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Indian Diaspora and Its Role in India's Soft Power Policy: A Study of Cultural Diplomacy, Foreign Policy and Global Influence

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Abstract: *The Indian diaspora has emerged as an important instrument of India's soft power and an influential actor in its foreign policy. Spread across more than 200 countries, the overseas Indian community represents a significant transnational network of cultural, economic, intellectual and political connections. Its contributions extend beyond financial remittances to include cultural diplomacy, knowledge exchange, international business, political advocacy, educational cooperation and the promotion of India's global image. The concept of soft power, developed by Joseph S. Nye, highlights the ability of a country to influence international actors through attraction, persuasion and shared values rather than coercion. In this context, the Indian diaspora functions both as a source and an agent of India's soft power. Through the promotion of Indian culture, traditions, languages, food, cinema, spirituality and yoga, diaspora communities contribute to strengthening India's international identity. Moreover, influential members of the diaspora have facilitated political engagement, economic partnerships and diplomatic cooperation between India and their countries of residence. This paper examines the relationship between the Indian diaspora and India's soft power policy, with particular attention to its role in cultural diplomacy, bilateral relations and international influence. It also analyses the challenges associated with diaspora engagement and suggests measures for strengthening the diaspora's contribution to India's foreign policy objectives. The study argues that effective diaspora engagement, supported by inclusive policies and institutional cooperation, can enhance India's global standing and contribute to its emergence as an influential international actor.*

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1. Introduction: In the contemporary international political system, the influence of a nation is no longer determined exclusively by its military strength, economic resources, or territorial power. "Cultural attractiveness, diplomatic credibility, political values, educational achievements, and international public opinion have become equally significant in shaping a country's position in global affairs" (Nye, 2004; Melissen, 2005). "This changing nature of international relations has increased the importance of soft power as an essential instrument of foreign policy. For India, a country characterized by civilizational diversity, democratic institutions, cultural traditions, and a substantial overseas population, soft power has become an important dimension of its international engagement" (Tharoor, 2012; Ministry of External Affairs, 2024).

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The Indian diaspora represents one of the most significant transnational communities in the world. "It includes Non-Resident Indians (NRIs), Persons of Indian Origin (PIOs), and Overseas Citizens of India (OCIs), whose historical experiences, geographical locations, professional backgrounds, and cultural identities differ considerably" (Ministry of External Affairs, 2024). "Despite this diversity, many members of the overseas Indian community maintain social, cultural, economic, and emotional connections with their ancestral homeland. Their participation in professional institutions, business organizations, educational establishments, political systems, and cultural associations has strengthened India's international visibility" (Mishra, 2007; Jain, 2010).

The Indian diaspora is not merely a community of migrants living outside India; "it is also an important bridge connecting India with the wider international community. Through their achievements in science, technology, medicine, education, business, politics, and cultural activities, overseas Indians have contributed to creating a positive image of India" (Nye, 2004; Jain, 2010). "Their presence in influential institutions and professional networks has enhanced international recognition of India's human resources, intellectual capabilities, and entrepreneurial potential" (Kapur, 2010).

Joseph S. Nye introduced the concept of soft power in 1990 to explain how states can achieve desired international outcomes through attraction rather than coercion. According to Nye (1990, 2004), culture, political values, and foreign policy are important sources of soft power. "India's cultural heritage, philosophical traditions, democratic experience, spiritual practices, cinema, music, cuisine, and yoga provide significant resources for its soft power projection' (Tharoor, 2012; Hall, 2012).

"The Indian diaspora strengthens these resources by acting as cultural ambassadors and informal representatives of India in different parts of the world. Indian cultural festivals, international yoga programmes, Indian restaurants, film festivals, religious institutions, and diaspora organizations have contributed to increasing public awareness of Indian civilization and contemporary society" (Mazumdar, 2018; Mahapatra, 2016). Similarly, "influential Indian-origin professionals and political representatives have helped develop closer connections between India and their respective host countries" (Pradhan & Mohapatra, 2020; Rana, 2009).

The growing importance of diaspora diplomacy is particularly visible in India's relations with the United States, the United Kingdom, the Gulf countries, Canada, Australia, and Southeast Asian nations. "The Indian-American community, for example, has contributed to strengthening political understanding, professional networks, and economic cooperation between India and the United States" (Kapur, 2010; Pradhan & Mohapatra, 2020). Similarly, Indian workers and professionals in Gulf countries have maintained important economic and social connections between India and West Asia through remittances, employment networks, and transnational relationships (Kapur, 2010; Rana, 2009).

Therefore, "the Indian diaspora should be understood as a strategic resource of India's foreign policy. Its potential extends beyond cultural promotion to include political advocacy, economic cooperation, knowledge transfer, and international partnership-building" (Pradhan & Mohapatra, 2020; Mazumdar, 2018). This study examines how the Indian diaspora contributes to India's soft power and how its role can be further strengthened in the changing international environment.

2. Statement of the Problem: India possesses considerable soft power resources derived from its cultural heritage, philosophical traditions, democratic institutions, educational achievements, and historical connections with different parts of the world (Nye, 2004; Tharoor, 2012). However, "the effective utilisation of these resources in international relations requires appropriate institutional mechanisms, sustained diplomatic engagement, and active participation from non-state actors (Melissen, 2005; Hall, 2012). Among

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these actors, the Indian diaspora occupies a particularly important position as a bridge between India and the international community" (Kapur, 2010; Rana, 2009).

Although the overseas Indian community has achieved considerable success in various fields, its contribution to India's foreign policy and international image is not always systematically coordinated (Kapur, 2010; Jain, 2010). "The diaspora is highly diverse in terms of geographical distribution, economic status, professional qualifications, political participation, and cultural affiliation. Consequently, its interests and relationships with India differ across countries and communities" (Vertovec, 2000; Sheffer, 2003).

The central problem addressed in this study is the gap between the enormous potential of the Indian diaspora and its systematic integration into India's soft power strategy (Kapur, 2010; Hall, 2012). "The study also examines the challenges of diaspora engagement, including differences between home- and host-country interests, political sensitivities, identity-related issues, social discrimination, and the limitations of institutional coordination" (Shain, 1999; Østergaard-Nielsen, 2003). These challenges highlight the need to understand diaspora diplomacy not merely as cultural networking but also as a complex process involving political, economic, social, and diplomatic relationships.

3. Objectives of the Study: The major objectives of the study are:

1. To examine the concept and significance of soft power in contemporary international relations.
2. To analyse the historical development and global significance of the Indian diaspora.
3. To investigate the role of the Indian diaspora in promoting India's cultural identity and international image.
4. To examine the contribution of overseas Indians to India's bilateral and multilateral diplomatic relations.
5. To identify the major instruments through which the diaspora promotes India's soft power.
6. To analyse the challenges and limitations associated with diaspora engagement.
7. To suggest policy measures for strengthening the role of the Indian diaspora in India's foreign policy.

4. Research Questions: The study addresses the following research questions:

1. How does the concept of soft power influence India's contemporary foreign policy?
2. In what ways does the Indian diaspora contribute to India's international image and cultural diplomacy?
3. What role does the diaspora play in strengthening India's bilateral and multilateral relations?
4. What are the major challenges affecting the effective utilisation of diaspora potential?
5. How can India strengthen diaspora engagement to enhance its global influence?

5. Research Methodology: The present study adopts a qualitative and descriptive-analytical research methodology. It is primarily based on secondary sources, including academic books, research articles, government publications, international reports, policy documents and relevant scholarly literature concerning the Indian diaspora, soft power and foreign policy.

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The theoretical foundation of the study is based on Joseph S. Nye's concept of soft power, which provides an analytical framework for understanding the relationship between attraction, cultural influence and international political outcomes. The study also draws upon the literature on diaspora diplomacy, transnationalism and public diplomacy to examine the contribution of overseas Indians to India's international engagement.

Relevant case examples, particularly India's relations with the United States, Gulf countries and Southeast Asian nations, are examined to understand the practical dimensions of diaspora influence. Government statistics and international migration reports are used to establish the demographic and geographical significance of the Indian diaspora. The findings are interpreted through qualitative analysis to identify its contributions, challenges and policy implications.

6. Conceptual Understanding of Soft Power: The concept of soft power was introduced by American political scientist Joseph S. Nye in his 1990 work *Bound to Lead: The Changing Nature of American Power*. It refers to the ability of a country to influence the preferences and behaviour of others through attraction and persuasion rather than military force or economic coercion.

Nye identifies three major sources of soft power:

1. Culture: Culture becomes a source of soft power when it attracts people in other societies. Literature, music, cinema, language, food, traditions and spiritual practices can generate international appreciation and cultural connections.

2. Political Values: A country's political values, institutions and domestic practices influence how it is perceived internationally. Democratic governance, individual freedom, pluralism, equality and social justice can contribute to its international attractiveness.

3. Foreign Policy: A country's foreign policy can strengthen its soft power when it is perceived as legitimate, credible, responsible and consistent with broader international interests.

Unlike hard power, which relies primarily on military and economic capabilities, soft power operates through attraction, legitimacy and the creation of favourable perceptions. Nevertheless, soft power does not replace hard power; both can complement each other in the pursuit of national interests.

In the Indian context, soft power is rooted in its civilizational heritage, religious and philosophical traditions, democratic institutions, cultural diversity, educational institutions and international engagement. The Indian diaspora provides an important channel through which these resources reach foreign societies.

7. Historical Overview and Global Significance of the Indian Diaspora: The history of the Indian diaspora is closely connected with trade, migration, colonialism, labour mobility, and globalisation. "Indian communities have maintained connections with different parts of the world for centuries through commercial activities, religious exchanges, and cultural interactions" (Lal, 2006; Jayasuriya & Pankhurst, 2003). These historical movements contributed to the formation of transnational Indian communities and established the foundations of contemporary diaspora networks.

During the colonial period, large numbers of Indians migrated to different regions of the British Empire, particularly Mauritius, Fiji, "Trinidad and Tobago, Guyana, Suriname, South Africa, and the Caribbean. Many migrated under the indentured labour system and worked in plantations and other colonial economic establishments" (Tinker, 1974; Carter, 1996). "Their descendants gradually developed distinct cultural identities while preserving several Indian traditions, languages, religious practices, and social customs" (Lal, 2006; Jayasuriya & Pankhurst, 2003).

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"A later phase of migration witnessed the movement of skilled professionals, students, entrepreneurs, and workers to Europe, North America, Australia, Southeast Asia, and the Gulf region. Economic liberalisation, technological development, and globalisation further accelerated international mobility among Indian professionals" (Khadria, 2001; Kapur, 2010). This transformation diversified the Indian diaspora in terms of occupational backgrounds, educational qualifications, economic resources, and geographical distribution.

According to the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, "India had approximately 18 million international migrants living outside their country of birth in 2020, making it the largest country of origin for international migrants in that dataset (United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs" [UN DESA], 2021). However, this figure should not be confused with the broader Indian diaspora population, which also includes people of Indian origin born abroad.

According to the Government of India's data, "the overseas Indian population was approximately 35.42 million in January 2024, comprising 15.85 million NRIs and 19.57 million PIOs and OCIs" (Standing Committee on External Affairs, 2025). This substantial population demonstrates the geographical reach and international significance of the Indian diaspora.

"The overseas Indian community has become increasingly visible in international politics, business, education, scientific research, and cultural activities. Its contribution is not limited to economic remittances; it also includes knowledge transfer, investment, professional networking, political participation, and cultural exchange" (Kapur, 2010; Khadria, 2001). These activities have strengthened India's transnational relationships and enhanced its opportunities for international cooperation (Nye, 2004; Rana, 2009).

8. Indian Diaspora as an Instrument of India's Soft Power Policy: "The Indian diaspora has emerged as an important instrument of India's soft power policy because it connects the country with diverse societies through cultural, economic, professional and political networks" (Nye, 2004; Kapur, 2010). "Its contribution can be understood through two interconnected dimensions: the diaspora as a source of India's international attractiveness and the diaspora as an active agent of cultural and diplomatic engagement" (Hall, 2012; Rana, 2009).

The first dimension relates to the achievements and international reputation of overseas Indians. "Indian-origin scientists, entrepreneurs, academics, doctors, technology professionals and political leaders have contributed to strengthening India's global image" (Kapur, 2010; Khadria, 2001). "Their professional success demonstrates the capabilities of Indian human resources and creates opportunities for greater international cooperation" (Nye, 2004; Jain, 2010).

The second dimension relates to the active promotion of Indian culture, traditions, values and national identity in host countries. "Diaspora organizations, cultural associations, religious institutions, educational networks and community celebrations provide platforms for cultural exchange and public engagement" (Vertovec, 2000; Tharoor, 2012).

"The Indian diaspora also contributes to diplomatic relations through political advocacy, public opinion formation and professional networking" (Rana, 2009; Kapur, 2010). "In countries where people of Indian origin occupy influential positions, they can facilitate communication between political institutions, business communities and civil society organisations" (Shain, 1999; Jain, 2010).

However, the diaspora should not be viewed as a uniform or automatically supportive political instrument. Its members possess diverse identities, interests and political opinions (Sheffer, 2003; Vertovec, 2000). Therefore, "effective engagement requires mutual respect, voluntary participation and sensitivity towards the political and social conditions of host countries" (Østergaard-Nielsen, 2003; Rana, 2009).

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9. Major Instruments of Indian Diaspora in Promoting Soft Power

9.1 Knowledge and Educational Diplomacy: Knowledge and education constitute important dimensions of India's international reputation (Nye, 2004; Tharoor, 2012). "Indian professionals have made significant contributions to science, technology, medicine, engineering, business administration and academic research across the world" (Kapur, 2010; Khadria, 2001).

The presence of Indian-origin professionals in leading international institutions demonstrates India's contribution to global knowledge production (Kapur, 2010; Jain, 2010). Prominent examples include Sundar Pichai in the technology sector and Satya Nadella in the field of corporate leadership.

Indian graduates and researchers working in universities, "research laboratories, multinational corporations and technology institutions contribute to the international visibility of Indian education and professional expertise" (Khadria, 2001; Saxenian, 2006).

Moreover, "academic collaborations, student exchanges, research partnerships and professional networks create opportunities for knowledge transfer between India and other countries" (Meyer & Brown, 1999; Kapur, 2010). "These connections can strengthen India's educational diplomacy and international research cooperation" (Nye, 2004; Rana, 2009).

9.2 Cultural Diplomacy: Culture is one of the most visible instruments through which the Indian diaspora promotes India's soft power (Nye, 2004; Tharoor, 2012). "Indian festivals, languages, traditional clothing, music, dance, literature and religious practices are celebrated in different parts of the world" (Vertovec, 2000; Jayasuriya & Pankhurst, 2003).

Festivals such as Diwali, Holi, Durga Puja and other regional celebrations have become important occasions for cultural interaction (Rana, 2009; Tharoor, 2012). "These events provide opportunities for local communities to understand Indian traditions and appreciate the country's cultural diversity" (Nye, 2004; Hall, 2012).

Indian cultural associations, temples, community organizations and diaspora institutions also contribute to preserving cultural heritage among younger generations (Vertovec, 2000; Sheffer, 2003). "Through these activities, the diaspora creates a positive connection between Indian civilisation and international society" (Jain, 2010; Mazumdar, 2018).

9.3 Indian Cuisine and Gastronomic Diplomacy: Indian cuisine has become an important element of India's cultural influence (Nye, 2004; Tharoor, 2012). "Food represents more than culinary practice; it communicates historical experiences, regional diversity, social traditions and cultural identity" (Ray, 2004; Appadurai, 1988).

"Indian restaurants and food festivals have popularised dishes such as biryani, curry, dosa, idli, naan, samosa, chicken tikka masala and various vegetarian preparations across different countries" (Ray, 2004; Mannur, 2009).

The global popularity of Indian cuisine provides opportunities for cultural interaction and encourages international communities to develop an appreciation of Indian traditions (Mannur, 2009; Tharoor, 2012). "In this sense, food functions as an informal instrument of cultural diplomacy" (Nye, 2004; Rockower, 2012).

9.4 Bollywood and the Indian Entertainment Industry: Indian cinema, particularly Bollywood, has played a significant role in projecting India's cultural identity internationally (Nye, 2004; Tharoor, 2012).

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Indian films, “television programmes, music and digital entertainment have attracted audiences across Asia, Africa, the Middle East, Europe and other regions” (Athique, 2012; Kaur & Sinha, 2005).

The Indian diaspora has contributed significantly to the international circulation of Indian films through theatres, cultural festivals, streaming platforms and community networks (Kaur & Sinha, 2005; Athique, 2012). “Indian filmmakers such as Mira Nair and Deepa Mehta have also contributed to international recognition of Indian and diasporic experiences” (Desai, 2004; Gopinath, 2005).

Cinema communicates India’s social realities, family traditions, historical narratives, cultural diversity and contemporary transformations (Dwyer, 2006; Vasudevan, 2000). Consequently, “the entertainment industry has become an important instrument of India’s public diplomacy” (Nye, 2004; Hall, 2012).

9.5 Secularism, Pluralism and Democratic Values: India’s constitutional commitment to secularism, religious freedom, democratic governance and cultural pluralism provides an important foundation for its international identity (Constituent Assembly of India, 1949; Austin, 1999).

The Indian diaspora reflects the country’s religious, “linguistic and cultural diversity. Indian communities abroad include people belonging to different religious and social traditions who participate in the cultural and civic life of their host countries” (Vertovec, 2000; Sheffer, 2003).

The teachings of Mahatma Gandhi, Swami Vivekananda, Gautama Buddha and Mahavira have also contributed to the international recognition of India’s traditions of peace, non-violence, tolerance and human values (Nye, 2004; Tharoor, 2012).

Through community engagement, interfaith dialogue and cultural activities, overseas Indians can strengthen awareness of India’s pluralistic heritage (Vertovec, 2000; Hall, 2012).

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9.6 Spirituality and Philosophical Traditions: Spirituality is an important component of India’s civilizational identity and international cultural influence (Nye, 2004; Tharoor, 2012). “Indian philosophical traditions have attracted people across the world through their emphasis on self-realisation, ethical living, meditation, peace and human welfare” (Radhakrishnan, 1923; Vivekananda, 1896).

The teachings associated with Buddhism, Jainism, Vedanta and other Indian philosophical traditions have contributed to international intellectual and spiritual exchanges (Radhakrishnan, 1923; King, 1999).

The Indian diaspora has helped establish and maintain spiritual centres, meditation institutions, religious organisations and cultural platforms in different countries (Vertovec, 2000; Williams, 1988). “These

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institutions provide opportunities for cross-cultural understanding and the international dissemination of Indian philosophical traditions" (Nye, 2004; Tharoor, 2012).

9.7 Yoga and Wellness Diplomacy: Yoga is among the most recognisable expressions of India's soft power (Nye, 2004; Hall, 2012). "Originating in ancient Indian philosophical traditions, yoga has developed into a globally recognised practice associated with physical health, mental well-being and spiritual development" (Singleton, 2010; Alter, 2004).

The Indian diaspora has contributed to the international spread of yoga through teaching institutions, wellness centres, cultural associations and individual practitioners (Strauss, 2005; Jain, 2014).

"The adoption of 21 June as the International Day of Yoga by the United Nations General Assembly in 2014, following India's initiative, represents an important achievement in India's cultural diplomacy" (United Nations General Assembly, 2014; Ministry of External Affairs, 2015).

International yoga celebrations have strengthened the visibility of Indian traditions and created opportunities for cultural engagement between India and different societies (Hall, 2012; Jain, 2014).

9.8 Political Advocacy and Lobbying: Political advocacy is another important instrument through which the Indian diaspora contributes to India's international influence (Kapur, 2010; Shain, 1999). "In democratic countries, citizens of Indian origin participate in political parties, legislative institutions, policy discussions and public organisations" (Sheffer, 2003; Varadarajan, 2010).

The Indian-American community has been particularly visible in the development of political understanding between India and the United States (Kapur, 2010; Varadarajan, 2010). "Diaspora organisations have contributed to public discussions, political networking and advocacy concerning bilateral cooperation" (Shain, 1999; Kapur, 2010).

The role of the Indian diaspora in the debates surrounding the India-US civil nuclear agreement illustrates how organised community engagement can contribute to greater political awareness and support for bilateral relations (Kapur, 2010; Ganguly, 2010).

Nevertheless, diaspora political participation should be understood within the democratic institutions and legal frameworks of host countries (Sheffer, 2003; Østergaard-Nielsen, 2003). Its effectiveness depends on credibility, transparency and the ability to develop mutually beneficial partnerships (Shain, 1999; Kapur, 2010).

9.9 Economic Diplomacy and Investment: The Indian diaspora contributes to India's economic development through remittances, foreign investment, entrepreneurship, trade networks and professional collaboration (Kapur, 2010; Khadria, 2001).

Diaspora entrepreneurs often maintain commercial relationships between India and their countries of residence. "These relationships can facilitate international trade, technological cooperation, business partnerships and investment opportunities" (Saxenian, 2006; Kuznetsov, 2006).

In addition, "overseas Indian professionals contribute to the development of international business networks and strengthen India's reputation as an emerging centre of innovation, entrepreneurship and economic growth" (Khadria, 2001; Saxenian, 2006).

Thus, diaspora engagement connects cultural influence with economic diplomacy and contributes to India's broader development objectives (Nye, 2004; Kapur, 2010).

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9.10 Digital Diplomacy and Social Media: Digital technology has transformed the relationship between diaspora communities and their ancestral homeland (Vertovec, 2004; Brinkerhoff, 2009). "Social media platforms, online cultural programmes, digital news networks and virtual professional associations allow overseas Indians to maintain continuous engagement with India" (Brinkerhoff, 2009; Karim, 2003).

Digital platforms enable the dissemination of Indian cultural content, educational information, tourism opportunities and public policy initiatives (Castells, 2009; Nye, 2004). "They also create spaces for dialogue between Indian institutions and overseas communities" (Brinkerhoff, 2009; Vertovec, 2004).

Through digital engagement, "the Indian diaspora can reach wider international audiences and contribute to the promotion of India's cultural and national identity" (Nye, 2004; Tharoor, 2012).

10. Role of the Indian Diaspora in India's Bilateral and Multilateral Relations

10.1 India-US Relations: The Indian-American community has emerged as an important bridge between India and the United States (Kapur, 2010; Varadarajan, 2010). "Its contribution extends across technology, education, business, healthcare, scientific research and political participation" (Saxenian, 2006; Khadria, 2001).

Indian-origin professionals and entrepreneurs have strengthened economic and technological connections between the two countries (Saxenian, 2006; Kapur, 2010). "Diaspora organisations have also facilitated political dialogue and greater public understanding of bilateral issues" (Shain, 1999; Varadarajan, 2010).

The debates surrounding the India-US civil nuclear agreement provide an important example of diaspora advocacy and political engagement (Kapur, 2010; Ganguly, 2010). "The Indian-American community helped generate awareness and support for closer strategic cooperation" (Kapur, 2010; Varadarajan, 2010).

10.2 India-Gulf Relations: The Indian diaspora in Gulf countries plays a particularly important role in India's economic and diplomatic relationships with West Asia (Nair, 1998; Khadria, 2006). "Indian workers, professionals, entrepreneurs and business communities contribute to the economies of their host countries while maintaining important connections with India" (Kapiszewski, 2006; Nair, 1998).

Remittances, labour mobility, trade networks and community relationships have strengthened India's engagement with the Gulf region (Rajan & Narayana, 2011; Khadria, 2006).

Unlike some diaspora communities in Western countries, a substantial section of the Indian population in Gulf countries consists of temporary migrant workers (Kapiszewski, 2006; Rajan & Narayana, 2011). "Their contribution demonstrates that diaspora diplomacy is not restricted to influential professionals or wealthy communities; ordinary workers also play an important role in strengthening international relationships" (Nair, 1998; Khadria, 2006).

10.3 India-United Kingdom Relations: The Indian-origin population in the United Kingdom has made significant contributions to business, education, healthcare, politics and cultural activities (Vertovec, 2000; Raj, 2003). "British Indian communities have strengthened historical and contemporary connections between the two countries" (Kapur, 2010; Varadarajan, 2010).

Their participation in political institutions, professional organization's and educational establishments provides opportunities for greater cooperation in trade, research, cultural exchange and diplomatic dialogue (Shain, 1999; Vertovec, 2000; Tharoor, 2012).

10.4 India-Southeast Asia Relations: Indian-origin communities in Southeast Asia have contributed to the historical and cultural connections between India and the region (Lal, 2006; Amrith, 2011). "These

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relationships are particularly relevant to India's Act East Policy, which emphasises economic cooperation, connectivity, cultural interaction and strategic engagement with Southeast Asian countries" (Ministry of External Affairs, 2014; Hall, 2016).

Diaspora networks contribute to strengthening people-to-people relations and provide a foundation for educational, cultural and commercial partnerships (Amrith, 2011; Kapur, 2010).

11. Major Challenges and Limitations of Diaspora Engagement: Despite its enormous potential, the Indian diaspora faces several challenges that can limit its contribution to India's soft power policy.

1. Diversity of Interests: The Indian diaspora is not a homogeneous community. Differences in language, religion, region, class, political opinion and migration history influence its relationship with India.

2. Host Country Political Sensitivities: Diaspora engagement must respect the sovereignty, laws and political institutions of host countries. Excessive political mobilisation may create diplomatic sensitivities.

3. Identity and Cultural Integration: Younger generations of overseas Indians may experience changing cultural connections with India. Maintaining cultural identity while integrating into host societies remains an important challenge.

4. Discrimination and Social Exclusion: Racism, xenophobia, workplace discrimination and social inequalities can affect the experiences of overseas Indians and influence their capacity for participation.

5. Limited Institutional Coordination: Effective diaspora engagement requires coordination among government institutions, diplomatic missions, diaspora organisations and professional associations. Gaps in communication can reduce the effectiveness of existing initiatives.

6. Unequal Recognition of Diaspora Contributions: The achievements of highly skilled professionals often receive greater attention than those of migrant workers, who also make substantial contributions to India's international image and economic relationships.

7. Political and Diplomatic Controversies: Political disagreements and conflicting narratives in host societies may sometimes affect the public image of diaspora communities and complicate diplomatic engagement.

8. Brain Drain and Human Capital Concerns: The migration of highly skilled professionals creates opportunities for international knowledge networks but may also raise concerns regarding the loss of skilled human resources from India.

These challenges demonstrate the need for a balanced, inclusive and institutionally coordinated approach to diaspora diplomacy.

12. Major Findings and Discussion: The study identifies several important findings regarding the relationship between the Indian diaspora and India's soft power policy.

First, the Indian diaspora constitutes a significant transnational resource that strengthens India's international visibility and cultural influence. Its geographical distribution provides opportunities for sustained engagement with different regions of the world.

Second, the diaspora promotes India's cultural identity through festivals, cuisine, cinema, languages, spirituality and yoga. These activities contribute to the development of favourable perceptions of India among foreign societies.

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Third, the international achievements of Indian-origin professionals have strengthened the reputation of Indian human resources in science, technology, medicine, education and business. Their success has created opportunities for knowledge exchange and international cooperation.

Fourth, political participation and advocacy by overseas Indians have contributed to strengthening India's diplomatic relationships, particularly in countries with influential Indian-origin communities.

Fifth, the contribution of the diaspora varies according to regional circumstances. The role of highly skilled professionals in Western countries differs from that of migrant workers in Gulf countries. Therefore, India's diaspora policy requires region-specific approaches rather than a uniform strategy.

Sixth, the economic contribution of overseas Indians through remittances, investment and trade networks demonstrates that diaspora diplomacy has both cultural and developmental dimensions.

Finally, the study finds that the effective utilisation of diaspora potential requires greater institutional coordination, protection of migrant rights, inclusive engagement and sustained cooperation between India and its overseas communities.

13. Policy Recommendations: To strengthen the contribution of the Indian diaspora to India's soft power policy, the following measures are suggested:

1. **Strengthening Institutional Engagement:** India should develop stronger coordination among diplomatic missions, diaspora organisations, educational institutions and professional associations.

2. **Promoting Cultural Diplomacy:** Indian cultural programmes, language initiatives, festivals, literature, cinema and traditional knowledge should receive greater international visibility.

3. **Encouraging Academic Collaboration:** Greater opportunities should be created for overseas Indian scholars, scientists and professionals to participate in research partnerships, visiting fellowships and knowledge-sharing programmes.

4. **Protecting Migrant Workers:** The government should strengthen legal assistance, welfare services and institutional protection for Indian workers abroad, particularly in vulnerable employment sectors.

5. **Expanding Digital Diaspora Networks:** Digital platforms should be utilised to encourage dialogue, cultural exchange, professional networking and participation in India's development initiatives.

6. **Promoting Inclusive Diaspora Engagement:** Policy initiatives should recognise the contributions of all sections of the diaspora, including skilled professionals, students, entrepreneurs, women and migrant workers.

7. **Strengthening Economic Partnerships:** India should encourage diaspora-led entrepreneurship, investment, technology transfer and international business cooperation.

8. **Encouraging Youth Engagement:** Educational exchanges, cultural programmes and leadership initiatives should be developed to connect younger generations of overseas Indians with India's contemporary society.

9. **Developing Region-Specific Strategies:** Diaspora engagement policies should recognise the different social, political and economic conditions of host countries.

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10. **Strengthening India's Global Image:** India should promote democratic values, cultural pluralism, peaceful international cooperation and responsible global engagement to reinforce the credibility of its soft power.

14. Conclusion: The Indian diaspora has emerged as one of the most significant non-state actors in India's contemporary foreign policy and soft power strategy (Nye, 2004; Kapur, 2010). "Its contribution extends beyond financial remittances and economic activities to include cultural diplomacy, political advocacy, educational cooperation, technological development and international relationship-building" (Khadria, 2001; Rana, 2009).

The concept of soft power provides an important framework for understanding how the Indian diaspora strengthens India's global position through attraction, persuasion and cultural interaction (Nye, 2004; Hall, 2012). "By promoting Indian traditions, languages, cuisine, cinema, spirituality, yoga and democratic values, overseas Indians contribute to developing a favourable international image of their ancestral homeland" (Tharoor, 2012; Mazumdar, 2018).

The diaspora's contribution is also visible in India's bilateral relationships. "The Indian-American community has strengthened political and economic connections between India and the United States, while Indian communities in Gulf countries have contributed to economic interdependence and people-to-people relations" (Kapur, 2010; Varadarajan, 2010; Kapiszewski, 2006). Similarly, overseas Indian communities in Europe, Africa, Southeast Asia and other regions provide important foundations for cultural and diplomatic cooperation (Vertovec, 2000; Lal, 2006).

However, the potential of the diaspora cannot be fully realised without addressing the challenges of migration, social integration, political sensitivities, institutional coordination and unequal recognition (Sheffer, 2003; Østergaard-Nielsen, 2003). "India must therefore adopt an inclusive and sustainable diaspora engagement policy that respects the diverse identities and interests of overseas Indians while encouraging their voluntary participation in international cooperation" (Kapur, 2010; Rana, 2009).

Ultimately, the Indian diaspora should be recognised not simply as a population living outside India's geographical boundaries but as an important bridge between India and the international community (Nye, 2004; Tharoor, 2012). "Its cultural, intellectual, economic and political contributions can strengthen India's soft power, enhance its diplomatic influence and support its aspirations for a more prominent role in global affairs" (Hall, 2012; Kapur, 2010).

"The future effectiveness of India's soft power policy will depend not only on the country's cultural and civilizational resources but also on its ability to build meaningful, respectful and mutually beneficial relationships with its global diaspora" (Nye, 2004; Rana, 2009).

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