India–Canada Relations in the Shadow of Khalistani Movement

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***Abstract*—India and Canada boast a long-standing relationship built on common ground – democracy, human rights, and multiculturalism, common wealth membership and strong people to people connections. Despite these commonalities the relationship has gone through several fluctuations because of disagreements involving nuclear policy, diaspora disruptions and security concerns which has ruptured healthy economic cooperation, through bilateral trade and investments. The diplomatic connections have gone through severe fluctuations specifically because of 2023 allegation headed by Canadian government towards India in killing Hardeep Sing Gujjar creating challenges for Indian students obtaining Canadian visas. To navigate these complexities and strengthen ties, both nations must find common ground while acknowledging areas needing diplomatic efforts. This study thus examines through an extensive qualitative research method, the importance of recent diplomatic crisis, the impact of indo-pacific in shaping the relation and the consistent effect of Indian diaspora entwined with Khalistani movement in this complex international environment.**

***Index Terms*—Khalistan, Engagement, Cooperation, Diplomacy, Bilateral, Polices**

I. INTRODUCTION

India and Canada share a multifaceted relationship spanning diplomatic, economic, and cultural dimensions. Bilateral ties have strengthened over the years, characterized by frequent high-level visits, robust trade, and cooperation in various sectors such as education, technology, and energy. Both nations collaborate closely in multilateral forums like the United Nations, Commonwealth, and G20, advocating for shared interests including climate change mitigation and global security. Despite occasional differences, particularly on issues like immigration policies, the overall trajectory of India-Canada relations remains positive, underpinned by mutual respect, people-to-people ties, and a commitment to fostering deeper engagement in the years ahead.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's tenure has been significant in shaping India-Canada relations through proactive diplomacy and strategic engagement. Under his leadership, bilateral ties have witnessed a revitalization, marked by increased high-level visits, including Prime Minister Modi's

visit to Canada in 2015, the first bilateral visit by an Indian Prime Minister in over four decades. Modi's emphasis on economic diplomacy has led to the expansion of trade and investment between the two nations, with efforts to tap into Canada's expertise in areas such as clean energy, technology, and innovation. Additionally, Modi's proactive engagement with the Indian diaspora in Canada has contributed to strengthening people-to-people ties and fostering cultural exchange. His tenure has also seen a deepening of cooperation in areas such as defense, security, and counter-terrorism. Overall, Prime Minister Modi's tenure has played a pivotal role in elevations. the India-Canada relationship to new heights, laying the foundation for enhanced cooperation and collaboration in the years to come.

Both the nations have collaborated within specific international organizations like that of United Nations, G20, Commonwealth and World Trade Organization respectively. The rise of India as a major economic state in South East Asia and Canadas specific strategies towards indo pacific has inevitably made the nations inculcate a pragmatic relation. Parallel to this, the recent tensions based on diaspora activism has made the relation palpable. The paper emphasizes in analyzing the contemporary trajectory by evaluating historical bonding, economic cooperation, and emerging challenges based on Khalistani movement which has been a long drawn obstacle in India –Canada cooperative ties.

II. METHODOLOGY

The study has adopted a qualitative research methodology giving emphasis on academic journals, government reports, policy documents, books, newspaper articles and official statements available in public domain. The study deploys historical and analytical approaches for the understanding of the evolution and continuity of the diplomatic ties between the two nations. Specific comparative analysis has been taken into account from 2014 after Prime minister Modis advent and triggering diplomatic tension based on the Khalistani movement and diaspora politics both in India and Canada.

III. HISTORICAL CONTEXT

India and Canada have a history of diplomatic relations dating back to India's independence in 1947. The early years were marked by mutual recognition and engagement within the framework of the British Commonwealth. However, significant developments occurred in the 1960s when Canada was among the first Western nations to recognize India's nuclear program along with infrastructure and technical assistance. However, the relation deteriorated with India’s nuclear test in 1974 where Canadian government argued about the nuclear assistance given to India specifically for peaceful purposes which has been turned down by Indian government. This push away relation went on for several decades. With the advent of Globalization in 1990s and international economic shift made the situation different as trade became inevitable for economic prosperity. In early twenty first century the relation upgraded with strengthening of India-Canada nuclear ties in

2010.With Modi Governments coming into to power and his visit to Canada in 2015 relaxed the relation symbolizing renewed political commitment and expansion of economic engagements. Bilateral ties flourished further with the influx of Indian immigrants to Canada in the late 20th century, contributing to cultural exchange and economic cooperation. Since then, both countries have worked to deepen cooperation in multiple areas, including trade, defense, education, and technology. High-level visits and exchanges have become more frequent, underscoring the growing importance of the relationship on the global stage. Today, India and Canada continue to strengthen their ties through dialogue, collaboration, and mutual respect, with a shared vision for a more prosperous and secure world.

IV. STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to Canada in 2015 marked a significant milestone in the bilateral relationship between India and Canada, culminating in the establishment of a strategic partnership between the two nations. Prominent Indo-Canadian organizations include Canada India Business Council (CIBC), Canada India Foundation (CIF), Indo-Canada Chamber of Commerce (I-CCC) and other local chambers and associations. The objectives of this partnership were multifaceted, aiming to enhance cooperation in various strategic areas including trade, investment, defense, energy, and education. One of the key outcomes of PM Modi's visit was the signing of several agreements aimed at boosting economic ties between the two countries. These agreements focused on areas such as trade facilitation, investment promotion, and collaboration in sectors like renewable energy, information technology, and infrastructure development. Additionally, both countries pledged to deepen their cooperation in defense and security, with discussions centered on counter-terrorism efforts, maritime security, and defense technology transfer. PM Modi's visit also emphasized the importance of people-to-people ties and cultural exchange, with initiatives aimed at fostering greater understanding and collaboration between Indian and Canadian citizens. This included the promotion of tourism, educational exchanges, and the recognition of the significant contributions made by the Indian diaspora to Canada's social, cultural, and economic fabric. Overall, the strategic partnership formed during PM Modi's visit to Canada in 2015 signaled a renewed commitment by both countries to strengthen their relationship across multiple domains. It laid the groundwork for deeper cooperation and collaboration, setting the stage for enhanced engagement in the years to come.

V. ECONOMIC ENGAGEMENT

Trade and investment between India and Canada have seen steady growth over the years, reflecting the expanding economic relationship between the two nations. While bilateral trade volumes have increased, there is still untapped potential for further enhancement. Significantly, based on natural resources and energy, Canada is rich in natural resources, particularly in energy-related sectors such as oil and gas, where it possesses significant expertise and resources. India, as a rapidly

growing economy, has a growing energy demand, making it a potential market for Canadian energy exports. Collaboration in this sector includes investments in oil and gas exploration and production, as well as renewable energy projects. Parallel to this, information technology and digital services needs special mention as India is known for its prowess in the IT and digital services sector, while Canada boasts a thriving tech industry. Collaborations in this domain include partnerships in software development, artificial intelligence, cybersecurity, and digital innovation. Canada is a popular destination for Indian students seeking higher education, and there are numerous academic collaborations between institutions in both countries. Additionally, Canada's expertise in vocational training and skills development aligns with India's initiatives to enhance its workforce's employability. Both countries have complementary strengths in agriculture and agro-food sectors. Collaboration in this area includes agricultural research, technology transfer, and trade in agricultural commodities. India is a major producer of generic pharmaceuticals, while Canada has a robust healthcare system and pharmaceutical industry. Collaboration in this sector includes partnerships in research and development, drug manufacturing, and healthcare services. India's infrastructure development needs present opportunities for Canadian companies specializing in construction, engineering, and infrastructure development. Negotiations and cooperation on comprehensive economic partnership agreement(CEPA) and Foreign investment promotion agreement (FIPA) has reflected strong bonding as trading partners. Though the progress has remained slow, but both the nations have understood the importance of deeper economic integration and understanding the international power play, both the nations have acknowledged the importance of inclusivity in economic forum.

VI. POLITICAL INTERACTIONS

High-level political exchanges between India and Canada have played a pivotal role in shaping bilateral relations and fostering cooperation across various domains. State visits and dialogues between leaders of both countries have served as platforms to strengthen diplomatic ties, enhance strategic partnerships, and explore avenues for collaboration. These interactions have not only deepened mutual understanding but have also led to tangible outcomes benefiting both nations. Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to Canada in 2015 marked a significant milestone in bilateral relations, resulting in the establishment of a strategic partnership between the two countries. During this visit, several agreements were signed to boost economic ties, promote defense and security cooperation, and strengthen people-to-people ties. The visit underscored the commitment of both nations to elevate their relationship to new heights and explore opportunities for collaboration in key sectors. Subsequent high-level exchanges have further reinforced the momentum in bilateral relations. Prime Minister Justin Trudeau's visit to India in 2018 provided an opportunity to deepen economic engagement, with discussions focusing on trade, investment, and innovation. The visit also highlighted the cultural ties between the two countries, emphasizing the importance of people-to-people connections in strengthening bilateral relations. Additionally, Prime Minister Trudeau's participation in events such as the Vibrant Gujarat Summit showcased

Canada's interest in expanding its footprint in India's dynamic economy.

In recent years, regular dialogues and consultations between officials from India and Canada have contributed to the ongoing enhancement of bilateral relations. These dialogues cover a wide range of areas, including defense and security, trade and investment, energy and environment, and education and technology. Such interactions provide a platform for both countries to discuss shared challenges and opportunities, exchange views on regional and global issues, and coordinate efforts to address common concerns. The impact of these high-level political exchanges on bilateral relations extends beyond the diplomatic sphere. They have facilitated increased trade and investment flows between India and Canada, leading to economic growth and job creation in both countries. Furthermore, collaboration in areas such as defense and security has strengthened regional stability and enhanced capabilities to address emerging threats. Cultural exchanges and people-to-people connections have fostered greater understanding and appreciation between the citizens of India and Canada, contributing to a deeper sense of friendship and partnership.

Looking ahead, continued high-level political engagement will be essential for sustaining the positive momentum in bilateral relations and unlocking the full potential of the India-Canada partnership. By building on the foundation laid by past exchanges and dialogues, both countries can further deepen their cooperation, address shared challenges, and seize new opportunities for mutual benefit and prosperity.

VII. PEOPLE TO PEOPLE TIES

The Indian diaspora in Canada has played a significant role in shaping bilateral relations between the two countries, contributing to cultural exchange, economic cooperation, and political engagement. With a population of over 1.6 million people, the Indian diaspora constitutes one of the largest and fastest-growing ethnic groups in Canada, exerting a considerable influence on various aspects of Canadian society and politics.

One of the most notable contributions of the Indian diaspora to Canada is its economic impact. Indian Canadians are actively involved in diverse sectors of the Canadian economy, including information technology, finance, healthcare, education, and small business entrepreneurship. They have established successful businesses, created employment opportunities, and made substantial investments in Canada, contributing to economic growth and prosperity. Additionally, Indian professionals, particularly in fields such as medicine, engineering, and academia, have made significant contributions to Canada's workforce and knowledge economy, enriching the country's human capital and innovation ecosystem.

Culturally, the Indian diaspora has enriched Canada's multicultural fabric, bringing with them vibrant traditions, languages, cuisine, and arts. Indian festivals such as Diwali, Holi, and Navratri are celebrated with enthusiasm across Canada, contributing to the country's cultural diversity and promoting cross-cultural understanding. Indian cultural institutions, community organizations, and religious centers play an essential role in preserving and promoting Indian heritage and identity among diaspora members and the wider Canadian society. Furthermore, Indian-Canadian artists,

musicians, filmmakers, and writers have made significant contributions to Canada's cultural landscape, enriching the country's artistic expressions and creative industries.

Politically, the Indian diaspora in Canada has become increasingly engaged and influential, participating actively in Canadian politics and advocating for issues of importance to the community and India-Canada relations. Indian Canadians have formed grassroots organizations, advocacy groups, and political networks

to promote their interests and engage with policymakers at various levels of government. They have successfully campaigned for greater recognition of Indian heritage and contributions, as well as for policies that facilitate the integration and advancement of immigrant communities in Canada. Moreover, Indian-Canadian politicians have risen to prominent positions in Canadian politics, serving as Members of Parliament, cabinet ministers, senators, and municipal leaders, thereby amplifying the community's voice and representation in decision-making processes.

The Indian diaspora's influence on bilateral relations between India and Canada extends beyond its socio-economic and political contributions to encompass its role as a bridge between the two countries. Diaspora members serve as cultural ambassadors, facilitating people-to-people connections, trade linkages, and investment flows between India and Canada. They maintain strong ties with their homeland through remittances, investments, philanthropy, and transnational networks, contributing to India's development and fostering closer relations between the two countries. Additionally, diaspora organizations and community leaders play a crucial role in organizing cultural events, business summits, and academic exchanges that promote mutual understanding and collaboration between India and Canada.

Despite its positive contributions, the Indian diaspora in Canada has also faced challenges and controversies that have impacted bilateral relations. Issues such as the Khalistan movement, allegations of extremism, and concerns about dual citizenship and loyalty have occasionally strained relations between the two countries and led to diplomatic tensions. However, the vast majority of Indian Canadians are law-abiding, productive members of society who contribute positively to Canada's multicultural mosaic and bilateral relations with India. In short, the Indian diaspora in Canada is a dynamic and influential community that plays a vital role in shaping bilateral relations between India and Canada. Its contributions to the economic, cultural, political, and social fabric of both countries are significant and enduring, fostering closer ties and mutual prosperity. As India and Canada continue to deepen their engagement and cooperation, the Indian diaspora will remain a valuable asset and a potent force for strengthening people-to-people ties and advancing shared interests and values.

VIII. INDIA, CANADA AND THE INDO-PACIFIC

Based on strategic convergence, Indo-pacific has eventually become a significant platform. Canadas specific indo-pacific strategy deals with several aspects forming the key partner of Canada. This specially includes, stability in the region, consistency of economic betterment, following rules based on international order and strategic significance. This is mainly categorized

by India's strategic importance based on its geographical location, enhancement in economy, naval capabilities and consistent diplomatic influence in south east Asian nations. Reduction of the constant over dependence on the traditional market system of the world, Canada has proposed potential cooperation towards India in the fields of cyber security, technological betterment, climate change mitigation, free flow of supply chains and natural resources. The Indo-Pacific structure has helped in proving the platform to both the nations where irrespective of several disagreements, pragmatic relations remain constant and regional stability cooperates in further economic growth.

IX. CHALLENGES AND CONTROVERSIES

The relationship between India and Canada has faced strains due to several contentious issues, notably the Khalistan movement and its associated diplomatic tensions. The Khalistan movement, seeking an independent Sikh state in the Punjab region of India, has been a source of friction between the two countries, particularly due to the presence of the Sikh diaspora in Canada who are sympathetic to the cause. Canada's

historical support for Sikh separatist movements, coupled with the presence of Khalistani elements within its Sikh community, has led to diplomatic challenges and occasional friction with India. One of the key controversies emerged during Prime Minister Justin Trudeau's visit to India in 2018 when some members of his delegation were found to have links with Sikh separatist groups. This led to strained relations between the two nations, with India expressing concerns over Canada's perceived tolerance of separatist activities on its soil. Adding fuel to fire, the allegation of killing Hardeep Singh Gujjar (leader of Khalistani movement in Canada) , by Indian diplomats have significantly ruptured the long standing cooperative links. The incident highlighted the complexities of managing relations between diaspora communities and their countries of origin, particularly when the diaspora's activities intersect with sensitive political issues. Furthermore, the issue of alleged funding and support for Khalistani groups by elements within the Canadian Sikh community has been a point of contention. India has accused certain individuals and organizations in Canada of financing and promoting separatist activities, leading to diplomatic confrontations and calls for Canada to take action against such groups. However, Canada has emphasized the importance of upholding freedom of speech and expression while condemning violence or terrorism in any form. These challenges have contributed to occasional diplomatic tensions and strained relations between India and Canada, affecting bilateral cooperation in various areas. The perception of Canada as a haven for Khalistani activists and sympathizers has led to mistrust and suspicion on the part of the Indian government, hampering efforts to deepen engagement and collaboration between the two countries.

Despite these challenges, both India and Canada have reiterated their commitment to maintaining constructive dialogue and finding mutually acceptable solutions to contentious issues. Efforts to

address concerns related to separatist activities and terrorism have been made through diplomatic channels and cooperation in counter-terrorism initiatives. However, achieving a lasting resolution to the Khalistan issue and restoring trust between the two nations will require continued engagement, dialogue, and a shared commitment to upholding the principles of sovereignty, territorial integrity, and respect for international law. Balancing the interests of diaspora communities with the imperatives of bilateral relations remains a complex and ongoing challenge for both India and Canada

X. CONCLUSION

In summary, the relationship between India and Canada is multifaceted, characterized by strategic partnerships, economic cooperation, cultural exchanges, and shared democratic values. High-level political exchanges, such as Prime Minister Modi's visit to Canada in 2015, have led to the establishment of key agreements and initiatives aimed at deepening ties between the two nations. However, challenges such as the Khalistan movement and diplomatic tensions have strained relations, underscoring the need for continued dialogue and cooperation to address contentious issues. Despite these challenges, the Indian diaspora in Canada plays a crucial role in fostering people-to-people ties and advancing bilateral relations through economic, cultural, and political engagement.

Currently, the state of relations between India and Canada remains positive, with both countries expressing a commitment to strengthening cooperation across various sectors. Efforts to enhance trade and investment flows, expand educational and cultural exchanges, and address shared challenges such as climate change and global security continue to be priorities for both nations. India’s technology and innovation has created a platform of cooperation in artificial intelligence, biotechnology, and digital governance, which offers significant potential to Canada. Canada’s specific expertise in clean technologies entwined with India’s renewable energy creates a field of future opportunities of cooperation. Academia has already given both the nations a long way forward. Multilateral cooperation by being members of several organizations assure the stability of the ties in between several contentions. It can be clearly observed that historical disagreements have not created a hurdle in long term cooperative relation. Recent diplomatic ties might have created a trust issue, but with Mark Carney’s coming to power and participation of both the states in G7 summit has given a different lens to India Canada relation.

Looking ahead, the future trajectory of India-Canada relations will likely be shaped by ongoing efforts to overcome challenges, capitalize on opportunities, and deepen collaboration in areas of mutual interest. By leveraging their respective strengths and fostering greater understanding and trust, India and Canada can further solidify their partnership and contribute to regional stability and prosperity in the years to come.Both the nations understand their inevitability in contemporary international relation.

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