

OUTSOURCING EDUCATION TO BACKSOURCING DIASPORA : INDIA'S CASE AGAINST AUSTRALIA

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ABSTRACT

The structural changes introduced in India in the early nineties have proved to be of historical significance. In the fast-changing age of technology, one area that can be of greater importance, if tuned to the changing educational scenario worldwide, could prove of great value to India is the sector of education. This paper is an attempt to draw attention to one of the aspects of education by arguing that the traditional idea of prioritizing education within the country only, need to expand its ambit to include and exploit the opportunities available at the global level to its disposal through the case of India and Australia's bilateral exchanges. The main focus of the argument is the potential utility of diaspora in this regard to not only an instrument of significance for building a bridge between the two nations but also for catering the educational divide between expectations and reality. The analysis revolves around the New Education Policy recommendations and its potentialities.

KEYWORDS: Education, bilateral relations, Indian Diaspora, NEP, new technologies, global standards, demographic divides.

The revolutionary transformations in information and technology and other sciences along with the ever-increasing significance of the social media platforms that have been proving extremely crucial especially in electoral politics have become an inescapable part of the contemporary international relations between or among countries in a multifaceted way. The spread of the bio-disease, i.e. Covid-19 is once again proving that point, allowing many countries to reconsider their long term policies and relations in an international framework as the spread of the virus causing decision shifts in relative terms. India's bilateral relationships with Australia have always been cordial and in the recent past few years, this relationship has achieved greater depths especially after the virus outbreak. Both India and Australia are facing the issue of rising China influence in the Indo-Pacific region as well as the declining of United States of America. As is visible through the bilateral exchanges¹ and Australia backing up India on critical matters of international importance². To take this further, two sectors where both the nations can engage holds great promises (if tapped to its potential) and these are education and diaspora. Both the sectors are well in congruence to the national interest of each nation. The addendum that there is no fixed pie, suits well to the contemporary needs of both countries in an ever expanding economies of scale where both parties can gain from an exchange.

It is highly unlikely that India can meet the demand for its educationally available population on its own. The demographic profile of India is the main driver of this demand. India's tertiary-age (18–22) population is the largest in the world and is projected to peak at 126 million in 2026

before stabilizing at 118 million by 2035. (Varghese, 2018) Indian enrolment in higher education (27 per cent) lags far behind peers like China (43 per cent) and Brazil (51 per cent). (Ibid) By 2030, India aims to lift the enrolment rate to 50 per cent, which would mean that one in four graduates in the world would be a product of the Indian higher education system. India created additional capacity for over 40 million students in the last two decades, but requires a further 200,000 secondary schools, 35,000 colleges and 700 universities to meet growing demand. (<https://www.ibef.org/download/Education-and-Training-Report-Jan-2018.pdf>)

India has an estimated 7 million people a year enrolled in vocational training (Brown and Jaffery, 2016) (compared to 90 million in China and 11 million in the United States. (Kazmin, 2014) In global university rankings, where India has no entrant in the top 100 – in contrast, six of Australia's 39 universities are ranked in the top 100. (World University Rankings, *Times Higher Education (THE)*, 2018) In relative terms, India produces a tenth of the number of PhD students that Australia does.³ Moreover, the ratio of Indian PhD to Indian undergraduate enrolments is lower than the ratio at United States universities – Australia also attracts significantly more Chinese PhD students than we do from India. (Varghese, 2018)

Hence, it is directly in favour of India to turn to foreign education and training providers to bridge the gap between demand and supply so as not to fall into crisis. It also needs to be taken into account that India's young population is increasingly willing to pay for education if there is a clear

path to more and better jobs. India will not have the capacity to meet this demand on its own. Its institutions cannot currently service the number of prospective students and quality remains patchy. As a world-class provider of education and training across secondary, university and vocational sectors, Australia is well positioned to partner with India. Boosting Australian education links with India is also a hedging strategy against an over reliance on the Chinese market, which accounts for roughly 30 per cent of our education exports. (Ibid) A recent HSBC report found the number of Indian parents wanting their children to study abroad had jumped from 47 per cent in 2016 to 62 per cent in 2017. (The global outlook for international higher education strengthens, *HSBC.com*.) Other surveys have found that over 70 per cent of Indian parents were willing to take on debt to fund education, higher than the global average of 60 per cent. The Value of Education: Foundations for the Future – Global Report’, *HSBC*, 2016).

The increasing numbers of Indian students – estimated at about 300,000 per annum currently – heading abroad for higher education and spending an estimated INR600 billion (US\$9 billion) in foreign exchange annually, the government clearly hopes to stop that flow. It seems that the current regime (BJP) has realized the potential of foreign educational exchanges. The Foreign Universities Bill that was introduced in 2013 by the UPA-II led government ignited some hope but faced significant opposition including BJP itself and lapsed in 2015. Previous bills floundered in 1995 and 2005. The 2013 Bill would have allowed foreign institutions to establish campuses in India. Support for the Bill has been stymied by the many vested interests, including Indian politicians and local business owners, who have a business stake in Indian universities and do not want to see foreign competition enter the market. “Internationalisation will be included as one of the components for allocating additional financial resources to government-funded higher education institutions” (Indian Express, 14 Apr 2016) according to Javadekar (previous union education minister under BJP).

Things have taken a different turn with the introduction of ‘New National Education Policy’ (India: National Education Policy, *Draft*, 2019.) as proposed by the following Union Education Minister Ramesh Pokhriyal ‘Nishank’. The new policy has been given its approval by the Union Cabinet. The education minister Pokhriyal said that students don’t need to spend dollars on education in foreign countries any more as the National Education Policy is in line with the global standards. “Prime Minister Narendra Modi has invited foreign universities to set up campuses in India and encouraged Indian universities to build overseas campuses so that students are motivated to stay in India and study in India,” he added. The policy also proposed far reaching changes related to the use of technology in the education

sector especially higher education along with establishing a single regulatory authority for higher education that can make a huge difference in terms of not only averting inordinate delays in policy implementation and streamlining the chaos that ensues due to graded power sharing in the education sector but also paving the way for smooth transformation of the future of education in India especially with regards to the establishing of campuses of foreign universities.

On the other hand, there is no sector with greater promise for Australia in India than education. India is big enough to accommodate all Australian education providers, which need to collaborate more and place increased emphasis on the quality of an Australian education in their marketing. As a world-class education provider, Australia is well placed to partner with India across secondary, university and vocational sectors. Australia’s vocational system is highly regarded in India and providers can benefit from this reputation if they can adjust their business model to reflect India’s low-cost, high-volume environment. India is already Australia’s second biggest education market and Australia is the second most popular destination for Indian students after the United States. (An India Economic Strategy to 2035.) Also Australia’s strength in vocational training is aligned with the Skill India campaign, a flagship reform effort of the Modi Government, which originally announced its plan to up skill 400 million workers by 2022.

International education is Australia’s third largest export industry. (Ibid) India’s growing population, expanding middle class, rising disposable incomes and the perceived value of an international higher education means increasing educational exchanges. India is currently Australia’s largest source of skilled migrants, second largest source of international students and a substantial proportion of those who come to Australia under temporary visas to fill skilled positions that Australians cannot. Indian students form the second largest international cohort (15 per cent) in Australian universities, following students from China (34 per cent). Most of those enrolled in Masters’ courses graduate in oversupplied fields (Hawthorne, 2014), rather than in programs focused on advanced fields, technologies and economic sectors where there are more opportunities. The top four preferred fields of higher education for Indian students are, Management and Commerce (48 per cent), IT (24 per cent), Engineering and Related Technologies (11 per cent), and Health (6 per cent). (An India Economic Strategy to 2035)

This constant flow can safely be ensured in the light of the new national education policy of India. It should be seen as a great opportunity by the universities in Australia to expand their purview of activity beyond Australia and make forays in Indian higher education. It is not that the educational networks are non-existent rather universities such as Monash

and Deakin have already been at the forefront of joint partnership since quite a long time and have been one of the big reason for exceptional educational diaspora in the recent past. But with the onset of new education policy, it has been said to be the priority of the state to ensure the smooth establishment of campuses in India itself as the Indian government's main focus is to streamline the executive processes. This would surely benefit the Indian public at large as they would have world class education at their doorstep. The benefits would be equally profiting for the Australian educational institutes and universities as the outsourcing of their expert personnel in the field of education would be in win-win situation personally as well as beneficial to the country at large by generating foreign exchanges in the form of sending receipts to their home country.

Education has much more to offer than increasing the number of Indian students into Australia. It also signals engagement, collaboration, responsiveness to the priorities of India and a bridge between our two communities. They can shape perceptions in a way governments cannot. And they create personal links, in business, the arts, education, and civil society which can help anchor the relationship. Compared to the professional Indian diaspora in the United States, United Kingdom, Canada, and Singapore, the Indian diaspora in Australia are yet to achieve a similar level of influence in higher levels of state and federal politics, academia and business. (Bagshaw,2017)The introduction of the Migration Act in 1966 enabled larger numbers of Indians to migrate to Australia (<http://www.acola.org.au>). As elsewhere, Indian immigrants to Australia in the 1960s and 1970s were mainly highly-qualified professionals in well-paying jobs in medicine, engineering and business. Many who came on Colombo Plan scholarships to study in Australian universities subsequently returned to settle in Australia and pursued successful careers. During the 1980s and 1990s, Indian engineers and IT specialists arrived under the skilled-migrant program. In Australia, skilled migration and education-related migration from India increased dramatically between 2006 and 2016, more than doubling the numbers of the India-born population.(<http://www.oecd.org/tax/tax-policy/revenue-statistics.htm>) Between 2006 and 2011, businesses owned by Australia's India-born population rose by 72 per cent, compared with a 40 per cent increase for those born in China. Nishant Kashikar, country manager, India and Gulf Tourism Australia said that India was the fastest growing inbound market for Tourism Australia with five consecutive years of double-digit growth. (The Hindu, September10,2019)

A large number of Indian populations were already in Australia — a huge Indian diaspora of 7.5 lakh people in addition to 90,000 students and a large base of Indian tech workers, he said.(Ibid) More than 38,000 Indians became Australian citizens in 2019-2020, a 60% increase from the

previous year and the largest diaspora group to be granted the country's citizenship. As per the Australian Bureau of Statistics' 2016 census, 619,164 people in Australia declared that they were of ethnic Indian ancestry. This comprises 2.8% of the Australian population. Among those, 592,000 were born in India It is the fourth largest, and one of the fastest growing, migrant communities in Australia, growing at 10.7 per cent per annum on average between 2006 and 2016. Indian-born population is expected to overtake the Chinese-born population by 2031, reaching 1.4 million.(<http://www.acola.org.au>) Out of over 200,000 people who became Australian citizens in 2019-2020, 38,209 were Indians, the highest number on record, followed by 25,011 Britishers, 14,764Chinese and 8821 Pakistanis.

The Australian Indian diaspora is a national economic asset, and should be engaged and deployed as such. Australia's Indian diaspora, comprising both Australians of Indian origin and Indians resident in Australia, makes a significant contribution to Australia's society and economy. They are the second highest taxpaying diaspora, behind the British. Indian-born population is almost three times as likely as the wider Australian community to hold a bachelor's or higher degree (58 per cent of the Indian-born population as compared to 22 per cent of the wider community). This particular segment of educational diaspora can be tapped even further if proactive willingness is shown on both ends which is directly in the favour of host country. This constant flow of educational diaspora can be ensured in a number of ways. For example, there can be built diaspora focused connections between both the countries through the help of already existent diaspora groups and organisations and also creating new educationally focused exchange programmes such as student peer to peer networks or institutional collaborations. Not just students but alumni associations should also actively partake in these engagements as many of them are already well established and it will be easier for them to pave the way for new generation of diaspora in the field of education. They can be helpful immensely to the upcoming diaspora by not just helping them to gain footing in the new found land but also by providing them with opportunities to get a good placement within the country itself since they are bound to be endowed with connections at both educational level and in the industry at large.

Australia's Indian diaspora population is concentrated in the larger states of Victoria and New South Wales, the large number hailing from Punjab, Gujarat and Kerala.Knowing this, a focused strategy should be created so as to not only strengthen the existing diaspora networks but also expanding it further in various other directions and ensuring the safety and security while having such exchanges. Focused research should be conducted to seek collaboration with educational as well as business firms or organizations to

take the random migration activity to an established network of potential vis-à-vis economic front between the two countries. The effects of overseas networks as sources and facilitators of trade and investment, purveyors of remittances and as 'brain banks' can be substantial. (Kapoor, 2003) Utilizing the Indian academic diaspora in Australia to navigate some of the complexities of the Indian research system might help.

NOTES

¹Mr. Morrison (Australian Prime Minister) said the “deep friendship” between Australia and India was about more than trade and diplomacy. “Founded on Bharosa (trust) and Samman (respect) — it is a friendship with depth, and marked by democracy, defence cooperation, diaspora and *Dosti* (friendship).”¹ “We know people are the living bridge between our countries: as students; skilled workers; or joining family, people of Indian heritage have enriched this country. India is now our biggest source of migrants and their presence has contributed to Australia becoming the most successful multicultural nation on earth,” he said. Apart from Mr. Morrison, other leaders who sent warm wishes to Indians were New South Wales premier Gladys Berejiklian and Opposition Labour Party leader Anthony Albanese. “There is an Indian Diaspora, which has contributed significantly to the linkages between the two countries. During the telephonic conversation, PM Scott Morrison spoke of the Indian community, including Indian students being valued as a vibrant part of the Australian society,” the MEA said.

² Australia has been a consistent supporter of India’s membership at UNSC, APEC, NSG (Nuclear Suppliers Group) Tokyo Convention and others. The changing of the name from Asia-Pacific to Indo-Pacific in itself reflects the strategic importance imparted to India by the Australian counterparts.

³The proportion of PhD students to total student enrolments in India is 0.4 per cent; in Australia it is 4.1 per cent.

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