

# Culture





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embers of the Indian Diaspora are deeply conscious of their rich cultural heritage. They are aware that they are the inheritors of the traditions of the world's oldest continuous civilization. Being part of such a rich legacy they are naturally keen to maintain their cultural identity.

28. 2. Deep commitment to their cultural identity has manifested itself in many ways and in every component of the Indian Diaspora. There is probably no other Diaspora in the world, which has such an extraordinary diversity. It is as diverse as the ethnic, linguistic and religious groups in India itself. The original members of the Diaspora, therefore, carried with them the rich traditions of harmonising different customs, practices, values and beliefs.
28. 3. Their unique capacity to harmonise and adapt has served Indians very well in the lands of their adoption. It is not a coincidence that members of the Indian Diaspora have done remarkably well in every part of the globe wherever they have settled down. With the exception of one or two countries, the Indian Diaspora has a higher *per capita* income than the national *per capita* income of the countries of their settlement. A remarkable feature is that this is true in both the most advanced countries as well as in the developing countries. In almost every country of their adoption they have higher educational standards than the national averages. By and large, the divorce rates are also substantially lower.
28. 4. The survey of the Diaspora in various countries given in the preceding chapters clearly demonstrates also that Indians have seldom sought conflict with their fellow citizens of the countries of their residence. What does one attribute this to? The answer lies clearly in the deep-rooted commitment to the cultural and civilisational ethos of India. This ethos has been imbibed by the successive generations of members of the Indian Diaspora, whether they are descendants of illiterate indentured labourers or of highly qualified professionals.
28. 5. Since the commitment to these cultural traditions is recognised as a major factor in their success in resettling themselves, the members of the Indian Diaspora are naturally keen to pass on these cultural values to their coming generations. The single biggest expectation of the Diaspora from India is to receive assistance in this endeavour. Cultural identity is also an important factor in developing relations between various components of the Diaspora. It is, therefore, important that India takes concrete measures to facilitate this process.

## **An Analysis of the Diaspora from the Cultural Perspective**

28. 6. From the point of view of cultural requirements the Indian Diaspora can be broadly divided into the following four categories: -

**a) Descendants of the Indentured/Plantation Labour**

28. 7. The countries to which emigrants from India travelled as indentured and plantation labour under colonial rule included mainly the former British, French and Dutch colonies. Their primary mode of communication continues to be the language of their erstwhile rulers. This is evident in Mauritius, South Africa, Reunion Islands, Fiji and the Caribbean island nations of Trinidad & Tobago, Guyana and Suriname. The Indian communities in Jamaica, Guadeloupe & St. Martin could also be included in this category.

28.8. The forefathers of members of the Indian Diaspora of today had gone to those places many generations ago. Their descendants have a deep and abiding love for India and for the values of Indian culture that they have inherited. They relive, with sentiment and nostalgia, this treasure trove of cultural traditions and values, which in most cases is their only legacy. The younger generations may never have visited India. But they still entertain the fervent desire to maintain linkages with their rich cultural heritage. As they are well assimilated in their new environment, it is only their yearning to seek and keep alive their cultural roots that keep them attached to India.

28.9. The overwhelming majority of the forefathers of the current generation of the Indian Diaspora in these countries had gone from the Hindi speaking areas of eastern U.P. and Bihar, as well as from the Tamil speaking areas in South India. They had generally lived in socially isolated communities and were only familiar with the traditions, values and even the dialects that they had inherited from their ancestors. With the passage of time, however, even their recollections and communication skills in their own languages began to fade.

28.10. Special mention must be made of the members of the Indian Diaspora in the Reunion Islands and in Guadeloupe. Because of the policies followed by their colonial masters at the time when the original emigrants had arrived, the contact of the present generation with the language and culture of their forefathers has been substantially diluted. The colonial administrators had arbitrarily changed, in their official records, the personal and family names, as well as the religion of the ancestors of the current members of the Diaspora. However, with their improved status, economic betterment and legal equality in the countries of their adoption, the Diaspora in those countries has now revived the search for its heritage and roots. The resultant quest is as assiduous as it is ardent, and as keen as that of the Diaspora anywhere else.

28.11. Another country where the Indian Diaspora has shown remarkable resilience and love for its original culture is Suriname, which was formerly a Dutch colony. Most of the present day descendants of the Indian Diaspora speak Dutch. But their attachment to the land of their ancestors

is seen in the way they have zealously preserved the language of their forefathers. They call it 'Sarnami Hindi'. Their attachment to India and things Indian is illustrated by the fact that even those among them who had migrated to the Netherlands a quarter century ago have successfully preserved this mutation of the Hindi language. Sarnami Hindi was the only language in which the Committee could hold discussions with the Surinami community in Holland. Interestingly, the only common language in which our discussions were conducted with the other segment of the Diaspora in that country, which had migrated to it directly from India during the last 35 years, was English!

**b) The Diaspora in the developed countries**

28.12. This segment of the Diaspora is largely composed of professionals with a high degree of education. It also has in it small traders and people from a rural agricultural background. This kind of composition of the Diaspora is reflected in the Indian communities in the U.S.A. and Canada, the U.K., Germany, France and Portugal, Australia and New Zealand. The members of the Diaspora in those countries are well integrated into their chosen homelands. They come, by and large, from well-educated backgrounds and are fairly affluent. They are professionally successful in their adopted homelands.

**c) NRI in the Gulf**

28.13. As discussed in Chapter 3, the NRIs in the Gulf are Indian citizens who will sooner or later return to India. The unskilled labourers do not have their families with them. The overwhelming majority of the Indians in the Gulf have gone there from Kerala. They have an unwavering commitment to India, its cultural ethos and values.

**d) Diaspora in South East Asia**

28.14. Except Myanmar, the NRIs & PIOs in South East Asia have regular contacts with India.

## **Expectations From India**

28.15. Based on our interactions with the Indian communities in various countries, it was evident to us that every component of the Diaspora has major expectations from India to assist it in realising its aspirations of bonding with it, and remembering its cultural roots with pride. Most of them regard this as intrinsic to their development, both material and spiritual. NRIs and PIOs are unanimous in their belief that handing down India's rich culture to their descendants is a *sine qua non* for the forging of ties between future generations of the Diaspora and India.

28.16. The Committee also considered this question from the perspective of our national interest. India should initiate constructive measures to ensure that its relationship with the diasporic community is properly nurtured so that it can blossom into an abiding phenomenon. Keeping alive the interest in Indian culture of future generations of NRIs and PIOs would be essential if there is to be continuity in their emotional bonding with India. Such a meaningful relationship would enhance

the Diaspora's pride and faith in its heritage, and consequently, its confidence in itself, as well as revitalise its interest in India's development. It would also help to bring together the widespread and disparate segments of the Diaspora. In this context the example of the Chinese Diaspora deserves our careful study.

## **The Existing Arrangements for Cultural Promotion**

28.17. The Committee reviewed the existing measures currently in force to promote Indian culture abroad, and the extent to which they are relevant to the needs of the Diaspora. The Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR), an autonomous organisation, has the primary responsibility for promoting India's cultural relations with foreign countries. In a communication to the Committee, the Director General of the ICCR informed us that the Council's mandate is generally in respect of "the promotion of cultural relations with countries abroad." In other words, the ICCR is not particularly Diaspora-specific. Countries in which PIOs constitute a significant part of the population naturally attract a larger share of the ICCR's attention. The Committee is of the considered view that the present allocations are not adequate enough to meet the requirements that we have projected in this chapter. The budgetary allocations for ICCR's cultural activities should be augmented to enable it to meet the aspirations of the PIOs and the NRIs, as well as to deepen our linkages with the Diaspora.

## **OBSERVATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

28.18. The Committee notes the vast divergence in the needs of the different segments of the Diaspora and favours a balanced and coordinated approach in responding to those needs. It is of the view that educational and cultural tools should be effectively used to increase connectivities with the diasporic Indians. Accordingly, the Committee makes the following observations and recommendations.

### **1. Cultural Organisations and Cultural Centres**

28.19. At present there are cultural centres in the following cities: Cairo (Egypt), Berlin (Germany), Port Louis (Mauritius), Paramaribo (Suriname), Georgetown (Guyana), Jakarta (Indonesia), Moscow (Russian Federation), London (UK), Almaty (Kazakhstan), Tashkent (Uzbekistan), Durban and Johannesburg (South Africa), Port of Spain (Trinidad & Tobago) and Colombo (Sri Lanka). The Committee visited the cultural centres in Trinidad & Tobago, Guyana, Suriname and Mauritius. In the United Kingdom, the Committee attended a function organised at the Nehru Centre and, in New York, a function organised by the Bharatiya Vidya Bhawan. The Committee is of the view that the scope and activities of the cultural centres in countries with a substantial Indian presence should be expanded and adequate funding provided for the purpose.

### **Mauritius**

28.20. The Indira Gandhi Cultural Centre, the Mahatma Gandhi Institute and the cultural organisations



run by various segments of the Indian community in Mauritius must develop greater synergy and coordination among themselves. This is absolutely essential for the optimum utilisation of the resources already deployed. During its meeting with representatives of the local Tamil community, the Committee was requested to provide facilities for study of the Tamil language, classical music and dance. They wanted India to supply the necessary teachers for this purpose. During our discussions in the Mahatma Gandhi Institute, the Committee was informed that the existing facilities for teaching Tamil at the MGI were not being fully utilised. Similarly, the state of the art facilities already established at the Indira Gandhi Cultural Centre are also grossly under-utilized. The Committee learnt that there are some plans to establish additional cultural centres for the different linguistic groups in Mauritius with local help. In the Committee's view the most cost-effective way to approach this question would be to enhance the facilities and activities already existing in the Mahatma Gandhi Institute and the Indira Gandhi Cultural Centre to meet the needs of the various linguistic groups of the Diaspora in Mauritius. The jurisdiction of the Indira Gandhi Cultural Centre should be expanded to include also the Reunion Islands. Such a measure would promote regional synergy and optimum utilisation. Similarly, short courses pertaining to Indian culture should be organised by the cultural centre in Mauritius, which would be open to students from other countries in the region like Madagascar. Some programmes should also facilitate familiarising the local population with their folk heritage.

### **Réunion Islands**

- 28.21. Special efforts are required to assist the community in the Reunion Islands to recapture their cultural and linguistic heritage. The office of our Consul-General is currently housed in rented accommodation. New premises should be constructed for the consulate, which would include provision for a Cultural Centre and an auditorium.
- 28.22. The Committee learnt that the local French Administration is planning to establish a common Cultural Centre, which would cater to the civilisational heritage of Reunion's diverse population including the PIOs. The Committee recommends that the Government of India should support this initiative.

### **South Africa**

- 28.23. The activities of the two existing Cultural Centres need to be expanded. Facilities for teaching Indian languages should be provided in them.

### **The Caribbean Countries**

- 28.24. The Cultural Centres in Trinidad & Tobago, Guyana and Suriname have a creditable record of achievements. Since these countries are barely an hour's flight from one another, there is need to develop greater synergy among them. Some common programmes should be run by them for people of the entire region. The Centres should also encourage intra-diasporic activities by running regional competitions, etc. These centres should expand substantially their existing facilities for

teaching Hindi, including the training of Hindi teachers. They should run both short term and long-term programmes and award appropriate certificates and diplomas. They should also include activities and programmes to familiarise PIOs with their folk traditions.

- 28.25. The Cultural Centre in Guyana has been without a Director for nearly two years. The Committee would like to place on record its appreciation of the valuable contributions made to it by Smt. Anuradha Joshi, wife of the High Commissioner, Dr. P.V. Joshi. She has been rendering voluntary services to it almost on a full time basis. In addition, she has also been conducting language classes on the local TV. There is a wealth of talent available among the spouses and adult children of members of Indian Missions. Such resources should be tapped to enhance and intensify the dissemination of Indian culture abroad. They could probably be offered in a totally cost effective manner if not totally free of cost. The Committee feels that there is scope for expanding the module on culture in the “Spouses’ Orientation Programmes” run by the Foreign Service Institute, and the “Culture Appreciation Courses” of the ICCR. That would enable spouses of Mission personnel to hone their talents in those areas for effective utilisation by the Missions abroad.
- 28.26. The Committee recommends that the construction of the Cultural Centre for which the land has been gifted already by the Government of Trinidad & Tobago should be undertaken at the earliest as any inordinate delay would not only bring us adverse publicity but it would also convey a wrong message.
- 28.27. Jamaica has a population of about 61,500 PIOs. The Committee understands that the PIOs in Jamaica are concerned about dilution in their cultural and linguistic heritage and are keen that the process should be arrested. The Committee recommends that a full-fledged Cultural Wing be established in the High Commission of India, Jamaica. The Cultural Wing with assistance from existing three Cultural Centres in the Caribbean region should be able to offer appropriate programmes for the PIOs in Jamaica.
- 28.28. In the Caribbean region, the Islands of Guadeloupe and St. Martin, which are overseas departments of France, also have about 45,000 PIOs. The cultural heritage of the PIOs has substantially diluted for similar reasons as already described in case of Reunion Islands. In fact, the geographical factor and comparatively smaller numbers make the situation even more difficult. The Committee has learnt that the PIOs in these Islands are also very eager to regain their cultural heritage. Every possible encouragement should be provided to support this endeavour. The Committee recommends that the Director of the Cultural Centre in Trinidad & Tobago should be asked to study the feasibility of running some short-term programmes. The Committee recommends that the possibility of establishing an extension in Guadeloupe of the Cultural Centre in Trinidad & Tobago should be explored. The Committee also understands that a Member of the National Assembly, Mr. Moutoussamy, a PIO from Guadeloupe is keen to support the endeavours which would help familiarize the PIOs with their rich cultural heritage. It would be relevant to mention that most of the PIOs in Guadeloupe are of Tamilian origin.

28.29. Madagascar has a population of about 25,000 PIOs. The PIOs in Madagascar are very keen to retain their cultural heritage. The Committee recommends that a Cultural Wing should be established in our Embassy in Madagascar for this purpose. The resources of the Indira Gandhi Cultural Centre and other institutions like Mahatma Gandhi Institute established by GOI's assistance in Mauritius should also be utilized for the purpose. The Indira Gandhi Centre could run short-term programmes for the Diaspora in Reunion & Madagascar.

### **The Netherlands**

28.30. The Committee strongly recommends establishment of a Cultural Centre in The Netherlands. The Centre should provide for language facilities, classical and folk dance forms and *yoga*. It can run short programmes on Indian aesthetic traditions. Helping the Surinami Indian community maintain their linguistic heritage should be a priority area of attention.

### **North America**

28.31. The project for establishment of a Cultural Centre in Washington DC has already been considerably delayed. It should be implemented expeditiously. In addition, the Cultural Centres or other such institutions should be created on the pattern of the *Alliance Francaise* in other prominent cities like Chicago, Houston and Los Angeles. A similar programme could be initiated in Canada. The Indian community in both these countries should be encouraged to extend financial support for such projects. Wherever feasible, the local Municipal or State Governments could also be co-opted in such efforts.

### **U.K.**

28.32. The Nehru Centre has fulfilled its vision and mission admirably and is the hub of Indian cultural and intellectual life in London. Considerable scope exists for further expansion of its activities. There is a wide range of diasporic activities for which Indian artists, poets and exponents of culture are in great demand. The ICCR should be geared up to respond to such demands adequately. There are also pressing requests to establish Cultural Centres in other cities like Birmingham, Leicester, Manchester and Edinburgh. These could be established on the pattern of the *Alliance Francaise*.

### **Malaysia**

28.33. The Committee examined the request of the Diaspora in Malaysia to set up a Cultural Centre in Kuala Lumpur. However, during the Committee's meeting with the President of the Malaysian Indian Congress, who is also Malaysia's Minister Of Construction, Dato' Seri S. Samy Vellu told us that the Malaysian Indian Congress has already decided to establish a Cultural Centre named after Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose, for which land had already been acquired. India should therefore consider extending help in providing equipment, books, CD ROMS etc. to that Centre.

The High Commission already possesses a very good auditorium. With marginal augmentation, our cultural activities in Malaysia can be substantially increased in the High Commission's premises.

## **Fiji**

- 28.34. Due to the prevailing political situation, it was not possible for the Committee to visit Fiji. Based on the information received by it, the Committee is of the view that, in the long-term interests of India, the Cultural Centre in Fiji should be revived and strengthened.

## **2. Other Institutions**

- 28.35. Apart from the Cultural Centres, a large number of religious institutions like temples, gurudwaras, mosques and churches in various countries also run a number of classes and programmes for imparting knowledge of Indian culture and languages to members of the local Indian community. Institutions like the Bharatiya Vidya Bhawan, the Rama Krishna Mission, the Chinmaya Mission and many similar Hindu, Sikh and Muslim organisations are rendering yeoman service in the cultural and educational field. Such efforts should be commended and supported. Members of the Indian community also run a number of institutions of the performing arts. Particularly noteworthy is the initiative taken by the great maestro Ustad Ali Akbar Khan in the United States. There are similar initiatives by other Indian artists. The efforts of these institutions merit support and recognition. In most cases such institutions require help for training at advanced levels. Schemes should be worked out under which eminent artists from India could impart short-term training in those institutions. In such cases, the entire local hospitality including payment of a suitable honorarium, should be the responsibility of the host institution. Many institutions represented to the Committee that they needed assistance in procuring teachings aids, music and costumes. The ICCR could establish a mechanism for providing such assistance with the help of various cultural institutions in India.

## **3. Models of Cultural Dissemination**

- 28.36. While examining the successful models of cultural centres, the Committee took note of the British Council model and the *Alliance Francaise* model. The Committee came to the conclusion that the British Council model would be viable in the larger demographic centres and where there are Missions of considerable size, whereas the *Alliance Francaise* model would be more suitable in centres which concentrate on the dissemination of Indian languages, and which are situated in places other than the great capital cities of the world.
- 28.37. India should encourage the setting up of Cultural Centres along the lines of the *Alliance Francaise*. This highly successful paradigm encourages the opening of cost-effective units in different countries of the world. We could use local diasporic resources and talents also. In the case of the *Alliance Francaise*, the parent organisation's contribution is restricted to maintaining a data base of teachers specially trained to teach the language to non French speaking people. Normally the sub-units

are encouraged to use locally available native French speakers but, in case of need, the main unit sends out teachers. The cost of such help is borne by the parent unit. The sub-units are also encouraged to provide art and other cultural appreciation courses. Such a system could help India, in a cost-effective manner, to meet the needs of the Indian Diaspora, revive linguistic skills, as well as increase appreciation of different cultural facets of India. This would, as a first measure, satisfy the Diaspora's quest for heritage and roots which, in the process, would help to promote a deeper connection with India.

#### **4. Sister City Relationships**

28.38. The Committee observed that at a number of places, the initiative for the establishment of sister city relationships had been taken by NRIs or PIOs. Such initiatives should be encouraged. We feel that a request by the Reunion Diaspora to have a sister city relationship with Pondicherry should be expeditiously facilitated. Twinning of cities of India and cities with a diasporic presence should be facilitated and supported to build better understanding and bonding. Primarily undertaken through the initiative of local leaders of Indian origin, some of the notable initiatives are: Sandwell, Derby, Leicester, Birmingham and Chicago.

#### **5. Opening Admissions to Cultural Institutions and Creating Seats/Appreciation Credit Courses in Colleges/Universities**

28.39. The training imparted by cultural institutions and institutions of the performing arts can become the most emotive and potent instruments in binding the Diaspora to India. The friendships and associations formed during the learning of such skills are still governed by the old *guru-shishya* relationship in a number of fields. Without additional effort, age-old values get inculcated into the learners. They learn to appreciate the depth of emotional bonding between the teacher and the taught. This type of emotive interaction penetrates all aspects of a student's psyche and shapes his or her personality. In the long run it becomes a strong motivating force in the individual's actions, second only to the emotional commitment to the family. The Committee strongly recommends that art and culture appreciation courses should be set up in recognised colleges. These courses should give the student appropriate credits for undertaking them, which would make it attractive for the students. Chairs for the dissemination of Indian perspectives in the fields of humanities and social sciences would also have a welcome impact.

28.40. The Committee has also examined these and similar recommendations in the chapter on Education.

#### **6. Youth Travel Programmes**

28.41. The Committee looked into various successful methods adopted by other countries, of positive interaction with their respective Diasporas. The Committee suggests that a successful model that we could emulate with benefit is the Birthright Israel programme. This programme assists younger members of the Jewish Diaspora to visit Israel and learn about their cultural roots. It is equally

important that this generation of the new Indian Diaspora travels to India, develops a sense of shared history and cultivates an appreciation of the varied challenges that India faces and the opportunities that she offers. Inclusion of the members of the mainstream community and members of other Diasporas in youth travel programmes would serve to forge links with those communities as well. Such programmes would help deepen the commitment of the Diaspora to India.

## **7. University Level Multi-disciplinary Scholarships for the Diaspora**

28.42. The Committee recommends that in order to meet the Diaspora's aspirations, university level scholarship award programmes should be instituted. Such programmes would attract the best of the diasporic Indian students to carry out research in their fields of specialisation for 1-3 years in India. The pool of industrial houses or academic institutions within India could generate the resources to fund this programme. Many other countries have successfully implemented similar programmes. Such programmes would provide new and evocative approaches to engage the younger generation of the Indian Diaspora emotionally and intellectually and would foster and strengthen their connections with India.

## **8. Identifying and Recognising the Needs and Achievements of the French and Dutch Speaking Indian Diaspora**

28.43. The Committee met some of the French-speaking, Dutch-speaking and English-speaking members of the Diaspora during its tours. Based on those discussions, the Committee recommends that India should focus its efforts specially on identifying and reaching out to the French-speaking and Dutch-speaking members of the Indian Diaspora. It was evident to us that those members of India's Diaspora feel distanced from India by their belief that India shows a preference for the members of the English-speaking Diaspora. The Committee strongly recommends that India should meet the aspirations of India's French and Dutch-speaking Diaspora and recognise and highlight their achievements. The mechanism of the Indo-French Commission could be used for promoting cultural interaction between India and France as well as its overseas departments, particularly Reunion and Guadeloupe. A similar initiative should also be taken in the Indo-Dutch bilateral dialogue.

## **9. Recognition of the Achievements of the Diaspora**

28.44. In addition to the recommendations made in Chapter 26 on Pravasi Bharatiya Samman Awards, we propose that the achievements of eminent cultural and literary personalities of the Diaspora should be recognised by organisations like the Jnanpeeth, the Sahitya Akademi, and the Lalit Kala Akademi. Similarly eminent sports people of the Diaspora should be honoured by the conferment on them of awards like the Arjuna awards.

## **10. Use of Distance Education and IT**

28.45. The Committee recommends that specially-tailored, high quality courses on appreciation of diverse aspects of culture and language learning should be made available to the Diaspora through distance learning programs, CD ROMs, internet sites, audio and video cassettes and films. The Committee feels that there is a vast cultural potential waiting to be unfolded in the fields of distance education and IT. Relevant recommendations have also been made on this subject in the Chapter 30 on Education.

## **11. Revival of Festivals of India**

28.46. The Festivals of India organised in Britain, the U.S.A., France, Japan and the erstwhile Soviet Union made an extraordinary contribution in creating awareness and interest in India's culture. In the U.S. and the U.K. the local Indian communities played an important role in making those festivals a success. The festivals also helped promote tourism to India. Such festivals should be revived and they could also, to some extent, focus on the Indian Diaspora and its substantial involvement.

28.47. In concluding, the Committee reiterates its belief that Culture can impact widely and vitally in strengthening the linkages between India and its Diaspora. Culture is non-invasive. It cuts across the divisions of societal levels, and of creeds, religions and races. It has the potential of bridging the gap between the citizens of the host country and the resident Indian community. Culture would also engage the interest of the younger generation of India's Diaspora. It would go a long way in fulfilling the felt needs of most NRIs and PIOs to keep alive their heritage of traditional art forms, language and cultural mores. It would contribute to promoting ties between various segments of the global Indian Diaspora.

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