



Redefining Diaspora Relations: Analysing Modi's Key Policies and Events in Empowering the Indian Diaspora

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Abstract - The Indian diaspora, consisting of over 35 million individuals worldwide is a cornerstone of India in terms of social, economic and cultural outreach. When the leadership is in the hands of Modi, the Honorable Prime minister of a nation like India, Indian Diaspora gained great importance and has become a critical pillar of its foreign policy and nation Identity. This paper delves into the transformative policies, initiatives, and high-profile events that have redefined India's relationship with its diaspora during Modi's tenure. It highlights groundbreaking efforts such as the Global Pravasi Rishta Portal, streamlined consular services, and cultural diplomacy, which have significantly strengthened ties between India and its global community. Furthermore, the study examines the impact of marquee events like the Madison Square Garden rally and "Howdy Modi" in galvanizing diasporic pride, fostering economic partnerships, and enhancing India's soft power on the world stage. By exploring these developments, the paper demonstrates how Modi's administration has strategically empowered the Indian diaspora, positioning it as a dynamic force in India's international relations, economic growth, and cultural diplomacy.

Keywords : - Indian Diaspora, Modi Administration, Participatory Democracy, Power.

Introduction- The Indian diaspora is “one of the largest and most influential in the world” with over 35 million people of “Indian origin” spread across nearly every continent. Historically, this global community has been an essential driver of India's economic growth through remittances, investments, and trade linkages. Additionally, it has improved India's standing internationally by acting as a crucial cultural bridge. However, interactions between India and its diaspora have changed under "Prime Minister Narendra Modi's leadership," with a renewed focus on political influence, economic integration, and cultural diplomacy. (Datta, 2013, Fernandes, 2014, Price, 2015).

During his time in office, Prime Minister Modi has made a conscious effort to portray the diaspora as both ambassadors of India's rich cultural legacy and contributors to its progress. Initiatives like the "Global Pravasi

Rishta Portal," which strengthens the connection between the diaspora and Indian missions abroad, and the expansion of consular services, have facilitated smoother interactions and improved the diaspora's sense of belonging. Additionally, Modi's government has placed significant emphasis on fostering pride among Indian expatriates, making them an integral part of India's global identity. High-profile events such as the Madison Square Garden rally in the United States, "Howdy Modi" in Houston, and similar programs in Australia and the United Kingdom have elevated the diaspora's status, transforming them into strategic stakeholders in India's foreign policy. (Deb, 2014). These rallies not only showcased Modi's charismatic leadership but also underlined the diaspora's role as a force multiplier in strengthening bilateral ties with host countries.

This paper examines how diaspora relations have changed under Modi, emphasising the diplomatic moves and policies that have strengthened their position in India's soft power and economic narrative. It also analyses the broader implications of this engagement, considering how the diaspora serves as a critical resource for achieving India's geopolitical and cultural aspirations. This study aims to shed light on how a global community might be used to accomplish mutual growth and influence by analysing the evolution of diaspora interactions.

Pre-Modi Era: The Historical Evolution of India's Diaspora Policy- Since gaining its independence, India's policy towards its diaspora has changed significantly. In the early years after 1947, India's foreign policy was primarily focused on nation-building and addressing the challenges of post-colonial development. Under leaders like Jawaharlal Nehru, the Indian government adopted a cautious approach toward the diaspora, concerned about potential dual loyalties and the lack of resources to engage effectively with the global Indian community. Diplomatic efforts were largely limited to addressing political, social, and economic challenges faced by People of Indian Origin (PIOs) in countries like Burma, Fiji, and Sri Lanka. With the advent of globalisation and economic liberalisation in the 1990s, India's diaspora policy underwent a dramatic shift. The Indian government actively courted Indian nationals overseas after realising the diaspora's economic and political potential. The government's move towards more formal engagement was evidenced by initiatives like the founding of Pravasi Bharatiya Divas (PBD) and the Ministry of Overseas Indian Affairs (MOIA) in 2004. (Ministry of External Affairs, 2011). These early efforts focused on encouraging remittances, investments, and knowledge transfer. However, the relationship remained largely transactional, viewing the diaspora primarily as an economic asset rather than as partners in India's broader development goals.

Modi's Paradigm Shift: Transforming Diaspora Engagement - A revolutionary era in India's relations with its diaspora has begun under Prime Minister Narendra Modi's leadership. Modi upgraded the diaspora's position to that of cultural ambassadors and essential partners in India's global goals, in contrast to the pre-Modi approach, which mostly focused on economic contributions. Modi positioned the diaspora as key actors in India's soft power strategy and foreign diplomacy by referring to them as "Rashtradoots," or ambassadors of the country.

Diaspora engagement has expanded under Modi's direction, taking on emotional, cultural, political, and economic facets. While enhanced consular services address the various requirements of Indian communities overseas, initiatives such as the Global Pravasi Rishta Portal have created a direct channel of communication between the diaspora and the Indian government. By reaching out to both Silicon Valley professionals and

Gulf labour migrants, Modi's outreach has been inclusive, expanding the scope of interaction beyond business dealings to encompass innovation, nation-building, and cultural diplomacy.

Additionally, Modi's administration has connected the diaspora to key initiatives like Startup India, Digital India, and Make in India. These programs foster a win-win partnership and encourage the diaspora to support India's growth monetarily, intellectually, and culturally. This all-encompassing strategy highlights a partnership model based on common goals and departs from the transactional character of previous diaspora initiatives.

Transforming Diaspora Relations: A Shift from the Pre-Modi to Modi Era - With notable distinctions in cultural diplomacy, economic integration, diplomatic engagement, political empowerment, and crisis management, the approach to India's diaspora has changed significantly between the pre-Modi and Modi eras.

In the pre-Modi era, cultural engagement with the Indian diaspora was sporadic and largely focused on economic matters, such as the Pravasi Bharatiya Divas. Although cultural pride was promoted, it was not a central aspect of diplomatic relations. In contrast, the Modi era has witnessed a sharp shift towards cultural diplomacy, with initiatives like International Yoga Day, the promotion of Indian festivals such as Diwali and Holi, and the establishment of Indian Cultural Centers globally. These initiatives have strengthened the cultural ties between India and its diaspora, empowering them as ambassadors of Indian traditions and values in their host countries. With programs like International Yoga Day, the promotion of Indian holidays like Diwali and Holi, and the creation of Indian Cultural Centres around the world, the Modi administration has seen a dramatic turn towards cultural diplomacy. By enabling them to serve as representatives of Indian customs and values in their new countries, these programs have improved the cultural linkages between India and its diaspora.

Economic engagement with the diaspora was relatively limited in the pre-Modi era, focused mainly on remittances and investment. While limited participation was possible through programs such as the Person of Indian Origin (PIO) card, there was no long-term economic integration. But under Modi, the Indian government has adopted a more assertive stance, incorporating the diaspora into the country's economic revolution. The diaspora has been positioned as a major contributor to India's economic growth through initiatives like Make in India, Digital India, and Start-Up India, which encourage people to invest in startups, take part in technical advancements, and cultivate business ties that spur innovation.

Diplomatic engagement with the diaspora in the pre-Modi period was limited to occasional events or crisis management, such as evacuations during conflicts. Consular services were available but not expensive. Under Modi, diplomatic engagement with the diaspora has become a more public and aggressive endeavour. High-profile events like the Madison Square Garden rally in 2014, "Howdy Modi" in 2019, and similar engagements in countries like the UK, Australia, and the Middle East have not only showcased India's achievements but have also elevated the political, economic, and social standing of the diaspora globally, making them central to India's diplomatic efforts. (Trigunayat, 2024). While the Indian diaspora's political influence was acknowledged in the pre-Modi era, it was not significantly empowered by the Indian government. There was a notable disconnect between the diaspora's political engagement and foreign policy of India. Additionally in the contexts of Modi era, however, the government has "actively sought to politically empower" the

diaspora. Events such as "Howdy Modi," where the Prime Minister appeared alongside prominent foreign political figures, underscored the political clout of the diaspora.

By strengthening relationships with influential diaspora leaders, Modi has ensured that the Indian diaspora is politically active and integral to shaping India's international relations. Crisis management in the pre-Modi era, such as evacuations during international conflicts, lacked the scale and coordination seen under Modi's leadership. The Modi government has demonstrated exceptional crisis management, most notably through the Vande Bharat Mission during the COVID-19 pandemic, which successfully repatriated over 1.8 million people.

This effort highlighted commitment of India for and to the welfare of its diaspora. Additionally, Modi's swift actions in evacuating students from Ukraine during the Russia-Ukraine conflict showcased the government's responsiveness to the needs of its people abroad, reinforcing India's proactive stance in protecting its diaspora during crises. (Hall, I., & Ganguly, Š. (2021). In short, the transition from the pre-Modi to Modi era has seen a great and very remarkable shift in India's interactions engagements with its diaspora, characterized by a more robust cultural, economic, political, and crisis management approach that has strengthened the global standing of the Indian community abroad.

Major Initiatives and Schemes Empowering the Indian Diaspora under Narendra Modi- Under the current regime led by Narendra Modi, India has remarkably shifted its approach and ways to engaging with its diaspora, treating them not only as an economic resource but also as key cultural and political ambassadors. Modi's rhetoric often frames the diaspora as "Rashtradoots" (ambassadors of the nation), acknowledging their pivotal role in amplifying India's soft power globally. (Singh, 2020). His government has introduced a series of transformative initiatives that have strengthened "the bonding or relationship between India and its pride, Indian diaspora. By emphasising political participation, economic cooperation, and cultural diplomacy, these programs enable the diaspora to actively support India's progress.

Pravasi Bharatiya Divas (PBD): Revitalization and Expansion- Originally launched in 2003, the Pravasi Bharatiya Divas (PBD) has been revitalized under Modi's leadership as a central platform for the engagement of "Indian diaspora". This annual event is a forum where Indian expatriates can connect with the government, discuss challenges, and contribute to India's progress. Modi's government expanded the scope of PBD, inviting participation from a wide array of sectors, including academia, healthcare, and technology. In addition to honouring the diaspora's achievements, the event now actively involves them in India's development and policymaking processes.

Global Pravasi Rishta Portal: Enhancing Connectivity- The Modi government launched the Global Pravasi Rishta Portal to strengthen the connection between India and its global diaspora. This digital platform facilitates consular services, provides job opportunities, connects businesses, and fosters cultural ties. By leveraging technology, the portal creates a streamlined system for managing diaspora needs, queries, and contributions, ensuring better engagement with Indian communities worldwide and enhancing their involvement in India's development agenda.

Expansion of Consular Services- Under Modi, consular services for the Indian diaspora have been significantly improved. The government established new consulates in key global locations and made it easier for members of the diaspora to access services such as the "Overseas Citizen of India (OCI) card" and also the

“online visa applications”. These changes ensure seamless connections for the diaspora, enabling greater participation in economic, cultural, and social exchanges between India and their host countries.

Vande Bharat Mission: Diaspora Repatriation during Crisis- The Vande Bharat Mission, launched during the COVID-19 pandemic, stands out as one of the most notable initiatives demonstrating Modi's commitment to the diaspora. The mission successfully repatriated over 1.8 million Indians stranded abroad, showcasing India's swift response to crises. It reinforced the government's dedication to the welfare of its citizens and emphasized India's readiness to protect and prioritize the diaspora, irrespective of their location.

Diaspora-Centric Economic Initiatives- India has actively worked to include the diaspora in the nation's economic revolution under Modi. Programs like "Make in India," "Digital India," and "Start-Up India" have directly engaged the global Indian community. Modi's outreach to Indian American tech professionals, particularly in Silicon Valley, has fostered high-tech partnerships in industries such as artificial intelligence, renewable energy, and digital innovation. The government has also encouraged diaspora investments in Indian startups and provided incentives to facilitate their economic contributions, helping drive innovation and growth.

Economic Contributions of the Diaspora- The economic contributions of the diaspora have been crucial to India's growth under Modi. India remains the world's largest recipient of remittances, with \$111 billion received in 2023 alone. (MIB, GOI, Research Unit, PIB, 2023). Beyond remittances, the diaspora has significantly contributed to India's innovation landscape through investments in startups, technology, and education. Modi's outreach has fostered collaborations in high-tech industries and further integrated the global Indian community into the national economic framework.

Indian Diaspora as a Cornerstone of Soft Power- Under Modi's leadership, the Indian diaspora has grown to be a vital component of India's soft power. The global diaspora has been brought together by initiatives like International Yoga Day, which Modi proposed at the UN in 2014 and which promotes India's cultural ideals of mindfulness and well-being. By establishing Indian Cultural Centres around the world, Indian culture has been greatly promoted and conserved, fortifying relationships with the diaspora. Furthermore, the diaspora's political clout, especially in nations like the US and the UK, has enhanced India's standing internationally, and diaspora leaders have helped to strengthen India's representation on global stages. (Mazumdar, 2018).

Support for Indian Diaspora Leaders in Host Countries- Developing ties with diaspora leaders worldwide has been a top priority for Modi's administration. This initiative has empowered individuals and solidified India's presence in various countries. Indian-origin politicians, business leaders, and activists have been supported in advancing India's interests abroad. These efforts have helped strengthen India's bilateral relations and foster collaborations on key issues such as trade, culture, and political dialogue.

Promotion of Cultural Centers and Indian Languages- The Indian government has encouraged the creation of Indian Cultural Centres worldwide in an effort to deepen cultural linkages with the diaspora. These centers serve as hubs for Indian culture, arts, literature, and language, offering educational programs, workshops, and performances. The promotion of Indian languages, particularly Hindi, through cultural exchanges and online platforms has reinforced the diaspora's connection to their heritage and nurtured a sense of pride in their cultural roots.

Education and Skill Development Initiatives- Modi's administration has promoted educational exchanges with international universities because it recognises the diaspora's ability to support India's educational and skill-development objectives. Initiatives such as Skill India have extended an invitation to the diaspora to collaborate in empowering India's youth and promoting technological and educational innovation. In order to ensure a consistent flow of information and experience, efforts have also been made to entice Indian students studying abroad to return to India for higher education.

Collaborative Diplomacy: Leveraging Diaspora Influence- Modi's administration has improved India's foreign policy by strategically leveraging the diaspora's influence. The government has used the diaspora's worldwide presence to forge closer ties with other countries by enlisting them in diplomatic initiatives, including as economic talks and political discussions. The diaspora has been essential in furthering India's foreign policy goals, whether it is through Indian American advocacy groups advocating for India's interests in Washington or Indian professionals demonstrating India's technological prowess.

The Indian diaspora has changed under Narendra Modi's leadership from being viewed mostly as a source of remittances to a vibrant and empowered population that supports India's political, cultural, and economic development. In addition to improving ties between India and the international community, his government's many programs have established the diaspora as important players in determining India's destiny.

Empowering the Indian Diaspora through High-Profile Global Events- India's appeal to its diaspora has become a significant diplomatic tool under Prime Minister Narendra Modi. His leadership has seen the organization of large-scale events worldwide that celebrate India's cultural heritage while empowering the diaspora socially, economically, and politically. In addition to fortifying relations with host countries, these events have established the Indian diaspora as important contributors to India's international ambitions.

Some Key Diaspora Centric Events like Madison Square Garden Rally (2014), Wembley Stadium Address (2015), Howdy Modi Event (2019), Namaste Trump (2020) are very important developments. Modi's address to over 18,000 Indian-Americans emphasized India's economic reforms like "Digital India" and "Make in India," urging the diaspora to become partners in the country's development. Wembley Stadium Address (2015) in the UK, Modi's speech highlighted India's cultural richness and encouraged the diaspora to engage in nation-building projects like Swachh Bharat and Skill India. Howdy Modi Event (2019) held in Houston with 50,000 attendees, this event showcased the Indian diaspora's political and economic influence, signaling their central role in the India-U.S. strategic partnership. Namaste Trump (2020) in which Modi's high-profile event in Ahmedabad during U.S. President Donald Trump's visit further emphasized the Indian American community's political clout and role in shaping international relations. (Leary, 2024).

Impact of These Events- Cultural empowerment can be the one. These events promoted India's cultural values globally, showcasing yoga, Ayurveda, and Indian festivals. This cultural pride empowered the diaspora to embrace their heritage and reduced barriers of discrimination, fostering greater acceptance in host countries. Economic integration is also one impact. Modi's initiatives like "Make in India" and "Digital India" created direct opportunities for diaspora-led investments and collaborations. Policies such as eased visa regulations and academic exchanges helped the diaspora engage more with India's economic transformation. Political Influence can be another impact. The scale of events like "Howdy Modi" demonstrated the diaspora's

political influence, particularly in the U.S., where it reinforced their ability to impact policymaking. The involvement of international leaders, including Trump, validated their role in bilateral diplomacy.

Social Confidence and Leadership- By acknowledging the diaspora as important participants in India's worldwide ascent, large-scale festivities gave them a sense of empowerment. Their confidence grew as a result of their increasing visibility, which promoted their involvement in leading positions in education, business, and politics. Additionally, by uniting people from various backgrounds to create a shared identity, these gatherings promoted diasporic togetherness. More coordinated support for India's interests overseas and regional projects in their host nations are the results of this unity. These gatherings improved India's reputation abroad and fostered goodwill by casting the diaspora as ambassadors. India's soft power was strengthened and its position on the international scene was cemented by the diaspora's active involvement in its diplomatic endeavours.

Conclusion- Prime Minister Narendra Modi's approach to redefining India's relationship with its diaspora has significantly transformed how the Indian state engages with its global community. Through targeted policies, diplomatic initiatives, and high-profile events, Modi has empowered the Indian diaspora, positioning it not just as a source of economic support, but as an influential stakeholder in India's global aspirations. Modi's leadership has provided the diaspora with avenues to contribute to India's development, both in terms of investments and intellectual capital, while fostering a deeper cultural connection. The key initiatives, such as the Vande Bharat Mission and the global celebrations of Indian culture, have not only strengthened the emotional and cultural ties between India and its diaspora but have also enhanced the political and economic influence of Indian communities worldwide. Events like the Madison Square Garden rally, "Howdy Modi," and the Wembley Stadium address have elevated the political visibility and social status of the diaspora, contributing to their active participation in shaping both host-country policies and India's international profile. These initiatives have empowered the diaspora to become integral ambassadors of India's soft power, playing pivotal roles in strengthening bilateral relations with countries like the United States, Australia, and the United Kingdom. Furthermore, they have fostered unity within the diaspora, encouraging collective action and leadership across various sectors. In conclusion, Narendra Modi's redefined approach to the Indian diaspora has not only solidified its role as a key player in India's global journey but has also empowered it to take an active role in shaping India's future on the world stage. As India continues to rise as a global power, the Indian diaspora will undoubtedly remain a crucial pillar in the nation's quest for progress, prosperity, and international influence. These gatherings have elevated the diaspora from passive spectators to active participants in India's global journey.

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