism; religious or faith tourism; and visiting friends and relatives (VFR) can draw diaspora tourists to India in a big way (Pande, 2014a).

Conclusion

Indians have been migrating since ancient times. The colonial rule, however, resulted in diasporic formations with large number of Indians preferring to settle in the countries to which they migrated as indentured labourers and later as skilled migrants. All these diaspora groups retained some or the other forms of connectivity, in terms of sociocultural and personalized and familial links, with the motherland. Although India showed little interest towards its diaspora for a long period after independence, the overseas Indians have always been the ambassadors of India and made substantial philanthropic contributions. The beginning of economic reforms in the 1990s opened India towards the diaspora and thus started a new phase of partnership. India has benefitted by all the sections and categories of its diverse diaspora be it the highly skilled elite diaspora or the semi-skilled blue-collared workers or the indentured diaspora. It is often stated that diaspora engagement works for India independent of the government, but measures taken by the government have been significant in making the diaspora partners in economic development and pursuing the foreign policy goals. There have been significant contributions from the diaspora in terms of remittances, bank deposits, philanthropy and soft power.

India as a nation and as a state has got reinforced by its diaspora. Indian diaspora has helped India to expand beyond its territories and have a global presence. Likewise, India's rising stature in the world and its growing economic power have also strengthened the position of its diaspora and have given them many economic opportunities. This has resulted in a good partnership between India and the diaspora. Nevertheless, problems continue to exist and India has a long way to go in terms of realizing the full potential of the diaspora and towards providing assuredness to several of the groups within the Indian diaspora.

Special efforts are needed to transform the capabilities into resources. Since the subject of diaspora spans across various ministries and government agencies—such as health, education, science and technology industry—and regions of India with cross-cutting agendas, there is a need for better coordination and credible mechanism to enhance the capabilities and maximize the potential of diaspora engagement.

Indian diaspora is a diverse construct which has also resulted in differences and contesting interest among them. Very often they fail to emerge as a united force in the host lands. Therefore, India needs to develop an inclusive policy and make all the sections of the diaspora feel connected with India. This will enable them to engage with the mother country in a more positive way and will broaden the scope of diaspora engagement. India also needs to develop credible mechanisms for continuous conversation between the Indians abroad and the Indians at home and the government.

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Notes

1. The NRIs are Indian citizens and hold Indian passport. MOIA records their number as 10037761.
2. The PIOs are no longer Indian citizens and number around 11872114.
3. The OIC is a partial citizenship given to PIOs. Till 2014, around 1203613 OCI cards were issued by Government of India.
4. The TTOKEN is a UNDP mechanism to tap the expatriate talents for the benefit of the home country and reduce the adverse effects of the 'brain drain'. The programme mobilises professionals to volunteer technical cooperation and consultancies with the home country on short-term basis.

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