

Absentee Patriotism: India, the Indian Diaspora and the *Pravasi Bharati Divas*

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ABSTRACT Absentee patriotism is about taking the issues of *nationalism*, *nation building* and *ethnicity*, as well as the notion of *imagined communities* beyond the borders of nation states. It serves as a critique and extension to the work of writers such as Eric Hobsbawn, Anthony Smith, Ernest Gellner and Benedict Anderson, whose eloquent work on these issues need to be revisited against the increasing numbers of migrants who continue to show affinity to either their countries of birth or their ancestral homelands. Such affinity is often demonstrated in the ways that they maintain their ethnic identities while rebuilding their lives and futures for their successive generations in the countries to which they relocate. In maintaining their ethnic identities they often show attachment to their countries of birth cum ancestral homelands by way of regular visits or remitting parts of their earnings, either to support families or to develop their countries. A country such as India is replete with these instances and provide an adequate basis to explain how the notion of “absentee patriotism” may remain alive as an extended form of nationalism in out-of-state existences and which challenges notions such as “imagined communities” that ignore the realities of history, ongoing contact and real investments in their countries of birth and ancestral homelands.

INTRODUCTION

This paper is about two issues that still tend to passionately bind People of Indian Origin (PIOs) and Non-Resident Indians (NRIs) to India. The first common factor that cuts across both segments is the survival and adherence to symbols of religious and spiritual value that are an integral part of the Indian landscape, such as the Ganges River, the Himalayan Mountains and the temples and ashrams that are integral parts of their surroundings. A second feature would be a more complex one that arises out of a yearning for association with the ancestral homeland for one or more reasons – such as family and investments that are in India, alienation brought about by hegemonic or exploitative forces, constant threats of marginalisation brought about by excellence in performances by individuals within the Indian communities abroad. In some instances ever persistent threats of xenophobic attacks by competing ethnic groups increases the threats of marginalisation – such as in Pakistan and Bangladesh where Hindu population numbers have decreased substantially since their independence through forced conversion or ethnocide; and in South Africa and various Caribbean Islands an entrenched feeling of insecurity among Indian populations prevail where xenophobic attacks by competing Black popu-

lations are deemed imminent at the slightest possible provocation or rumour mongering. These realities are crucial to the maintenance of ethnic identities and separateness (see for instance Hall, 2004 – on the Sikh community in Britain). Realising the widespread fears that Indians often experience in their adopted countries, in 2003 the Indian government under the leadership of Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee’s Hindu dominated Bharata Janata Party (BJP), conceptualised an ingenious method of raising awareness and conscientising Indians abroad about the value of being in constant contact with India. His justification was to make Indians abroad feel wanted, loved and a part of a nation-state. Hence his introduction of the Pravasi Bharatiya Divas (PBD), now an annual 3-day somewhat “social” event held to especially commemorate and honour Indians living abroad (see Bhat and Narayan 2010; Brahmachari 2011). In response Indians abroad have demonstrated mass endearment and affection for the country of their origin by attending in their thousands every year. However, while there is sincerity in the attempts to win them over Diasporic populations all over the world, their economic contributions towards development of infrastructure in India are now beginning to take precedence over sheer affinity. With a population of around 25 million people spread out in the world, among who are highly

successful professionals and entrepreneurs, the earning potential for India through tourism or investment is enormous.

Tapping into this potential resource requires more than annual social events that might reinforce a sense of belonging to the motherland – a country where one's roots of ancestral origins are. However, it is not only in establishing association with India through the PBD that matters, but in also creating a sense of belonging that goes beyond mere recognition of ancestral roots. The attempts in the PBD events is to generate what is touted in this paper as *absentee patriotism*, defined here as an extension of nationalistic fervour that binds people over the generations in ways that are no less patriotic among those who have not migrated. "Homeland" in this context is intended to reflect upon a material association with India through tourism, family ties and investments by PIOs and NRIs. In this sense the definition differs from Benedict Anderson's notion of the "imagined community" – which is meant to portray a notion of imaginary and romanticised association with a country of origin that is known by the individuals but never visited. It is, according to Anderson, a socially constructed view by people who have a sense of belonging and longing for a region of ancestral origin. The shortcoming of Anderson's theory is that it ignores the historical and contemporary backgrounds of such communities and the realities that they experience around issues such as polarisation (Montalvo-Jose and Reynal-Querol 2002) and fractionalisation (Alesina, 2003). It is these histories and experiences that condition their thinking about establishing ethnic boundaries or extending them towards reinventing association with their ancestral homelands. In culturally and ethnically diverse populations polarisation and fractionalisation are at least two ways of capturing the socio-political divisions that simultaneously disconnects and reconnects people respectively to neighbouring communities in their current places of residence or their countries of origin.

While Anderson's theory of imagined communities is a reference to expatriate populations, he writes persuasively about the notion of 'nationalism' – in which he identifies three generic goals viz.: national autonomy, national unity and national identity. According to Anderson, a point which Smith accepts favorably, is that for nationalists, a nation cannot survive without a

sufficient degree of all three (Smith, 2001: 9) amply influenced by Hobsbawm's (1992) seminal work on "Nations and Nationalism since 1780". But those are conditions that apply to people resident in a country, who feel a sense of belonging to it, and where economic goals and political aspirations are encased within an ongoing fervour of nationalistic spirit. However, other complexities need to be addressed in such a situation, such as the class make-up of the nation and how each segment adopts the spirit of nationalism, and how the so-called 'imagined communities' turn their imagination into realities when they increase contact with their ancestral homelands. These are issues that remain shortfalls in both Anderson's and Hobsbawm's discussions.

In his plenary talk to the American Anthropological Association meeting in 1991 Hobsbawm raised a provocative issue in his assertion of his identity as an historian: "... For historians are to nationalism what poppy-growers in Pakistan are to heroin-addicts: we supply the essential raw material for the market". In wooing the Indian Diaspora from across the globe with a fair measure of success, the Indian state is engendering the notion that "for the Indian Diaspora is to India what nationalism is to India within India: the Diaspora too provides the raw material for the country's development". But this kind of provision can only be made through resource possession – a privilege of people from middle and upper class backgrounds. Such approaches to the Indian Diaspora produced certain structural additions to the Indian polity such as the Ministry of Overseas Indian Affairs (MOIA) – now taken over by India's Ministry of External Affairs, capitalising upon 'cultural affinities' (see also Habermas 1989; Inglis 1993 – though not specific to the Indian scenario building with the Diaspora).

Absentee patriotism is a specific reference to middle and upper classes among Indian communities resident outside India, notwithstanding the fact that diasporic people from working class backgrounds could also feel a similar level of attachment to India. The emphasis here is particularly about the middle and upper classes whose affordability has privileged them with the means to experience India first-hand. In the case of such segments entire families or individuals in families have either made once-off visits because of affordability or continue to commute

on a regular basis to India when circumstances permit. However westernised they might be, and in contradiction, however averse they might be to resettle in India, a nostalgic sense of attachment still prevails widely among Indian Diasporic communities. This incorporates Anderson's notion of "imagined community", but considers it inaccurate on its own if applied to the spirit of "absentee patriotism", especially as it acquires momentum in contemporary strategies by the Indian state to capitalise upon the Diaspora's perennial attachment to India, often stemming from ethnocentric and racist attitudes towards them. Absentee patriotism therefore needs to be understood against two sets of interconnected issues. First, appreciation must root itself in the complex set of historical and contemporary realities of exploitation, marginalisation, ethnocentric attitudes as well as xenophobic attacks – such as in South Africa, Fiji and Trinidad-Tobago. And second, noting the economic and professional successes against significant adversity, as well as the persistence of religio-spiritual adherences especially among Hindus, the Indian government has realised the inclination of the Indian Diaspora's will to connect with India in tangible ways.

INDIAN FERVOUR AND INDIAN IDENTITY

In retrospect, the exportation of Indian indentured labour in the nineteenth century is a story of social transformation from extreme adversity to generally¹ significant advantage. The adversity lay in the harsh conditions under which labour was recruited and the advantage lay in the ways that successive generations turned unbearable socio-political conditions into positive outcomes. British colonies in the nineteenth century were ascribed statuses in India that were almost akin to the biblical notion of purgatories². By that time British occupation of India was a continuation of the morbidity of Mughal dynastic rule, which tapered off almost without resistance against the new incoming conquerors. While Mughal rule matched the British plunder and exploitation of Indian labour and resources, it was characterised by an equal aim to undermine indigenous systems of worship to replace them with Islamic practices. But the British presence in India went beyond religion, trade and territory. Their aim was to dis-

rupt and dismantle the fabric of community life within India for at least two reasons. The first was to ensure that Indian agricultural products, especially cotton, were shipped away to keep the English masses in England employed in their then burgeoning factories; and the second reason was to convey Indian labour to their distant colonies where agriculture, especially in sugar cane plantations, served to enhance British "superiority" over competing colonisers from Spain, Portugal, France, Italy and Belgium³.

When Indian indentured labour was sought by the British in the nineteenth century to support their agricultural endeavours in their colonies, the methods they used fell short of willingness on the part of those who became victims of their recruitment strategies. Recruitment was however persuasively tempered by their then erstwhile politician Lord Macaulay's address to the British parliament on 2nd February 1835:

I have travelled across the length and breadth of India and I have not seen one person who is a beggar, who is a thief, such wealth I have seen in this country, such high moral values, people of such calibre, that I do not think we would ever conquer this country, unless we break the very backbone of this nation, which is her spiritual and cultural heritage and therefore I propose that we replace her old and ancient education system, her culture, for if the Indians think that all that is foreign and English is good and greater than their own, they will lose their self-esteem, their native culture and they will become what we want them, a truly dominated nation (Macaulay 1861).

Subscription to social values, underpinned by the ascribed determinants of caste-based labour, religious beliefs and commitment to family life, engendered an almost inseparable attachment to their homes, community and land. Both world views and cosmic values evolved out of their multifarious holism to life, keeping them content with their stability and the satisfaction that Lord Macaulay witnessed as so intrinsic to their lifestyles. Such passion emerged out of their achievements and sense of belonging to where they lived, worked and reproduced, that a spontaneous sense of aversion developed to the world beyond their oceanic boundaries. It was for these kinds of reasons that writers such as Sharma (n.d.) and Jain (1993) captured the sentiments of yore among Indian attitudes toward relocating to foreign lands. Sharma, an

Indian born scholar who worked on a cultural exchange program in the Caribbean Islands, reviewed historical records on the means and methods of recruitment of indentured labour. His scrutiny brought him to the conclusion that Indians were “conned, cajoled and coerced” into becoming indentured labourers. Jain’s research reinforced Sharma’s position when he highlighted the mood of nineteenth century India as one of firm patriotism and attachment to the land that they occupied. Strict taboos prevailed about relocation to foreign lands, referring to the ocean as “*kala pani*” (black waters) – if it was used as a means to migrate (Jain 1993: 3). The notion of “black waters” had the tendency to connote ideas about encounters with evil, loss of caste and spiritual status, disconnectedness to family and erosion of identity. Indians, particularly Hindus, have a reputation for restricting their passion towards religious beliefs and practices to their villages. Remaining in India imbued each individual with a sacredness that was intertwined with the area to which they belonged. It was a period characterised by a virtual insular consciousness that endorsed satisfaction with what they had and what they achieved. Competitiveness with foreign populations was irrelevant to their localised orientations towards economic needs and political aspirations, making them easy targets for the more aspirated and better organised foreign intruders.

Indian identity until the middle of the twentieth century revolved around at least four issues: family, broader kinship networks, family owned land and sites of worship. Those who left to work in the colonies and their descendants were often not counted as integral to the household structures or broader kinship networks at the time. Time and distance added to the severance of ties with kin in India. In South Africa, most descendants of indentured labourers were, and still are hardly aware of their ancestral roots and knew little about caste based occupations, unless they were of upper caste backgrounds. But only few, especially among the priestly caste (Brahmins) pursued conventional careers, although many did not know where their ancestral roots lay in India. It is especially among the Gujarati traders that ties to India still remain, since many of them have claim to properties especially in the state of Gujarat. As traders, Gujarati households held on to their vernacular longer than other segments of the Indian Diaspora pop-

ulation, and they often (and still do) tend to travel to India to maintain ties that are rooted in their property interests.

While their primary purpose in the colonies was to cultivate and enrich the British Empire through agriculture, Indian hopes and aspirations over the generations drifted away from agrarian interests to more urbanised lifestyles based upon paid employment, commercialism and professionalism. By the second half of the twentieth century there was a distinct and profound pattern of severance with agricultural activities in all of the colonies. The rising interest in secondary schooling and tertiary education instigated an about turn away from market gardening and commercial agriculture to white and blue collar employment, as well as movements towards professions that marked a significant degree of upward mobility. Through their achievements, many have become involved in political and economic structures that have not only raised their personal levels of visibility but the communities to which they belonged as well. This has attracted praise, envy and insecurities from among numerous other ethnic groups. But it has also caught the attention of successive ruling political parties in India too since 2003 - when they first arranged a special 3-day event that was introduced to commemorate indentured labourers and their descendants - known as the Pravasi Bharati Divas (PBD).

THE PBD AND RE-UNIFICATION WITH THE “MOTHERLAND”

Until the BJP rose to power in New Delhi, it was the Indian government’s position that any attempt to reconnect with the Indian Diaspora in ways other than tourism would be tantamount to interference of other countries citizenries. It was India’s first Prime Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru, who adopted a somewhat dismissive attitude by emphasising that Indians who have naturalised citizenship in overseas countries should not be enticed to return to India. Nehru’s view became an established but unlegislated policy that Indians abroad should remain in their respective countries and contribute towards to their development initiatives. Successive governments after him adopted this position without further interrogation. The situation changed when the first BJP government led by Prime Minister Atal Beharie Vajpayee mooted the idea of a

PBD, stating that Indians overseas need to be made to feel a sense of connection to India. His words conveyed a genuine passion for the Indian Diaspora's need to "feel wanted and loved by India"⁴, emphasising with almost unquestionable innocence that if they wished to invest in India then ways and means ought to be found to encourage them. The purpose at that initial stage was to initiate a bond that appeared to rest in memory and romanticism about being Indian in foreign lands, often generated through singing of holy songs (*bhajans and kirtans*), and recitals from scriptures that name and describe places associated with revered anthropomorphic representations of God. En-masse exoduses from countries such as Kenya and Uganda to developed English speaking countries served as significant reference points that justified the call for the Diaspora to feel a sense of reunification with India. Certainly without intention, Vajpayee's call indirectly reinforced Benedict Anderson's notion of the 'imagined homeland'. Among the Indian diaspora, Hindu symbology through song, praise and cuisine serves as an inherent form of sustainability with identity maintenance and association with a distant soico-cultural milieu that seldom, if at all, bears any resemblance to life in India.

The PBD, since 2003, was in its initial years held from 9-11 January every year, with 9 January intended to commemorate MK (Mahatma) Gandhi's return to India from South Africa. The dates of the event were later changed to 7-9 January and hosted in different cities in India. Marketed as a "days of affection" for the Indian diaspora, it is propagated as an event when the Indian Diaspora has the chance to mingle and bond with India's politicians, business magnates, others from the Indian Diaspora, and India's people at large. Spread across the print and electronic media in all the countries where sizeable numbers of the Indian Diaspora reside, its advertisement is one of enticement to attend the event, to tour India and to experience its "unity in diversity". Yet there are differences about who makes up the Indian Diaspora, with at least two major segments to whom the Indian state makes its world-wide appeal viz. NRIs and the PIOs. Among the former category are usually first generation Indians who live and work abroad, with known and existing kinship ties in India. The latter category are especially reference to people who are descendants of inden-

tured labourers and passenger Indians, most of whom among the former sub-category have lost all ties with kinship networks in India. Many descendants of passenger Indians however continue to maintain ties through property interests in India. As the business class among PIOs they more than others had the means to travel to India frequently to sustain linkages with kin groups who occupy their jointly owned property.

In its message, philosophy and intentions, the PBD is akin to a clarion call to the Diaspora to "reunite" in ways that will create ties that range from sustainable linkages to virtual eternal bonds with the "Motherland". Advertised as a mega-cultural event with a mere inkling of the bigger intention to invest in India, the PBD serves as a significant catch-point for those among the Diaspora who have the intention to at least tour India. In advertising in the persuasive ways that they do, it would make sense for those travelling from abroad not to merely restrict their travel to a single point in India where the PBD is held. Most of the several thousand delegates that attend each year from afar make a contribution to the Indian tourism coffers by way of their travels to other parts of the country as well. India's diversity⁵ is well represented in the successive events. By taking them to different regions in the country the central government displays a commendable ability to hold together regions and linguistic populations who can otherwise emphasize their differences and call for autonomy or independence that can be costly to the central state and its people. Kashmir is a typical example of the enormity of costs in resources and human lives in a war that can be used to hold a government to ransom.

Many in the Diaspora tend to respond to the call to attend. Its intended effect is often expressed by the delegates' views of the venues, the organisational capacity, key political figures and business magnates, as well as the evening cultural events that have more than mere entertainment values attached to them. Ex-Prime Minister Manmohan Singh in 2009 in New Delhi, business magnate Lutchmee Mittal in Jaipur in 2010 and current Prime Minister Narendra Modi in Ahmedabad in 2015 serve as icons whose presence is intended to add to the significance of the annual PBD functions. Success in politics and business, accompanied by charisma, global contacts and respect, and articulation skills, adds glamour and "meaning" to the PBD

in ways that creates mass awareness and appeal to those who are yet to attend. In each event, a new enticement is added to the Diaspora call for association with India – such as visas on arrival at Indian airports, lowering the costs of applying for Overseas Citizenship of India (OCI) identity cards, and collapsing the NRI and PIO statuses to reduce distinctions between the two categories. Much of it has to do with citizenship and limited rights and privileges for those who want an association with India. A major thrust is with the Indian banks that offer special interest rates for NRIs and PIOs, and special incentives for doing construction and infrastructural work in the country. PBD event venues are distinctive with stands that are set up by banks in India and are marketed through personalised approaches to potential clients and passers-by alike. Their confidence lay in their reference to the USA's banking system that anti-climaxed in April 2008. Years of mismanagement converged towards both a national and international crisis that led to serious reassessments of the confidence that the world once had in the American banking system. The impact that this crisis had on the world economy was significant, but the Indian banking system remained unshaken by it. As a platform the PBD is persuasively used to convince the Indian Diaspora about the apparent sound fundamentals of the Indian banking system. Collectively, the special interest rates, the special incentives for developers and the strength of the banking system in India have acquired a mass appeal that has attracted huge capital from the wealthy in the Diaspora.⁶ In one interview, the deposits made by individuals and companies allegedly have the effect of blurring the distinction these have with actual remittances from those who work overseas.

In the PBD of 2015 India's Prime Minister's universal call in August 2014 to manufacturers in the world to "MAKE IN INDIA" was resoundingly recited by Chief Ministers as well, but in ways that intended to highlight their provinces attractiveness as investor's havens.

MIGRANTS, REMITTANCES AND THE CALL FOR INVESTMENTS

By their very nature remittances by migrant workers are crucial to the survival of families and households. They also serve the purposes of uplifting the living standards of the house-

holds that they are intended to support. But remittances are of at least two kinds viz. that which is internally remitted through migration from one area to another, or from one country to another. In the first aspect it is more of a microcosm in that it is households that are the major beneficiaries of remittances, acquired through the national currency. Their benefits may range from meeting mere incidental expenses, allowing households to live better, or permitting them to upgrade their living standards through home improvements where remittances are more generous. The latter two instances create visibility for the recipient members and have the tendency to set them apart from their neighbourhoods as upwardly mobile if their situation is not matched by others around them. A class distinction emerges out of this kind of situation, whether it is restricted to individual households or entire neighbourhoods.

At a national level, remittances can have a similar effect but on a much broader level. Remittances from overseas in currencies that have greater conversion value than local currencies are an asset to foreign currency reserves of a country. Their benefits can have a trickling down effect if the reserves are responsibly invested. They have the power to uplift the confidence of the state in its financial standing and borrowing capacities for delivery of social service needs. The export of labour from India, unskilled, skilled and professional, has earned for the country the position of biggest recipient of remittances in 2013. India's international migrant workers recorded a US\$70 billion transference of funds from countries all over the world. This excludes amounts sent via the *hawala*⁷ method, or people bringing in their own amounts and personally handing over to kin members. The World Bank's project on "Knowledge Partnership on Migration and Development" outlined at least four overlapping reasons for this viz. statistical, historical, cultural, and economic. It is statistical because by virtue of its population size India's working migrant population is expected to be proportionate; it is cultural because meeting kinship responsibilities is one way of saving families from embarrassment when (especially) men go out to seek employment; and it is economic because India's slum dwellers and rural masses are still relatively impoverished when compared to for instance with their larger populated counterpart, China.

Recent information sought through the World Bank's research on Knowledge Partnership on Migration and Development data reveals a significant shift away from the dominating countries that benefitted through remittances. Mexico, Philippines and France which were once the biggest benefactors of remittances now lag substantially behind India and China. It is estimated that both these countries remittances add up to a far greater amount than the next five countries that are immediately after them in such ranking. But there are two issues that mark significant differences between China and India in the remittances that are calculated and the reasons for which money is likely to be transferred to each country. Money sent by Chinese migrants from overseas is recorded as foreign direct investment (FDI), especially since it is likely to end up being used to open up businesses, while Indian migrants often remit money back home for more compassionate reasons, such as paying for family members' education fees or medical bills. Herein lay the likely differences between extents of poverty in China and India. In China support for families are not as desperately needed as in India, where families are still comparatively poorer, hence greater levels of remittances to Indian families.

There is however the concept of "remittance decay", which in economists terms are a weakening of amounts remitted back home through fading familial ties and inclinations to continually support them. But with Indian migrant workers the situation reflects one of a continuing will to support families at home. There are two reasons for this which the World Bank Report stopped short of recognising viz. that Indians generally cling to kinship networks for longer periods than other communities, borne out of their inclinations to feel a continuous sense of pride and belonging to family. The second reason is linked to the value that many still attach not only to extended family life-styles but to regional pride as well. Indian attachment to joint and extended family lifestyles often remain intact through the feelings of responsibilities over siblings' and parents, as well as the states from which they come. Family and regional pride and honour remains at the forefront of the Indian family value system and for those who still subscribe to them. Migrants' lives and their long distance responsibilities over kith and kin abound from countries across the world. Anec-

dotal evidence is amply supported by literature on Indian migrant workers contributions towards their family support. Puja Guha's (2013) reference to remittances to Central Gujarat is an illustration of how remittances not only help families and households in their sustainability and upliftment, but how diaspora philanthropy through what she refers to as "private giving" provides for regional development as well. While these illustrations spread across the country and are significant in the measure of assistance that they render to substantial numbers of people and their regions that would otherwise remain impoverished, they remain investments that are applied to household maintenance, lineage reproduction and regional development. If their impact is only tangential to the Indian GDP it is a somewhat indirect form of investment in the country's population and infrastructural development. While such remittances might be widespread throughout the country with high frequency in certain areas, it however cannot be factored into visionary modelling of the economy for the future. But what can be incorporated into such tasks are calls by the states to the elite in the Indian Diaspora whose investments are more reliably measurable and predictable.

The Indian state has benefitted enormously from this to the point of bringing back numerous NRIs and PIOs in their calls to invest in infrastructural development in India. In order to showcase their successes in attracting foreign capital investment in India each PBD has time slots in which investors from the Diaspora do presentations on their types of investments and their returns on investments. The presentations have been impressive among some of investors – some of whom have a record of doing more than a hundred million dollars (American/US) over less than a decade. One of the investors from the USA spelt out his history of engagement in India as a Diaspora investor. It began from building a block of 20 apartments to advancing by the 7th year into the construction of their 7000th unit. The enterprise was spread over two states in northern India and served to attract several more investors from the USA. Their initial investment began with a smaller amount because they needed to learn about and experience the reliability of the banking sector, as well as the reliability of suppliers of material, workmanship, and regulations that governed the construction of buildings. While a few glitches were

confronted, they were overcome with relative ease and the process of construction continued. Each project was followed by due process, targets were met with expectations, which in turn allegedly set the pace for the next project. It also drew the attention of other successful Diaspora entrepreneurs who had settled in the USA and who began showing an interest in wanting to investment in India.

Two of them were from the state of West Bengal who had an interest in investing in their native state. One of them was successful but the other had to divert his interest to another state that is, Gujarat. Both cases provided interesting examples of how encouragement to potential Diaspora investors can either be relatively easy or equally daunting.

In the instance of the individual who had succeeded in investing in the State of West Bengal, the scene was virtually set for him make a successful bid to enter. It was the in the coal mining industry where his brother was well established but was inviting him to invest. His enthusiasm lay in the fact that West Bengal's increased need for energy resources, especially from coal, provided fertile ground for investment. While his brother was successful his operation depended upon archaic tools and machinery and manual labour, which hindered higher production levels. An infusion of capital into the business for appropriate technology would literally result in an output that was a minimum of 12 times more than what they were achieving without it. The investment paid out because an established clientele existed and wider distribution networks were waiting to be tapped. The returns on their investment was achieved within less than 18 months and the business showed a meteoric rise in production and image within the smaller mining community in their area.

The second case showed how people who were not familiar with Indian politics can be easily dissuaded from investing in the country. His attempts at building a private school and tertiary college in West Bengal was to coincide with a development project near a site earmarked by the TATA Group. The site was chosen because the TATA group investment projects are also associated with infrastructural development and emergent middle classes. With the growing successes among private educational institutions in India the site showed long term potential. But the politics around the TATA group's invest-

ment tainted its potential because of what appeared to be a "popular" uprising against it. The charge was one of displacement of people from their land without guarantees of them being either adequately compensated or given guarantees for employment. The Chief Minister (Mamta Bannerjee) was the constant source of attack because of her perceived attempts to gerrymander and create a false sense of security in her constituency. The situation however changed when the TATA group was invited by the state of Gujarat's then Chief Minister, Narendra Modi (succeeded in elections to become India's Prime Minister in May 2014), to relocate their proposed investment to his state. The offer was accepted and the West Bengali investor decided to follow suit. His investment thereafter began a process of construction without the insecurities he felt in his native state. While he was "*still not seeing profits*" at the point of his talk he was confident that his investment in a tertiary college with linkages to a popular University in the USA was going to pay off. His next project was going to be a secondary school that will attach itself to the college, allowing it a direct feeder process from the captive student population already there.

In each of the three instances above two out of the three investors treaded with caution because of the perceived threats about what the system could offer or do to hinder their investments. While the first appeared to have set the trend for investment in India through its successes in building projects, the second benefited from his brothers already established performance in the coal mining industry. It was far from the central metropolises where constant accusations of corruption and unfair play in economic practices prevail. His entry was relatively easy and his networks for business were already expanded by pre-existing distribution centres that were created by his brother. But the last case displayed fears that so many members of the Diaspora still tend to believe in because they dwell upon entrenched perceptions. He was inclined to abandon the idea of investing in India until he alleged to have had the privilege of being contacted by the Narendra Modi's office directly – encouraging him to invest in Gujarat. In this unexpectedly personalised approach he was promised that the typical red-tape for which the Indian Bureaucracy is so renowned will be avoided. To his pleasant surprise regular formalities

were ignored and the process for setting up his enterprise provided a completely different perspective to doing business in India. It replenished his confidence in the changing scenarios providing him with a re-energised if not new found sense of patriotism and consciousness in his country of birth – albeit from a distance.

PATRIOTISM AND CONSCIENTISATION

People of Indian origin (PIOs), either as PIO descendants of indentured labourers of the 19th century or as Non-Resident Indians (NRIs) share the same kind of passion that people of other major faiths have either in their countries of birth or in the places of pilgrimage – such as Christians going to the Vatican in Rome or to holy sites in Israel, or Muslims to Mecca and Medina in Saudi Arabia. If it is not family that still attracts people in the Indian Diaspora back to India, it is also the pull of religious and spiritual yearning that continue to take them there. In this sense there prevails an unending sense of affinity to the country which will continue into the foreseeable future, ably propagated in Higson's (1998) paper on nationality and the media. Higson's discussion on national identity and the media is an exemplary demonstration of how effective this can be in identity building.

Such a level of affinity, especially towards monumental features such as the Ganges River and the Himalaya Mountains and the religious centres that are set in these surroundings, provide ideal opportunities for the Indian government to draw support from the Diaspora. Hindu association with revered features of worship in India bear a deep sense of passion that will keep them connected to the country despite their places of relocation. For instance, the campaign to clean up the River Ganges under the current Narendra Modi government since May 2014 gained momentum among Diaspora communities in various parts of the world. In his visit to the USA in 2014 Modi urged the Indian Diaspora there to invest in India by visiting the country every year as tourists, by acting as individual ambassadors for India, and by contributing to it through money, technical expertise and time – especially in clean-up campaigns of the River Ganges and garbage build ups in the rest of the country. In a subsequent visit by President Obama to India, Modi, to mark their emergent relationship with Modi, introduced a

new public-private initiative, calling it the The Indian Diaspora Investment Initiative – aimed at helping Americans of Indian origin to invest in India. While successive Indian governments' strategies have been consistent about keeping the Diaspora wherever they are, none have been as honest about how they wish to relate to them in the long term as the BJP (Bharata Janata Party) under Narendra Modi:

"We are changing the contours of diplomacy and looking at new ways of strengthening India's interests abroad," said Ram Madhav, general secretary of the ruling Bharatiya Janata party (BJP). "They can be India's voice even while being loyal citizens in those countries. That is the long-term goal behind the diaspora diplomacy. It is like the way the Jewish community looks out for Israel's interests in the United States (<http://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/mar/02/narendra-modi-india-overseas-diaspora-united-states>).

The crowds that greeted Modi in his 2014 visit to the USA was an emphatic public indication of his popularity then and the welcoming new-era of politics he represented in India. Belonging to a party that has become renowned for its public defence of Hinduism but adopting an all-embracing multi-religious position despite negative perceptions against him, ushered in new challenges for India's population within the country and its Diaspora. While patriotism amongst most Indians in India remains generally unquestionable, there has been a need to infuse among the Diaspora Indians a similar level of patriotism, albeit from a distance. Together with Modi's populist appeal to majority Hindu India, the PBD serves as an ideal event to whip up patriotic sentiments and entrench that sense of belonging to "Mother India". Family properties and social attachments, places of pilgrimage and spiritual guides (in the form of living and late gurus), and sheer curiosities about India as an old intriguing civilisation, collectively add up to a mounting hysteria of belonging. India's offer to the Diaspora of the OCI Card is intended to inculcate a notion of dual belonging – where Indians could work within the economies of their adopted countries but invest in their droves in India.

The annual PBD events are structured in ways that are geared towards captivating the interests of the Diaspora Indians to make them want to be a part of India. Talks by the Prime

Minister and President, by Chief Ministers of different provinces propagating their economic successes, dramatic enactments of historical figures such as Gandhi's famous salt march, displays of India's home-grown nuclear programmes and military hardware, and international successes in their computer software training programmes, are among the wide range of showcasing and the promising advances that lay ahead. To demonstrate that India is internationally competent and respected is the key to acquiring a devoted following from its Diaspora. Herein lay the seeds of absentee patriotism – a concept that is more real than Anderson's notion of the "Imagined Community/Homeland". People visit India on a regular basis, express their feelings for their country cum ancestral homeland, are beginning to invest hugely, and continue to demonstrate an affinity to it, yet ironically cannot resettle there. In reality, this is what both the Indian government and the Diaspora itself would like. Their adopted homelands are there for their career building and business interests, as well as for their children's future. But India is there for their individual and collective identity, as well as their religious pride. From wherever they are and from whatever distance they may speak, they can still be the "ambassadors" that Narendra Modi would like to see manifest.

CONCLUSION

There has been a drastic shift away from the ways Indians in India viewed those who migrated in the nineteenth century to the ways in which they are viewed presently. Perceptions about them being "*malich*" (impure because they crossed the *kala pani*, that is "*black waters and 'infected' their caste purity*") has now transformed to them becoming useful networks in India's drive towards cleaning up the country and to tapping their capital resources for investments inside India. But they also serve as useful links to India's entrepreneurs finding new markets in overseas destinations. In essence economic realities have taken precedence over myopic beliefs about loss of caste purity brought about through migration. Disownment has, over the last 160 years, transformed into reacceptance, especially in the light of the economic value that the diaspora is known to bring to the Indian economy. Jawaharlal Nehru's virtual in-

difference to PIOs and NRIs overseas has seen a radical departure to one of an all-embracing brotherly-sisterly acceptance in India. Being seen as citizens dispersed across the globe is a strategic way of engendering feelings of endearment, nationalism and patriotism. India does not need more people to settle there, but they do need more foreign investments, technical expertise and refinements from the outside world to actively change people's bad habits about being disrespectful towards public hygiene. Feeling a sense of connection to India is not a difficult one for NRIs and PIOs, especially since religious sentiments provide an easy launching pad to make them feel more welcome to India. The proclivity towards association with India is increased by virtue of ongoing marginalisation, racist and xenophobic attacks against Indians in the previous colonies and newly adopted countries, and the lasting memories they carry with them that tends to set them apart from those who they feel have victimised them. Hence absentee patriotism for Indians overseas is an appropriate way to describe the affinity and nationalistic fervour that so many still feel towards "the motherland". For the increasing numbers that are ascending to the ranks of the middle classes across the globe among NRIs and PIOs, India is no longer an "imagined homeland". It is a reachable and affordable entity that could be seen, experienced and settled into, although home is still often where the best economic prospects prevail for Diaspora. It would therefore be expected that absentee patriotism would be an appropriate form of association for them in the same ways that Jews all over the world show affinity towards Israel, but remain where the economic prospects are most encouraging for them.

NOTES

- 1 I use the word "generally" here because there is a prevalent but misguided assumption, especially in South Africa, that all Indians are middle class and above.
- 2 Constant talk among elders in my family suggested that my paternal grandfather and others in his ship who landed in Durban in April 1908 were given to believe that gold in South Africa was being picked in the streets.
- 3 In the 19th and 20th centuries sugar acquired significant trade and domestic value – which placed the British Empire ahead of its competitors in trade from their colonies.
- 4 Interview with an Indian diplomatic official in Durban, 23 January 2014. Permission was not requested to mention his name.

- 5 Dependent upon how classifications are done, India's languages and dialects can number (respectively) from 300 to 800.
- 6 Interview with a State Bank of India (SBI) official in Ahmedabad, 8th January 2015. Casual chats with representatives from other banks harped upon similar lines about the strength of the Indian banking system.
- 7 Transference of money through trusted social networks that is cheaper than banks and post-offices.

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