



## Internet: A Tool to Interlink Indian Diaspora

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### Abstract:

*Diaspora is the movement of people from any nation or group away from their own country (OAL dictionary). Indian Diaspora is a geographically diversified Diaspora, which is spread in as many as 110 countries. The Government of India estimated that there are 30 million Indian Diaspora spread across the world. The nature of settlement of Indian Diaspora can broadly divided into two parts, namely 'old Diaspora' and 'new Diaspora'. The prominent countries that figure in the old Indian Diaspora are Malaysia, Mauritius, Trinidad and Tobago, Fiji, Guyana, and Suriname and the important countries with the new Diaspora are all the developed countries like – USA, UK, Canada, Australia and New Zealand. Apart from these two, a good number of Indians also live in the Gulf region.*

*Science and technology brought valuable changes in human life. Internet emerged as a tool to interlink the diversified Indian Diaspora and it is a powerful medium in maintaining the sense of identity among the Indian diasporic community. It provides a feeling of belongingness with their 'mother land'. Usage of internet across the world made a landmark of 360,985,492 to 2,095,006,005 from December 31, 2000 to March 31, 2011. The statistics clearly indicates that the growing number of internet users across the world. Various E-Tools provides an opportunity to meet the diversified Diaspora virtually. Internet acts as an intermediate to disseminate the motherlands social, political, cultural, educational and environmental issues to the diversified Indian Diaspora. People of Indian origin can be in touch with their home land using web and it also made the communication much faster than earlier days. In terms of cost internet is much more beneficial than any other means of communication.*

*This paper emphasizes on the importance of internet while connecting the diversified Indian Diaspora across the world. Since the people of*

*Indian origin living in various geographical areas, internet creates a virtual relationship and creates a sense of belongingness with their motherland. Intention of this article is to bring a light on various modes of internet which are playing effective role in interlinking Indian Diaspora.*

**Key words:** Internet, Diaspora, Information and Communication Technology (ICT), Culture

## **Introduction**

Diaspora is a word of Greek origin that means scattering or sowing of seeds. It is used to refer to people who leave their native lands to live in other parts of the world for employment, business or any other purpose. According to Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary (OALD) Diaspora means "the movement of people from any nation or group away from their own country". Indian Diaspora is a geographically diversified Diaspora, which is spread in as many as 110 countries. The Government of India estimated that there are 30 million Indian Diaspora spread across the world. The nature of settlement of Indian Diaspora can broadly be divided into two parts, namely 'old Diaspora' and 'new Diaspora'. The prominent countries that figure in the old Indian Diaspora are Malaysia, Mauritius, Trinidad and Tobago, Fiji, Guyana, and Suriname and the important countries with the new Diaspora are all the developed countries like – USA, UK, Canada, Australia and New Zealand. Apart from these two, a good number of Indians also live in the Gulf region. Most of the Gulf migration from India took place from the State of Kerala.

## **Indian Diaspora and Internet**

Internet is a tool to interlink the diversified Indian Diaspora and it is a powerful medium in maintaining the sense of identity among the Indian diasporic community. It provides a

feeling of belongingness with their ‘mother land’. Usage of internet across the world made a landmark of 360,985,492 to 2,095,006,005 from December 31, 2000 to March 31, 2011 (Internet World Stats). The statistics clearly indicates the growing number of internet users across the world. E-Tools like websites, e-mail, audio-video calling via internet, chat room, online messaging, social networking sites like Orkut, Facebook, hi5, Cyworld, Flickr, Friendster, Google Buzz, LinkedIn, MyLife, Myspace, BIGADDA, Ibibo, etc. provides an opportunity to meet the diversified diaspora virtually. There are numerous internet sites where Indian diaspora can share their views, discuss politics, and reunite with the ‘homeland’ using internet. There are a good number of Discussion Forums and Online Groups (such as Yahoo Groups, Google Groups) over the web which helps to bring the likeminded people together and also enable them to discuss on their interest area. Internet acts as an intermediate to disseminate the motherlands social, political, cultural, educational and environmental issues to the diversified Indian Diaspora. People of Indian origin can be in touch with their home land using web and it has also made the communication much faster than earlier days. In terms of cost internet is much more beneficial than any other means of communication.

### **Internet Tools which are connecting Indian Diaspora**

The significant feature of internet is connecting people virtually. It is a tool to interlink the diversified Indian Diaspora and it is a powerful medium in maintaining the sense of identity among the Indian Diaspora community. It provides a feeling of belongingness with their ‘mother land’. E-Tools like websites, e-mail, audio-video calling via internet, chat room, online messaging, social networking sites like Orkut, Facebook, hi5, Cyworld, Flickr, Friendster, Google Buzz, LinkedIn, MyLife, Myspace, BIGADDA, Ibibo, etc. provides an opportunity to meet the diversified Diaspora virtually. There

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## E-Mail

The popular channel of communication on the Internet is electronic mail (e-mail). The e-mail message can be simple text or can be enhanced by attachment of other binary files, such as images, videos, sounds and executable files.

Here are the popular free email service providers with different features which are playing significant role in connecting the Indian diaspora.

SL. No.	Service Provider	Features
1.	Hotmail	Send, receive, and organize email, a free web-based email provider, personal calendar and customizable contact groups.
2.	Gmail	Free email service with spam protection, groups replies into a single conversation, and it allows users to search their message archive.
3.	Yahoo! Mail	Provides free, customizable email, including PhotoMail online picture sharing, spam protection, filtering, and multiple email account management.
4.	Mail2World Personal Services	Free email service with unlimited storage, translation engine, SMS services, spam protection, domain names, and a variety of skins.
5.	Orgoo	Orgoo provides web-based application which allows users access to all of their IM accounts, email accounts, SMS, and video chatting in one place.
6.	Indiatimes Mail	Provides free email for users including folders, tags, and calendar.
7.	E-OmniNet	Provides POP3 email, file manager, calendar,

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		bookmarks, and address book.
8.	ASTRAL FreeMail	This is web-based email service and it offers file attaching to the messages, address book, personal folders, and other features.
9.	Expat Mail	Provides multi-lingual email designed specially for globetrotting expatriates.
10.	Lycos Mail	Enables email, voice mail, and instant messaging services.

## **Mailing list**

A mailing list connects a group of people who are interested in the same area. When one person sends e-mail to the mailing list, that message is automatically sent to everyone on the list. Mailing lists can be moderated or unmoderated. A moderated mailing list is screened by the list administrator, who may kill duplicate messages or messages that are not related to the list's theme. An unmoderated mailing list is wide open; all mail sent to it is automatically transferred to everyone on the list. The mailing list itself is a database of the e-mail addresses of people who have subscribed to it. When the user wants to subscribe to a mailing list, he/she sends a message to the mailing list administrator, asking to join the list or sends a message to a list server that automatically subscribes the requestor to the list, by adding the requestor's e-mail address to the database. To cancel a subscription, a cancellation request needs to be sent to the list administrator.

## **Online Chat**

One of the most immediate ways to communicate with others via the Internet is to participate in live "chat". In simple words we can name it as "live keyboard conversations" with other Internet users who are online at the same time. Online conversations in which you are immediately able to send messages back and forth to one another is called chat. It refers to any kind of communication over the internet, which offers an

immediate transmission of text-based messages from sender to receiver. Ex: Google chat, Yahoo messenger, MSN messenger etc. Online chat may address as well point-to-point communications as well as multicast communications from one sender to many receivers. Online chat provides the feeling of face to face conversation.

## **Online Forums**

In simple words online forum is a web site that provides an online exchange of information between people about a particular topic. It provides a venue for questions and answers and may be monitored to keep the content appropriate. It also called a "discussion board" or "discussion group". Depending on the access level of a user or the forum set-up, a posted message might need to be approved by a moderator before it becomes visible. Depending on the forum's settings, users can be anonymous or have to register with the forum and then subsequently log in order to post messages. On most forums, users do not have to log in to read existing messages. The online forum allows Indian Diaspora to discuss various topics, it's a good platform to exchange ideas. Ex: *Indians* in London (IIL)

## **Internet Telephony**

A category of hardware and software that enables people to use the Internet as the transmission medium for telephone calls. For users who have free, or fixed-price Internet access, Internet telephony software essentially provides free telephone calls anywhere in the world. There are many Internet telephony applications available. Some, like CoolTalk and NetMeeting, come bundled with popular Web browsers and others are stand-alone products. Internet telephony products are sometimes called IP telephony, Voice over the Internet (VOI) or Voice over IP (VOIP) products.

## **Videoconferencing**

Videoconferencing is a conference linking two or more participants at different places by using computer networks to transmit audio and video data. Both the participants have a video camera, microphone and speakers connected on his or her computer. As the two participants speak to one another, their voices are carried over the network and delivered to the other's speakers, and whatever images appear in front of the video camera appear in a window on the other participant's monitor. To make videoconferencing work, the conference participants must use the same client or compatible software. Many freeware and shareware videoconferencing tools are available online for download, and most Web cameras also come bundled with videoconferencing software. In recent years, videoconferencing has become a popular form of distance communication in all areas.

## **Wireless Communications**

The rapid growth of technology made has communication easier. We are not bound to the wired communication; today we have advanced wireless communication. With the advent of wireless technology today you can use your wireless device not only to make phone calls, but to send and receive e-mail and instant messaging. Wireless network is a network set up by using radio signal frequency to communicate among computers and other network devices. Sometimes it's also referred to as WiFi network or WLAN. This network is getting popular nowadays due to easy to setup feature and no cabling involved. There are several kinds of wireless technologies, the main difference being their range. Some offer connectivity over an area as large as your desktop whilst others can cover a medium-sized office space.

## **Social networking**

We are today living in an increasingly networked world and online social networking is emerging as one of the most popular methods for people to connect to each other. Social networking sites (SNS) have unleashed a new dimension and space for users to network and maintain contacts. These sites offer people new and varied ways to communicate via the internet wherein people are allowed to create their own web pages or profiles and to construct and display an online network of contacts. Users of these sites are then able to communicate not just with people they know but also with people outside their list of contacts. This concept of networking, which inherently attempts to bring people together with similar interests, has been applied to numerous specific and generalized interests. For example, there are sites that focus specifically on business networking such as LinkedIn, others that aim to develop users' specific hobbies or passions such as photo sharing (Flickr) and video sharing (YouTube). Thus these sites enable users to enhance their skills, knowledge and above all 'network' base by allowing interaction amongst people with similar interests or concerns. While the latter are characterized as sites hosting 'usergenerated content' and have their focus on 'content creation'. The word 'social' is understood in its literal sense of 'seeking or enjoying the companionship of others'. Hence, these are websites about making friends, relations and connections in the online world with people whom we know and others whom we would like to know.

One such significant section of people using SNS comprises people of Indian diaspora. The social network sites have become animated spaces for interaction among diasporic groups that are using them for discussing subjects as varied as their immediate concerns of finding jobs and accommodation in a new country, celebrating religious festivals from discussing the challenges and comforts of their lives in their 'adopted home' to inevitably discussing issues of where they belong,

what their identity is and what they could do to preserve the culture of their ‘original home’. These sites have thus become new centers of diasporic discursive activity and present themselves as a new field of research in order to understand the nuances of diasporic communication, the representation of ethnicity in new media and how these spaces ultimately enable the diaspora to negotiate their new identities and realities.

Here are the list of social networking sites with more than 100 million active users.

<b>Name</b>	<b>Archive Accounts</b>	<b>User</b>	<b>Date</b>
Facebook	845+ million		September 2011
Qzone	536 million		December 2011
Twitter	380+ million		November 2011
Windows Live	330+ million		June 2009
Tencent Weibo	310 million		December 2011
Habbo	230 million		September 2011
Skype	200 million		January 2012
Vkontakte	164+ million		February 2012
Badoo	121+ million		July 2011
Bebo	117 million		July 2010
LinkedIn	100+ million		March 2011
Google+	100+ million		February 2012

Source: <http://en.wikipedia.org>

## **Online community**

Online community is a virtual community that exists online and whose members enable its existence through taking part in membership ritual. An online community can take the form of an information system where anyone can post content, such as a Bulletin board system or one where only a restricted number of people can initiate posts, such as Weblogs. Online communities have also become a supplemental form of communication between people who know each other primarily in real life. Many means are used in social software separately

or in combination, including text-based chat rooms and forums that use voice, video.

## **How Internet Interlinks Indian Diaspora?**

Internet interlinks Indian Diaspora which spread across the world. It has demolished all geographical boundaries virtually and has been connecting people successfully. Internet emerged as the fastest growing communication tool compared to than any other channels like road, railway and airways. It acts as an intermediate to disseminate the motherlands social, political, cultural, educational and environmental issues to the diversified Indian Diaspora. People of Indian origin can be in touch with their home land using internet and it has also made communication much faster than earlier days. In terms of cost internet is much more beneficial than any other means of communication. The internet enabled interlinking aspects are as follows:-

### **❖ Continuity of Indian Marriage System**

Rapid growth of education, modernization and urbanization has made remarkable effect on Indian marriage system. Inter-caste and Inter-religious marriages are not taboo today. It is highly impossible to argue that our traditional marriage system has clearly vanished in educated and modernized urban people. Till today migrated people wants to have marriage relationship with their motherland. There are good number of websites like Shaadi, Bharatmatrimony, Vivahabandhan, Jeevansathi, Hamarishaadi, Arathy, Makemymarriage, Mangaljodi, Mangliks etc. which are playing effective role in this way and social networking sites are also in the cutting edge in this initiative. These websites act as intermediate to get the suitable life partner according to bride and groom's wishes. The above mentioned websites provide information regarding bride/groom's age, education qualification, occupation, religion, caste and sub-caste, mother tongue, color, height, native place,

contact details and also photograph. Internet facilitates to build marriage connection with Indian Diaspora. Finding right bride or groom has become much easier than earlier days with the help of internet. Online communities are contributing to bring Indian Diaspora together for ex: India Canada Association, Indian Community in Australia, Indians in London (IIL), Indians in Sweden, Indians In Europe, Indians in Malaysia, Indians in US, Indians in Singapore, Indians In UK (IIUK) etc.

### ❖ **Political Activism / Participation**

Simon R. B. Berdal in his thesis (2004) explained the importance of internet like this “As the globally evolving Internet provides ever new access points to virtual discourse forums, it also promotes new civic relations and associations within which communicative power may flow and accumulate. Thus, traditionally ... national-embedded peripheries get entangled into greater, international peripheries, with stronger combined powers... The Internet, as a consequence, changes the topology of the "centre-periphery" model, by stimulating conventional peripheries to interlink into "super-periphery" structures, which enclose and "besiege" several centres at once”(Source : Wikipedia). We can see initiatives like corruption free India, corruption free politics, protection against rigid bureaucracy, right to vote, free and fair election, democratic India etc. over the internet. Argument and criticism regarding each and every political step within the country and internationally which are happening in the internet not only by citizens of India but Indian Diaspora as well. It clearly shows affection of Indian Diaspora regarding the motherland. They seek positive change in the country’s political system.

### ❖ **Social Issues**

Population, poverty, minority, corruption, crime, child labor, women empowerment, agricultural problems, literacy, health problems, migration, environmental exploitation, human rights etc. are the few social issues which are discussed over the

internet. Good number of NGO's are receiving financial assistance from Indian Diaspora to uplift the marginalized people. Various literacy programs, social awareness programs are running in India with the help of Indian Diaspora. Online transaction has made finance transfer easier. Organizations which are working for the marginalized people display their activities over the web which has made the knowledge sharing process easier. Indian organizations are applying western way of problem solving techniques to solve the problems with the help of Indian Diaspora. Anyone in the world can rise the voice against environmental exploitation like misuse of nuclear power, dam and displacement, deforestation, mining, air and water pollution, rapid industrialization in agricultural land etc. with the help of internet.

#### ❖ **Financial Issues**

On the one hand the country is losing highly skilled manpower but on the other hand huge amount of money keeps flowing to the country by Indian Diaspora. Internet banking made the financial transfer easier. Non Governmental Organizations (NGO) are receiving financial assistance from Indian Diaspora for their social activities in India. Indian Diaspora can buy Indian goods through internet. Generally NRI's prefer to buy property in India. It clearly indicate two things, first one is they want to come back to their motherland. Second, they are insecure in the country in which they are living. But we cannot generalize this statement to all Indian Diaspora. Anyhow internet is a crucial tool of the present day in terms of financial issues and financial matters are the one thing which binds the Indian Diaspora with their motherland, parent home. And internet is helping towards keeping the bondage stronger than the earlier days.

India received the highest remittance in 2010 compared with any other country in the world. India received nearly \$21 billion from overseas Indians in 2003, the figure jumped to \$55 billion in 2010. World Bank data also points to the fact that India

receives the highest remittance, followed by China (\$51 billion) and Mexico (\$22.6 billion), Philippines (\$21.3 billion) and France (\$15.9 billion). Kerala and Punjab are currently among the states which receive the highest remittance from overseas residents.

### ❖ **Student community and family bond**

Students of Indian origin are traveling in higher numbers than ever before to pursue higher education abroad. The most preferred educational destinations are the U.S. and U.K. In the year 2006, of the 1,23,000 studying outside India, 76,000 have chosen USA (94,563 in 2007-2008, 83,833 in 2006-2007) as a country of their choice followed by UK, Canada and Australia. Most popular foreign universities are University of Southern California, New York University, Columbia University, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, Purdue University, Indiana, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, University of California, Los Angeles, University of Texas, Austin, Harvard University, Boston University, University of Pennsylvania.

Internet is helping student community in two ways. One, they can be in touch with their family members, share their feelings, get assistance and help to solve the problems in terms of finance, study and adjust to the new environment. Two, it allows likeminded students to come together and share the knowledge. There are many student groups in Orkut, Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter, Google Plus, MySpace etc. according to their geographical location and interest. For ex : Indian Students in the US, UK Indian Students. For the Indian students in other countries internet is a medium to seek internal help. Since frequently they cannot meet their family members physically, internet provides the virtual relationship for both students and parents. Internet is also helping the age old people to be in touch with family and friends.

### ❖ Cultural Aspects

Indian Diaspora is deeply conscious of their rich cultural heritage. They have carried the rich traditions of harmonizing different customs, practices, values and beliefs along with them. It is important to understand how the Diaspora can maintain their cultural identity without losing their roots in different places and cultures. The culture of the place where they are living and the culture of their motherland are different. Usually the Diaspora with the same cultural identity share their culture, history and ancestry. Indian festivals are celebrated across the world and these festivals are creating more and more interest in their own motherland. In the U.K. and the U.S. the local Indian communities are playing an important role in making those festivals a success. Culture is a channel to bring Indian Diaspora together.

Culture acts as a parameter of 'Identity' of Indian Diaspora. Internet provides an opportunity for Diaspora to be in touch with their own culture. Internet plays two key roles in cultural aspects. One, it provides a platform to connect Indian Diaspora in the place where they are residing. Secondly, it bridges the connection to share cultural aspects with India. Cultural aspects of different geographical areas of our country, historical places, food system, various languages and dress culture are visible over the internet and it also enables sharing cultural aspects through video and audio. A person sitting in western country can watch our festivals with the help of internet, two-way interaction has made this process much more effective. Technology has allowed cultural identity of Indian Diaspora, due to advancement in technology physical distance is not a crucial issue. The ethnic groups like Amazing Indian Diaspora, Pratibimb - Indian Cultural Community Australia, Tamil Cultural Association of North Carolina, Liberated African and West Indian Descendants Association, Indian Cinema Society, WiCan (West Indian Culture and Arts Network), Indians Abroad, India - Culture and Religion - Knowledge and Wisdom, Punjabi diaspora (Sikhs) and Non

Resident Oriya etc are few examples of Indian cultural groups abroad.

Some of the websites represent the Indian culture are as follows,

<http://www.indianartsandculture.org>

<http://indiaculture.net>

<http://www.indiaculture.nic.in>

<http://www.bestindiansites.com/culture>

<http://www.saigan.com/heritage>

<http://www.culturopedia.com>

<http://www.indiancultureonline.com>

<http://www.thebestofindia.com>

#### ❖ **Internet as mass media**

The term mass media refers to any kind of communication such as newspapers, magazines, books, the broadcast media of radio, television and movies designed to reach the mass. Dissemination of information to the public or a certain group of people is the main feature of any mass media. Internet is acting as emerging and effective channel of mass media. Internet provides an opportunity to Indian Diaspora to access Indian mass media like e-newspapers, e-magazines, News channels, Radio and Television anywhere in the world with the help of internet connectivity. Though they are in different parts of the world, can access various television and radio channels in their native language, can read e-newspapers and magazines in their interested language. So this kind of attitude gives the feeling of belongingness with their motherland. Various news channels providing live news allows Indian Diaspora to get to know the latest information of their motherland within few minutes, it's much faster than road, railway and air mode of communication.

## **Conclusion**

Science and technology brought valuable changes in human life. Internet has made the distances shorter and the world smaller. The concept of global village comes true with the advent of internet. Our Indian Diaspora is a geographically diversified. The Government of India estimated that there are 30 million Indian Diaspora spread across the world. Geographical distance is not a crucial problem to contact people today. Because Internet emerged as a tool to interlink the diversified Indian Diaspora and it is a powerful medium in maintaining the sense of identity among the Indian diasporic community. It provides a feeling of belongingness with their 'mother land'. Internet provides an opportunity for Diaspora to be in touch with their mother land in various aspects i.e. culture, political, social, educational, financial and environmental etc. Good number of E-Tools provides an opportunity to meet the diversified Diaspora virtually. Internet creates a virtual relationship and constructs a sense of belongingness with their motherland.

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