DIASPORIC MEDIATIONS: NAVIGATING FOREIGN POLICY IN THE CONTEXT OF INDIA- SINGAPORE RELATIONSHIP

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ABSTRACT

India's historical ties with Southeast Asia extend across geography, cultural, culture, economy, civilization and strategy. These ties deepened significantly following the launch of the Look East Policy in the 1990s, which catalysed India's active interaction with ASEAN and Singapore and their homeland, fostering closer trade relations and revitalizing social and cultural relations. This policy facilitated investments and interactions between the Indian diaspora in bonds. The transition to the Act East Policy in 2014 under Prime Minister Narendra Modi further amplified these connections, shifting the focus from economic recovery to a comprehensive framework encompassing cultural, political, and strategic aspects. Against this backdrop, this paper examines the role played by Indian diaspora as a key instrument of soft power in strengthening mutual ties among India and Singapore, with particular emphasis on political and economic dynamics.

Keywords: Indian Diaspora, Soft Power, Look East Policy, Act East Policy

1. INTRODUCTION

The word diaspora typically refers to individuals residing outside the borders of their homeland while maintaining active socio-cultural ties and enduring connections with the native population of their country of origin. In a specific historical milieu, the term diaspora indicates the act of "scattering" or "dispersing. "Primarily, the term diaspora known as the forced exile of Jews from Palestine, embodying notions of violence, isolation, ruin, and banishment. Over time, its meaning and significance have shifted, evolving in response to varying historical and cultural contexts. For example, while enslavement and the indenture system were among the several egregious forms of oppression in the colonial period, the concept now extends to include a broad range of labour recruitment systems (Cohen, 2008). From an Indian perspective, migration from India has been driven by a range of factors, both voluntary and forced. Economic opportunities, education, political instability, and the search for better living conditions have historically motivated individuals to move abroad. In many cases, these migrants, often part of the Indian diaspora, have not returned to India, either due to established careers, family ties, or challenges in re-settlement. Research on Indian migration should adopt

a nuanced approach, incorporating historical, socio-economic, political, and cultural dimensions, while emphasizing the complex, diverse, and often long-term experiences of the diaspora. Despite being dispersed, there remains a strong sense of nostalgia, driven by deep cultural, social, and religious ties to the homeland.

2. THE ROLE OF 'SOFT POWER' IN SHAPING INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS AND FOREIGN POLICY

Power is an eminent resource for countries seeking to influence others and achieve desired outcomes. This influence can be exerted through various means, including coercion, foreign aid, or the strategic use of temptation and persuasion. Soft power refers to a state's ability to shape the actions of other countries through the appeal of its culture, values, and policies, instead of coercion or force. The term "soft power" was created by Joseph Nye lately in 1980s in his book "Bound to Lead", primarily to describe the diplomatic strategy of the United States. Nye contended that achieving success in international relations requires nations to effectively integrate soft power as well as hard power strategies. States should develop and leverage the soft power by utilizing cultural centre, civilian institution, educational institutions, and corporations. Over the time, the concept of soft power has transcended its American origins and has been adopted by numerous countries as a key element of their foreign policy (Kugiel, 2017).

Since the conclusion of the Cold War, the landscape of worldwide relations has undergone substantial transformation, driven by changing geopolitical factors and new global realities. Globalization and interdependence significantly reduce the probability of clash and conflict between states. In many instances, military power alone is insufficient for countries to achieve their foreign policy objectives, as economic, diplomatic, and other forms of influence play a crucial role in shaping international relations. Nye asserts that communication strategies play a critical role, with outcomes increasingly determined not solely by military victories, but by the ability to shape and dominate the prevailing narrative (Nye, 2011). The use of hard power has historically imposed significant costs on nations and their people, as seen during the World Wars. This prompted the development of "soft power" as a strategic approach in in foreign policy and diplomatic relations. In practice, soft power proves effective only when underpinned by a state's military capabilities, economic capacity, global reliability, and, most critically, its legitimacy. Furthermore, the utilization of soft power in a state's domestic political dynamics can have a significant impact on the international stage, as global audiences closely observe how leaders govern within their own nations and engage with the international community (Li, 2008).

3. THE DIASPORA AS A TOOL OF SOFT POWER

The diaspora plays a pivotal role in a nation's foreign policy, serving as a vital tool for cultivating soft power on the global stage. Often regarded as a form of "smart power," the diaspora community enhances a country's influence and strengthens its international presence. By adopting a comprehensive diaspora policy, its potential can be fully realized, yielding measurable results. The diaspora not only helps promote and strengthen soft power but also supports the expansion of soft power and the development of hard power, especially in economic and military areas. Diasporas are well-positioned in the modern world to shape global perceptions of their home countries, thereby enhancing the national image and contributing to a country's "nation branding." Diasporas serve as a significant means of conveying messages and shaping perceptions of their countries of origin within host nations. Consequently, they could be regarded like a "low-cost foreign policy tool." In the realm of diplomatic relations, scholars perceive diasporas as transnational advocacy entities that advocate for the objective of their countries of origin in abroad. The full potential of the diaspora as a tool of soft power in the foreign policies of nations remains under-explored. Diaspora communities, however, have the capacity to function as instruments of a government's diplomatic strategy, advancing specific foreign policy objectives outside the territorial limits of the nation-state. As a key factor of soft power, diaspora is instrumental in shaping public opinion and social attitudes within host countries towards their countries of origin. In the second half of the twentieth century, numerous countries have effectively leveraged the potential of their diaspora communities. Notably, both China and Israel successfully utilized the influence of their diasporas to advance their diplomatic objectives (Kugiel, 2017). India and Singapore share a longstanding legacy of social and cultural exchange including trade relations, which have fostered strong bilateral ties over time. This enduring partnership has contributed to the growing significance of soft power throughout the region. Since the period of Sir Stamford Raffles, the British official and key figure in founding of Singapore, the relationship between the two nations has remained robust and continues to strengthen (Lal & Rai, 2006). Following India's economic liberalization in the 1990s, mutual engagement with Singapore entered into a different era

of growth and mutual advancement. Currently, Singapore is home to a significant number of registered Indian companies are working in Singapore, while over 440 Singaporean firms have established a presence in India. In November 2018, the India-Singapore CEO Forum was established to further strengthen these ties. Notably, Singapore stands as India's largest trading ally in Southeast region (MEA. 2019). In 2014, the PM of India made several formal trips to Singapore, aiming to boost up the diplomatic ties between the two nations in areas such as science, innovation, technology, and the economy. The Indian diaspora has traced its roots in Singapore when trade relations were established among the British colonial rule and the region of the Southeast Asia. A significant number of individuals were forcibly brought to Singapore as worker also prisoners of war. The majority of the Indian population in Singapore originated from the southern regions of India, having arrived in the mid-nineteenth period primarily as labourers. They were employed on agricultural farms and estates, as well as in the infrastructure and development sector of the Singapore's government (Yadav, 2005). India's approach regarding the diaspora has evolved significantly, from the colonial period to the early years of independence and into the present. After independence, India maintained limited engagement with its overseas population. It took several years to recognize the potential of the Indian community in strengthening the India and Singapore engagement. In the early phase of 1990s, India underwent a notable transformation in its political and economic framework with the adoption of the Liberalization, Privatization, and Globalization (LPG) model. As a key element of this shift, Prime Minister Narasimha Rao initiated the 'Look East Policy' (LEP) in 1991. This policy sought to enhance India's connections with Asia by promoting economic, and political ties, and advancing security engagement, all in alignment with the country's broader strategy of economic globalization. Nearly 25 years later, in 2014, Prime Minister Narendra Modi refocused on Asia to strengthen India's political, social, security, cultural, and economic connections, bringing renewed energy and purpose to India-Singapore relations Singh & Rahman, 2010). The "Look East Policy" has been redefined and strengthened in its contemporary form as the "Act East Policy." Indian policymakers recognized the significant role of the Indian diaspora in Singapore, not only as a key economic asset but also as a pivotal factor in India's ascent as a global power. This shift aims to foster reciprocally valuable and complementary relationship within the region of Southeast Asia.

4. FOREIGN POLICY AND DIASPORA

The relationship between diaspora and foreign policy is inherently interconnected, with diaspora policy being an integral component of a nation's broader foreign policy framework. As non-state actors and a form of soft power, diasporas play a significant role in shaping international relations. Through lobbying and other forms of engagement, they interact with state actors in their host countries, thereby influencing the policies of their countries of origin. Diasporas often find themselves navigating the complexities of dual cultural, societal, and national identities. They are emotionally invested in their native land and host nation, striving to maintain social connections within each society. This unique position enables diaspora communities to influence the foreign policy decisions of both their country of origin and their adopted nation. In the twenty-first century, the global order has shifted, making it clear that diplomatic ties among nations can no longer be established solely on military power. Instead, these relationships must be based on cultural, social, and economic foundations to ensure long-term stability. In the age of globalization, it is crucial to establish strong, consistent, and steady connections among countries to promote global tranquillity. In this context, the diaspora acts as a vital cultural bridge, representing their homeland in the host country and fostering mutual understanding between the two nations. Soft power in international relations is driven by five main tools: public diplomacy, economic diplomacy, cultural diplomacy, development cooperation, and crucially, engagement with the diaspora. Diasporas play a vital role in diplomatic strategies by contributing in ways that extend beyond official governmental relations. Diasporas engage diplomatic strategies in foreign policy through three key approaches: advocacy, mediation, and representation. Diaspora advocacy involves the active engagement of diaspora communities in influencing policies that affect their rights and well-being in both their countries of residence and origin (Ho & McConnell, 2019). In Singapore, the Indian community has leveraged Tamil language along with cultural practices as instruments of diplomatic outreach to promote integration, advocate for the political rights, and strengthen the soft power tools for both nations. Tamil is recognized as an Singapore's official languages, represents the Indian ethnic community. Diasporas play an active role in mediating conflicts between their home and host countries, influencing political and strategic dynamics. They can act as both disruptive and peace-making forces in political settlements. For example, during the ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka, the Tamil diaspora provided financial support to the LTTE in their homeland (Cochrane & Swain, 2009). In the peace-building process, the diaspora plays a crucial role by raising consciousness by endorsement of human rights

in the countries of origin and countries of residence. As an external yet closely connected entity, the diaspora occupies a distinctive role as an intermediary in foreign policy. The next approach, diaspora representation, highlights the role of diasporas in diplomatic activities, with representation serving as a crucial mechanism through which they engage in diplomatic processes. For example, the Punjab government in India aimed to involve the Sikh community in the country's advancement objectives. However, the Sikh diaspora's-historical support and funding for separatism highlights the complicated engagement between its political aspirations of the Sikh diaspora as well as India's diaspora policies. Stateless community often employ specific forms of representation to achieve political identification regarding global sphere. Diaspora strategy play a vital role in international relations, as they extend beyond the boundaries of a nation's domestic framework (Ho & McConnell, 2019).

5. INDIA'S DIASPORA-DRIVEN SOFT POWER IN SINGAPORE

The Indian diaspora in Singapore has long been closely linked to the political landscape and policies of India, even prior to the country's independence. During the freedom struggle, the diaspora was instrumental in supporting India's quest for independence. Notably, Subhas Chandra Bose significantly influenced the movement through his leadership of the Indian National Army (INA), empowering the fight for freedom. This event represented a significant turning point for Singapore's Indian community, as Indians diaspora played a crucial role in advancing the movement for India's freedom from British colonial rule. In Singapore, Indians played a vital role in supporting India's independence movement and the abolishing the British regime. The Sikh community in Singapore strongly supported the Ghadar Party and its main purpose. The Indian community in Singapore has a crucial influence on India's economy and politics, while also contributing significantly to Singapore's socio-economic and political development (Lal & Rai, 2006). Currently, many Indians hold prominent positions within the Singaporean government, and they are actively involved in the social and cultural life of the country. Their influence extends to both the political and economic spheres, contributing significantly to the strengthening of bilateral engagement among India and Singapore. India's "Look East Policy" has significant impact in fostering strong, long-term ties among India and region of Southeast Asia, further enhancing this collaboration (Pande, 2017). The 'Look East Policy' was primarily centred on enhancing early trade relations and commercial initiatives through investment ties. A significant number of foreign investors pulled out their capital in 1990-1991, due to India's balance of payments crisis, the government raised funds through Indian Development Bonds (IDBs) to attract investments from Non-Resident Indians (NRIs). This strategy, similar to the concept of 'Diaspora Bonds' used by several countries—most notably Israel—allowed India to secure financing during a challenging period in the international market. The Indian government could raise USD 1.6 billion through the issuance of Indian Development Bonds. These bonds, commonly referred to as 'Diaspora Bonds' were initially launched as 'Indian Resurgent Bonds.' In 2000, the government introduced these bonds called 'India Millennium Bonds,' which contributed to a significant boost in the Indian economy, raising USD 5.5 billion (Ketkar & Ratha, 2007). In 1998, when the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) assumed power, the government of India launched the Person of Indian Origin (PIO) card for individuals of Indian descent residing in specific countries. This initiative granted the Indian diaspora visa-less travel as well as conferred various exemptions, including enhanced opportunities in business, education, and investment industry. In 2000, The government of India established the High-Level Committee on the Indian Diaspora, led by the late Mr. L. M. Singhvi. This committee performed a significant act in shifting the focus of India's foreign policy and leadership towards the diaspora of India. Its recommendations were widely accepted and implemented, most notably leading to the establishment of the Pravasi Bharatiya Divas celebrations (Rajan, 2016).

During the, Atal Bihari Vajpayee term, India's approach to its diaspora underwent a significant transformation, marking a new and more dynamic phase. Vajpayee was the first Prime Minister to establish a direct connection between India and its global diaspora. In 2003, he initiated the annual celebration of Pravasi Bharatiya Divas, observed on January 9, to celebrate the comeback of Mahatma Gandhi from South Africa in 1915. This incident has since served as a platform to strengthen India's relationship with its overseas communities. The Ministry of Non-Resident Indian Affairs (MOIA) was set up in 2004, with the primary aim of addressing the needs of the Indians living overseas, Non-Resident Indians (NRIs), and Persons of Indian Origin (PIOs). Its two key objectives were to foster engagement and strengthen ties with the Indian diaspora, as well as to understand and resolve the challenges faced by overseas Indians. Under the guidance of Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee, the initiative to introduce PIO and Overseas Citizen of India (OCI) cards was launched as a means to further connect India with its global community (MEA,2018). In the sixteenth election declaration, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) outlined its commitment to engaging with Non-Resident Indians (NRIs),

Persons of Indian Origin (PIOs), and the Indian diaspora through a proactive diplomatic strategy aimed at promoting "Brand India" on the global stage. The manifesto emphasized that NRIs, PIOs, and overseas professionals represent a significant resource for advancing India's national interests and global image. The party proposed leveraging this reservoir of talent and influence to strategically enhance India's international presence and reputation (Challagalla, 2018). Prime Minister Narendra Modi has carried forward Atal Bihari Vajpayee's vision of fostering strong connections with the Indian diaspora. As part of this commitment, Modi has undertaken visits to several nations, including the United States, Canada, Australia, Fiji, Mauritius, Seychelles, Singapore, Sri Lanka, Bhutan, France, Germany, and Japan, to strengthen ties and engage with Indian communities abroad.(Samudranil,2015) The concept of the Pravasi Bharatiya Divas (PBD), "Ancient Route, New Journey: Diaspora in the Dynamic ASEAN- India Partnership," effectively underscored the deep interconnection between bilateral engagement and the Indian community. It highlighted the historical linkages and the evolving role of the diaspora in fostering dynamic partnerships between India and ASEAN nations (MEA, 2018). Sushma Swaraj engaged with the Indian community in Singapore, emphasizing their role in strengthening the cooperation between India and ASEAN nations. During her visit, she also had a meeting with Shri Ponnampalam and Shri Sockalingam, ex-soldier of the Indian National Army, and got the blessings. In support of this initiative, PM Modi, during his visit to Singapore, inaugurated the Indian Heritage Centre—an innovative initiative aimed at promoting Indian handicrafts and supporting rural livelihoods. In 2015, Indian Prime Minister made two official visits to Singapore, for paying the respect at the funeral of Singapore's founding father Mr. Lee Kuan Yew. The visit echoed the sentiments of Rabindranath Tagore, who once remarked, "Asia is regaining its self-consciousness for the realization of its own self." Modi's "Act East Policy" brought institutional reforms as well as transformative shift, such as the merger of the Overseas Citizen of India (OCI) and Persons of Indian Origin (PIO) cards, effectively eliminating the discrimination previously faced by the Indian diaspora (Modi, 2015). As a part of the visit to Singapore, Prime Minister outlined a plan to empower Singaporean Indians by enabling them to become stakeholders in India's progress. The policy emphasizes that state governments in India should proactively engage with the Indian diaspora, drawing inspiration from Singapore's significant role as a key partner in the development of Amaravati, the proposed capital city of Andhra Pradesh (Mikkilineni, 2018). While highlighting entrepreneurship, innovation, and social engagement event themed on "India and Singapore: Stepping into the Future – A Partnership for Enterprise and Innovation,". Prime Ministers Modi and Lee discussed their diplomatic ties and emphasized strengthening bilateral ties in economic engagement, technology advancement, innovation, as well as human and cultural ties. Each of the leaders expressed their support for the Joint Working Group (JWG) on FinTech, directed by the Monetary Authority of Singapore (MAS) and the Department of Financial Services (DFS), Ministry of Finance, India, along with significant government departments from both nations. Singapore's Prime Minister, Lee, has consistently advocated for India's inclusion as a permanent member in a reformed United Nations Security Council. Additionally, a Hackathon was collaboratively hosted by Nanyang Technological University (NTU) in Singapore and All India Council for Technical Education (AICTE) aiming to foster innovation and technical collaboration (HCI, 2018) India signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with TiE Singapore to launch the Singapore-India Incubation Programme under the Start-up SGI initiative, directed by Enterprise Singapore (ESG). TiE is a prominent and global network for entrepreneur organizations for Indian community abroad. Prime Minister Narendra Modi introduced several schemes in India, such as Make in India, Skill India, and Digital India, which have been instrumental in promoting investment opportunities for the Indian diaspora (MEA, 2018). These policies provide significant opportunities for the diaspora to contribute. The Indian government should implement policies specifically targeting the Singaporean Indian diaspora to enable their greater involvement in both the public and private sectors. Such initiatives would further strengthen and solidify the bilateral relations between India and Singapore. It is encouraging to see the current government prioritizing significance of the Indian diaspora (Challagalla, 2018). The Indian community in Singapore has increasingly become a vital bridge, enhancing ties and fostering deeper collaboration between the two nations. Through the "Act East Policy", Singapore has solidified its role as a gateway to the East, contributing to the rapid growth of India-Singapore relations.

6. IMPACT OF THE INDIAN DIASPORA ON SINGAPORE'S FOREIGN POLICY

Singapore and India share an enriching history, and their bilateral relations strengthened significantly after the launch of India's 'Look East Policy' in 1991. With the rise of Narendra Modi as Prime Minister in 2014, the Indian government's primary focus shifted towards engaging its diaspora and fostering cultural ties. In this context, Singapore emerged as a key partner, offering prompt initiatives to support the Indian community. The Singaporean government

has also implemented policies aimed at facilitating stronger connections between the Indian diaspora and their homeland, including liberal immigration policies and fostering business ties between the two nations. The government of Singapore has also provided cultural assistance to the Indian community, exemplified by the opening of the Indian Heritage Centre in 2015 in the guidance of the Singapore National Heritage Board. The establishment of the centre traces the heritage and contributions of Indian communities and also, South Asian communities in Singapore, and the broader region. Additionally, Indian films, literature, and other cultural expressions enjoy significant popularity in Singapore, further deepening the cultural engagement among the countries. In the current context of foreign ties, the influence of art, literature, architecture   as well art has become increasingly important in shaping diplomatic engagements, presenting opportunities for further strengthening Singapore's relationship with India (Tan, 2014). In 2018, Prime Minister Modi introduced three type of Indian digital payment platforms—BHIM, Ru-Pay, as well as State Bank of India—in Singapore, aiming to advance the global expansion of India's domestic payment systems (MEA, 2018). The initiative has been positively received by the government of Singapore and the Indian diaspora as well. Soma Sankara Prasad, the Country Head of the State Bank of India (SBI) in Singapore, stated, "To expand our remittance offerings, we are launching Rupee Remittance to India through the United Payments Interface (UPI)." This service provides significant advantages for India's blue-collar employee in Singapore, facilitating the transfer of funds to their relatives through the given application.

Recently, Track-II diplomacy in the context of India and Singapore has intensified, with Indian think tanks and policy analysis` groups contributing significantly to the strategic shaping of Singapore's foreign policy. As a result, the Indian community has exerted a notable influence on both the political and cultural spheres in Singapore, enhancing India's strategic position in the region.

7. POLITICAL INFLUENCE OF INDIAN DIASPORA IN SINGAPORE

The Indian community in Singapore has been actively engaged in 'high politics' from the time of   colonial era. In 1923, Indian made up around 8% of Singapore's population was of Indian descent, yet this community had little political representation in the legislature, there was a single Indian member serving in the assembly.Several Indians played significant roles in Singapore's power politics, including Arumugam Ponnu Rajah, was the chief secretary of the Progressive Party, who won as a City Councillor in 1949. Additionally, Legislative Councillors C.R. Dasaratha Raj and also S.C. Goho made notable contributions. In 1950, S. Jaganathan, leader of the Singapore Trade Union Congress, highlighted the significance of the Indian community to the Labour Movement. Indians were instrumental in shaping Singaporean politics throughout the critical transition of the country's move toward self-governance. A key figure in this transformation was Chengara Veetil Devan Nair, a former political prisoner and communist and the Singapore's third President, who had a significant role in shaping the societal changes (Kesavapany & Latif, 2016). In Singaporean politics, the Indian community has historically been divided along ideological lines, with representation from conservative, liberal, and socialist factions. Prominent Indian parties, such as the Malayalam Indian Congress (MIC), which has since been rebranded as the Singapore Regional Indian Congress (SRIC), have a significant contribution in shaping the political landscape. The Indian community in Singapore is instrumental in the process of decision-making within Parliament, functioning as intermediaries and advocated among Singapore and India, thus influencing mutual engagements. The politics of Singapore serves as a valuable instance for India, showcasing how political discourse can transcend divisions based on caste creed, faith, religion, and other social challenges. In contrast to many other nations, these factors are not prominent in the political framework of Singapore. The government consistently prioritizes the collective welfare of its citizens, while the people of Singapore remain deeply committed to the country's prosperity. This unity and dedication have contributed to the sustained strength of the Singaporean dollar. Furthermore, Singapore maintains an inclusive political system, where no citizen faces restrictions in participating in the political process (Tan, 2007).

8. SINGAPORE'S IMMIGRATION POLICIES AND THEIR IMPACT ON THE INDIAN DIASPORA

The Singaporean government of Singapore implemented a significant shift in its immigration policy in the 1990s, marking the beginning of another developmental phase. This strategic transition redirected the focus from prioritizing "foreign investment" to emphasizing the attraction and integration of "foreign talent. "Singapore actively sought to attract skilled foreign talent as part of its strategic effort to transform its economy into a hub driven by technology, knowledge, creativity, and innovation. To achieve this goal, the nation prioritized the recruitment of highly skilled

professionals from abroad. In his 1997 National Day Rally speech, Singapore's Prime Minister emphasized the importance of human capital in the information age, stating, "In the information age, human talent, not physical resources or financial capital, is the key factor for economic competitiveness and success. We must, therefore, welcome the infusion of knowledge that foreign talent will bring." (Yang & Zhan, 2017). In 1991, Singapore's Economic Development Board (EDB) launched the International Manpower Program, followed by the Prime Minister's Office assuming responsibility for foreign talent initiatives in 1995. The Singapore Talent Recruitment (STAR) program was introduced in 1998. The government of Singapore made efforts to influence the foreign talent, particularly during the first decade of the 21st century. Notably, in 2004, the Global Investor Program (GIP) and the Financial Investor Scheme (FIS) were introduced, providing pathways for foreign professionals to secure work visas, financial integration, and permanent residency. The Personalized Employment Pass (PEP) was launched in 2007 to further support these efforts. However, in 2012, the FIS was discontinued, and the GIP eligibility criteria were tightened. These immigration policies have significantly facilitated the settlement of the Indian diaspora in Singapore, fostering their integration into the nation's economic and social landscape (Kumar & Siddique, 2010).

9. INDIAN DIASPORA ORGANIZATIONS: KEY DRIVERS OF BILATERAL TRADE AND INVESTMENT EXPANSION

Several industry organizations have played a prominent role in fostering India and Singapore cooperation, including the Confederation of Indian Industry (CII) and the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FICCI). These associations have established branches in Singapore and collaborate together with local counterparts, such as the Singapore Indian Chamber of Commerce and Industry (SICCI), to strengthen bilateral ties. Several networks in India, including Network India, facilitate connections between Singaporean firms and the Indian market.

In addition, alumni networks from prestigious Indian institutions, such as IITs and IIMs, have established active platforms in Singapore that foster networking among entrepreneurs, students, and business leaders from diverse sectors including finance, technology, maritime trade, manufacturing, logistics, and supply chain management. These platforms have become increasingly popular for knowledge exchange and collaboration. Moreover, India's leading educational institutions, including IITs and IIMs, maintain strong ties with top-tier Singaporean universities, such as NUS and NTU, further enhancing educational and professional linkages between the two countries (Dhanji & Rangan, 2018).

The Indian community in Singapore serves as a significant source of soft power, not only strengthening the mutual engagement among India and Singapore but also enhancing India's influence within the broader ASEAN region. With China expanding its influence in Southeast Asia, it is crucial for both to deepen their strategic cooperation, and the Indian diaspora plays a pivotal role in this effort. Despite their relatively small numbers in Singapore, the community can substantially contribute to advancing India-Singapore relations.

10. IMPACT OF INDIA'S 'LOOK EAST' AND 'ACT EAST' POLICIES ON THE INDIAN DIASPORA IN SINGAPORE

The implementation of the 'Look East Policy' provided a significant opportunity for Singaporean Indians to engage in investments and interactions with their ancestral homeland. Through the policy, it was possible for India to establish a foothold in the region, creating a platform for the Indian community to strengthen and rejuvenate their social and cultural ties with India (Sikri, 2009). During the colonial era, many individuals migrated from India to Singapore, with some choosing not to return to their homeland. For these individuals, the Loss of Indian Nationality (LEP) served as a valuable opportunity to re-establish connections with India. In the 1990s, Singapore faced an economic insurgent in the 1990s, got labour deficiency as well, which further influenced migration dynamics. To address the labour shortage, workers without specialization were recruited from India and other countries. As a result, between 1990 and 1991, many people from India went to Singapore under the LEP program. Additionally, amendments in Singapore's immigration policies starting in the late 1980s further facilitated migration from India. In April 1987, the government of Singapore introduced a new immigration policy, furthermore the Two-Tier Levy formula was implemented in 1991. This system recommended employers to offer a higher levy for employers whose service exceeded the "dependent ceiling" worth of the firm. The introduction of the Levy and Dependent Ceiling policies coincided with the Singaporean government's decision to welcome Indian professionals. This policy shift, along with trade agreements, facilitated the movement of proficient and very specialized professionals, particularly from India. As noted by Amarjit Kaur, an Indian scholar

specializing in Southeast Asia, "The diminishing significance of Southeast Asia's Indian minorities since the mid-1950s seems to have been reversed by the rising demand for Indian professionals, migrant workers, and contract labour." (Pande, 2017). The LEP enhanced the growth of reciprocal trade and strengthened economic and strategic partnerships, which in turn encouraged migration from India to Singapore. However, the LEP often overlooked the community of India in international relations, failing to maximize their potential in strategic and political context. Furthermore, Indian politicians were often confused to admit the diaspora as a significant determinant in shaping India–Singapore mutual cooperation as well as an instrument for further relations with the broader ASEAN nations (Pant & Deb 2017). The Indian diaspora in Singapore plays a pivotal role in fostering bilateral relations between India and Singapore, as well as contributing to the broader ASEAN region. Members of the Indian community are actively involved in Singaporean politics, holding prominent positions as representative of government, administrators, and even the Head of State. This active participation significantly enhances the ties between the two nations. Historically, the Indian diaspora arrived in Singapore as labourers, domestic servants, and entrepreneurs. Over time, they have successfully established themselves in the country, driven by their diligence, resilience, and intellectual capabilities. This community's prosperity and success continue to shape the dynamic relationship among India and Singapore (Jha, 2009).

11. CONCLUSION

The Indian community has an important role not only in shaping India's freedom struggle as well as in influencing its post-independence policy. Notably, Singapore was the only country where a significant army, formed with the support of the local Indian community, fought for India's independence. It was also in Singapore that India's national flag was first hoisted, and the government-in-exile declared India's independence. The contributions of the Indian community in the struggle against British rule are critical to understanding this period of history. Post-independence, the Indian diaspora continued to play a significant role in advancing India's economic and strategic objectives in Singapore. However, the lack of enthusiasm of successive Indian governments toward overseas Indians led to a sense of estrangement from the homeland. The turning point came with the onset of globalization and the liberal economic policies introduced by the Narasimha Rao government, which necessitated a renewed engagement with the Indian diaspora. This re-engagement was further bolstered by the 'Look East' policy, which strengthened ties between India and Singapore. The first National Democratic Alliance (NDA) government, under the leadership of Atal Bihari Vajpayee, took further steps to solidify these bonds, fostering closer relationships between India and its diaspora. In the period of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, the Indian diaspora has found a deeper connection with India through the "Act East" policy. This policy has encouraged a renewed sense of belonging among the diaspora community. Also, India and Singapore strategically utilize their shared cultural heritage and contemporary collaborations as key instruments of soft power, reinforcing bilateral relations and fostering regional stability through multifaceted cultural engagements.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None.

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