

# *Inherent Indian Vision of Political Thinking: Prospective Global Supplant*

*Organized by*

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## **Role of Indian Diaspora in Indian Political Thinking**

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As a community activist for the last 43 years in the USA, I like to touch upon the Role of Indian Diaspora in Indian Political Thinking. A brief description of the Indian Diaspora, going back to 150 years, the colonialists took indentured laborers to Mauritius, South Africa, Fiji, Caribbean countries such as Trinidad, Guyana, Suriname and a few other British Colonies. They preserved their culture and identity even after 150 years. Early 1900s saw sporadic migration of students, workers and farmers going to countries such UK, Canada and the USA. The 1960s and 70s saw large migration of students and professionals to Industrialized West and large-scale contract laborers to The Middle East. Finally, in the last two decades, large scale migration of IT professionals, engineers and scientists to all over the world.

The Diaspora Indians now reach over 30 million and is still growing. India has a unique advantage of having over 400 million people who are very well verse in English. In fact, India is the largest English speaking country in the world. As the youngest nation, there is no other country in the world other than India which can provide English speaking young professionals to the Western world where they could support the older age population.

The early Indian immigrants went through unimagined hardships, racial violence, bigotry, and discrimination, whether it was in South Africa or in U.K., USA or Canada. At times, they were beaten up and robbed off their belongings. It also created leadership in the Diaspora Indian community, as

Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi became a Mahatma who after returning to India from South Africa influenced the political thinking of the then leadership and launched non-violent struggle called Satyagraha to achieve India's freedom from the British.

In the early 1900, before World War I, small number of Indian students were arriving to the US for higher studies. Of course, it took as much as one month to arrive in America. Higher education in the American universities was a powerful magnet for young people. However, upon graduation, they were not able to get jobs commensurate with their qualifications. They attributed American employers' discriminatory practices to their being nationals of a subjugated country.

Indian emigrants also started coming to the United States in the beginning of the twentieth century. Most of them were unskilled workers and found work in lumber mills or as farm hands. The employers preferred Indian workers as they worked hard and accepted lower wages. White laborers fearing displacement from their jobs, demanded exclusionary laws against the cheap Indian workers. The festering hostility and pent-up frustrations of American workers manifested in violence against the Indian immigrants at several places. Americans pressured their elected officials to pass exclusionary and other laws against the Asians. As a result, in 1917, Asian emigration to the United States was stopped.

In 1913, an India Independence Movement, known as Gadar Movement was started in US to free India from the yokes of British rule. Under the leadership of Lala Hardyal, Sohan Singh Bhakna, Kartar Singh Sarabha, Maulvi Barkatullah and Krishan Varma, the movement motivated several thousand Diaspora Indians to leave their businesses and jobs and went to India to free their motherland from the British. They drew plans to infiltrate the Indian army and excite the soldiers to fight against the British Empire and free India from the shackles of British imperialism. With funding from the German government, several ships were chartered to carry arms and ammunition to India. About 6000 Diaspora Indians hurried homeward to liberate their motherland. Unfortunately, the traitors of the movement leaked out the secret plan to the British spies. The ships carrying arms and ammunition never reached India. Many Gadarites and revolutionaries were taken captive upon reaching India. Many were arrested, 48 were given death sentence, 69 life imprisonment, and several were given varying terms of imprisonment in India and the USA.

The Gadarites had a flame of liberty lit in their hearts, and made sacrifices for the cause of freedom and liberty of their motherland. Although the movement did not achieve its stated objective, but it awakened the sleeping India and had a major impact on India's struggle for freedom. The heroism,

courage and sacrifices of the Gadarites inspired many freedom fighters who eventually saw India freed in 1947 from the British imperialism. The Diaspora Indians played important role to influence the political thinkers of that time.

Now move forward to the 1960s and 1970s, when large scale migration of Indian students, engineers and medical professionals migrated to the US. They were able to settle in the new country in short time. Then comes the Emergency Rule implemented by Mrs. Indira Gandhi in 1974 curtailing the freedom of expression and jailing a large number of opposition leaders. Outside India, the loudest noise came from the US Indians. In fact, passports of many Indian citizens were revoked by Govt. of India. Diaspora Indians, especially from the US also played its part for lifting of the Emergency by Mrs. Gandhi.

Move forward to the early 1990s, when Govt. of India was almost bankrupt, Diaspora Indians came forward to save India from the economic disaster. Moving forward to the mid-1990s, when Prime Minister Narasimha Rao and the then Finance Minister Dr. Manmohan Singh moved forward with liberalization and the Diaspora community had played a role in emphasizing the need for liberalization.

Move forward to early 2000s, when Vajpayee administration wanted to attract the resources of Diaspora Indians for investment and business development. What GOPIO did in 1989 bringing Diaspora Indians at the First Convention of People of Indian Origin, after 14 years, the government organized the first Pravasi Bharatiya Divas in January 2003. That was a great initiative by Govt. of India to reach out the Diaspora Indians and the Diaspora community reciprocated. It was a great platform for Indian lawmakers and political leaders to hear pravasi Indians on how they could be involved in India's development.

In the last fifteen years, administrations of Dr. Manmohan Singh and Shri Narendra Modi continued to reach out Diaspora Indians. The large-scale meetings of Diaspora Indians addressed by Shri Modi is an indication how Diaspora Indians are welcoming new initiatives. Currently Diaspora Indian economic experts are also serving the Modi administration developing govt. policies.

Looking at selective areas,

## **Philanthropy**

Overseas Indians, particularly in the US, have become philanthropic contributors to support many university programs and established chairs for Indian studies. I personally had the opportunity to co-

chair an effort to set up the first chair at my Alma mater, Columbia University, i.e. Jagdish Bhagwati Chair for Indian Political Economy. My own commitment in the early 1990s was that if we establish the first chair, a dozen chairs will follow. The chair was officially inaugurated in 2004 and is now held by NITI Ayog Vice Chair Prof, Arvind Panagariya. Now we have over two dozen India related chairs and program in the US universities. Successful Indian Diaspora entrepreneurs have also set up centers of excellence in many IITs and other institutions in India. This is one area where the Diaspora experience can be shared to motivate with their Indian counterparts setting up such programs in all major universities. This is where the Diaspora Indians can influence in political thinking to develop policies providing tax benefits to those who will participate to establish such ventures.

## **Technology**

Seventy years back, at the time of India's Independence, India had to import even the needles and thread and safety pins from UK. Thanks to the initiative of Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru in setting up IITs, NITs and other institutions. However, many of us graduated from these institutions could not find jobs at that time and had to move to the West, particularly to the USA and Canada for higher education. After the IT revolution of the 1990s, even larger number of engineers and technologists have moved to the West. In these countries, even our next generations have done extremely well topeing all science and technology contests. Now, we have come to a stage where Indians in America is the largest ethnic group to have access to all kinds of technologies, IT and emerging cutting edge technologies. This is where the Indian political thinking could be influenced to embrace Indian Diaspora's leadership role in engineering and technology for India to leapfrog into next generation technologies. India could access these technologies for the larger good of the society whether building up new generation industries or areas such as power generation, clean water and some of PM's initiatives such as Digital India, Clean India and Smart Cities.

## **Basic Education**

Many Diaspora Indians have set up schools and colleges in their villages and home towns. The Diaspora also supports many nationwide projects such as Akshay Patra, Pratham, Asha for Education and Ekal Vidyalaya to improve basic education. This is another area where the Diaspora can influence the political thinking to improve the quality of basic education through public/private initiatives. The same applies to technical education where a majority share of engineering graduates are unemployable at present.

## **Clean Politics**

Although in democratic systems, corrupt politicians are all over the world, in comparative terms, elected politicians in the west are much more accountable to their constituencies. They join politics as a public service. Their income would have been much higher have they worked in corporate world and other professions. Diaspora Indians are also entering political arena in the Western countries and achieving elective positions. That may be an area where Diaspora Indians can influence Indian political system to bring in clean politics.

## **A Final Word**

Diaspora Indians have achieved success in all spheres of life. The thirty million strong can and will influence the inherent vision of political thinking to develop policies for the larger good of the society in India. Diaspora Indians have reached to the top-level positions in Mauritius, Guyana, Trinidad and Tobago, Fiji and Singapore. Now a new breed of Diaspora Indians has reached to the top-level positions in Portugal (Prime Minister António Costa) and Ireland (Dr. Leo Varadkar) and a possible run for US President by Senator Kamala Harris as a Democratic candidate. Although some people dreamt of Akhand Bharat, with Diaspora Indians spread all over the world, we are emerging as Viswa Bharat and Global Bharat. The Indian political thinkers have a lot more work to do to realize this new reality and to do the needful to maximize India's benefits and enlarge its influence in the world.