



E-ISSN: 2664-603X
P-ISSN: 2664-6021
IJPSG 2024; 6(2): 198-206
www.journalofpoliticalscience.com
Received: 05-08-2024
Accepted: 11-09-2024

Mule Rohit Ashok
Ph.D., Centre for West Asian
Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru
University, New Delhi, India

Evolution of 'Diaspora' as an essential factor in Bharat's foreign policy of the 21st century

Mule Rohit Ashok

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.33545/26646021.2024.v6.i2c.385>

Abstract

'Diaspora' refers to people who 'migrated' abroad from their place of 'birth' or 'ancestral origin' for socio-economic reasons but are still connected multi-dimensionally to their place of origin. Their constant attachment to their homeland has become practicable because of the ICT revolution of the 21st century. In addition, it has been seen in the last few decades that the diaspora's political, economic, and cultural significance has tremendously been intensified because of their increasing numerical strength worldwide; however, these are pushing factors for the country of origin to consider them seriously an essential characteristic within the foreign policy paradigm. The context fits nicely into the 21st century's evolving foreign policy of Bharat. Of almost 300 million global diasporas, 35 million are Bhartiya, sending around \$120 billion in remittances yearly (2024) and, in many ways, contributing to the broadening of the 'knowledge economy'. Furthermore, it has emerged as an essential cultural and political category in the host country, helping to build Bharat's image on various global fronts. The inception of PM Modi's regime marked the assertiveness and enthusiasm for prioritizing the 'diaspora' in foreign policy's diplomatic endeavours. To an extent, comparatively, it was largely ignored by previous regimes. Today, Bharat is an emerging power; of course, the diaspora would play a significant role in shaping the nation's position in an evolving world order. Thus, PM Modi has approached the diaspora through 'Soft Power Diplomacy' to realize Bharat's global aspirations. So, this paper intends to investigate the diaspora's evolution as an essential feature in Bharat's foreign policy in the post-independence period. Special attention will be paid to its understating in Modi's regime outlook.

Keywords: Bhartiya diaspora, foreign policy, diaspora diplomacy, FDI, remittances

Introduction

Essentiality of 'Belongingness' in the Definition of Diaspora

The term 'Diaspora' originates from the writing of Greek historian Thucydides (B.C. 4th), who usually used it to describe the Greeks' dispersal. However, in recent modern history (20th century), it was widely used to expose the dispersal of the Jewish people in the post-1940s. Later, at the end of the 20th century, the term diaspora was further generalised to describe the phenomenon of every kind of people's movement around the globe. Then, around the 1970s, within academia, a separate/independent discipline emerged to study theoretically (systematically) such movements of the people, known as the 'Diaspora Studies' (Grossman, Jonathan, 2018: 1263) ^[10]. Since then, extensive scholarly literature has been developed on the subjects. There is no dearth of the academic definitions of diaspora, sometimes leading to certain ambiguities. For example, according to Brubaker, the word diaspora has come to be applied to almost any population or group of people living outside its homeland (Brubaker, Rogers, 2005) ^[2]. For Oxford bibliographies, the term diaspora is, often involuntary, dispersal of the population from a homeland (motherland) to multiple areas, thereby creating communities and identities based on the histories and consequences of dispersal (Kenny, Kevin, 2013:3) ^[13]. These two essential definitions of the diaspora precisely reflect the common denominator in defining the term, i.e. "To anyone not at home". Nonetheless, the mere migration of individuals does not fulfil the condition of being a part of a diaspora community; instead, a sense of emotional attachment (belongingness) to the identity of (birth/ ancestral) motherland is also necessary. This means that migrated individuals must 'emotionally' connect with their aboriginal identity, which shows their attitude of 'people goodness' or 'belongingness'. If migrants do not have any attachment to their motherland, thus they would not be entitled to be called as a part of the diaspora.

Corresponding Author:
Mule Rohit Ashok
Ph.D., Centre for West Asian
Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru
University, New Delhi, India

Unwittingly, the diaspora is generally part of ‘transnational’ communities, but their aboriginal national identity also matters a lot. Generally, emotional attachment typically comes from their ‘survival instincts’. It is a life experience that wherever an individual goes, they try to find an emotional connection that provides them with ‘mental healing/relaxation’. Of course, that connection is found in ‘aboriginal culture’. In the phase of extreme globalization, individuals are isolated from socio-cultural life; thus, they are necessarily trying to connect with their original culture to heal and give meaning to life. As a result, in a Cosmopolitan world, ‘Ethnic-national cultural identities’ have become a crucial part of the definition of the diaspora (Pande, Amba, 2013: 59) ^[19].

A Brief Overview: The Globally Spread Bhartiya Diaspora: Manifold collections of references are available to decipher the scale, direction, and frequency of an age-old omnipresent phenomenon of human mobility from the Bhartiya subcontinents, i.e. ‘Arya-Varta’ (the land of Arya). Bharat’s ^[1] ancient epic texts, such as Mahabharata and Ramayana and several other available historical scriptures, help to understand the phenomenon of migration more meticulously. Later in the historical progression, the literature developed during the period of Buddhism and the post (5th century B.C. to 5th century A.D.) is extensively helpful in understanding human migration from Bharat. In such an extended period, hundreds of thousands of Buddhist monks migrated to various parts of the world, such as Southeast Asia, West Asia, China, and others, to spread the ‘Dhamma’ or ‘Buddhist philosophy’. In those parts of the world, their successors settled down in large numbers, still sensitive regarding the emotional attachment to their ancestors’ homeland (modern Bharat or the land of Buddha). If we look to the early modern historical times, especially the British colonial period (post-18th century), Bhartiya s were involuntarily forced to migrate to various British Colonies in South America, Africa, and the Caribbean region as ‘slaves’ and ‘indentured laborers’ in the plantation works. These labourers had faced many issues of atrocities, which later were seriously taken up by several Bhartiya nationalists such as Mahadev Rande, Dadabhai Nauroji, Phiroj-shah Mehata, Gopal Gokhale, and Tilak from the platform of the Bhartiya National Congress (INC) and consistently demanded human treatment. Resultantly, Viceroy Lord Curzon set up the ‘Office of the Protectorate of Emigrants’ to prevent the atrocities against Bhartiya labourers. However, during the freedom struggle, several Bhartiya freedom fighters fought from overseas, such as Lala Hardayal, who had mobilized the Bhartiya-American community in the US; Shyam ji Krishna Verma, a professor at Oxford and founder of Bharat House; and Madam Kama contributed to the freedom struggle from Europe. These are just a few names, but many more hundreds of Bhartiya migrants contributed to the Bhartiya freedom struggle from abroad (Desai, Niranjana, 2006: 94) ^[6]. The Most important event to notice is that nearly 2.5 million Bhartiya soldiers fought in European land from the side of ‘The Allied Powers’ in World War I and II. Successive generations of these indentured labourers, freedom fighters, and war soldiers have been settled in the West, mainly Europe and

the USA, but are still connected with Bharat. They all now belong to part of the broader Bhartiya diasporic community. In the recent history of the post-independence period (post-1950s), the English-learned elite class (specifically upper castes first or second generations) were explicitly attracted to Europe and America to pursue higher technical education and find better job opportunities. For them, the English language played a significant role in opening the gate towards Western countries. Even in the 21st century, for the Bhartiya s, the United States of America (USA) and Europe have still occupied a significant destination location for educational and economic purposes. Recent data regarding the ‘Brain Drain’ phenomenon shows that students who appeared for the highly competitive engineering entrance exams, i.e. the IIT, in 2010, 36% of the 1000 and 62% in 2018 went to America (Chaudhary, P, 2023) ^[4]. This trend indicates that Bharat’s best- skilled minds still preferred to go to developed countries for better incentives. However, Bharat has been essentially a leading exporter of talent to the Western world. Of course, Bhartiya’s proficiency in the English language, derived from a legacy of British colonial rule, has helped them a lot. The U.S. Consulate General in South Bharat, Hyderabad, is the first U.S. diplomatic office to open in Bharat since Bharat’s independence. It reflects the United States’ commitment to strengthening engagement with the Bhartiya people. This consulate has emerged as an essential facilitator to provide access for Bhartiya people; however, it is also America’s largest South Asian outpost. So, ‘Telugu’ has grown into the fastest-speaking language in America in recent years (Bhartiya Express News Service, 2023). In the U.S., Bhartiya-Americans are engaged in diverse occupations ranging from white to blue collar, including NASA scientists to cab drivers, from doctors to motel owners, from professionals to store owners, from public service to serial entrepreneurs, and many more (Overseas Bhartiya Facilitation Centre, 2020). In the post-1980s, a new pattern of migration has been evolving by diversifying the destination preferences of Bhartiya from the West to the GULF, Southeast Asia, and African countries because of new economic opportunities in these regions. These countries provide opportunities to Bhartiya irrespective of their social and linguistic background (The Economist, 2023).

The data sheet was released by the International Organization of Migration (IOM) in 2023, which mentioned 281 million migrants (constituting 3.6% of the world’s people) spread around the globe-almost 25 million are Bhartiya s (International Organization of Migration, 2022), according to the web page of “Bhartiya Diaspora Organization”, the released data for 2024 shows that the global footprint of the Bhartiya diaspora substantially increased from 25 million to 35.42 million within one year. Of these, 15.85 million are non-resident Bhartiya s (NRI), and 19.57 million are people of Bhartiya origin [PIO] (Bhartiya Diaspora Organization, 2024). This growth of 10 million is phenomenal. Besides the Bhartiya diaspora, the Mexican diaspora, which comprised nearly 11.2 million, stood as the second biggest group, and the third is comprised of Chinese migrants, who comprised 10.5 million (International Organization of Migration, 2022).

¹ This research article has used the name ‘Bharat’ instead of ‘India’.



Map 1: Source: BharatDiaspora.Org

According to the latest data released by the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) Bharat, which is available online, given the list of the top 10 countries where the Bhartiya diaspora resides, as follows: USA -5.4 million; UAE -2.6 million; Malaysia - 2.9 million; Canada -2.8 million; Saudi Arabia - 2.4 million; Myanmar -2 million; United Kingdom -1.8 million; South Africa - 1.7 million; Sri Lanka -1.6 million; Kuwait -0.995 million (Ministry of External Affairs, 2023). However, all 35 million Diasporas have spread to more than 130 countries. These countries showcase the extensive global reach and influence of the Bhartiya diaspora, which continues to contribute to the economies and cultures of their host nations. However, this has helped build the most prominent overseas network, Bhartiya. The point that needs to be considered here is that such substantial numerical strength of the Bhartiya diaspora in the 21st century has emerged as an essential category for securing the country’s political and economic interests abroad. These would be significant assets in developing Bharat’s bilateral or multi- lateral relationship. Hence, the Bhartiya diaspora has emerged as a compelling component for Bharat’s foreign policy-makers to consider as a strategic asset to secure Bharat’s politico- economic interests globally.

Navigating Bharat’s ‘Diaspora Diplomacy’ as a Foreign Policy Component: The Post- Independence Era

The countries in the world are experiencing a higher rate of human migration. Economic interdependence and integration of countries have provided people with sufficient reasons (education and jobs) to migrate from one part to another part of the world. The numerical strength of the diaspora communities is a compelling factor for the country of origin to consider them seriously in securing national interests. According to Ho and McConnell, in the 21st

century, maintaining relationships with globally spread ‘diaspora’ and connecting them to their country of origin through various policies and programs has become essential to any country’s policy-making. So, connecting the diaspora led to the development of a multifaceted policy framework, which led to the emergence of a new branch of policy analysis known as ‘Diaspora Diplomacy’. Diaspora diplomacy has emerged as a distinctive field of interdisciplinary study at the ‘intersection’ of diaspora studies and diplomacy studies (Dolea, Alina, 2024:7). Specifically, in the post-Cold War (1990s) period, scholars focused on understanding the concept of ‘Diaspora Diplomacy’ within the ambit of the foreign policy narratives. The highly developing political economies of countries like Bharat, Brazil, and South Africa have started providing a considerable amount of their human capital into the world economic markets. That turned a diasporic community into a large number. To utilize such diaspora for securing political-economic interests, these countries changed the modus operandi of their foreign policy domain by adding the Diaspora as an essential component (Dolea, Alina, 2024: 8). The context of evolving diaspora diplomacy as a critical part of foreign policy is very much applicable to the country ‘Bharat’. The following section will try contextualizing diaspora diplomacy in the post-independence period to PM Modi. However, this section would help distinguish a paradigm shift in Bharat’s foreign policy from earlier regimes to the present PM Modi regime about diaspora.

The First Prime Minister, Pt. Nehru’s Approach to Diaspora (Overseas Bhartiya)

Prime Minister Nehru's policy approach to overseas Bhartiya (Indians) was essentially conditioned by the emerging socio-political-economic situation immediately

after the independence. 'Just' achieved political independence from the clutches of imperialism, which compelled leadership to focus on 'national' priorities rather than 'external' ones. Thus, the priorities of political leadership were primarily conditioned according to the country's immediate social, economic and political needs. Under this context, PM Pt. Jawaharlal Nehru strongly advocated an 'Active Dissociation Policy' for overseas Bhartiya, which meant maintaining distance from Bhartiya overseas communities to protect the host country's sovereignty. This principle of sovereignty protection mainly came from the Panch-Sheel principles of foreign policy, one of which was the non-interference policy. Pt. Jawaharlal Nehru would likely be considered to be protecting Bharatiya dwelling over another country's land correspondence to violating the principle of non-interference in the country's internal matters. So, Pt. Nehru consciously considered that the country must not breach the host country's sovereignty while protecting the Bhartiya migrants (Desai, Niranjana, 2006:95) [6]. In the context of maintaining international relations, PM Nehru's 'safest' or 'distancing' policy approach with the overseas Bhartiya was mainly due to the simple reasons of "its' host countries internal matter to deal with the overseas community not a country of origin". However, Pt. Nehru was a staunch advocate of the country's political sovereignty on global fronts, and he considered that if Bharat had tried to direct the host country's foreign policy according to the overseas community, it would assume a breach of the host country's sovereignty. Under this political impression, Pt. Nehru unwisely decided to dissolve the Ministry of Overseas Bhartiya (Indians) in 1947 (Kennedy, Andrew, 2015: 96). Resultantly, the overseas Bhartiya communities paid the high cost of such an official step. In 1957, his cold view of active disassociation regarding overseas Bharatiyas came in Parliamentary question and answer sessions: "If they adopt the nationality of the country, we have no concern with them. Sentimental concern there is, but politically they cease to be Bhartiya nationals" (Chaulia, Sreeram, 2016). This statement inferred that PM Nehru considered the overseas Bhartiya community 'not politically connected or associated' with Bharat. As a result, in the whole regime of PM Pt. Nehru's Bhartiya overseas community were ignored from the policy point of view because the impression was that they were a distant community that did not belong to part of Bhartiya society at all. The 'political exclusion' of overseas Bharatiya from foreign policy priority unwittingly led to a disconnect in sentimental relations with their homelands. Thus, in PM Nehru's foreign paradigm, no essential respect was given to overseas Bhartiya under the wrong impression of protecting the host country's sovereignty.

Nonetheless, Bharat's foreign policy approach was stereotypical because of PM Pt. Nehru, during the time (1950s and 60s), strongly supported the cause of the 'Apartheid' issue in South

Africa but was afraid of addressing the concerns of Bhartiya's overseas communities. Of course, I agree that PM Pt. Nehru considered issues of 'Apartheid' as issues of extended humanity, but what was about the Bhartiya extended community? Were they not part of our extended Bhartiya family? In addition, the Bhartiya overseas had repeatedly asked for Bhartiya leadership to "assimilate/identify" themselves with the local societies. However, PM Nehru repeatedly referred to overseas Bhartiya as mere

"guests" of the local indigenous population (Desai, Niranjana, 2006:95) [6]. It means the then leadership had not considered overseas Bhartiya as an integral part of Bhartiya society. There might have been a different point of view behind PM Nehru's consideration of the Bhartiya diaspora as a guest community, but it created a negative impression on society. Shyama Prasad Mukherjee and Jan Sangh leaders aptly criticized Pt. Nehru that the "illusionary image of global leader ignored indigenous people". However, not only that, but senior leaders like Morarji Desai and Manubhai Shah had reportedly told Bhartiya businessmen in East Africa that they were all "chors". It strongly sensitized overseas Bhartiya about exclusion from Bhartiya's societal bond (Desai, Niranjana, 2006: 98) [6]. Such an apathetic attitude failed to harness the diaspora's strengths, consequently damaging their image. For example, Meghnad Desai pointed out that in the 1960s, times were callous for the Bhartiya diaspora, which wasn't rich or powerful, "I remember people saying: Americans will never have Bhartiya in Top positions." (LSC, 2012)

More policy or institutional mechanisms were needed to allow investment in overseas Bhartiya from East and Central African countries when they were looking for alternative destinations for economic security. Around the 1970s, Bharat was in a chronic financial crisis, and such investment could have been a panacea. Consequently, out of frustration, the Bhartiya diaspora was compelled to deposit nearly \$150 million in British banks. Bharat's leadership's myopic policy visions lost hope among overseas Bhartiya to see Bharat as a protector of their genuine interests. Although Bharat maintained a strategic friendship, an active engagement with overseas Bhartiya was missed. In post-1947, Bharat had the excellent opportunity to harness the economic strength of the diaspora, which could have been an enormous contribution to the upscale pace of development but missed it until the 1990s.

However, the government of Bharat never provided any humanitarian assistance when the Bhartiya diaspora faced the problem of expulsion from Burma, Zanzibar, Kenya, and Uganda in early 1970. About Bharat's inability to protect overseas Bhartiya, the Statesman very aptly summed up in an editorial: "Unfortunately, Bharat has little to offer besides sympathy to the people of Bharatiya origin who now face the prospects of statelessness... Bharat's ability to persuade the East African governments to retain these people who had once rendered some service and made Africa their Home is also sadly limited, despite what this country has done in the name of Afro-Asian solidarity". In short, the Government of Bharat's policy towards the diaspora in the post-independence period was a strange mixture of distant paternal responsibility and a dislike for them.

Changes in perception in the post-emergency period

In the late 1970s, two significant incidents, the National Emergency (1975) and the Khalistan Movement (1980s), were a threshold for changing the policy orientation of the government of Bharat towards overseas Bhartiya. Affluent Bhartiya professionals and business class settled down in the US, Canada, and Europe highly criticized the emergency of 1976 imposed by then-PM Indira Gandhi. However, they lobbied the media and formed anti-government public opinion in foreign countries. For the first time, the government realized the political strengths of the Bhartiya

overseas community, at least in the UK and USA. The government of Bharat understood that if the political and economic strength of the overseas Bhartiya were appropriately directed and utilized through specific policy channels, they could be an essential agent for Bharat's economic and political transformation. Consequently, the political leadership of Jan Sangh (1977-1980) and then the government under the leadership of Shrimati Indira Gandhi, Shri. Rajiv Gandhi concentrated on mobilizing the overseas Bhartiya by assuring them of the address of various issues through changes in policy orientations. However, Bhartiya missions abroad were explicitly asked to develop and maintain close working relations with NRI groups. By 1982, over 500 Bharatiya organizations were in the UK, and 650 in the USA had formed to protect Bhartiya diaspora interests. Secondly, the Khalistan movement and the militancy in Punjab compelled PM Rajiv Gandhi to consciously re-look at diaspora policy and provided new enthusiasm for diaspora policy.

High-Level Committee on Diaspora

PM Atal Vajpayee created an institutional mechanism such as the Office of Chief Commissioner (NRIs) under the aegis of the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) in 1999. However, the NRI/PIO Division, headed by an officer of the rank of an Additional Secretary in the Ministry of External Affairs in the 2000s, was responsible for looking comprehensively at diaspora issues. After a lapse of 57 years, the UPA Government revived the Ministry of Non-Resident Bhartiya Affairs in May 2004. It was renamed the Ministry of Overseas Bhartiya Affairs (MOIA) in September 2004 (Times of Bharat, 2016). In 2016, the Ministry of Overseas Bhartiya (Indian) Affairs merged with the Ministry of External Affairs for administrative convenience.

The NDA-I government started the process of formation of the MOIA to have a comprehensive look at the problems and aspirations of the Bhartiya diaspora by appointing a five-member² 'High-Level Committee' in 2000, headed by the eminent jurist Dr. L.M. Singhvi MP. The primary objectives of the committee were to prepare a comprehensive report on the Bhartiya Diaspora, acknowledge the Bhartiya diaspora's achievements, sensitize it to their problems and their expectations from their mother country, propose a new policy framework for creating a more conducive environment in Bharat to leverage these invaluable human resources -and thus forging stronger ties of the Bhartiya Diaspora with their homeland. The committee had noted: "This is the first time that Bharat engaged every segment of her diverse diaspora in an extensive consultation and interface". In addition, the committee noted that "The opening up of Bharat's economy in the post-1990 led to a dramatic change in the regime's

² In addition to the Chairman, the members of the Committee were Shri. R.L. Bhatiya, Shri J.R. Hiremath, Shri Baleshwar Agarwal, and Shri J.C. Sharma, Secretary in the Ministry of External Affairs. It mandated to make a comprehensive study of the global Bharatn Diaspora and to recommend measures for a constructive relationship with them. The appointment of the High-level Committee represented a historic first step since out independence. The observations and conclusions of the Committee helped in laying the foundation for a sound framework of policy approach for a mutually beneficial and incremental interaction between Bharat and her Diaspora.

approach towards diaspora communities". The committee strongly believes that now is the time to involve the Bhartiya diaspora, in multifarious ways, in the economic rejuvenation of Bharat and revive their sense of belonging with Bharat".

The first policy to reach out to the Bhartiya diaspora began in 2003 when Atal Bihari Vajpayee

Initiated a celebration of 'Pravasi Bhartiya Divas'- on the 9th of January, which marks the day when Mahatma Gandhi returned to Bharat from South Africa. The government decided to celebrate it annually by holding events that bestowed awards on prominent members of the Bhartiya diaspora. In post-LPG times, the leadership aptly recognized the significance of the diaspora community for Bharat's economic growth. Thus, they started building bonds with them by developing various policies to connect the diaspora community of every corner of the globe; since then, it has remained an essential agenda of successive governments. Developing various foundational infrastructures to connect the diaspora with their homeland led to the evolving 'Diaspora diplomacy' as a critical component within the ambit of the foreign policy of Bharat. It means consistently cultivating relationships with overseas communities to In addition to the Chairman, the members of the Committee were Shri. R.L. Bhatiya, Shri J.R. Hiremath, Shri Baleshwar Agarwal, and Shri J.C. Sharma, Secretary in the Ministry of External Affairs. It mandated to make a comprehensive study of the global Bharat Diaspora and to recommend measures for a constructive relationship with them. The appointment of the High-level Committee represented a historic first step since out independence. The observations and conclusions of the Committee helped in laying the foundation for a sound framework of policy approach for a mutually beneficial and incremental interaction between Bharat and her Diaspora.

PM Narendra Modi's Assertive 'Diaspora Diplomacy' in Foreign Policy Domain

PM Modi's leadership has typically been recognized for strategically deploying the historically neglected diaspora as an essential soft power agency in the foreign policy domain. Under the regime, Bharat's diaspora diplomacy has become too assertive in the context of soft power diplomacy. However, within the ambit of soft power diplomacy, all energy has been diverted to attracting overseas Bhartiya for the country's development. Statistics show that the Bhartiya diaspora is much more influential in the global platform because of its numerical and economic strengths in almost every region. Although diverse in ethnicity, religion, linguistics, class, and caste, they all see Bharat as their 'single' cultural and civilizational 'homeland' (Rana, Kisan, 2009: 264). As the charismatic leadership of Mr. Modi came to political power, he led a change in the 'Nehruvian' perception concerning the diaspora as the 'Guest community' or 'policy of dissociation' to an 'integral part of Bhartiya society' or 'pro-active policy engagement'. The prime reason for recognizing the diaspora as a valuable asset within the ambit of foreign policy is its potential for future economic development (Mazumdar, Arijit, 2018:475). PM Narendra Modi understood the economic potential of the diaspora community very well. Thus, he has taken various initiatives to galvanize the Bhartiya diaspora globally, from the developed United States to an underdeveloped small

island like Fiji. Since 2014, this active engagement with the diaspora has appeared as ‘oxygen’ for PM Modi. He often employed the concept of ‘three Ds’- democracy, demography, and demand -in his spiels about Bharat’s rise and inherent strengths. However, he also implicitly pays special attention to a fourth ‘D’- the ‘Bhartiya diaspora’ around the globe (Rama, Lakshmi, 2015; Chaulia, Sreeram, 2016). Harnessing the talents and loyalties of the Bhartiya diaspora is a prime objective of PM Modi’s ‘Diaspora Diplomacy’. PM Rajiv Gandhi was very concerned about this when he called Bhartiya technocrats to bring the ICT revolution to Bharat. Despite this, since independence, no prime minister like Modi has infused energy and love for the motherland into the Bhartiya diaspora community. PM Modi specifically shared sentiments of ‘Nationalism’ and ‘Civilization Achievement’ with the Bhartiya Diaspora to infuse a connection with the motherland.

PM Modi’s administration appears to be convinced that the diaspora not only plays a crucial role in Bharat’s economic development (as a source of investment, knowledge and technology) but also contributes to strengthening existing bilateral ties between Bharat and the countries in which they are based. For example, in 2008, the diaspora played a crucial role in ensuring the passage of the Bharat-US Nuclear Deal in the US Congress, which uplifted Bharat-US relations to a strategic level of friendship. Similar contexts also apply to the Gulf country, where more than 8 million Bhartiya reside, which helped build strategic ties with other countries.

Therefore, whenever PM Modi went on foreign visits, he appeared more interested in publicly interacting with the Bhartiya diaspora, concurrently meeting with political leaders. Such a ‘public interaction’ strategy has successfully appealed to the diasporic community as a way to strengthen cultural bonds with their motherland, Bharat. Retrospectively, it led to a transformation of perception regarding the Bhartiya diaspora as they are not a ‘guest or distant’ people but instead our ‘extended community’. This active interaction with the diaspora was missing earlier by leadership. Therefore, the Bhartiya diaspora has always remained a priority of Indian foreign policy. The idea of ‘interaction’ is a unique feature in PM Modi’s ‘diaspora diplomacy’. It is also one of the characteristic reasons for the ‘paradigm shift’ in diaspora diplomacy.

Over the past ten years, Prime Minister Modi has visited approximately 65 countries across all continents of the globe. During every one of his visits, he participated in public interaction with the Bhartiya diaspora. Most public interaction is marked by the grand welcome ceremony of packed audiences (range 20000 to 50000) like at Madison Square Garden in New York City (September 2014), Allophones Arena in Sydney (November 2014), Ricoh Coliseum in Toronto (April 2015), Wemble Stadium in London (November 2015) and the Howdy Modi (2019) in Texas, etc. (PTI, 2021). His outreach efforts have been quite successful in connecting with the diaspora, as shown by the enormous turnouts at his speeches, the large number of people lining the streets to see him, and how many wanted to shake hands and take ‘selfies’ with him. The visual of a power-packed crowd in every diaspora interaction not only tells a story of how much the diaspora values their Bhartiya connection but also how the current government values engagement with them (Varma, Monica (2023). During PM Modi’s recent visit to the United States, he

received 15 standing ovations in Congress, which made the Bhartiya diaspora feel more confident about their leadership and motherland. They are now hopeful for better policy initiatives in the future. Backstage at the Kennedy Center, PM Modi personally observed that most young minds, educated in Bharat, made rich in America, and eager to connect with the man who presents “Bharat as a Vishvaguru”, preaching that this is “the century of Bharat” (Cave, Damien, 2023). Umesh Sachdev, a Bhartiya-American founder of Uniphore, an artificial intelligence business, said to PM Modi, “Thank you for lifting the image and spirits of Bhartiya Americans” (Cave, Damien, 2023).

With an emphasis on national pride and civilizational links, PM. Modi has successfully cultivated a strong relationship with Bharat’s diaspora across the globe. We can say that PM Modi’s ‘Diaspora Diplomacy’ has taken a new contour in foreign policy. However, specific challenges remain to strategically maintain bonding with the diaspora by creating a favourable atmosphere. Consequently, he is making a diaspora a cultural ambassador of Bharat worldwide.

BJP General Secretary Shri Ram Madhav said, “We are changing the contours of diplomacy and looking at new ways of strengthening Bharat’s interests abroad. They can be Bharat’s voice even while being loyal citizens in those countries. This is the long-term goal behind diaspora diplomacy. It is like the way the Jewish community looks out for Israel’s interests in the United States.” The Modi administration has continued the practice of previous administrations in organizing the annual “Pravasi Bhartiya Divas” (non-resident Bhartiya Day) to celebrate the successes of the Bhartiya diaspora and to recognize their contribution to Bharat’s growth and development. In the 17th Pravasi Bhartiya Divas (PBD), PM Narendra Modi said, “Bharat will nurture and protect its diaspora spread across the world and urged members of the diaspora to become representatives of Bharat’s heritage”. He termed every overseas Bhartiya a “Bharatvanshi” and promised the government’s support for their well-being. The diaspora represented a “powerful and capable Bharat” Adding the diaspora could help introduce Bharat to the world. They asserted that the “ancestors” of contemporary Bhartiya paved the way for “Bharat’s cultural expansion” in other parts of the world (The Hindu, 2023).

Economic-Political-Cultural Essentialities for Inclusion of Diaspora in Bhartiya Foreign Policy Domains

The Bhartiya diaspora (NRIs & PIOs) is a relevant part of Bharat’s soft power-related foreign policy strategy; it helps boost Bharat’s image globally through bilateral multilateral or organizational diplomatic engagement. But it also holds a hard power - the power of money. Overseas Bhartiya had produced economic assets which are valued equal to 25% of Bharat’s GDP in 2012 (The Economic Times, 2013), The far greater economic potential the Bhartiya diaspora possessed could be significant for Bharat’s economic growth, and PM Modi aptly recognized and directed the monetary policy.

His primary constant focus is on motivating the business class diaspora to invest capital, expertise, time, and energy in Bharat and ensure the removal of bureaucratic hurdles through effective policy mechanisms.

However, Jagdish Bhagwati, a noted economist of Bhartiya origin and a member of the first Prime Minister’s Global

Advisory Council of Overseas Bhartiya³. In 2009, underlined the significance of diaspora for development: “Developing countries seek ways of protecting and enhancing the out flows and of profiting from the many good spill-over effects they expect to benefit from as their citizens settle in prestigious places in the rich countries ... Enhancing these good effects require that countries such as Bharat and Taiwan adopt the diaspora model, extending a warmer embrace to their national abroad, to that these spill-over effects can be increased” (Mishra, Amit, 2016).

There are three primary ways to analyse the Bhartiya diaspora community's contribution to developing the economy. First is ‘Remittances’, the second largest source of external financing after service exports, which is a very effective source for the macroeconomic stability of Bharat. It has bolstered Bharat’s economy by fattening its forex and functioning as an emergency fund when it faces macroeconomic problems such as trade deficit or revenue deficit or other, providing a much-needed cushion. RBI Governor Shashikant Das said, “Remittances have helped Bharat’s forex reserves to jump back to the \$600 billion mark with a stabilizing exchange rate. Consequently, forex reserves fund imports, the most crucial being oil; help the government pay off its external debt; and strengthen Bharat’s currency”. When these remittances are used to invest, they can boost the home country’s capital. For example, relatives back home may use this money to fund their own or save it, increasing the funds banks have to lend to businesses. Diasporas also invest directly in business opportunities and government bonds in their home countries (The Economic Times, 2023),

The NRIs' remittances are higher than those of the Bhartiya foreign direct investment (FDI). The cumulative FDI by NRIs is a modest \$10 billion, constituting less than 5% of the total FDI in Bharat. Bhartiya sent \$89 billion in 2021 and \$108 billion in 2022 (around 3% of GDP), higher than the Chinese and Filipino emigrants send to their home countries.

The body was formed in 2009 to tap the experience and knowledge of eminent people of Bharatn origin in diverse fields from across the world and was announced by then PM Manmohan Singh. In the first council included economist Jagdish Bhagwati, peace activist Ela Gandhi, Nobel laureate Amartya Sen and PepsiCo CEO Indra Nooyi. PM Modi suspended this body in 2015. See: Duttgupta, Ishani (2015), “PM’s Global Advisory Council of People of Bharatn Origin suspended”, The Economic Times, 9 January 2015.

Bharat has retained the top position in total remittances since 2012, and the large size of the diaspora is mainly a reason for this high volume of remittances.

The Migration and Development Brief, released by the World Bank in 2012, estimated that the flow of remittances into developing countries for 2012 was around \$406 billion. The diaspora is digitally connected with the rest of the

world, and being active on social media networks has made it possible for the administration to engage with them. Major Bhartiya cities have already benefitted from diaspora remittances and foreign investment, especially in the information technology (IT) sector and IT-enabled services (ITES) sector (Maini, Tridivesh and Ramaswamy, Sridhar, 2014).

The second is investment in infrastructure and social sector by the Bhartiya diaspora. In 1990, Bharat adopted the LPG policy and opened the economy for external investments in various sectors. Among all kinds of investors, the Bhartiya diaspora would be very crucial. Hence, leadership appealed to them to invest in both short- and long-term infrastructural projects in the emerging Bhartiya economy. Asian Development Bank said, “Diaspora’s investment could be a strong potential source of financing for Bharat and other Asian countries’ infrastructure. Asian developing countries need massive infrastructure investment of about \$1.2 trillion to \$2.1 trillion; their limited budgets wouldn’t allow it” (Vats, Sukriti (2023).

Several provisions have been implemented to promote capital investments from Bhartiya Diaspora, including special incentives for bank deposits, share market investments, and special requirements for OCIs and NRIs for FDI. The FDI's single window clearance route is the Foreign Investment Facilitation Portal (FIFP)⁴. The National Single Window System (NSWS). It is undoubtedly removing red-tapism from bureaucracy and motivating investment. However, the National Infrastructure Investment Fund (NIIF)⁵. It is a collaborative investment platform for international and Bhartiya investors with a mandate to invest equity capital in domestic infrastructure. “Diaspora bonds” are a tool to facilitate a more significant inflow of funds in the infrastructure sector. The government has lifted the three-year lock-in period on investments made by NRIs in infrastructure debt funds. The Bharat Investment Grid (IIG) has apan-Bharat database of projects available for investors. The National Single Window System (NSWS) is a digital platform to guide you in identifying and applying for approvals according to your business requirements. The Know Your Approval (KYA) module includes guidance for 32 Central Departments and 32 States. Link: <https://www.nsws.gov.in/>.

To see more information, link:

<https://www.ifswf.org/members/national-infrastructure-investment-fund>.

Traditional investment vehicles like fixed deposits are still popular among NRIs. However, interest rates hovering below 5% diminish the allure and have hardly changed bank interest rate savings. The Public Provident Fund is also a safe option for investing money in a retirement fund. However, as of February 2020, the annual rate of returns is between 9-12%.

The fund investment has tax exemption under Section 80c.

In 2015, PM Modi and President Obama announced a new public-private partnership forum called the ‘Bhartiya

³ The body was formed in 2009 to tap the experience and knowledge of eminent people of Bharatn origin in diverse fields from across the world and was announced by then PM Manmohan Singh. In the first council included economist Jagdish Bhagwati, peace activist Ela Gandhi, Nobel laureate Amartya Sen and PepsiCo CEO Indra Nooyi. PM Modi suspended this body in 2015. See: Duttgupta, Ishani (2015), “PM’s Global Advisory Council of People of Bharatn Origin suspended”, *The Economic Times*, 9 January 2015.

⁴ The National Single Window System (NSWS) is a digital platform to guide you in identifying and applying for approvals according to your business requirements. The Know Your Approval (KYA) module includes guidance for 32 Central Departments and 32 States. Link: <https://www.nsws.gov.in/>.

⁵ To see more information, link: <https://www.ifswf.org/members/national-infrastructure-investment-fund>.

Diaspora Investment Initiative', aimed at assisting Bhartiya - Americans in investing in Bharat (Rama, Lakshmi, 2015). At the U.S. - Bharat Business Summit in New Delhi, promoted a new partnership among the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), Calvert Foundation and several private financial institutions in Bharat to develop a Bhartiya Diaspora Investment Initiative. President Barak Obama said, "A new public-private partnership to help millions of proud Bhartiya - Americans directly to invest in Bharat's future. The initiative will allow folks back home to generate a new stream of financing for Bhartiya businesses that are investing in non-traditional, and too often overlooked, markets-from providing healthcare to rural communities, to improving water and sanitation, to opening up those new bank accounts" (USAID, 2015).

The core work of USAID is to connect members of the Bhartiya-American diaspora to the development of their country of heritage through investment. Through this investment, Bhartiya Americans can support financing for businesses that tackle poverty across Bharat, working in critical sectors like education, financial inclusion, agriculture, healthcare, water and sanitation, renewable energy, and energy efficiency.

In the tech industry, Vinod Khosla, co-founder of Sun Microsystems, a computer maker, explains that it took much work for Bhartiya entrepreneurs to raise money in 1980s America. "You were people with a funny accent and a hard-to-pronounce name, and you had to pass a higher bar", he says. In the post-1990s, Adobe, Alphabet, Google, IBM, and Microsoft are all led by people of Bhartiya descent.

The 'might' of the Bhartiya diaspora is increasingly on display at the pinnacle of business and the apex of government. Devesh Kapur and Aditi Mahesh at Johns Hopkins University totted up the number of people with Bhartiya roots in top jobs, including those born in Bharat and those whose forebears were. There are currently 25 Bhartiya-descended chief executives identified in S&P 500 companies, which is an increase from 11 ten years ago (Somvanshi, Kiran, 2022). Given the many Bhartiya-origin executives in other senior positions at these companies, that figure will almost certainly rise further.

The NRI not only gives back to the country through investments and remittances. They are equally involved in supporting the causes close to their hearts by supporting many non-governmental agencies and government-sponsored schemes. This support comes in many forms - charities, trusts, donations, and direct action. For example, the Dakshana Foundation, established by Mohnish Pabrai, is focused on alleviating poverty by investing in education for meritorious students from the financially weaker sections. He called upon Bhartiya living abroad to urge families in their adopted countries to visit Bharat every year to boost tourism, and he asked the organizer of the Madison Square Garden even to donate \$30,000 to Bhartiya villages (Beniwal, Hemant, 2022).

The Bhartiya-American US are sending home more money than those in the Gulf countries. But, they are less likely to return home and even start businesses in Bharat because Bhartiya is getting the coveted Green Card in the US, and they are more likely to become citizens there. The NRIs in the US are prosperous, but they still need to be super-rich. They do not have surplus capital to pump into Bharat like

Mata's Mark Zuckerberg or Amazon's Jeff Bezos. The Bhartiya in Gulf countries will come back at some point because there is no possibility of becoming citizens in those countries.

Conclusion

There has been a tremendous transformation in Bharat's foreign policy about diaspora concerns, especially in PM Modi's regime. PM Modi activated all modes of diplomacy to connect the diaspora with their homeland and contribute to cultural, economic, and political development. Of course, that kind of energetic diplomacy was missing before him. However, in the post-independence period, PM Nehru, due to specific political reasons, ignored the diaspora from the foreign policy frame of reference by calling them the 'Guest Community'. Only after the Emergency of 1976 did the then-leadership start considering diaspora within foreign policymaking. The 1990s LPG policy compelled the government to identify the economic importance of the diaspora for the development of Bharat. Then, in 1994, a special department was established to look after diaspora issues and policy-level engagement with the Bhartiya diaspora community around the globe was initiated. However, it found no significant changes in the bureaucratic routine, and they are functioning as they did earlier. Sometimes, bureaucracy seemed to follow the 'Nehruvian policy attitude of Active dissociation'; however, as PM Modi came to power, he was concerned with ensuring the administrative and policy changes to connect the diaspora with the homeland. He knows the utility of the diaspora's knowledge and capital for Bharat's political, cultural and economic development. PM Modi usually says, "World's keenness to engage with Bharat has risen. Our diaspora can play a vital role in furthering Bharat's engagement with the world". So, under the governance mantra of "Sabka Saath, Sabka Vikaas" -take everyone along and work for everyone's welfare, PM Modi has infused enthusiasm within the diaspora to invest capital, expertise and knowledge for Bharat's growth. PM Modi's 'Diaspora Diplomacy' continues, and the Bhartiya diaspora will function as a 'global bridge' that connects the world with Bharat for economic development.

References

1. Beniwal H. Everyone should know the unmatched NRIs contribution to the Bhartiya economy. WiseNRI. 2022 Nov 15. Available from: <https://www.wisenri.com/nris-contribution-to-the-bhartiya-economy/>.
2. Brubaker R. The Diaspora's Diaspora. *Ethnic Racial Stud.* 2005;28(1):1-19.
3. Cave D. Modi and Bharat's diaspora: a complex love affair making global waves. *The New York Times.* 2023 Jul 19.
4. Chaudhary P, Ganguli I, Gaule P. Top talent, elite colleges, and migration: evidence from the Bhartiya Institute of Technology. Cambridge: NBER Working Paper Series; 2023.
5. Mock D. Bharat in World War 2. *World War 2 Facts.* 2021. Available from: <https://worldwar2fact.org/Bharat-in-World-War-2>.
6. Desai N. Bharat and its diaspora. *Bhartiya Foreign Affairs J.* 2006;1(4):94.
7. Dole A. *Diaspora diplomacy, emotions, and disruption: a conceptual and analytical framework.* Los Angeles: CPD; 2024.

8. Duttagupta I. PM's Global Advisory Council of People of Bhartiya Origin suspended. *The Economic Times*. 2015 Jan 9.
9. Global Footprint of Bhartiya Diaspora: The World's Largest Diaspora. Available from: [link not provided].
10. Grossman J. Towards a definition of diaspora. *Ethics Radic Stud*. 2018;42(8):1263.
11. International Organization of Migration. *World Migration Report 2022*. United Nations; 2022.
12. Kennedy A. Nehru's foreign policy: realism and idealism conjoined. In: Malone D, et al., editors. *The Oxford Handbook of Indian Foreign Policy*. Oxford: Oxford University Press; 2015. p. 92-103.
13. Kenny K. *Diaspora: A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford: Oxford University Press; 2013.
14. London School of Economics. Lord Meghnad Desai: arguing about the world. 2012 Sep 10. Available from: [link not provided].
15. Ministry of External Affairs. In a significant initiative, the Government of Bharat had set up a High-Level Committee on the Bhartiya Diaspora in September 2000 under the Chairmanship of Dr. L.M. Singhvi, MP, Government of Bharat. 2002 Jan 8.
16. Mishra A. Diaspora development and the Bhartiya state. *The Commonwealth Journal of International Affairs*. 2016 Nov 28.
17. Nye J Jr. Soft power. *Foreign Policy*. 1990;(80):153-71.
18. Overseas Bhartiya Facilitation Centre. *The Overseas Bhartiya & Bharat weaving a new global fabric*. Ministry of Overseas Bhartiya Affairs, Government of Bharat; 2020. Available from: <https://mea.gov.in/images/pdf/WeavinganewfabricfinalReport.pdf>.
19. Pande A. Conceptualizing Bhartiya diaspora: diversities within a common identity. *Econ Polit Wkly*. 2013;48(49):59.
20. Rana K. Bharat's diaspora diplomacy. *Hague J Diplom*. 2009;4:361.
21. Somvanshi K. Companies with Bhartiya-origin CEOs make up a chunk of S&P 500's market cap. *The Economic Times*. 2022 Sep 12.
22. *The Economic Times*. Bharat considers the introduction of 'diaspora bonds' to attract investment from NRI. New Delhi; 2013 Jul 2.
23. *The Economic Times*. How NRI money bolsters Bharat's economy. 2023 Apr 7.
24. *The Economist*. Bharat's diaspora is bigger and more influential than any in history. New Delhi; 2023 Jun 12.
25. *The Hindu*. Bharat is for your 'interest and expectations' PM Modi tells overseas Bharatns. New Delhi; 2023 Jan 9.
26. *The New Bhartiya Express*. Biggest in South Asia, new US consulate has 54 windows for consular services. Telangana; 2023 Apr 20.
27. *The New Indian Express*. Indian diaspora has distinguished itself across the world: PM Modi in the US. New Delhi; 2021 Sep 23.
28. *Times of Bharat*. Government to merge overseas Bhartiya affairs ministry with MEA. New Delhi; 2016 Jan 8.
29. USAID. New initiative announced to enable diaspora investment in Bharat's development. 2015 Jan 26. Available from: <https://2012-2017.usaid.gov/news-information/press-releases/jan-26-2015-new-initiative-announced-enable-diaspora-investment-Bharats>.
30. Varma M. How PM uses diaspora diplomacy to push the rising Bharat story. *News 18*. 2023 May 25.
31. Vats S. How diaspora can help fund Bharat's infrastructure needs - 'patriotic discount on bonds, remittances'. *The Print*. 2023 Feb 4.