

India's Policy towards its Diaspora: Continuity and Change

*Aparajita Gangopadhyay**

This paper presents aspects of continuity and change in India's policy towards its diaspora. It particularly focuses on the initiatives undertaken by the government such as the celebration of Pravasi Bharatiya Diwas and the creation of a separate Ministry for Overseas Indians in the light of the recommendations of the L.M. Singhvi Report. The primary objective is to understand the implications of these initiatives vis-a-vis noticeable 'shifts' in the foreign policy matrix of the Indian state.

As is well-known, the policy adopted by Jawaharlal Nehru, after independence in 1947, considered the overseas Indians as an external entity outside the purview of Indian domestic and foreign policy formulations. Nehru categorically advised his overseas brethren to integrate themselves within their host countries. This policy of impassiveness towards the expatriate Indians continued till the 1980s. Thereafter, a slow but steady transformation seems to have been set in motion so far as policy towards Indian diaspora is concerned. The submission of the L.M. Singhvi Committee Report on People

* Lecturer, Centre for Latin American Studies, Goa University, Goa.

of Indian Origin (PIOs) and Non-Resident Indians (NRIs) (on 8 January 2002) may be looked at as the most important embodiment of this change in outlook and approach. Even though the Report was submitted during the NDA rule, there is as yet no evidence to suggest that the present United Progressive Alliance (UPA) government has any reservations on this count. The celebration of the Fourth Pravasi Bharatiya Diwas, held in Hyderabad on 7-9 January 2006, testifies to certain continuity in policy terms.

Antecedents of the Indian Diaspora

The Indian diaspora is one of the largest diasporas in the world, with its presence in all continents. In many of the countries the people of Indian origin form one of the largest ethnic groups, like in Fiji, Mauritius, Suriname, Trinidad and Tobago, Guyana and Nepal. The immigration of these people to overseas was in two distinct phases: a) Overseas emigration in the nineteenth and the early part of twentieth century or emigration during the colonial period; b) Twentieth century migration to the industrially developed countries or emigration in post-colonial period. The first phase of this emigration in the nineteenth and the, twentieth century witnessed the unprecedented emigration of indentured and other labourers, traders and professionals and employees to the British, French and the Dutch colonies in Asia, Africa and Latin America. In the colonial period, broadly three distinct patterns of Indian emigration were identifiable: 1) "indentured" labour emigration¹, (2) *Kangani* and *maistry* labour emigration,² and (3) "passage" or "free" emigration³. The colonial government officially sponsored the indentured labour emigration, named after the contract 3 signed by the individual labourer to work on plantations. It began in 1834 and ended in 1920. The indentured labour

was essentially taken to British Guiana, Fiji, Trinidad and Tobago, Jamaica, and to the French colonies of Guadelupe and Martinique, and the Dutch colony of Suriname. The second type of emigration was essentially to Ceylon, Malaya and Burma. Thirdly, those who paid their areas passage moved to South and East Africa. In contrast, during the second phase of migration, mainly professionals moved to the industrialised nations of the West as part of what is referred to as 'brain drain'.

The colonial management was to be the 'protector' of these immigrants and would take care of their welfare. It was only in the early part of the twentieth century that some voices within the freedom movement in India criticised the fate of the indentured labour to the British and other European colonies. For example, the Indian freedom movement recognised the demands of the Indians living in British East Africa for equality within the races, political representation, rural landownership and urban residence.⁴ Many Indian leaders cited the unscrupulous ways of labour recruitment - by fraud and by force - and the treatment meted to them, both during the long journeys and in plantations, and called it as "a system of slavery in disguise".⁵ Despite the voices raised by freedom fighters in India against the indenture system, the practice was carried out unabated till 1 January 1920.

Though the colonial government enacted a few legislative directives for the protection and well being of the indentured labour in plantation barracks, they themselves violated these directives more often than not. Subsequently, on the request of the colonial government of India, the secretary of state for colonies had appointed a number of commissions of inquiry in order to seek justice against discrimination and exploitation of Indian labour. But, neither the commissions

nor the reports contributed in any concrete manner in lessening their appalling conditions. Moreover, some such reports brought out the horrifying existing conditions, and thus were not made public for fear of shame; one such example is the report submitted by the West Indies Royal Commission in 1940. The only policy that the government followed was to export sufficient low paid work force to run the plantations. Other such instances of the British neglect of the Indian labour were evident also in the early part of the century. For example the Wragg Commission reported in 1887 that the Indian traders had the right to go to any part of the British Empire, since by trading in the remote parts they would provide the white population with useful services.

The British encouraged the indentured labour to settle down in their island (especially in Fiji, Mauritius, Trinidad and Tobago) colonies following the ban on indenture system to serve essentially the interest of British plantations. Moreover, the British position was that the Indians were simply citizens of whatever colony they lived in. When later India applied to appoint agents in the West Indies and Fiji to help monitor the grievances of the diaspora, the colonial office refused on grounds that the Indians were permanent residents 'enjoying harmonious relations with the other sections of the local populations'. For instance, in 1923 L.B. Shastri appealed against the colour bar in colonies but the British did not pay heed to this appeal. The 38th Indian National Congress Annual Session in December 1923 declared that unless India became independent, the grievances of the Indian diaspora could not be properly remedied.⁶ As a result, with the independence of most of these former colonies, a legacy of hatred between the descendants of emancipated African slaves and the Indian indentured labour emerged. With the

independence of India, the newly independent state had to come to terms with its former colonial master and the Indians living mostly in the former British Commonwealth.

Diaspora at a Distance: The Nehru-Gandhi Years

India was in a dilemma when it came to the expatriate Indians living abroad after 1947. India's foreign policy formulator Jawaharlal Nehru felt that India's foreign policy dictated independence from all foreign involvement, with its focus on non-alignment and good relations with the developed as well as the developing nations (especially the newly emerging Asian and African countries), and excluded a specific policy towards the overseas Indian community. Nehru had "made the expatriate Asians alien in a legal sense" and their status did not allow for any special relationship between them and the Indian state. According to Marie Lall, this policy had several drawbacks. India did not get involved when part of the Indian diaspora was going through political, economic and social discrimination or even a severe crisis. India feared spoiling its relations with the newly decolonised world and did not even take up the issue of violation of human rights there. Moreover, despite the continued informal ties, which remained between the members of the diaspora and their families in the place of origin, they were not encouraged to take part in the economic development of India.⁷ According to Bhiku Parekh, on the other hand, although overseas Indians took considerable interest in India they did not develop a tradition of discourse on it comparable to those of the Jewish, English, Irish and other diasporas about their respective homelands. The perceptions of the overseas Indians who went in colonial times about their homeland was largely nostalgic, sentimental, patchy and without a focus.⁸

While the diasporic discourse on India was acquiring a clear and coherent character, the same cannot be said about the Indian discourse on diaspora. India took little interest in overseas Indians. The past protestations of the plight of the indentured labourers and their terms of employment were soon forgotten. After independence, successive Indian governments adopted an attitude of studied indifference to the overseas Indians lest they should appear to be interfering in the internal affairs of another country. They were anxious not to appear as their protector, or to encourage their return back to India, nor to expose them to the suspicion of divided loyalty. In 1948, several Trinidadian Indians threatened to commit mass suicide unless their government agreed to facilitate their return to India. In spite of Nehru's appeal, they came but most of them returned back. In 1947, hundreds of Indians in Jamaica organised 'back to India' demonstrations, but nothing came out of it.⁹

This policy adopted under Nehru continued till the Rajiv Gandhi years. The government of India pushed for the expatriates to integrate with the society of their host country. This was partly out of concern for independent India's new diplomatic overtures towards the newly decolonising world. According to Lall, "The highly moralistic policy shifted India from its nationalist movement which had included the diaspora to a nation state project which was to exclude them".¹⁰ Moreover, it was a strong belief in India that the expatriate Indians had become part of the controlling category in many of these former colonies, and in order to maintain their privileged position through their control of the country's economy had adopted the discriminatory policies like their colonial masters towards the public. In Africa, it was observed that while the British imperial system had kept the different racial groups separate, the Indians

too had shown no inclination to integrate with the African masses and support them in their struggle for independence.

Nehru was clear in enunciating his foreign policy goals that plainly stated that the Indians who had left their country of origin to seek employment abroad had to integrate with the local population, support their struggles for freedom, and even put 'their cause first'.

It is the consistent policy of the Government that persons of Indian origin who have taken foreign nationality should identify themselves with and integrate in the mainstream of social and political life of the country of their domicile. The government remains naturally alive to their interests and general welfare and encourages cultural contacts with them. As far as Indian citizens residing abroad are concerned, they are the responsibility of the Government of India...¹¹

He pointed to their economic success in these countries where they were guests, and stated that it was their turn to support their movements of political struggles. In the Lok Sabha he stated: "Now these Indians abroad, what are they? Indian citizens? Are they going to be citizens of India or not? If they are not, then our interest in them becomes cultural and humanitarian, not political... Either they get the franchise as nationals of the other country, or treat them as Indians minus the franchise and ask for the most favoured treatment given to an alien".¹² The government of India for almost four decades followed the Nehruvian policy. Indians abroad were advised to accept local citizenship and cease to separate their future from those of the local people. Therefore, Sunil Khilnani in his book *The Idea of India* writes: "...Nehru believed that an Indian identity could emerge only within the territorial and institutional frame of a state".¹³

According to Anirudh Gupta, "The Nehru policy was based on the unrealistic hope that within the broad pattern of African-Asian nationalism the separate identity of Indian immigrants would be forgotten".¹⁴ Another obstacle was that the issue of the expatriates was no longer an imperial issue, but a matter that could cause diplomatic problems between two sovereign states if India championed the cause of its emigres too vociferously. Moreover, India needed the support of these countries to fight against a larger imperialist policy worldwide.

Therefore, independence hardly brought any anticipated relief to the plight of overseas Indians in the British and French colonies as a consequence of the distinct Nehruvian policies of respecting national sovereignties, cultivating amicable international relations, non-interference into the affairs of other nations and the pursuit of non-alignment. According to Bhiku Parekh, "The Indian lack of interest in overseas Indians had also its roots in its patronising attitude to them. For the politically minded Indians, including Nehru and the socialists, overseas Indians were either poor or illiterate and this was a liability, or they were rich men who exploited the local population and thereby an embarrassment".¹⁵ Many Indians also felt that overseas Indians had developed a habit of clinging on to India, as a result neither did they integrate with the natives nor evolved an autonomous life of their own.

It was only in the case of the South Africa that economic and political sanctions were taken up to further the cause of the Indian community. Till the 1970s there existed a separate department concerned with the overseas Indian affairs located within the Ministry of External Affairs, but most of its work remained classified. According to Srikant Dutt, "It seems to be impossible to get any exact information on this

particular department, it was most probably linked to the movement to stop the brain drain, which was being noticed at that time".¹⁶ For example, Indira Gandhi was particularly interested in reclaiming Indian scientists to help in Indian development. On the other hand, she made herself unpopular during the East African crisis of 1968-72 when she endorsed the Nehruvian policy of non-interference and stressed on India's relations with the African nations first over her concern for the treatment meted out to the Indians there.

Another reason for the pursuit of this policy was the issue of citizenship. Although the Constitution of India under Article 8 provided citizenship for the children of those whose parent or grandparent was born in India, the issue of dual citizenship was never raised because of the question of loyalty. But those who wished to return could get back their citizenship, but there were a number of associated complications. Therefore, Nehru referred in his Republic Day addresses in 1960-62 of the 'mother country' and the position of the overseas Indians as ambassadors to the host countries. Thus, as slowly India became supportive of the decolonisation in Asia and Africa, it left the diaspora to fend for itself. According to Lall, "What the government of India did not want was split loyalties among those living in one country, holding the passport of the second and investing in a third, all out of reasons of security or convenience".¹⁷ Moreover, between 1947 and 1955 the Indian Citizenship Act explicitly abolished dual nationality under the Constitution, the matter of dual nationality still remained somewhat vague. Tinker contends that despite India not approving of dual nationality, some East African Indians who were intensely proud of India's newly independent status obtained an Indian passport without surrendering existing citizenship rights.¹⁸ The Indian

Citizenship Act was redrafted in 1955 that cleared all ambiguities. The Act now made no difference between the Commonwealth states and other states and the Act was universally applicable to all.

The expatriate Indians became aliens like any other foreigners and the Government of India (GOI) restricted their rights in buying/owning property and investing in their country of origin. With the Janata government's advent to power in 1977, some significant changes in the policy were being considered. Some such changes that were envisaged included rectification in the laws that would permit Indians living overseas to their 'motherland', even if they were foreign nationals. The government also organised a seminar and declared that the Indian Council of Cultural Relations would be involved with the Indian diaspora. They reiterated that the Indian foreign policy would try and attain the right balance between pursuing its diplomatic goals and the issues concerning the overseas Indians.

The first time that any special department or agency was mentioned was in 1986, when a special approval committee was constituted within the department of industrial development for the expeditious clearance of the industrial proposals of NRIs (Non-Resident Indians). Then in 1987, an Indo-NRI Chamber of Commerce and Culture was set up to promote the overseas Indians' cases. In fact, even the Department of Overseas Indians that had been set up in 1941 had been transferred to that of Commonwealth Relations in 1944.¹⁹ So the government of India in reality did not have a central machinery to deal with the expatriates till the mid 1980s. The changes were evident especially in the areas of buying properties between aliens and the NRIs. The latter were allowed to purchase properties in specified areas, with strict rules and regulations extended to all such NRIs. These

measure were the result of an early phase of liberalisation in the 1980s. This the GOI hoped would fuel back some investments into the country, yet the procedures reeked of 'red-tapism' that kept the NRIs out.

Bhiku Parekh points out to the change in attitudes of the Indian government towards the expatriates overseas mainly due to two reasons. Firstly, stereotypes were broken as more Indians came in contact with the overseas expatriates. This also led to a sense of "pride in their struggles and achievements, a desire to reciprocate their affection, and a sense of guilt for having neglected them for so long".²⁰ Secondly, India's self interest also played a vital role. India's foreign exchange situation was worsening from the 1970s and the Indians who had moved out after the independence into the developed countries were successful and prosperous. India looked to benefit not only by their "remittances but also by their technological, scientific, managerial and other skills".²¹ Overseas Indians now became extremely important and were given the status of NRIs that 'reduced their diasporic existence to a matter of mere residence'.

In addition, there had been a change in composition and class of those moving overseas from the colonial period to the period of post-independence. The latter emigration was taking place essentially to the West and to the Gulf countries. From those living in the Gulf the remittances were high, and those moving out as part of the 'brain drain' kept informal ties with their mother country. The Gulf labourers remained different from the migrants to the West. Throughout the period of the 1970s to 1990s the Indian members of parliament raised questions about the welfare of those Indians living in the Gulf. Indian government also subsequently signed a number of treaties with various Gulf governments on issues such as deportations, labour laws, as

well as a change in its own Emigration Act in 1983. The Gulf War also witnessed the work of the Special Coordination Unit and the Overseas Indians Division in evacuation of the Indians working in there.²² Alongside this, the brain drain to the developed nations continued.

The term NRI first appears in the parliamentary debates in 1984, but did not replace the other headings in the indexes of 'Indians abroad' or the 'People of Indian Origin' or even the 'expatriate Indians'. There is moreover, no clear delimitation to who was a NRI and who was not till 1991, when the definition was linked to citizenship. The Nehruvian policy continued till the early 1990s with two changes: the foreign policy priorities changed from a global, ideological to a regional and more realistic one (from Nehru to Rajiv Gandhi) and then a change in foreign economic policy from a closed economy to a relatively open one (Rajiv Gandhi to PV Narasimha Rao).²³ But by 1991 the end of Cold War had brought significant transformations globally, and India had to face new political, economic and security challenges. By this time India was aware of the many 'other Indians' in the world, and within India there began a debate about the expatriate Indians living in these countries. Additionally, by 1991 India's economic conditions were very poor. Its foreign exchange reserves had reached an all time low. India's import bills on oil had risen sharply as a consequence of the Gulf War.

Revisiting Diaspora in the Era of Liberalisation

The Narasimha Rao government embarked on New Economic Policy that called for immediate and extensive reforms. The economy was for the first time opened up to outside investors who could acquire a majority share holding in the Indian companies. A plan to dismantle the public sector

loss making units was also decided upon. Subsequently, the tariffs were slashed and the rupee was made convertible on the trade account. Thereafter, the rupee was also devalued. The Minister of State of the Finance Ministry R. Thakur stated that: "...the resulting improvement in our balance of payments will restore the confidence of the NRIs in the Indian economy and encourage the inflow of foreign exchange from the NRI sources".²⁴

There were a number of special concessions for the NRIs to invest in the Indian industries, set up new industrial ventures or deposit their foreign currency in the Indian banks. Some important incentives were: NRI investment in real estate development; 100 per cent investment in 34 high priority industries; maximum limit of portfolio investment increased from 5 per cent to 24 per cent; investment in India Development Bonds; approval of investment and technical collaboration on automatic basis; establishment of a Chief Commissioner for NRIs; exemption of FERA to NRIs on various issues etc. Despite these relaxations there remained the blockades associated with the repatriation of the profits, alongside the overwhelming bureaucratic hurdles. The pre-1991 economic crisis had also seen the opposition parties also speaking up for the cause of the NRIs and portraying them as the 'saviours of their mother country'. But the Congress government in power clearly stated that they did not feel that the NRIs would simply move their money into the country out of sheer patriotism. The government also strongly felt that the investments were required in form of joint ventures instead of deposits in the banks that could leave the country without a moment's notice. The strong feeling that persisted among large sections within the government was that the money lend by the NRIs would be a debt that could lead India to default on payments later.

Therefore, the subsequent failures of the government to speed up the reforms made the rhetoric of attracting the NRIs seem empty. The policy implementation was slower than the political declarations of the government. Many parties opposed this liberalisation and criticised the government on the grounds that these reforms did not reach the masses. The breakaway from the Nehruvian tradition did not happen quickly enough. The government continued to drag its feet and the loss making PSUs continued to function. M.C. Lall accords three main reasons for the disinterest of the NRIs in the Indian economy, reasons that were both institutional and historical. She states that India's colonial past had made her mistrust any investment that came from abroad. The 'ideological legacies' made her move towards development and planning associated with the public sector. The bureaucracy that had ruled the country since 1947, was based on the 'license raj or the permit raj'. The 1991 reforms changed little of the bureaucracy as heavy regulation remained in place and the public sector continued to exist. Finally, the strong opposition that was offered by the local industrialists who were not in favour of removing the 'protection' that they had enjoyed over the years, and face challenges from the outside competitors that would snatch away the long monopolies. Therefore, there were a number of political enunciations minus a real political will.²⁵

Simultaneously, the NRIs also placed their demands for a bail out plan of the Indian economy. They wanted the reforms to go all the way to protect their investments and use them efficiently. The question of dual nationality also arose. The NRIs felt that granting Indian citizenship would make investing in India easier, as under the present rules they could not stay in India for more than 180 days. Confusion prevailed within various circles of the government

and the press as contradictory statements were made by a large number of government officials. For example, Eduardo Faleiro, the Minister of State for External affairs declared in 1991 that the government was considering dual citizenship, whereas some others stated that it was not possible. This uncertainty ended when the Minister of State for Parliamentary Affairs and Home Affairs, M.M. Jacob stated: "The concept of dual citizenship is not consistent with the Constitution of India and Citizenship Act, 1955... citizenship was not clearly defined before the passage of the Independence of India Act".²⁶ In fact, the government was of the view that such a step would be hazardous to national security as Pakistani citizens could in effect claim Indian citizenship.²⁷ Moreover, the idea of representation in the Lok Sabha was voted out as the parliamentarians felt that the NRIs would take over their constituencies and buy the votes with their money. Besides, some sections also highlighted the lack of 'morals' of the NRIs and their bad effect in the country. Lall, quotes N. H. Khan, who highlights the NRIs disinclinations due to: "Once here, they come up against business partners who fleece them of their money, land deals that often turn out to be fraudulent, arrogant bureaucrats, corrupt officials and red tape. Multinational Companies have a system of PR agencies to deal with these kinds of blocks. But for the individual NRI, the signal reads: You are not welcome".²⁸

Therefore, mistrust continued between the government and the NRIs. It was felt that the government of India had shown disregard towards the expatriates, and its inability create the right economic environment was the cause of the estrangement between India and her diaspora. In the past, only on two occasions had the Indian government asked the expatriates to contribute - towards the defence efforts in the disputes with Pakistan and China.

All this made it clear that now India was targeting towards its expatriates who had left in the post-Independence period mostly to the developed countries of the West for any economic pull-off. The NRI therefore became synonymous with that Indian who had moved towards the West to improve his economic status, and not those who left the country as indentured labour, petty traders or those who paid for their passage especially under the colonial rule. The latter group was no longer the focus of interest as far as the economic priorities were concerned. According to Bhiku Parekh, the attention towards the older diaspora was largely cultural, patchy and patronising whereas the present concern is largely economic and political. Here, the preoccupation is mainly with the immigrants to the West with a view to attract their capital and skills and to mobilise their political influence. It is the latter, much pampered group, which enjoys disproportionate public attention in India.²⁹ Similarly, Mahim Gosine says that India's perception of east Indians who lived in the societies of diaspora is negative.³⁰ Accordingly Lall states that the NRIs being a 'hidden asset' in terms of economic potential did not strike the Indian government till the 1990s. Even after liberalisation and the public realisation that the diaspora could lift India out of the economic problems that she was facing, there was little the government was prepared to do to establish a relationship in order to cash in on the asset.³¹ She calls the relations between India and the NRIs a case of 'mutual abandonment'.

The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and the 'New' Diaspora Policy

The advent of the BJP-led NDA government brought about a radical shift in the policy of the government of India. They quickened the pace of the reforms and speeded up the move

towards integration with the process of globalisation. It recognised that the technology transfers and the augmentation of the foreign exchange reserves were part of its New Industrial Policy. The NDA government took the entire process of liberalisation ahead that had been stated by its predecessor, the Congress. Almost all remaining restrictions on trade and other economic sectors were removed, and India became part of the World Trading Organisation (WTO). The NRIs were in greater focus, as they were encouraged even more than before to invest in India, with general relaxations across the board for them. A special proposal for NRIs was announced with the launching of the People of Indian Origin Card Scheme on 31 March 1999. The PIO card allowed for some special economic, educational, financial and cultural benefits besides acting as a long-term visa for the cost of \$ 1000 for the duration of 20 years.³² This shift was clearly evident by 1999, when the Chennai Declaration of the BJP included:

We believe that the vast community of NRIs and PIOs also constitute a part of the Great Indian Family. We should endeavour to continually strengthen their social, cultural, economic and emotional ties with their mother country. They are the rich reservoir of intellectual, managerial and entrepreneurial resources. The Government should devise innovative schemes to facilitate the investment of these resources for India's all-around development".³³

One can discern three major shifts in India's policy orientation towards its diaspora since independence. Firstly, at independence where India's priorities changed from anti-colonial nationalist movement that had included all Indians around the world, to a nation state understanding which

limited itself to internal integration. The Nehruvian encouragement of asking the Indian diaspora to integrate itself with the host country remained the dominant policy till the 1980s. The second policy shift happened when the ideological foreign policy of the Nehru years gave way to a more realistic regionally oriented policy of Indira Gandhi that could have improved government-NRI relations. But, the new approach appeared to be clear only in the second half of the 1980s under Rajiv Gandhi who handled the Fiji crisis. This was also the first time that the potential NRI was discussed and the banking system for the expatriates in the Gulf was facilitated. The third policy shift was evident in the liberalization period where despite the present suspicion among the Indian elites and government, they tried to encourage the NRIs to bring India out of its economic problems.³⁴ Therefore, whilst the ideals changed over time, the exclusion of the diaspora remained constant. The turn about has been visible with the BJP government coming to power. The mild alterations that were evident in the first forty years, the subsequent but slow changes have given way to an 'aggressive' policy towards the people of Indian origin. Although, the PIO card was announced, still in 1999 and 2000 budgets the NRIs was hardly mentioned at all.

In September 2000, the government constituted a High Level Committee on Indian Diaspora under L.M. Singhvi to look into the matters concerning the NRIs and the People of Indian Origin. The government of India Committee on the Indian Diaspora was created to recommend a broad and flexible policy framework after reviewing the status, needs and role of persons of Indian origin (PIOs) and non-resident Indians (NRIs). The Committee was headed by L M Singhvi, MP (BJP) and former High Commissioner to Britain, with the rank of a cabinet minister, and submitted its report by 7 December

2001 to the external affairs minister. The Committee looked at the role of PIOs and NRIs in India, the rights and facilities extended to them, and also examined the conditions of their existence including their rights discrimination in the countries of their residence.³⁵

Singhvi Committee Report and Its Implications

Atal Behari Vajpayee released the Singhvi Committee Report on 8 January 2002. The Report is in five parts.³⁶ Among some of the highlights of this report is the granting of the dual citizenship to foreign citizens of Indian descent settled in certain countries, within the rubric of the Citizenship Act. The committee also recommended that a 'single window' organization should be opened for interacting with them. "It emphasizes the requirement for developing a clearly defined policy and suitably calibrated country-specific plans for enhancing connectivities".³⁷ Apart from general recommendations, the other issues that are covered include: improvement of airports, regulatory requirements of the government, welfare of Indian women married to NRIs/PIOs, problems of overseas Indian labour. There are sector wise recommendations too under the headings of Culture, Economic Development, Tourism, Education, Health, Media etc.

During the Pratham Pravasi Bharatiya Diwas, the former Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee stated. "We are in favour of dual citizenship but not dual loyalty. The loyalty with India will remain but they will also be loyal to the country where they have taken citizenship but it has been resolved now. I am hopeful that Indians settled abroad will find it suitable".³⁸ The dual citizenship will be applicable to people of Indian origins living in 7 countries—US, UK, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, a large part of Europe and

Singapore. Dr. Singhvi stated that dual citizenship recommended was within the framework of the Citizenship Act and would not require any amendment to the Constitution.³⁹ The issue of dual citizenship has emerged as the most controversial in the report.

Commenting on the idea of dual citizenship Jayati Ghosh wrote in the *Frontline* that: "The government's apparent intentions on the issue of dual citizenship make it clear that certain elite Non-Resident Indians are to be treated differently from ordinary Indian citizens, both at home and abroad".⁴⁰ Therefore, the dual citizenship was to provide the advantage in two areas, for those NRIs who are part of the PIOs are given special incentives for investment in India. These benefits will be, firstly, ownership of various forms of property within the country and participation in the electoral processes, both through voting and contesting in the elections. The BJP has enormous support both political and financial from the Indians living in these regions mentioned above (mostly the industrialized countries). Moreover, those who have migrated to these countries belong to the professional classes and would like to remain part of the decision making process. The inherent bias is visible as all PIOs are not eligible for the dual citizenship. For example, such privileges will not be granted to those who are the descendents of the indentured labour in the Caribbean or in Fiji or those who are in Africa, whose ancestors went as petty traders.

The aim of wooing the Indian diaspora in the western countries could be seen as part of that dramatic shift in India's policy since 1997. If one can stretch this argument that by providing the diasporic Indians these inducements they hope to inculcate and develop within the Indian diaspora a strong pro-India lobby in these countries that could help India back

home. These countries could then look at India more favourably for investments as well as be more positive towards India's foreign policy posturing (like creation of a strong India caucus). The Indians living there are rich and have substantial financial clout. Singhvi stressed the need for rethinking in India of its diaspora because of current changes in society and economy that had tremendous implications for the Indian diaspora. He stated that Indians operated in a web of relationships and the networked economy held tremendous possibilities for the prosperity of the Indian diaspora (like China).⁴¹ Subsequently, during the Dwitiya Pravasi Bharatiya Diwas, Bhartiya Samman Awards were conferred on ten eminent NRIs/PIOs. Here, Mr. Vajpayee welcomed by saying that: "We invite you not only to share our vision in the new millennium but also to help us shape its contours. We do not want your investment we also want your ideas. We do not want your riches we want the richness of your experience". The Tritiya Bharatiya Pravasi Diwas concluded with a call by the President A.P.J. Abdul Kalam to the Non-Resident Indians to fund the establishment of an Overseas Indian Research Foundation (OISF) to support research in challenging areas including earthquake prediction, and involve themselves in extending urban amenities to rural areas of the country with the establishment of "PURAs (Providing Urban Amenities in Rural Areas)" since the nation faced huge challenges in this area. Here, the Prime Minister Manmohan Singh announced that his government would extend dual citizenship to all overseas Indians who had migrated out of the country after 26 January 1950, and assured of the continuance of economic reforms at a greater speed to unleash India's latent potential.

The most controversial issue that emerges is the oft-made declaration by various governments that by granting dual

citizenship the nation's security will be endangered seem to have been lost. Moreover, the Citizenship Act of India also does not permit granting of dual citizenship. The issue of loyalty to one country, which had been the crux of matter in the past, seems also to have become irrelevant. In that context, the PM's statement as well as that of L.M. Singhvi create certain confusions and contradictions—will the dual citizenship need an amendment to the Citizenship Act of 1955 or not? It is also clear that the expectation about bailing India out by the NRIs does not seem to hold water, as their responses continue to remain lukewarm at the best. The NRIs continue to have strong familial and kinship relations with India but are not interested in investing in the mother country.

Conclusion

The aforementioned shifts in India's policy towards its diaspora are inextricably linked with the pro-active foreign policy that India has been following for the last couple of years. The policy certainly has doses of pragmatism as it is trying to economically and politically harness the Indian network and resources that till now only existed in the cultural domain through extended and putative familial relations and the nostalgic search for 'roots'. Also, one has to factor in the changing socio-economic profile of the Indian diaspora along with their newly acquired financial strength. In the public imagination as well, the NRIs are considered to be the repository of the much-needed private foreign capital. For government and the people alike, the NRI support has come to stand for the great engine of national development. Arguably, the increasing visibility and respectability of the diasporic Indians coincide with the ushering in of the economic liberalisation programme. It

would be interesting to examine the linkages and connections between the economic compulsions of liberalisation and the attendant openness and receptivity to diaspora.

On another plane, the changing profile of the diaspora itself is an outcome of the policies pursued in the domestic domain that occasioned a great outflow of skilled professionals to the foreign shores beginning with the 1970s. These domestic policies themselves have been refracted through the changing social character of the ruling elites in India. For the descendants of the Nehruvian elites the nation-state is no longer the ultimate container of their globalising aspirations and dreams. In other words, the current policy orientations towards Indian diaspora are as much about politics as about economics.

Seen thus, it would be fair to accord due credit to the Rao government of 1991 for releasing initial requisite impulses for the subsequent shifts in policy rhetoric surrounding the issue of dual citizenship to the NRIs. His government definitely made the beginnings that transcended Nehruvian traditions and rhetoric in the arena of foreign policy. The NDA government only moved further in that direction while extending its scope. Nonetheless, the thorny issue of dual citizenship needs to be thrashed out and resolved before the government starts expecting any tangible benefits either in political or in economic terms. As of now, the pronouncements by the government, namely, the award to the outstanding NRIs, the commemoration of 9 January as the NRIs day, contain more of symbolic than real value. No wonder, the NRIs contributions so far in actual economic terms or in any form of material inputs have been nominal notwithstanding excessive praises showered on them. Needless to add, the actualisation of the Singhvi report and the attendant policy implications call for a serious debate

and has the potential to open up the proverbial Pandora's Box on the issue of national security and development.

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Endnotes

1. An earlier version of this paper was presented at the National Seminar on "Indians in the Caribbean and the Recent Developments in the Region" in Goa. I would like to thank Dr. Rahul Tripathi and Dr. Manish K. Thakur for their useful comments.
2. Indian labour emigration under the indenture system first

started in 1834 to Mauritius, Uganda and Nigeria. Later the labourers emigrated to Guyana (1838), New Zealand (1840), Hong Kong (1841), Trinidad and Tobago (1845), Malay (1845), Martinique and Guadeloupe (1854). Grenada, St Lucia and St. Vincent (1856), Natal (1860), St. Kitts (1861), Japan and Surinam (1872), Jamaica (1873), Fiji (1879), Burma (1885), Canada (1904) and Thailand (1910). Under the indenture system some 1.5 million persons migrated (Clarke 1990).

3. The Kangani (derived from Tamil kankani, meaning foreman or overseer) system prevailed in the recruitment of labour for emigration to Ceylon and Malaya. A variant of this system, called the maistry (derived from Tamil maistry, meaning supervisor) system was practised in the recruitment of labour for emigration to Burma. Under these systems the kangani or maistry (himself an Indian immigrant) recruited families of Tamil labourers from villages in the erstwhile Madras Presidency. Under these systems the labourers were legally free, as they were not bound by any contract or fixed period of service. These systems, which began in the first and third quarter of the nineteenth century, were abolished in 1938. Quoted from N. Jayaram, "The Study of Indian Diaspora: A Multidisciplinary Agenda", *Occasional Paper No. 1* (Centre for Diaspora Studies, Hyderabad), 1998.
4. There was a steady trickle of emigration of members of trading communities from Gujarat and Punjab to South Africa and East Africa (Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda), and those from South India to South East Asia. Most labourers immigrated to East Africa to work on the railroad construction. These emigrants were not officially sponsored: they themselves paid their "passage" and they were "free" in the sense that they were not bound by any contract.
5. Y. Ghai and D. Ghai, eds., *Portrait of a Minority - Asians in East Africa* (Nairobi: OUP, 1970), pp.8-9.
6. Hugh Tinker, *A New System of Slavery: The Export of Indian Labour Overseas, 1830-1920* (London: Hansib Publishing Limited, 1993) quoted from Jayaram, n.3.

7. M.C. Lall, *India's Missed Opportunity—India's Relationship with Non-Resident Indians* (Aldershot, Hampshire: Ashgate Publishing Ltd., 2001), pp.27-28, 84.
8. *Ibid.* p.76.
9. Bhiku Parekh, "The Indian Diaspora", in Jagat K. Motwani, Mahin Cosine and Jyoti Barot Motwani, eds., *The Global Indian Diaspora: Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow* (New York: Global Organization of People of Indian Origin, 1993), pp.8-9.
10. *Ibid.*, pp. 9-10
11. Lall, n.7, p. 77
12. *Ministry of External Affairs Annual Report (MEA)* (New Delhi), 1991-92.
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15. Anirudh Gupta quoted in P. Bhatia, *Indian Ordeal in Africa* (New Delhi: Teen Murti Library, 1972), pp. 121-122.
16. Parekh, n.9, p. 10.
17. Quoted from Srikant Kumar Dutt, *India's Relations with Developing Countries: A Study of the Political Economy of Indian Investment, Aid, Overseas Banking & Insurance* (London: London School of Economics, 1981), pp.93 (Ph.D Thesis).
18. Lall, n.7, p.99.
19. Quoted from H.Tinker, *The Banyan Tree: Overseas Emigrants from India, Pakistan and Bangladesh* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), quoted from *Ibid.*, p. 100.
20. Quoted from U. Mahajani, "India and the People of Indian Origin Abroad", in M.S. Rajan, ed., *India's Foreign Relations During the Nehru Era* (Bombay: Asia Publishing House, 1976), p.22, 290.
21. Parekh, n.9, p.10.

22. Ibid., p. 10.
23. *MEA Annual Report 1990-1991*, p.82.
24. Lall, n.7, pp.2-4.
25. *Lok Sabha Debates* (Parliament House, New Delhi), Q.271, 2 August. 1991.
26. Lall, n.7, pp. 163-165.
27. Quoted from N.H. Khan, "Home Sweet Home", 26 April 1998 (internet) in Lall, n.6, p. 168.
28. Quoted from "Dual Citizenship for NRIs Likely Soon", *The Telegraph*, 10 March 1992, and "Rao Opposes Dual Citizenship for NRIs", *Statesman*, 18 May 1994.
29. Lall, n.7, p. 168.
30. Parekh, n.9, p. 10.
31. Mahin Gosine, "The Forgotten Children of India: A Global Perspective", in Jagat K. Motwani, Mahin Gosine and Jyoti Barot-Motwani, eds., *The Global Indian Diaspora: Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow* (New York: Global Organization of People of Indian Origin, 1993), p. 19.
32. Lall, n.7, p. 4.
33. The main clauses of the PIO card are:
 - a. No registration with the FRRO (Foreign Regional Registration Office) if the stay does not exceed 180 days.
 - b. For acquisition, holding, transfer and disposal of immovable properties PIO cardholders would be given parity with the NRI nationals.
 - c. Children of the PIO cardholders will be treated at par with the children of NRI nationals with respect to admission to education institutions in India.
 - d. They would be eligible for NRI nationals housing schemes. Lall, a 7, p. 197.
34. "Chennai Declaration", *BJP News Report*, 28-29 December 1999.

35. Ibid, pp.4-5.
36. The committee included Sri R L Bhatia, Congress MP and former Minister of State for External Affairs, J R Hiremath, former Diplomat and Baleshwar Agrawal, Secretary-General of the Antar Rashtriya Sahyog Parishad. An additional secretary in the Ministry of External Affairs was the member-secretary. The terms of reference of the Committee were:
- a. To review the status of PIOs and NRIs in the context of the Constitutional Provisions
 - b. Laws and rules applicable to them, both in India and the countries of their residence
 - c. Study the characteristics, aspirations, attitudes, requirements, strengths and weaknesses of the Indian diaspora and its expectations from India.
 - d. Study the role PIOs and NRIs may play in the economic, social and technological development of India
 - e. Examine the current regime governing the travel and stay of PIOs and investments by PIOs in India. The committee will recommend measures to resolve the problems faced by NRIs, and evolve a broad but flexible policy framework and country-specific plans for forging a mutually beneficial relationship and for facilitating their interaction and participation in India's economic development.
37. **Part I** contains the Letter of Transmission of the Report to Government by the committee Chairman; the Orders of the Ministry of External Affairs setting up the Committee describing its terms of reference; the Foreword; the Executive Summary and the Acknowledgements.
- Part II** is a detailed examination of the genesis and particular circumstances of the Indian Diaspora in selected countries and regions. This section concludes with a global perspective of other Diasporas and the nature and extent of their interaction with their countries of origin.

Part III contained the three Interim Reports that were submitted by the Committee to Government some months ago and which have been graciously accepted by our Prime Minister today. These are: the fee reduction in the PIO Card Scheme, celebration of Pravasi Bharatiya Divas on January 9 each year and the institution of 10 Pravasi Bharatiya Samman Awards.

Part IV of the Report includes detailed examination and recommendations on major Diaspora issues in the fields of Consular and related matters, Culture, Economic Development, Investment, International Trade, Industry, Tourism, Education, Health, Media, Science & Technology and Philanthropy. This part of the Report also deals with dual citizenship and the creation of a single window dedicated organisation to interact with the Diaspora.

Part V of the Report contains the detailed Conclusions and Recommendations of the Committee on the entire gamut of the expectations, needs and requirements of our agenda for the Indian Diaspora.

38. See <http://meadevjic,iti/news/offical/20020108official.hun>
39. *Hindu* (Bangalore). 9 January 2002.
40. Under the 1955 Indian Citizenship Act. anyone who had 'voluntarily acquired the citizenship of another country... (to) cease to be a citizen of India'.
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