



Indian Diaspora as Strategic Asset in Canada

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Abstract

The purpose of this article is to address the question of the Indian diaspora's strategic significance in Canada. It also strives to solve issues and concentrates on possibilities in this area of study. The development and exchange of ideas and commercial networks is the Indian diaspora's primary function in Canada. Long-term gains for the two nations' cooperation will result from such actions. The study will also look at how the governments of India and Canada, as well as the Indian diaspora living in Canada, must cooperate to strengthen ties between their two nations. It also highlights the steps the Indian government took to interact with the Indian diaspora in Canada and work toward bridging the divide. In order to maximize the benefits offered by the Indian diaspora that unites the host and home nations, it will attempt to concentrate on the future course of diaspora participation and the function of policies, institutions, and cooperative efforts of both. The study explores the relationship between diaspora and development and comes to the conclusion that it should be promoted for the mutual benefit of both nations.

Keywords: Diaspora, India-Canada, Strategic Assets, Development.

Introduction

The Indian diaspora in Canada is crucial to advancing Indian interests in host nations on an economic, cultural, political, and strategic level as well as fostering relationships. The Indian diaspora serves as a link between Canada and India. Strong people-to-people ties, democracy, pluralism, and shared historical traditions are the foundation of Canada and India's positive relationship. The Indian diaspora is essential to strengthening international relations. Since they



are acknowledged as strategic assets in the field of foreign policy, the diaspora has grown to be a formidable force. Additionally, it promotes economic growth of both the home and host nations.

The evolution of the Indian Diaspora Communities is the outcome of several migrant waves that occurred over hundreds of years for a variety of causes, including postcolonial work programs and indentured labor under colonization. The symbiotic worldwide networks of families, friends, and enterprises have boosted people's transnational participation in the aftermath of globalization by facilitating the flow of ideas about common cultural, social, and economic interests.

Defining ‘Diaspora’ and ‘Strategic Asset’

The Greek word “dispersion” is where the word “diaspora” originates. The word has changed throughout time to currently include anybody who shares a shared origin or culture with a certain nation but who, for a variety of reasons, resides outside of that nation. According to the Indian Government, the term “Indian Diaspora” refers to a population of Indian nationals residing overseas, whether permanently or temporarily, or who can trace their ancestry back to India (Kapur 2003). The modern Indian diaspora consists of ‘Overseas Citizens of India’ (OCI), ‘Persons of Indian Origin’ (PIO), and ‘Non Resident Indians’ (NRI). Overseas Citizens of India (OCI) and Persons of Indian Origin (PIO) were combined into a single category in 2015. Modern Diasporas are “ethnic minority groups of migrant origin receding and acting in host countries but maintaining a strong sentimental and national links with their countries of origin - their Homeland” (Sheffer 1986: 3).

Emigration in pursuit of commerce or employment to support colonial ambitions may result in a diaspora. A labor diaspora, an imperial diaspora, or a trade diaspora may result from these events. Indian soldiers were given the option to serve and occasionally remain in various regions of the British empire by the British colonial authority. While traveling to the Punjab in 1897, the Sikh soldiers stopped in British Columbia during Queen Victoria’s jubilee. The



message that farm laborers might find employment on the railroads and in the timber mills was disseminated by these Sikh soldiers. Consequently, around 5,000 Sikh immigrants landed in Canada between 1904 and 1907, marking the emergence of the Indian diaspora in Canada (Cohen 2008).

Between 1908 and 1947, the continuous travel laws limited the immigration of Indians to Canada. In 1947, both these limitations and the prohibition on voting were repealed. Following it, the Canadian government drafted a number of immigration laws that increased the number of Indian immigrants living in Canada. Indian immigrants to Canada were initially unskilled, but after 1998, family reunion and skilled laborers made up the majority of Indian immigrants (Lal 2008).

We define strategic assets as any tangible or intangible asset that has substantial value inside a state or country. Due to their persuasive power, strategic assets are crucial for the nation's growth. The countries of origin that take a strategic approach and prioritize their overseas diaspora communities have the prospects to contribute to growth and development through their assets, resources, and experience. These factors are significant in confirming the notion that diasporas are strategic assets that are essential to advancing the interests of their homelands (Nathan 2014).

Indian Diaspora as Strategic asset in Canada

In the age of globalization, where everything is interrelated and dependent upon one another, diaspora contributes significantly to the growth of both the host nation and the home nation. The World Migration Report 2020 states that, with a global diaspora of almost 17.5 million people, India is the largest country of origin for international migrants. Since the late 1990s, Statistics Canada estimates that about 30,000 Indians have immigrated to Canada annually. In Canada now, there are about 1.3 million Indians.



Punjabi people make up half of the Indian community in Canada. Bengalis, Sindhis, Tamils, Gujaratis, and Keralites are among the other Indian ethnic groups. Because of this ethnic and cultural diversity, Indo-Canadians speak various languages. Punjabi is the most commonly spoken language. Indo-Canadians are a symbol of linguistic, religious, and cultural diversity. Different ethnic and religious backgrounds lead to different cultural behaviors among groups. The demographic and religious characteristics of Indo-Canadians demonstrate the influence of immigration laws on the development of diaspora communities. According to Canada's 2020 Annual Report to Parliament on Immigration, the majority of permanent residents in Canada in 2019 were Indian immigrants.

The Indian diaspora of today is more prosperous and skilled than in the past, and it is essential to India's progress. The diaspora today serves as a strategic asset due to its contributions in the form of investments, charity, knowledge transfer, advocacy on behalf of India, and international promotion of Indian culture. Remittances that migrants send home to their family, are one way that the diaspora has contributed significantly to the nation of origin. Based on World Bank data, Canada sent \$2.8 billion in remittances to India in 2017, out of the \$5.8 billion in total remittances sent from Canada nationwide. The three primary uses of these remittances by friends and family members are: a) maintenance and renovation of the home and family; b) consumption; and c) productive activities such as medical and educational costs (Sorenson, Nicholas, and Engberg 2002). Remittances, according to the World Bank, can boost entrepreneurship, improve investment in health and education, and lessen recipient family poverty (Ozden and Schiff 2005).

In addition to supporting small companies and entrepreneurs back home, the Indian diaspora also provides Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) to further the economic growth of their home country. The Indian High Commissioner to Canada, Ajay Bisaria, stated that despite the ongoing epidemic, commerce has increased by 24% during COVID-19, and that in the previous six years, investment from Canada to India has increased from US \$5 billion to US \$60 billion. Currently operating in India are more than 2,000 Canadian businesses, including numerous



software firms, McCain French fries, and Bombardier Transportation. The Punjabi Indian Diaspora in Canada has concentrated its efforts on their native state of India. An important factor in Punjab's growth is the Indo-Canadian population. An integrated village model, education and health initiatives, and university-to-university linkage in local areas-including initiatives with Punjab University-are a few significant projects.

A significant contribution made by the diaspora is the transfer of knowledge obtained to the place of origin. International skilled migration influences human capital through four channels: prospect, absence, diaspora, and return (Kapur and McHale 2005). These diaspora are significant conduits for the dissemination of technological expertise and information through "brain gain" and "brain circulation" (Brinkerhoff 2008, 7). A significant contribution that diaspora members provide to their home countries is their optimism about the future, which leads to creativity and entrepreneurship.

The Indian diaspora has also contributed to their native country by engaging in various charitable endeavors. "In the 20th century, diaspora philanthropy has expanded rapidly, organizing itself beyond the framework of providing funds for natural disaster relief to one of the most significant financial and social resources to developing countries" (Dunn 2004, 12). They aim to have an impact on the corporate world, the media, and the government. They discuss a range of topics that impact their situation, including citizenship, immigration, human rights, and involvement in politics in their home nation. A significant portion of all charitable donations is represented by diaspora philanthropy (Johnson 2007).

India and Canada now have more official working groups, agreements, memoranda of understanding, and dialogues than ever before, which has strengthened their political and cultural ties. Through Ministerial Dialogues on trade and investment, energy, finance, and foreign policy, Canada and India maintain strategic cooperation at the ministerial level. The Indo-Canada Chamber of Commerce (I-CCC), the Canada India Foundation (CIF), the Canada



India Business Council (CIBC), and various regional chambers and associations are some of the well-known Indo-Canadian organizations.

Regular working groups on counterterrorism, energy, security, trade, agriculture, education, research, and technology are held at the government level. The relationship between IITs and Canadian universities is expanding. The ‘Shastri Indo-Canadian Institute’ (SICI) is intimately associated with a large number of persons. The training of several distinguished pediatricians from India at the Toronto Sick Children's Hospital, who will return to practice in India, is one of the health care projects that Indo-Canadians have undertaken.

The inherent involvement of the diaspora in international affairs causes a confluence of a nation’s foreign policy and diaspora policy. The Indian government has taken the following actions to interact with its diaspora overseas:

- The Confederation of Indian Industry (CII) and the Ministry of Overseas Indian Affairs (MOIA), which was founded in 2004, have collaborated on public-private initiatives pertaining to diaspora matters.
- Since 2003, the Indian Diaspora has been invited to a yearly conference called Pravasi Bharatiya Divas, which brings together political and corporate leaders from India.
- Every year, notable Indians living abroad are bestowed with the Samman Awards in recognition of their noteworthy contributions to the global advancement of India and Indian ideals.
- Founded in 2007, the Overseas Indian Facilitation Centre specializes in real estate, business, taxation, and asset management.
- An organization called the India Development Foundation (2008) was established with the goal of helping Indians living abroad make contributions to India's social sectors, which include health, education, and rural development.
- Students and young professionals can participate in the Know India Program (KIP).



Opportunities and challenges

The Indian diaspora is more than just a strategic resource that India may use as needed. They also carry obligations with them. The Indian diaspora anticipates that India will help them when they are in need. Strong diasporas are not necessarily advantageous for the nation of origin. Negative propaganda and foreign support for separatist movements such as the Khalistan movement are issues for India. Some Sikhs living abroad in Canada are funding and supporting this campaign, which raises security concerns for India. As it continues to interact with the Indian diaspora in Canada, the Indian government will need to exercise caution over these delicate matters.

The Indian diaspora overseas demands justice in their new nation, not in their place of birth. The bilateral ties between the country of origin and the country of host are negatively impacted by this. The environment and policies of the diaspora's home country have a significant impact on its consequences (Kapur 2003). For instance, a sizable portion of the Indian diaspora residing in Canada, the United Kingdom, Australia, and other host nations lend their support to the farmers' protest in India.

Regarding the connection between development and diaspora, there are several noteworthy perspectives. The balanced growth approach is the first strategy. It indicates that the diaspora improves the development of their home nation and lessens income gaps across countries by lowering unemployment, offering financial help through remittances and the development of migrating skills. The methodical approach is the second strategy. This method disputes the idea that migration brought about by talent transfer inevitably advances national development. According to this, migration causes brain drain and exacerbates wealth inequality and inequities, which in turn alters the development process. As a result, the contextual definition of diaspora should not be limited to positive or negative perceptions. Remittances, for instance, that diaspora members send home to their native country can be significant for the economy, but the movement that led to the diaspora's creation demonstrates a lack of progress in their



home nation and may have unfavorable effects (Rajan 1999). The socioeconomic climate of their home country and, to some degree, the host nation determine how relevant these two strategies are. Development and the diaspora are therefore mutually reinforcing.

Many diaspora organizations are currently actively engaged in networking other diaspora organizations for development. Diaspora, however, are frequently divided and do not cooperate for a similar goal. The work of the Indian diaspora is not very successful because of a lack of knowledge of their potential and abilities. In comparison to white European immigrants, visible minorities and recent arrivals identify less as Canadians and have lower levels of trust for their fellow citizens, according to a survey from the Institute for Research on Public Policy in Montreal.

Additionally, it says that immigrants from visible minorities assimilate more slowly than immigrants from Europe. Additionally, it is evident that the diaspora's tendency to operate independently has hindered the diaspora's ability to improve ties between India and Canada. The key areas of the Indian diaspora are not well understood, nor is the broad viewpoint of civil societies and governments in the two nations about the issue of the Indian diaspora in Canada clearly understood. Therefore, knowledge is needed to influence governments and civil society's public policies. It is necessary to encourage reflection and dialogue among the Indian diaspora and other appropriate stakeholders.

Even though there is a sizable Indian diaspora in Canada, the proportion of Canadians who invest in India is now quite low when compared to other countries like the US, Singapore, Mauritius, Japan, and others. Additionally, there is a need to increase bilateral trade between the two nations, since the Indian diaspora may contribute significantly and advance the nation's economic growth. With the Indian government's efforts to draw in resources and talent from the diaspora, there are both opportunities and challenges in the healthcare and medical tourism sectors that can be utilized by Canadians and the many Indians who are returning to the state of Punjab.



Unlike the Indian Diaspora in the US, the Indian Diaspora in Canada has not had a substantial impact on Canadian policy towards India, despite being well-represented in the federal parliament. No organized lobbying has been done to advance the interests of India or the other way around. Punjab-based Indian diaspora, which is heavily involved in the service industry and agribusiness, is widely dispersed throughout British Columbia. The diaspora of Punjabis in Canada may contribute to research and development in the fields of agriculture, dairy, agro processing, and other industries, hence aiding Punjab's transition into a knowledge-based state (Salehi 2007).

Conclusion

The Indian diaspora, a valuable strategic asset, contributes significantly to India's development in a number of ways, including philanthropy, remittances, investment, advocacy, and knowledge transfer. There is a symbiotic relationship between Diaspora and development. An prominent, affluent, and politically successful Indian diaspora is beneficial to India since it serves as a link between the two countries, fostering stronger bilateral ties. India and the Indian diaspora in Canada benefit from one another; it is not a one-way relationship. It also serves as a spur for the economic growth of both the receiving nation and the country of origin.

India and its diaspora may support one another for shared goals. Because the Indian diaspora may supply the necessary strategic impetus, it is critical to realize India's full potential. Projects like Made In India, Clean Ganga, Digital India, and Skill India can benefit from the involvement of the Indian diaspora. It is a positive start to formalize the Visiting Advanced Joint Research Faculty (VAJRA) programs, which seek to establish a program of rotation in which top-tier nonresident Indian scientists, engineers, doctors, managers, and professionals provide their expertise to Indian public sector enterprises.

The Indian diaspora will have a major impact if it is perceived as a community of communities rather than as a broken identity, which would restrict its significance. The connections between India and Canada are the main emphasis of the Canadian Chamber of Commerce. It begs



Canada to provide greater employment possibilities in order to maximize the potential and abilities of Indo-Canadians and those living abroad and to strengthen bilateral commercial connections. It is important to consider the Indian diaspora's dynamics in Canada as a process, particularly when it comes to development cooperation through connections to NGOs and civil society organizations (Salehi 2007).

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