

## **The significance of Overseas Indians in Indian Politics**

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### **Introduction:**

The Overseas Indians, dispersed across the globe, has played a crucial part in shaping not only the economies of their adopted countries but also influencing the political milieu of India. This essay explores the multifaceted contributions of the Indians living abroad to Indian politics, examining the ways in which this global community has impacted policies, diplomacy, and electoral dynamics which has helped India in its diplomatic and economic ties with the adopted country and also the local politicians in India.

### **Historical Context:**

The Indians living abroad have a rich lineage, which can be traced back to the two centuries when natives migrated to various parts of the British Empire for economic opportunities. Over time, this diaspora has grown and diversified, with significant population in countries like the United States of America, Canada, United Kingdom, Fiji, Mauritius, South Africa, South American countries, many European states, South East Asian countries and the Gulf nations. The historical ties between the diaspora and India have created a bridge that facilitates the exchange of ideas, investments, and political influence.

### **Economic Contributions and Political Influence:**

The primary channels through which the Overseas Indians engages with Indian politics is economic and scientific contributions. Remittances from overseas Indians serve as a crucial source of foreign exchange, contributing to India's economic development. For example, In 1991 when India was facing problems regarding its forex and balance of international payment in which India's foreign exchange reserves had fallen and the country couldn't repay its external debts, the financial remittances received from the Gulf countries saved India from economic crisis. Beyond financial support, members of the diaspora have actively participated in shaping economic, science and technology policies, leveraging their expertise in diverse sectors to influence decision-making processes from time to time.

### **Political Lobbying and Advocacy:**

The Indian diaspora has become a formidable force in political lobbying and advocacy on a global scale. Through various organizations and networks, diaspora members have worked to promote India's interests, advocate for policy changes, and address issues affecting the community. In countries like the United States, Indian-American groups have successfully engaged with policymakers, influencing decisions related to trade, immigration, and strategic partnerships between India and their host nation.

The Indian Diaspora in many countries abroad have actively lobbied for the India's cause and also have been successful in getting their voices heard in the local political establishments through the local legislatures and parliamentarians in its favor. Asian Indians in the United States have lobbied many times with the policy makers (the Congressmen and Senators) against the sale of highly sophisticated weapons to Pakistan and they also worked hard in favor of the Government of India when sanctions were put against India after the Pokhran Nuclear Tests in May 1998. The overseas Indians have been lobbying in favor of India on various policy matters in their host countries whenever the need arose from time to time specially in the European countries.

### **Electoral Impact:**

The influence of the Overseas Indians is not limited to economic and policy realms; it extends to Indian elections. Persons of Indian Origin (PIOs) don't have the right to vote in Indian elections but Indian Political parties actively court the NRIs and diaspora during election campaigns, recognizing the potential impact of their support. Some NRIs have also entered Indian politics directly, either by contesting elections or by contributing to political discourse through media, advocacy and at times taking responsibilities in the government (Sam Pitroda, Raghuram Rajan, Arvind Panagariya etc.).

The NRIs and Overseas Indians have been very active in the local and state elections. The major size of their participation is seen in the states of Punjab, Kerala, Gujarat, Karnataka, etc. The Overseas Indians and NRIs influence the voters through their money power. Some of the states have large numbers of NRIs and diaspora which fund the election campaigns of various candidates in their areas whether its local or the state level.

### **Cultural Diplomacy:**

The Overseas Indians serve as societal ambassadors, promoting India's rich heritage and fostering cultural exchanges with the motherland and the host country in which they work and reside. Festivals, art exhibitions, textiles and academic collaborations organized by the diaspora contribute to a positive image of India globally. This cultural diplomacy not only enhances the soft power of India but also establishes a shared identity that transcends geographical boundaries.

India has a rich cultural heritage and people from all the states of India have migrated globally. They carry with them their cultural traditions and are able to showcase in the country they are residing. The Overseas Indians have been assimilated well in the customs and traditions of the host country. India being a multi-cultural and multi-religious society has helped the Overseas Indians to respect the cultural and religious practices of the adopted country. The Overseas Indians have been celebrating the various Indian festivals in the countries they are residing. They are the real cultural ambassadors of India to the countries they are residing, thus helping India to improve its ties with the foreign countries.

## Challenges and Critiques:

While the contributions of the Indian diaspora to Indian politics are significant, challenges and critiques exist. Some argue that certain diaspora members may not fully understand the nuances of India's socio-political landscape, leading to well-intentioned but potentially misguided interventions. Additionally, concerns have been raised about the potential influence of foreign powers on Indian politics through diaspora channels, highlighting the need for careful scrutiny and regulation. The role of India diaspora in the Indian politics has been carefully examined and the government needs to tread carefully while scrutinizing their participation in the local and state elections as they influence the outcomes of the elections at various levels through their money power.

The Indian diaspora, dispersed across the globe, has retained a deep connection with the political developments in their homeland. However, this engagement is not without challenges, and the diaspora's response to Indian politics often sparks both admiration and critique.

### Challenges:

#### 1. Distance and Disconnection:

**Geographical Barriers:** The physical distance between the diaspora and India poses a significant challenge. Many members of the diaspora are generations removed from their roots, leading to a potential disconnection from the intricacies of Indian politics.

#### 2. Diverse Perspectives:

**Divergent Political Opinions:** The Indian diaspora is diverse, with individuals holding a spectrum of political views. This diversity often leads to varying opinions on Indian political developments, making it challenging to form a cohesive diaspora response.

#### 3. Limited Influence on Domestic Policies:

**Impact on Domestic Policies:** Despite their emotional and financial contributions, the diaspora's influence on domestic policies in India is limited. Political decisions are primarily shaped by residents within the country, and the diaspora's input might not align with the immediate needs and concerns of the population on the ground.

#### 4. Cultural and Contextual Divide:

Understanding cultural nuances, the diaspora may struggle to fully grasp the nuanced cultural and contextual factors influencing Indian politics. This lack of nuanced understanding may result in misinterpretations and incomplete perspectives on complex issues.

#### 5. Engagement Challenges:

**Barriers to Active Participation-** Limited avenues for active participation in Indian political processes can pose a challenge. Voting from abroad is not universally allowed, restricting the direct involvement of the diaspora in shaping electoral outcomes.

## 6. Selective Engagement:

- Focused on Home Regions: Critics argue that the diaspora's engagement tends to be region specific, with individuals often focusing on the political issues of their home states or regions. This selective engagement can limit proper understanding of the diverse political landscape in India.

### Future Prospects:-

As the Overseas Indians continues to increase in numbers and evolve, its role in Indian politics is likely to expand. Advances in technology have facilitated easier communication and collaboration, enabling the diaspora to engage more actively with political developments in India. Increased political representation, a deeper understanding of local issues, and a continued commitment to the welfare of India are essential for ensuring a positive and constructive role for the diaspora in the years to come. Most of the Overseas Indians have been supportive of the democratic system in India but some infringe groups amongst the diaspora has been formed which have been working to destabilize the democratic process and also to divide the country. India, therefore, has to be careful in dealing with such kinds of diasporas and also the country in which these groups operate from. They can cause a threat to the Indian democratic system and unity of the country as well in the future.

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