Indian Diaspora in International Relations: 'Tinker, Tailor, Soldier, Spy', or A 'Great Off-White Hope' of the New Century?

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Abstract

The actors of the Indian diaspora are either looked at with suspicion or with awe. Based on these opposite sentiments, models could be made by putting the actors in different typologies. A matrix is constructed comprising a limited number of typologies of models and a few typologies of actors. Irrespective of how one finds slots in the matrix - whether implicitly in a fuzzy manner, or explicitly by creating well-defined typologies, one would still need to probe further in terms of contextualizing a myriad of models and actors with international relations per se. It is interesting to know how international relations - through the immigration policies - have been instrumental in determining the actors and the models of the Indian diaspora, and the roles they had assumed or been assigned to play in the host societies. Also, it would be fascinating to know how the actors and models of the Indian diaspora act as pressure groups in host societies, and now increasingly in India too as their country of origin, affect international relations. The Indian diaspora's unforeseeable economic success has resulted in a major paradigm shift not only in the destination countries but also in India. Thus, India has emerged as the most sought-after source country for the supply of professionals to the developed host countries. What remains for India as well as the host countries in the emerging international relations scenario is to locate the locus of loyalty of the so-called 'tinkers', 'tailors', 'soldiers', or 'spies' that comprise the Indian diaspora.

Keywords: Indian Diaspora, International Relations, Paradigm Shift, NRI, Brain Drain, Brain Gain, Indian Students.

Talking of the actors and models of the Indian diaspora, I have not so far come across any definite existing discourse that has dealt with a clearly defined category called 'models' of Indian diaspora. On the other hand, 'actors' would perhaps be a more obvious category in the Indian diaspora as a holistic entity. The two alternative sets of adjectives in the subtitle that I have chosen for this article to describe the Indian diaspora reflect my impression that the models could be based on how the actors in Indian diaspora are going to be viewed in the arena of international relations in the twenty-first century whether with suspicion, or with awe. Secondly, they also reflect a transition from the first to the second that might have taken place over time or that is in progress. For obvious reasons, I have left it as an open question.

I have tried to begin with constructing a framework of an underlying matrix, comprising a limited number of typologies of models and a few typologies of actors. The first I have called Model I, Model II, etc., - a set on the side of the rows, and the second, Actors A, B, etc. - another set on the side of the columns. Such an underlying matrix, I suppose, would pave the way for addressing each of the binaries of models and actors that one could allocate to the

cells created in the sub-matrixes, still keeping the issues together under a holistic umbrella. The next step would be to name the models and actors in each typology of the matrix for the purpose of placing the issues in one cell or the other.

Figure 1: The Matrix of Typologies of Actors and Models in Indian Diaspora

Typology of of Actors / Typology of Models	A						B	C	D
	i	ii	iii	iv	v	vi			
I — PIO	√	√	√	√	√	?			
I — NRI	√	√	√	√	√	√			
II									
III									
IV									

In the prototype matrix (Figure 1), for example, I have named the models as the Persons of Indian Origin (PIOs), and the Non Resident Indians (NRIs) in Models Typology I. similarly, in Actor Typology A, I have named them as i, ii, iii, iv, v and vi – representing respectively - unskilled labourer, the semi-skilled workers, the traders, the entrepreneurs, the professionals, and the students under a typology of actors.

Though not spelt out in the prototype matrix, as an extension of these typologies, in Models Typology II, the 'twice banished', and the returnees may form another typology of models; in Models Typology III, the temporary migrants, the circulatory migrants, and the sojourners could appear as a third typology; in Models Typology IV, the indentured workers and their earlier variants the slaves, soldiers, policemen, the lascars, the maids, etc., the present-day refugees/asylees, the voluntary migrants could make still another typology where the degree of coercion could be the index. One can also have a typology of models based on plain geographical location, or complex geopolitical occupation of space by the Indian diaspora. There could still be one more typology comprising the 'brawn drain', brain drain, brain bank, brain gain, etc., as categories of models.

Similarly, in the extended typology of actors, we could have Actors Typology B with the principal "seed migrants", the dependant spouses, the pre-generation parents, the second-generation progeny, other relatives, and even sponsored friends as a second typology. Actors Typology C could be the diasporic associations based on provincial, linguistic, art and culture, religious, and professional groupings. Another important one, Actors Typology D, could comprise men and women as separate actors. And then, we could also have *occupational actors* like doctors, nurses, engineers, information technologists, architects, lawyers, masons, drivers and so on in one more typology, and the *generic actors* like the writers, teachers, scientists, inventors, innovators, managers, white-collar workers, blue-collar workers and so on in various fields, as yet another actor typology.

Irrespective of how one finds slots in the matrix whether *implicitly* in a fuzzy manner, or *explicitly* by creating well-defined typologies as a next step, we would still need to probe further in terms of *contextualizing* a myriad of models and actors with international relations *per se*. International relation in itself is a mystical category as it covers a whole lot of space with distinctly different, although not disjointed, aspects of civil society: the political, the economic, the cultural (which includes the religious), and the security-related to name some of the most important ones only.

One way or the other, i.e. implicitly or explicitly, it seems the field of diaspora studies is poised for the challenge of addressing a new perspective. Its novelty would lie in the *deconstruction* of the interface between the two variables, the Indian diaspora and international relations, and playing with the interpretation of phrasing that interface in terms of identifying each of them as the dependent variable under one construct and independent variable under a different construct. In other words, we have a choice to say that ID (short for Indian diaspora) is the dependent (or determined) variable, and IR (short for international relations) is the independent (or determining) variable; or *vice versa*. For example, we may wish to know how international relations through the immigration policies have been instrumental in determining *the actors* and *the models* of the Indian diaspora, and the roles they had assumed or been assigned to play in the host societies so far: Often actors are determined by the quantitative and qualitative immigration quotas for importing "seed migrants" in the labour market, by the family-reunification clause in the family preferences, and so on. Similarly, models are determined by temporary entry and stay rights of Indians as exchange visitors or intra-company transferees, transition categories like the H-1B visa holders, or permanent residents with green cards and the like, and as citizens by naturalization or birth.

Alternatively, we may say that we want to learn how the actors and models of the Indian diaspora, as pressure groups in host societies, and now increasingly in India too as their country of origin, affect international relations: Whether (1) bilaterally between India and each of the destination countries, or (2) multilaterally amongst the nations globally. This might be examined (1) historically through the past, (2) contemporarily through the state of affairs that are current, or (3) futuristically in the times to come.

One may choose to address it in either of the two ways. However, it is my impression that if we were to assess it in a more or less sense, the policy concerns in the host countries have dealt more with the first perspective in terms of looking at questions of assimilation of Indians as well as all other foreigners into the local society and community, whereas the policy concerns in India have lately been more with the second perspective of how the Indian diaspora could be mobilized to influence, to the advantage of India, the bilateral and multilateral relations from across the borders. While I suppose both the perspectives of the interface between the Indian diaspora and international relations one of the receiving country and the other of the sending country would be important, the novel part would be the outcome of a fusion between the two approaches, with focused attention on the actors either as 'traitors' in home countries and 'spies' in the host countries, or as 'prodigal children' in the former and 'rays of hope' in the latter.

There would perhaps be enough literature on how international relations have shaped the actors and the models or vice versa in the past. What I have attempted in this paper is to contemplate the links between the actors and models of Indian diaspora with international relations in a contemporary as well as a futuristic way. The boundaries between disciplinary approaches in diaspora studies are getting blurred, and the diaspora experts are increasingly adopting multidisciplinary outlook, which I think is a welcome sign for the field. Keeping this in mind, I have tried to address some of the issues with a holistic perspective of international development in mind, whether local or global. In doing so, however, I have mainly used a limited example of the Non-Resident Indian (NRI) diaspora in the United States.

Figure 2 presents the regional distribution of an approximate 20 million-strong *stock* of the Indian diaspora at the close of the twentieth century, about half of them PIOs and half

NRIs (ICWA 2001). It is common knowledge that the earlier migrants who formed the basis of an Indian diaspora mainly involved 'cheap' manual labourers leaving India in large numbers to meet the enormous quantitative demand for indentured workers that arose in the plantations, mainly in south-east Asia and the Pacific, but also in the Caribbean and the African countries immediately after the British had abolished slavery in 1834 leading to what is sometimes also called the 'brawn drain'. The 'brain drain', a quality exodus of India's cream of highly skilled professionals comprising doctors, engineers, scientists, teachers, architects, entrepreneurs, and more recently the IT workers, and nurses on the other hand, appeared a century-and-a-quarter later. From the post-mid-1960s, it has continued in the twenty-first century, flowing westward and contributing *inter alia* to the concentration of Indian diaspora's 10 percent share in the USA.

**Figure 2: Percentage Distribution of NRIs and PIOs by Region**
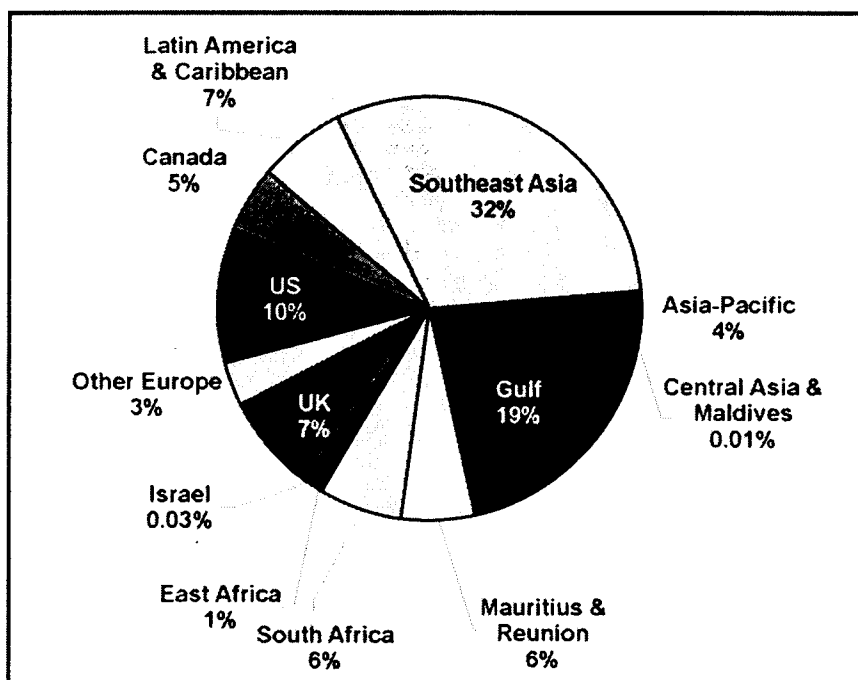
Source: ICWA, Report of the High Level Committee on the Indian Diaspora, New Delhi: Indian Council of World Affairs, 2001.

From the perception of a highly-educated or skilled knowledge worker supposedly 'draining' India of its knowledge wealth and human resources, professional Indian immigrants have come to be seen as 'angels' with a perfected image of transnational "global citizen" of the twenty-first century within the short span of the closing decade of the twentieth century. This paradigm shift in the perception about professional migrants leaving India, has taken place in phases though from the 'brain drain' of the 1960s and 1970s to the 'brain bank' of the 1980s and 1990s, and subsequently to 'brain gain' in the twenty-first century. This complete turnaround of perception in moving from one model of the Indian diaspora to the other gets reflected in the current official and public euphoria in India over the rising immigration quotas in the developed host countries, mainly the US and the UK, the EU, Canada, Australia and New Zealand, Japan, Malaysia, Singapore, and so on.

Figure 3 provides a glimpse of the transition period into the twenty-first century in terms of the composition of Indian diaspora in the US. In 1999, India-born residents in the US with

a science, engineering or social science (SES) degree had numbered 165,000. Indians thus accounted for 13 percent of the total number of all foreign-born US residents with science, engineering, and social science (SES) degrees, which was more than the proportion for any other foreign-born diasporic residents including the Chinese.

Figure 3: Size of Foreign-born Diasporic Residents in the US with SES Degrees, by Country of Birth, 1999.
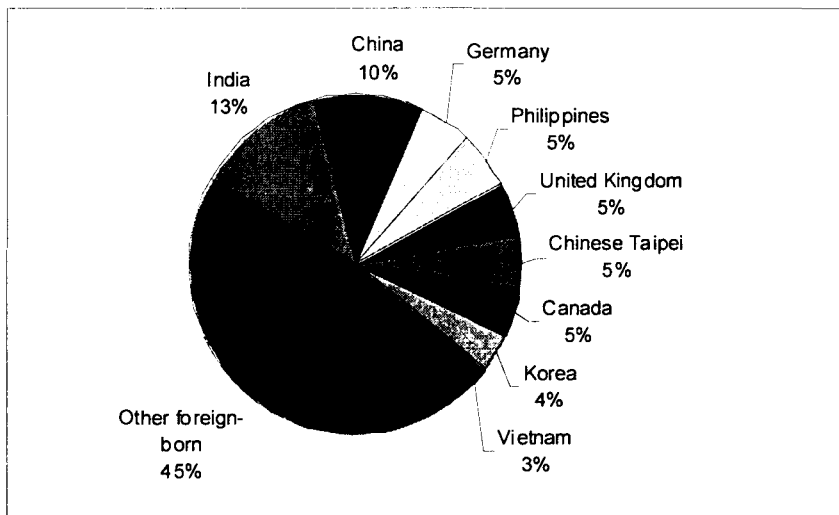
Source: Author, using National Science Foundation, Division of Science Resources Statistics (NSF/SRS), Scientists and Engineers Statistical Data System (SESTAT), 1999.

Figure 4 is a subset of Figure 3, showing county-wise origin of all foreign-born residents with a doctorate degree in science, engineering or social science, residing in the United States in 1999, and India accounting for a high share of 16 percent or 30 000 people, second only to the Chinese.

Figure 4: Size of Foreign-born Diasporic Residents in the US with SES Doctorate Degrees, by Country of Birth, 1999
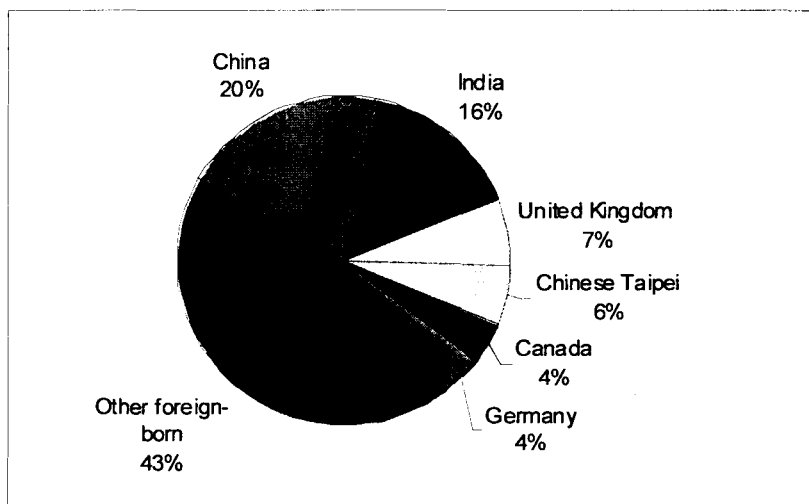
Source: Author, using National Science Foundation, Division of Science Resources Statistics (NSF/SRS), Scientists and Engineers Statistical Data System (SESTAT), 1999.

This is about the stock profile of the NRI human capital in the US. Table 1 presents another picture of the transition period the *flow* profile of the occupational shift of the NRIs human capital entering the United States between 1999 and 2001. It shows a substantial increase in the proportion of those holding the highest-rung "professional and technical" occupations over the three transition years into the new century (from 12 percent to 21 percent to 28 percent respectively), conveying that the position of the highly skilled and knowledgeable amongst the Indian diaspora workforce in the US labour market has undergone significant enhancement. In addition, their share amongst immigrants of all foreign nationalities entering and settling in the US has also been increasing over this period (from 9 percent to 15 percent to 24 percent). This is true for the second tier of occupations too, viz., the "executive, administrative and managerial" occupations, on both counts, though at a smaller scale.

Table 1: Occupational Profile of the NRIs Entering the US, 1999-2001

	1999			2000			2001		
	Number	Share of all Indian immigrants (%)	Share of all Immigrants (%)	Number	Share of all Indian immigrants (%)	Share of all Immigrants (%)	Number	Share of all Indian immigrants (%)	Share of all Immigrants (%)
Professional and technical	3 492	11.6	9.4	8 632	20.6	14.7	19 935	28.4	23.8
Executive, admnstritrative and managerial	1 112	3.7	7.1	1 644	3.9	7.9	3 062	4.3	11.1
Clerical and administrative support	576	1.9	4.2	573	1.4	3.9	643	0.9	3.9
Sales	648	2.1	6.1	689	1.6	5.3	842	1.2	5.4
Service	559	1.9	3.2	798	1.9	2.6	1 041	1.4	2.7
Farming, forestry and fishing	1 328	4.4	11.7	1 080	2.6	9.5	1 161	1.7	12.8
Skilled workers	301	0.9	0.9	308	0.7	0.8	389	0.6	0.8
Total with occupation	8 016	26.5	5.7	13 724	32.7	7.2	27 073	38.5	11.3
Occupation not specified	22 221	73.5	4.4	28 322	67.3	4.3	43 217	61.5	5.2
Total immigrants	30 237		4.7	42 046	100	4.9	70 290	100	6.6

Source: Author, using data from the US Immigration and Naturalization Service Yearbooks, the latest being from the Yearbook 2001, published in 2003.

At a generic level in the knowledge sector, Table 2 presents a very comprehensive overview of the presence of Indian diaspora in the science, engineering and social science (SES) faculties of the US higher education system, by teaching field and gender, in a comparative perspective with the total faculty, as well as all other, and all Asian diasporas. It shows that amongst the American faculties in 1997, almost 7,000 teaching staff were of Indian origin, constituting 3 percent of the total faculty strength, 15 percent of all foreigners, and 23 percent of all Asians, with the share of Indian women being more than a quarter of all female faculty, and over one-eighth amongst the Asian female diaspora. The picture leaves enough scope for one to contemplate on the potential for bilateral as well as multilateral advocacy and linkages the Indian academic diaspora would command in the US and the rest of the world.

Table 2: Indian Diaspora Amongst the US Faculties, by Teaching Field and Gender, 1997

	Total SES faculties	Indian Diaspora (ID) as SES faculties	ID as % of Total SES faculties	ID as % of All diasporas	ID as % of All Asian diasporas	Female % in Indian Diaspora	Indian Female Diasora (IFD) as % of Total female	IFD as % of Asian female diaspora
Total SES	224 707	6876	3.1	15.3	23.2	12.1	26.8	12.9
Physical sciences	37 020	688	1.9	9.3	19.4	16.7	18.8	9.9
Life sciences	53 055	1014	1.9	13.4	31.2	31.6	38.7	15.7
Math. & computer	44 375	2086	4.7	18.3	33.0	13.9	39.6	24.5
Social sciences	65 509	1491	2.3	15.5	32.2	6.3	10.7	5.1
Engineering	24 748	1597	6.5	17.8	27.4	0.9	23.3	6.3

Note: Data include first jobs of post-secondary teaching at four-year colleges and universities in the United States, but exclude faculties in two-year or community colleges, or those who teach as a secondary job.
Source: Author. Computed and compiled from National Science Foundation, United States, Science and Engineering Indicators 2000.

Initially, beginning in the early 1960s, the brain drain from India was associated with the public recognition that the Nobel Prize had brought to the gifted PIO scientists like Har Gobind Khorana (Medicine 1968) who had naturalized into American citizenship at that time, or Subramanyan Chandrasekhar (Physics 1983), who having naturalized in 1953, had made the United States his home. Gradually, following the landmark 1965 amendments to the US Immigration and Nationality Act, the migration of professionals became a mass phenomenon through the 1970s and onwards, with the Indian professionals enjoying the distinction of being one of the best-educated, highly employable, and high-income earning ethnic groups of the US census data, yet in their own country disdained as 'deserters' of the 'motherland India', either openly or subtly.[1] It was only towards the end of 1990s that the success and achievements of the Indian diaspora in the US drew real attention of the developed countries in the West and the East alike, subsequently or simultaneously followed by a change of attitude in India too towards its diaspora.[2]

Apart from the US, within the European Union (EU) in the West the largest economic entity in the world today two-thirds of the entire Indian diasporic community still resides in the UK. Here too, the Indian community is one of the highest-earning and best-educated groups, achieving eminence in a variety of fields comprising business, information technology, the health sector, the media, and entertainment industries. In Canada, with just 3 percent share in a population of 30 million, Indo-Canadians have recorded high achievements in the fields of medicine, academia, management, and engineering. The Indian immigrants' average annual income in Canada is nearly 20 percent higher than the national average, and their educational levels too are higher. In the East, there are 30,000 Indian citizens in Australia; and New Zealand has also witnessed a rise in the entry of Indian professional immigrants, those engaged in domestic retail trade, medical, hospitality, engineering, and IT sectors, and countries like Japan, Korea, and Singapore are trying to attract Indian talent in large numbers, testifying the importance of the Indian diaspora in international development.

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[1] Even socially, crossing the seas was at one time considered a taboo in high-caste communities in India, e.g. as depicted in Munshi Premchand's novels and stories. Perhaps it was the cumulative effect of the nexus between the diaspora and the aspiring migrants that led to the crumbling of such taboos over time, resulting in swelling streams of migrants joining the Indian diaspora wherever it grew.
[2] There is enough evidence of diaspora-India interaction that has been documented in the media lately.

Another important point to be noted is that the highly skilled Indians have joined the diaspora not only through the "employment gate" but also through the "academic gate" as a revolving diaspora of students that forms a distinct set of actors in the Indian diaspora the "semi-finished" Indian professionals abroad.[3] Data collated by the US Institute of International Education's *Open Doors 2004* survey reveal that in 2003-04 India retained its No. 1 position in the US university enrolments (followed by China, Korea, Japan, Canada, and Taiwan) for the third year in a row. Indians now account for 15 percent of all foreign students stock in the US. To serve the dual purpose of sustaining an expensive higher education system, and meeting *short-term* labour shortages, both the UK and the US, with other countries following suit, have adopted a policy of allowing foreign students in their universities respectively, to stay on and work, rather than return to their countries of origin on completion of their degrees (*The Hindustan Times,* March 2005). In addition, the destination countries gain political mileage in the form of a bonus: The foreign students become their long-term ambassadors in the international political arena.[4] India has thus become a 'must destination for internationally renowned educational institutions shopping for "knowledge capital" - i.e., to woo the Indian student' (*The Hindu,* November 26, 2000). In October 2000, four countries had mounted education 'fairs' in Delhi and other Indian cities, and since then it has become a regular feature of international relations in India. Most diplomatic missions project these as ways 'to facilitate the search of a foreign education to Indian citizens,' but the countries also compete against each other for the generic Indian 'semi-finished human capital' - the student. Figure 4 shows that Indian students accounted for 4 percent of all foreign students enrolled in tertiary education in OECD countries in 2001. A far larger share was registered for the United States, where 10 percent of enrolled foreign students were Indian. In 2004, this share of Indian students amongst all foreign students in the US went up to 14 percent.

Figure 5: Indian Student Diaspora amongst All Student Diasporas in Receiving Countries, 2001 (%)
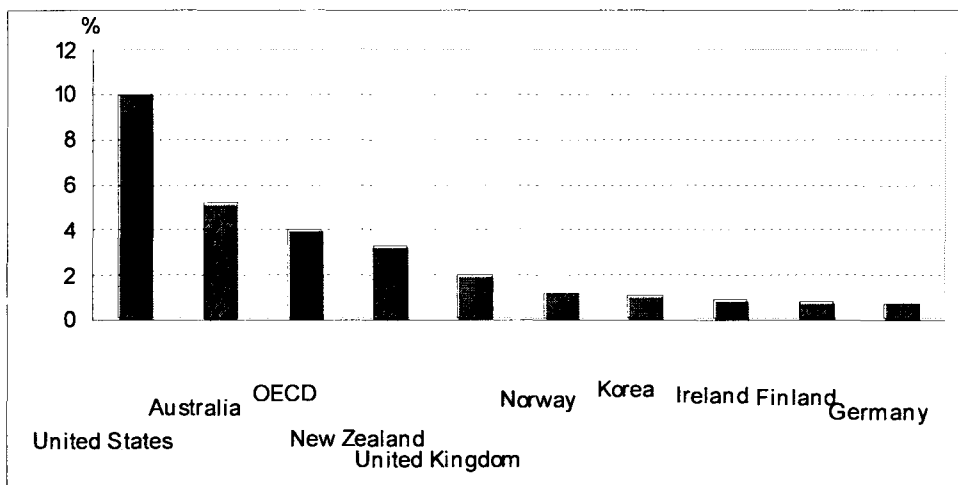
Note: Excluding data for Canada, Greece, Luxembourg, and Portugal.
Source: OECD Education database.

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[3] The term "semi-finished human capital" was first used by Tapas Majumdar (1994).
[4] They play important role in world politics as they have done in the past as, for example, some of the well-known NRI students belonging to a few iconic families in India, did play in mobilizing public opinion in the US during India's independence struggle! (Jensen 1988, as cited in Khadria 1999).

The growing competition among countries like the US, UK, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, and Ireland, and also non-English speaking countries like France, Germany, and the Netherlands, is bringing even the Ivy League institutions to India, and to other South Asian countries too, to look for the cream of students (*The Economic Times*, November 24, 2004).

Conclusion

To conclude, the perception of the destination countries, in which the Indian professional migrants have settled to form a diaspora, has thus undergone a significant reversal. Britain has come a long way since the days of Enoch Powell and his prophecy of 'rivers of blood' flowing if economic immigrants were allowed to settle in Britain. The change in values since 1971 could be primarily attributed to the Indian diaspora itself that has defied the anticipated doom by rising to unforeseeable economic success.[5] The reason why the paradigm shift in the societies and regions where Indians have settled is important for the hosts lies in their realization that, given the appropriate support, one type of diasporic actors the abhorred and suspect 'tinkers, tailors, soldiers, and spies', if not outright 'social parasite' can become the social boon, or as someone has phrased it sarcastically, the white man's 'great *off-white* hope'! (Albinia 2000)

Presently thus, India has emerged as the most sought after source country for the supply of professionals to the developed host countries. This has led to a major paradigm shift in India too away from 'brain drain' being looked at as an outright loss, and therefore *painful* for the country, to 'diaspora' as a potential option for turning the phenomenon of migration into an opportunity, and therefore *gainful*. What remains for India as well as the host countries in the emerging international relations paradigm is to judge where the loyalty of the so-called tinkers, tailors, soldiers, spies that comprise the Indian diaspora would lie? Whether they would prove to be a real great 'off-white hope' not only for Europe or Australia or America, but also for the world as whole? Or, whether it will depend on which way the wind of international relations would first blow in the new century, rather than be blown by the diaspora?

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[5] Today, Britain is an endless repository of success stories of the Indian professional diaspora, ranging from Lord Swraj Paul, to steel magnate Laxmi Mittal, to icons like Nobel Laureate Amartya Sen.

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