

Foreword

The Indian Diaspora spans the globe and stretches across all the oceans and continents. It is so widespread that the sun never sets on the Indian Diaspora. The population of the Indian Diaspora is estimated to be about 20 million. There are about 10,000 or more overseas Indians in 48 countries. In 11 countries there are more than half a million persons of Indian descent and they represent a significant proportion of the population of those countries. Their industry, enterprise, economic strength, educational standards and professional skills are widely acknowledged. They live in different countries, speak different languages and are engaged in different vocations. What gives them their common identity are their Indian origin, their consciousness of their cultural heritage and their deep attachment to India.

In November 1977, a seminar was held at the India International Centre in New Delhi to consider the current status and problems of Indian communities living overseas. In his inaugural address to set the tone of the deliberations, the then Minister of External Affairs said, “The subject of overseas Indians is one which is very dear to our hearts.... Everyone of Indian origin overseas is a representative of India and retains many aspects of our cultural traditions and civilization. Though our sons and daughters have gone abroad to work or to reside there, India will never disown them or fail to appreciate and respect their essential loyalty to the culture and heritage of the mother country.”

Many seminars have been held since then, both in India and abroad, on the same subject. Meanwhile, the Indian Diaspora has spread far and wide. Not only has it increased in numbers, but it has also gained universal recognition for the unique contributions that its members have been making to their host societies while, at the same time, acting as a bridge between them and the land of their ancestors. But the Diaspora experience has not always been without problems and challenges. The Diaspora has had many hopes and expectations from India – if only to respond positively, with the right mix of policies, to its numerous needs and aspirations. The expectations of the Indian communities abroad are modest – merely to enable them to preserve their age-old culture through a continuing and smooth relationship with what has rightly been referred to as their ‘mother country’.

The Minister of External Affairs who had inaugurated the seminar in 1977 is now the Prime Minister of India. The time has arrived to translate into reality his vision of forging a constructive relationship between what he had described as the mother country and her children abroad. Towards that end, the High Level Committee was appointed in September 2000 by the Ministry of External Affairs with the approval of the Prime Minister. The terms of reference of the Committee were of the widest amplitude. Its mandate was to make a comprehensive study of the global Indian Diaspora and to recommend measures for a constructive relationship with them.

The Committee was required to submit its report to Government within a period of 180 days, starting from 1st September 2000. However, considering the complexity of the task assigned to it, and the parliamentary and various other commitments of its Members, Government allowed the Committee additional time to be able to do justice to the important task that had been assigned to it.

The Indian Diaspora is unique as it surpasses all the others in its extraordinary diversity and global spread. Indian emigrants have made remarkable contributions to their host countries by helping to transform their economies. In the words of the Mauritian poet, **Vishwamitra Ganga Aashutosh,**

No Gold did they find

Underneath any stone they

Touched and turned

yet

Every stone they touched

Into solid gold they turned

The Indian Diaspora has transformed the economies and has come to occupy a pride of place in the life of those countries. Its members are found as entrepreneurs, workers, traders, teachers, researchers, inventors, doctors, lawyers, engineers, managers and administrators. The successes of the Indian Diaspora can be attributed to its traditional ethos, its cultural values and heritage, its educational aptitude and qualifications, and its capacity to harmonize and adapt. In several countries, it has surpassed the per capita income of the indigenous population. By playing a leading role in the global technological revolution, it has transformed India's image abroad. While it continues to flourish in different countries and in different walks of life, it continues to be rooted in its ancient cultural heritage; at the same time, it is uplifted by India's prosperity and progress.

The destiny of the Indian Diaspora has always been intertwined with the fortunes of India. India's progress and prosperity is reflected in the stature and respect accorded to her Diaspora wherever it is located. The 20th century phenomenon of the explosion in the means and the pace of travel and communications has brought about a closer interaction between 'overseas Indians' and their country of origin. It has also encouraged meaningful interactions between the far-flung groups of the Diaspora. Today, instead of the earlier 'hub and spoke relationship' between India and her Diaspora, we have begun to move towards a network design of a 'web relationship'. This could be a giant leap forward in the process of achieving a globally beneficial and interactive impact on all segments of the Diaspora.

The Indian Diaspora has been an important factor in India's relations with other countries. The Indian public has always been aware of this. It is indeed more alive today than ever before to the issues concerning the welfare of its kith and kin in distant lands. The presence of a sizeable Indian community in any country has had a significant bearing on our political relations with that country. In the period 1973 to

1994, the inward flow of remittances from members of the Diaspora in the Gulf region was an important factor in India's financial and fiscal policies. Since India's economic liberalisation in 1991, there is greater potential for even more substantial economic content in India's relations with her Diaspora.

There are, broadly, three distinct elements in the Indian Diaspora. There were firstly those among them whose journey began during the colonial period. In most cases, they were an economically beleaguered labour force seeking their livelihood in distant lands. A second wave of migrants ventured out into the Gulf and other neighbouring areas in recent times, as professionals, artisans and factory workers, in search of opportunities and commerce. And then there is the current third wave consisting of professionals and the educated elite of India who seek economic betterment in the more advanced countries of the world. All the three segments of the Diaspora have achieved a fair measure of success in their adopted homelands.

India's emergence as a modern society, destined to play a role in knowledge-based industries, particularly in the field of information technology, has helped to change the image of the Indian Diaspora globally. It is no longer considered as an economically disadvantaged, silent minority in many of the lands of its permanent settlement. It has even started playing a role in moulding public opinion in them. It is no coincidence that the last two decades have seen the emergence of members of the Indian Diaspora as elected leaders, politicians and eminent professors and other professionals, managers and entrepreneurs, in their adoptive homelands. This period has coincided with India's resurgence as a global player and a country of stature in the comity of nations. Members of the Indian Diaspora are also playing an important role in mobilising political support for issues of vital concern to India in their new countries. The United States of America, Canada and the United Kingdom are examples of that pro-active role. Because of their increasing economic strength, members of the Indian Diaspora are also well situated to play a pivotal role in energising and augmenting bilateral trade, investments, transfer of technology and tourism with those countries.

The appointment of the High Level Committee represented a historic first step and we hope that our observations and conclusions would assist in laying the foundations for a sound framework of policy and approach and for a mutually beneficial and incremental interaction between India and her Diaspora. Since our independence, this is the first time that India has engaged every segment of her diverse Diaspora in an extraordinarily wide-ranging consultations and interface. On that basis, the Committee has proceeded to respond to its wide-ranging terms of reference and to make recommendations on issues of general and particular interest to our Diaspora. It has endeavoured to bring a fresh perspective and the benefit of academic studies, data analysis, and consultations with Members of Parliament, serving and former diplomats and with Diaspora communities, in examining the issues of increasing linkages and connections between India and her Diaspora. In India and its Diaspora, there is today, a greater awareness, a deeper engagement and renewed enthusiasm and optimism for the new thresholds of opportunities to relate to India.

The frequent use of the terms Diaspora, NRIs and PIOs in this Report calls for a semantic annotation on them. The term **Diaspora** is of Greek origin. It referred originally, to a dispersion or scattering of the Jews beyond Israel, mainly in the 8th to the 6th centuries BC. It is now commonly used in a generic sense for communities of migrants living or settled permanently in other countries, aware of its origins and identity and maintaining varying degrees of linkages with the mother country. It is in this sense that the Committee uses the term Diaspora to refer to Indians who migrated to different parts of the world and have generally maintained their Indian identity.

The term Indian Diaspora includes in its ambit both NRIs and PIOs. **NRIs** or **Non Resident Indians** are Indian citizens, holding Indian passports and residing abroad for an indefinite period, whether for employment, or for carrying on any business or vocation, or for any other purpose.

On the other hand, the term **PIO** or **Person of Indian Origin** is applied to a foreign citizen of Indian origin or descent. Technically, he/she would belong to one of the following three categories, namely:

- A person who, at any time, has held an Indian passport;
- Any one, either of whose parents or any of whose grandparents or great grandparents was born in and was permanently resident in India as defined in the Government of India Act, 1935 and other territories that became part of India thereafter, provided he/she was not at any time a citizen of the countries referred to in para 2 (b) of MHA notification No.26011/4/98-IC.1 dated 30th March, 1999.
- The spouse of a citizen of India or a person of Indian origin covered in the above two categories of PIOs.

During the last eighteen months, we have held wide-ranging consultations with the concerned Ministries and Departments of the Central and various State Governments, especially those of States with a sizeable number of migrants abroad. We have also visited 20 foreign countries selected broadly on the basis of the concentration of PIOs in them. However, with the exception of the Maldives, we have advisedly excluded from our purview the Diaspora in the SAARC countries. In the course of our global survey of the Indian Diaspora, we heard at length the views of the members of the Diaspora in different countries and conducted a large number of case studies and collected empirical evidence about issues and concerns of both NRIs and PIOs. At our request, special Study Groups were set up by a number of Ministries, Departments and non-governmental organisations to prepare detailed reports on Diaspora matters pertaining to their respective spheres of activity.

To consider all those inputs, innumerable in-house meetings were held by the Committee at its headquarters in Delhi - to reflect on, and assess the vast body of information, views and suggestions that it had been able to garner. It has had the advantage of detailed and structured responses from our overseas Missions and Posts. The following Report of the High Level Committee on the Indian Diaspora represents the

results of all the initiatives and inputs, which have enriched and reinforced it. The Report is structured in five parts.

Part I contains the Letter of Transmission of the Report to Government by the Committee Chairman; the Order 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. From a careful study of these models we could select such elements as could be adapted by us to enhance the future potential of increased connectivity between India and her Diaspora.

Part III contains copies of the three Interim Reports that were submitted by the Committee to Government some months ago. They pertain to the following issues that are considered as of immediate importance namely, the PIO Card Scheme, Pravasi Bharatiya Divas and Pravasi Bharatiya Samman Awards. The Interim Reports now form a part of the Report of the Committee because of their relevance to the nation's agenda for the Diaspora.

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, Industrial Development & 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.

The Report addresses the vexed question of dual citizenship in considerable depth and detail. The Committee has examined the issue in all its ramifications including legal, constitutional and security aspects. The Committee has made its considered recommendation that dual citizenship should be permitted to foreign citizens of Indian descent settled in certain countries, within the rubric of the Citizenship Act. We have shown that constitutional amendment is not required for allowing dual citizenship and that a framework and a legislative pattern are already in existence in the Citizenship Act waiting to be adapted. We recommend that the option of PIO cards, which is more suitable for persons of Indian descent in many countries, should be continued, that those who hold PIO cards should be allowed to avail themselves of the provisions of naturalization after two years of obtaining the card and those who acquire dual citizenship should be allowed to become naturalized citizens after one year. This relaxation should in any case be applicable to senior citizens of Indian origin who may wish to return to India for good in the evening of their lives to settle down.

It was emphatically conveyed to the Committee by all segments of our Diaspora that they would like the Government of India to set up a single-window organisation for interacting with them. In order to promote

such interactions meaningfully, it is absolutely essential to identify the lacunae in our present setup and also the systems, which fall short of the expectations of the Diaspora. It is equally essential that we should develop a clearly defined policy and suitably calibrated country-specific plans for enhancing connectivities. The Committee has made detailed recommendations on the structure, nature and functioning of such an organisation that it has proposed to achieve those objectives. The setting up of a Pravasi Bharatiya Bhavan which may also house this proposed new organisation also forms part of the recommendations in Part IV of this Report.

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, as well as possible Governmental responses to them, with a view to increasing interactivities between India and her Diaspora.

The engagement of the Diaspora has generated a new sense of enthusiasm and expectation. Both India and the Diaspora have promises to keep. We are confident that the best is yet to come. The Committee sincerely believes that effective and early implementation of its recommendations will open a new chapter not only in the history of the relationship between India and its Diaspora, but will become a very important factor in the development of our relations with the countries which the Diaspora has made “its home away from its original home.”

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(L. M. Singhvi)
Chairman

Sd/
(R. L. Bhatia)
Member

Sd/
(J. R. Hiremath)
Member

Sd/
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Member

Sd/
(J. C. Sharma)
Member-Secretary

19th December 2001