

# Diaspora Factor in India's Foreign Policy

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**Abstract:** *The key features in the field of the foreign policy have contesting perspectives. Both the internal and external factors determine the foreign policy of a country. Foreign policy making is indeed a challenging task. Therefore, the leaders of a country always take utmost care in framing the foreign policy. Foreign policy making cannot be seen only in the light of the emergence of internal and external factors but the increasing number of diaspora in the comparative global scenario. Indian diaspora has been a significant player in India's foreign policy.*

**Keywords:** *Diaspora, Foreign Policy, International Relations, Soft Power*

## Introduction

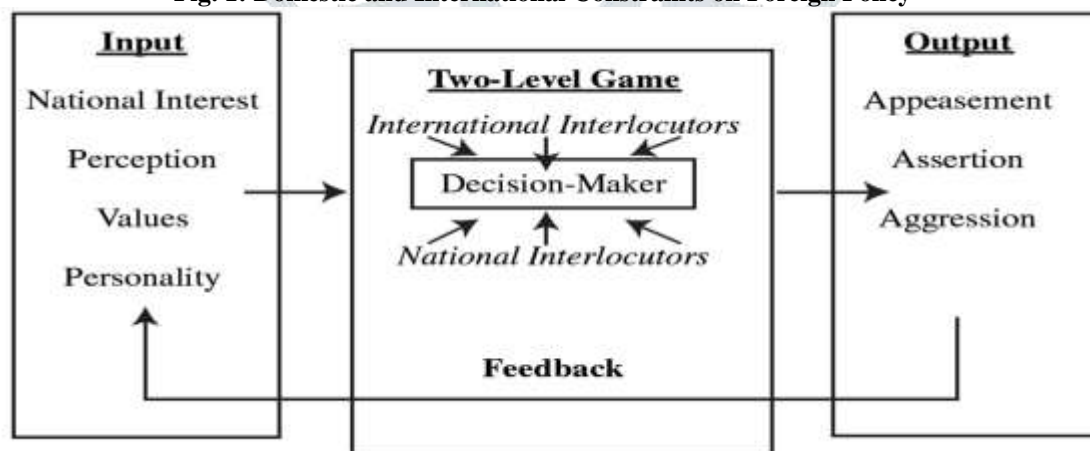
Diaspora policy in any country falls under the broader rubric of the foreign policy of that country. Since diaspora is located in a foreign country and the home country tries to approach and engage the diaspora with the home country, it involves the foreign policy of a country. Sometimes the diaspora plays a big role in shaping the foreign policy of the home country towards the host country, and in some other instances, the host country's attitude towards the diaspora is determined by how the host country figures in the foreign policy framework of the home country. India's diaspora policy approaches fall under the broader gamut of Indian foreign policy.

Diaspora policy of a country basically focuses on three aspects, the interests of the country, the diaspora group and the host country of the diaspora group. So, the diaspora policy involves three actors, the home country, diaspora group and the host country. As it involves three actors, sometimes one marks certain differences among them. But there is no doubt that diasporas have an impact on the foreign policy of their homeland. However, this impact is not similar in all the cases. There is the difference of impact of different diasporas on their homeland's foreign policy. Shain observes that this difference is derived from four main elements: permeability of the homeland (state, government, and society); perception of the diaspora by the homeland (and vice versa); the balance of power between the two; and the cohesion of diaspora voices regarding homeland foreign policy (Shain 2007: 130).

## Foreign Policy: A Conceptual Understanding

Foreign policy is the negotiation between nations. It seeks information to make way for a country to act and engage with other countries politically, socially, economically, and militarily. The foreign policy of a country tries to define the nature of the existing structure of power in international politics and devises policies for resolving issues at national and international level.

**Fig. 1: Domestic and International Constraints on Foreign Policy<sup>1</sup>**



(Source: Mitra, Subrata K. and Jivanta Schöttli 2007: 21.)

<sup>1</sup> This figure has been taken from Mitra, Subrata K. and Jivanta Schöttli (2007), "The New Dynamics of Indian Foreign Policy and its Ambiguities", *Irish Studies in International Affairs*, Vol. 18: 19–34, [Online: web] Accessed 07 July 2018, URL: <http://www.ria.ie/ria/files/4e/4e7cf297-d26a-4a1b-9bc9-479a4a6e0def.pdf>. Robert Putnam (1988) has discussed about the 'Two-Level Game' in his paper, 'Diplomacy and domestic politics: the logic of two-level games', *International Organisation* 42 (3): 427–60.

In the above figure, Subratra Mitra and Jivanta Schöttli explain Robert Putnam's concept of two-level game. Putnam's two-level game explains that at the domestic level, international actors pursue their interests by making the regime follow policies favorable to them. And the politicians try to create power domination by building alliances among these groups. Therefore, foreign policy decision makers are required to achieve two different levels all together. At national level, they must be aware of the recompenses and requests on the home side; and overseas, they must exchange their international complements.

The works on foreign policy analysis include taxonomic survey and theories of foreign policy. As the study on foreign policy includes both international and domestic politics, it is the primary subject in discipline of international politics. The nations use diplomacy as the instrument of executing foreign policy. Formation of alliances and the creation of linkages to carry out international trade and business are manifestations of foreign policy. Foreign policy has not been much effective in forming hypotheses about the behavior of states in general and has been less efficient in formulating the foreign policy for weak countries.

The foreign policy of a country is defined by several factors. Generally, the components of the foreign policy are of two types, internal determinants of foreign policy and external determinants of foreign policy. Internal determinants of foreign policy include territory, geographical factors, culture and history, economic factors, technology, national capability, social structure, public opinion, political party system and leadership. There are several external determinants of foreign policy, which include international organizations and institutions, perception of other countries, position at international level, public opinion at international level and groupings (Rizwan 2009).

### **Diaspora as a Factor in India's Foreign Policy**

The migrant-homeland relationship defines that the concept of diaspora has changed, and in order to read and explain the nature of diaspora, it is necessary to study the role of origin countries in their establishment and purpose. The proactive foreign policy towards diaspora in the recent years has been due to the increasing knowledge and information about the diaspora.

Diaspora engagement policies are a primary network through which migrant source states are interacting with their diaspora. These policies have more and more important concerns in an increasing number of states. These policies are not simply shifting the political landscape and established planning of many states but also finely remaking their basic relations of citizenship and sovereignty. Governments, regional and local authorities promote and favour a positive consideration of diasporas as development actors. Policy management is needed to avoid conflicts of interests at international level (between the host and home country) and at national level (among different stakeholders) in order to achieve policy coherence and good use of available resources (Ionescu 2006: 54).

Diasporas have been making contributions for a long time, without waiting for policy to mobilize them and sometimes even in spite of these. However, diaspora contributions are directly related to institutional frameworks, socio-economic settings, political environments as well as issues of perceptions, images, trust and social identification, in both the home and host country (Ionescu 2006: 07). In the economic, social, philanthropic and political spheres, diaspora has been a very dynamic player. In India the diaspora group have performed important role in different sectors. Their superb skills in entrepreneurship, expertise in the field of the research and innovation in technology, decision-making skills etc. have made them accomplish many milestones for themselves. And these accomplishments have certainly helped India in many ways and made India known in the world.

There are the multiple and intricate consequences of international migration. It is more and more acknowledged that the diaspora group impacts both economically, politically and socially on both their home country and their country of residence. The diaspora helps as a third device, in the sense that, both as a source of financial flows and as a facilitator of flows of engineering sciences and provision. Lastly, when migrants return, it benefits the home country with improved human and financial capital, foreign relations and young thoughts. The additional effects of international migration take place through the diaspora or return migration. In many instances, people go abroad, increase their human capital through training and work experience, and then take back these experiences to their lands of ancestry.

Kuznetsov and Sabel point out about the benefits that the home and host country derive out of the international migration. They claim, "The global circulation of high-skill and low-skill labor from poor economies to rich ones and back is opening new possibilities for economic development. The changes are most noticeable in the behavior of the most skilled workers. The brain drain pattern of migration long drew many of the most promising students from poor countries to lucrative and challenging careers in developed countries" (Kuznetsov and Sabel 2006: 06).

Diaspora link, in which bright scholars migrate to foreign countries to work in the technologically advanced markets, practice their specific global links, and particularly those of their diaspora, to assist in setting up innovative institutions in their countries of origin.

There have been major changes in India's foreign policy towards its Indian diaspora. During the period of India's freedom struggle Indian nationalists vehemently opposed the prevalent indentured system and they demanded for the complete abolition of the system. They also demanded that better treatment should be provided to the overseas Indians residing in different parts of the globe. During this period, many overseas Indians in different countries voiced against the British rule in India and they supported the cause of India's independence. As early as in the year 1906, India House was set up in London to support the Indian independence movement. But after independence India's priorities changed from an anti-colonial nationalist movement that had included all Indians around the earth to the formation of a nation-state, but which now basically focused on the nation building that primarily included Indians living under the geographical boundary of India. The first Prime Minister of India Jawaharlal Nehru encouraged the overseas Indians to integrate with their host countries. This policy approach of Nehru towards

the Indians continued till roughly the period of 1990s with some changes during the period of different governments. Major changes in India's foreign policy towards its diaspora occurred in the 1990s. Since the 1990s, GOI has followed a more proactive policy to engage its diaspora in its development process. Along with many schemes, GOI also introduced the significant Person of Indian Origin (PIO) card scheme. In 2004, GOI established a separate ministry called, Ministry of Overseas Indian Affairs (MOIA) to deal with the issues pertaining to the Indian diaspora. Now India has a more proactive policy towards its diaspora. GOI has initiated various schemes and programmes for its diaspora like, Scholarship Programmes for Diaspora Children (SPDC), Mahatma Gandhi Pravasi Suraksha Yojana (MGPSY), Indian Community Welfare Fund (ICWF), Know India Programme (KIP), Study India Programme (SIP) etc.

The Indian diaspora group has also reciprocated very progressively to this proactive policy of the home country. The diaspora group has not only invested in the economy of the home country but also is sending remittances and giving aid during the period of crisis of the home country. Diaspora group has engaged itself in the development of its home country by participating in different sectors. The diaspora group communicates with the home country through modern communication tools and social networking sites. The Indian diaspora has certainly become a significant element in the foreign policy of India. The shift from brain drain to brain circulation marks the shift from a world in which the function of long-range labor markets was to fill jobs with relatively fixed requirements to a world in which filling a job changes not only the definition of what needs to be done but also the setting in which future needs are defined (Kuznetsov and Sabel 2006: 08). The approach towards the Indian diaspora as brain drain has shifted to brain gain. This positive change in the inner principles of policy framework has certainly made Indian diaspora to be more progressively engaged with the homeland. The Indian diaspora group has helped the government on information technology policies, telecom system, capital funds, issues connected to the information technology etc. Kapur (2001) notes that "This points to the cognitive effects arising from the projection of a coherent, appealing, and progressive identity on the part of the diaspora, which signals an image of prosperity and progress to potential investors and consumers."

### Conclusion

The size of the Indian diaspora is about 25 million that is settled in most of the prominent countries of the world. They have contributed significantly for the development of India. With every achievement of the overseas Indians, India feels more honored at the world stage. Indian diaspora is the most efficient soft power that influences the foreign policy of their host countries in favour of India. It could be argued that India's diaspora policy and India's foreign policy are two sides of the equation and change. In the present day scenario, the Government of India has undertaken various measures and initiated many schemes for its diaspora.

Indian foreign policy towards its diaspora reflects changes and shift in emphasis at different phases of its history. It is very much part of recent economic consideration that has led to growing importance and emphasis on Indian diaspora in terms of policy by Indian government. Indian government, after 1991 has looked upon Indian diaspora as potential source of investor for development project. The Indian liberal economic policy favours extension of global market in India and the diaspora group can be instrumental in this regard.

Truly, the Government of India's linkages with its diaspora has been quite progressive in recent times. GOI has initiated a number of new policies to reinforce and carry forward the relationship between India and its diaspora. Moreover, the diaspora group has very well reciprocated this relationship. Though this relationship is to some extent asymmetrical in nature, yet it has been well accepted by both the parties.

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