

# Indian Diaspora: a Pillar of India's Foreign Policy an Analysis Based on the Perspective of Dr. Sachin Chaturvedi (Based on the Shri Baleshwar Agrawal Memorial Lecture Series)

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## Abstract

This research paper presents a comprehensive analysis of the role of the Indian diaspora in India's foreign policy, based on Dr. Sachin Chaturvedi's keynote address and insights from other eminent speakers during the Shri Baleshwar Agrawal Memorial Lecture Series. It argues that the Indian diaspora has evolved from being merely cultural inheritors to becoming robust economic, strategic, intellectual, and diplomatic assets for India.

India's foreign policy has extended beyond traditional government-to-government relations into the realms of public engagement and people-centric diplomacy—where the role of the Indian diaspora has become pivotal. This paper highlights how the diaspora is contributing at multiple levels—image-building, cultural exchange, economic investment, policy influence, and global collaboration.

According to Dr. Chaturvedi, the diaspora's contribution to India's economy is not limited to remittances. They are significantly bolstering India's economic structure through innovation, technological investment, startup ecosystems, and skill development. Their intellectual capital—reflected in their leadership roles in global universities, think tanks, and institutions—strengthens knowledge-based collaboration and policy dialogues.

Additionally, the diaspora enhances India's cultural presence across the globe. From organizing festivals and preserving Indian languages to promoting yoga, Ayurveda, and Indian philosophy, they serve as dynamic agents of cultural diplomacy.

The study also emphasizes the diaspora's increasing involvement in policy-making. Indian-origin individuals now occupy influential political, administrative, and diplomatic positions across the United States, Canada, the UK, and Gulf countries, helping secure India's interests on global platforms.

This paper analyses the multidimensional role of the diaspora under five major pillars: economic contribution, intellectual capital, cultural propagation, public diplomacy, and policy-making participation. It concludes that the Indian diaspora has emerged as a powerful and enduring pillar of India's foreign policy.

**Keywords:** Indian Diaspora, Foreign Policy, Public Diplomacy, Cultural Diplomacy, Economic Contribution, Intellectual Capital, Soft Power

## **1. Introduction: The Expanding Role of the Diaspora in Foreign Policy**

India's foreign policy has undergone a significant transformation over recent decades. Formerly limited to state-centric relations, bilateral talks, or multilateral forums, it has now adopted a broad, multilayered, and society-centric approach. At the core of this shift lies the Indian diaspora—a community that not only embodies India's civilizational ethos but also represents India's economic, intellectual, and strategic interests on the global stage.

Dr. Sachin Chaturvedi, Director General of the Research and Information System for Developing Countries (RIS), lucidly articulated this evolving role in his keynote address at the Shri Baleshwar Agrawal Memorial Lecture. He characterized the diaspora as a "pillar" of India's foreign policy—not merely representing historical memory or cultural pride, but actively contributing to contemporary diplomacy, science-technology partnerships, trade, investment, and development cooperation.

This new dimension of foreign policy includes emerging domains such as public diplomacy, development diplomacy, and cultural diplomacy—each of which sees active participation and leadership from the Indian diaspora. Be it Indian-origin scientists in global universities, entrepreneurs in Silicon Valley, laborers in the Gulf, or political leaders in the West, all are shaping India's international image and strategic outlook.

Dr. Chaturvedi emphasized that the diaspora's engagement goes far beyond emotional connection or cultural nostalgia. They are now strategic assets, intellectual investors, and dynamic agents of global engagement. Their involvement has made India's foreign policy more participatory, flexible, and innovation-driven.

In conclusion, this introductory section asserts that the diaspora is no longer a supplementary element but a decisive force in India's foreign policy—a change that strengthens India's global presence through multidimensional and inclusive strategies.

## **2. Economic and Intellectual Contributions of the Indian Diaspora**

Today, the Indian diaspora is not only a cultural emissary but also a key economic and intellectual force shaping India's development and foreign relations. Their engagement has moved beyond symbolic association to tangible contributions to India's economic stability and global reputation.

According to the World Bank, India received over \$125 billion in remittances in 2023—the highest in the world. These are not just personal transfers but powerful instruments of economic support, bolstering forex reserves, stimulating consumption, and uplifting rural livelihoods. Increasingly, these remittances are being directed toward education, healthcare, infrastructure, and innovation. Diaspora-led startups, social enterprises, and CSR activities are significantly reinforcing India's socio-economic structure.

The diaspora's intellectual contribution is equally vital. Indian-origin scientists, tech experts, professors, and policy leaders are in pivotal roles in top universities, research institutions, and multinational corporations. Their expertise is not only facilitating knowledge exchange but also enhancing India's credibility and influence in global academic and scientific forums.

Dr. Chaturvedi refers to this as "Intellectual Diplomacy"—where ideas, skills, and research become new mediums of diplomatic engagement. This form of diplomacy is helping position India as a knowledge-based global power. Thus, the economic and intellectual dimensions of the diaspora are central to shaping both India's present and its future.

### 3. Cultural Identity and Soft Power

The Indian diaspora serves as the torchbearer of India's cultural identity and soft power—an influence that appeals to global hearts and minds without coercion. Wherever they settle, diaspora communities uphold Indian traditions and propagate Indian values through their lifestyle and social practices.

From the U.S. to Australia, and from the Gulf to Europe, the widespread celebration of Indian festivals, popularity of yoga camps, growing interest in Ayurveda, and rising global acceptance of Indian music and dance reflect the expansive reach of Indian culture. This is not merely a cultural performance but an embodiment of Indian values and perspectives in global consciousness.

Language and media have also become powerful tools of this cultural expansion. Indian languages like Hindi, Tamil, Malayalam, and Gujarati are now read and spoken globally. Diaspora literature vividly captures Indian values, nostalgia for the homeland, and their interaction with host societies. Pioneers like Shri Baleshwar Agrawal institutionalized diaspora journalism, establishing platforms for cultural dialogue between India and its global communities.

Diaspora media not only present the Indian worldview but also shape discourses that redefine Indian identity in modern contexts. Their cultural efforts firmly anchor India's soft power in language, values, and communication—making it a major force in global identity building.

### 4. Public Diplomacy and Policy-Making Participation

The participation of diaspora communities in public diplomacy and policy-making marks a notable shift in India's foreign policy. Diplomacy is no longer the exclusive domain of governments; it now embraces community engagement as a key pillar—and the diaspora is at its center.

People-centric diplomacy has emerged as a defining trend of the 21st century. Through initiatives like Pravasi Bharatiya Divas, Bharat Vandana Yatra, and Global Indian Conferences, the Government of India has transformed diaspora engagement into a strategic component of foreign policy. These platforms offer diaspora members meaningful connections with India's development journey, global vision, and policy direction.

Institutions like the Antar Rashtriya Sahayog Parishad (ARSP), Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR), and Indian Council of World Affairs (ICWA) are institutionalizing these dialogues, embedding people-centric, cultural, and emotional dimensions into foreign policy frameworks. This inclusive, participatory approach redefines India's global image as dialogic, democratic, and open—an image consistently reflected by diaspora actions worldwide.

Dr. Chaturvedi aptly described the diaspora as a living embodiment of "Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam"—a philosophy that promotes unity in diversity, mutual respect, and global coexistence. The diaspora forges cooperative relations with host societies while upholding Indian values and often brings back valuable global experiences to India.

### 5. From the Girmitya Experience to Modern Strategy

The Girmitya history is not just one of struggle but also a testament to Indian resilience, cultural continuity, and global presence. In the 19th and 20th centuries, Indian laborers were sent under contract to countries like Fiji, Mauritius, Trinidad, Suriname, Guyana, and South Africa. They carried with them not only labor but also language, religion, festivals, and values—foundations of India's cultural diplomacy today.

Even now, Indian-origin communities in Fiji, Mauritius, and South Africa retain strong cultural roots. As Professor Anil Suklal, India's High Commissioner to South Africa, noted, the Girmitiyas are not just part of India's past but active agents in its present policy framework.

Gandhiji's experience as a diaspora member in South Africa is particularly notable. His experimentation with satyagraha laid the intellectual foundation for India's freedom movement. This precedent proves that diaspora communities can profoundly shape national and global political trajectories.

Today, the Girmitiya community plays a central role in India's diplomacy, academic exchanges, and cultural cooperation. With initiatives like scholarships, language programs, and joint research projects, the India-Girmitiya relationship is evolving into one of strategic and intellectual collaboration. Their presence in India's "Look East," "Act West," and "Indo-Africa" strategies strengthens international partnerships. Hence, the Girmitiya experience is no longer just a historical narrative but a roadmap for future global engagement.

## 6. Conclusion: Indian Diaspora as a Strategic Force

The Shri Baleshwar Agrawal Memorial Lecture Series reaffirms that the Indian diaspora is not merely a global community of expatriates but co-creators of India's global vision. They are enhancing India's image, diplomacy, investment flows, culture, and ideational outreach at multiple levels.

India must now embrace this vibrant community not only as cultural heirs but also as strategic partners. Continued dialogue, institutional collaboration, and policy participation with the diaspora can significantly bolster India's global leadership.

"India will lead the world"—is no longer a distant dream but an achievable reality, and the Indian diaspora is the vital force propelling that vision forward.

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