"The Largest Gathering of the Global Indian Family": Neoliberalism, Nationalism, and Diaspora at Pravasi Bharatiya Divas

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"The Largest Gathering of the Global Indian Family": Neoliberalism, Nationalism, and Diaspora at Pravasi Bharatiya Divas[1]

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Introduction

On 9 January 2003, more than 2,000 people from around the world arrived in New Delhi to participate in an event that was touted as the "largest gathering of the global Indian family." Banners prominently displaying the Indian tricolor lined the roads leading to the convention site, superimposed with the slogan "Welcome Back, Welcome Home." Surrounded by intense media attention, India's prime minister, Atal Behari Vajpayee, inaugurated Pravasi Bharatiya Divas, proclaiming that this event commemorated the "Day of Indians Abroad." Over the next three days, in the midst of the coldest winter Delhi had experienced in years, the Indian government and the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FICCI) spent twenty-two crore rupees (US$49 million) on lectures, seminars, trade exhibition booths, lavish amounts of food and drink, and spectacular stage shows featuring Bollywood actors. Advertised widely on the Web and in the Indian news media, Pravasi Bharatiya Divas was the first government-sponsored event that brought together Indians in India with representatives of the nearly 20 million Indians who live overseas.[2]

Now an annual event that continues to be celebrated in cities across India, Pravasi Bharatiya Divas is a striking example of the new historical, political, and cultural relationship between the Indian state and diasporic populations in the early twenty-first century. Marking a radical departure from previous government policies toward non-resident Indian (NRI) and person of Indian origin (PIO) populations, the conference signals the commitment of the Indian

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state to the welfare of diasporic populations. By rhetorically evoking an unbroken link between "Mother India" and her "children abroad," the conference revitalizes the Indian government's historically non-committal relationship to overseas Indian communities. At the same time, it also foregrounds the emergence of a newly important group of "national" subjects: the *pravasi bharatiya*, or "Indians abroad." Marking the culmination of a series of neoliberal economic reforms first instituted by the Indian government in 1991—including proposals for dual citizenship and tax incentives for NRI and PIO groups—the 2003 Pravasi Bharatiya Divas conference signifies the growing importance of diasporas to the domestic and global ambitions of the postcolonial Indian state.

As Indian citizens living in the United States, we attended the inaugural Pravasi Bharatiya Divas as independent delegates, sharing an intellectual and personal interest in this state-sponsored celebration of Indians abroad. While one of us knew of upcoming plans for the conference from her ongoing research on NRI populations, the other learned of the event from her father, who was invited to attend as a delegate from Japan. Invitations to Pravasi Bharatiya Divas were issued via Indian embassies and consulates to Indian chambers of commerce around the world, as well as to major Indian community organizations, Indian-owned businesses, and private entrepreneurs and individuals. Via its official Web site, however, the conference was also open to any other person who wished to attend, at a cost of $200 in registration fees. Invited and independent delegates were not necessarily Indian citizens, but participation was contingent on each delegate's ability to establish a current or prior historical relationship to India. While several delegates brought their spouses and other family members—many of whom were making their first trip to India—the conference was predominantly oriented toward middle-aged male business people. As two of the youngest conference delegates, as women, and as academics in the humanities and social sciences, we were in the distinct minority at the celebrations that marked Pravasi Bharatiya Divas.

The scale of public funding and commercial entertainment that characterized the 2003 Pravasi Bharatiya Divas conference provoked us to examine the changing political and economic relationship between the postcolonial Indian state and its diasporas. While Vajpayee's the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)-led Hindu nationalist government organized the first Pravasi Bharatiya Divas, subsequent annual conferences have been administered by different coalition governments. Over the past five years, these events have consistently been characterized by an unprecedented alliance between public funding and private entrepreneurship, mobilized in the service of the Indian state. This organizational alliance is visible

primarily through the consistent deployment of a nationalist rhetoric that emphasizes the territorial integrity and political sovereignty of the postcolonial Indian state. Thus, each Pravasi Bharatiya Divas conference not only showcases India's relation to its diasporas but also operates as a media event that reminds the national public of the sovereign power of the state. In turn, this rhetoric of sovereignty incorporates professional and middle-class diasporic subjects into an expansive—or global—national body. As we argue below, this new material and rhetorical relationship is expressed through a narrative of filial piety and familial loyalty. At the 2003 conference, the government's attempt to produce a global idea of India through its diasporic populations was met with skepticism and resistance by delegates. Yet we also consider the ways in which the diasporic delegates at the conference were complicit in the government's attempt to create a cohesive national body that redefined the place of the Indian state on the world stage. How does Pravasi Bharatiya Divas articulate a new historical narrative premised on an organic bond between India and its diasporas, a bond that makes a seamless transition between the colonial and postcolonial eras? What does the first "Day of Indians Abroad" tell us about the location of diasporic populations within the increasingly globalized ambitions of the modern Indian state?

In this essay, from our disciplinary standpoints in political science and cultural studies, we explore the 2003 Pravasi Bharatiya Divas conference for the intersection of ideologies of nationalism, neoliberalism, and diaspora in modern India. We focus on the 2003 conference as an important site for the nationalization of diasporic subjects, specifically in terms of its rhetorical production of a singular Indian diaspora. We bring to bear our different disciplinary methodologies, using archival research, literary analysis, and ethnography to examine the proceedings of the conference. Over the course of three days, we attended various panels and events and spoke to conference delegates from Fiji, New Zealand, Canada, Europe, Australia, and the United States as well as to Indian television and news reporters. Together as well as individually, our experience at the Pravasi Bharatiya Divas celebrations illuminated the ways in which we were part of a historical process initiated by the Indian state to expand its sovereign domain over diasporic subjects.

However, the significance of Pravasi Bharatiya Divas (hereafter PBD) goes beyond the insights it provides into the globalization of the modern Indian nation-state. Our analysis of this conference also contributes to an emergent body of scholarship on the role played by diasporic populations in contemporary international politics. The dominant tendency in this cross-disciplinary literature has been to treat diasporas as a liberatory force, evading or, at least, making

possible the eventual transcendence of the territorial nation-state.[3] To be fair, some scholars have focused on the ways in which diasporic populations facilitate nationalist projects that are wedded to territorial forms of the state. For example, Benedict Anderson has extended his seminal argument on nationalism to highlight the role played by diasporic communities that actively finance or mobilize specific types of nationalist movements in their homelands (58–74). While the developments captured by Anderson's evocative term "long-distance nationalism" deserve closer scrutiny, in our view his thesis provides only a partial understanding of the ways in which diasporic populations frequently re-inscribe the territorial, psychic, and economic domain of the nation-state.[4] While Anderson focuses almost exclusively on diasporas as independent actors, celebrations like PBD enable us to understand how states actively constitute diasporas as national subjects, thereby redefining the domain of the "national." We also note that countries as varied as Ghana, Haiti, Armenia, and Mexico host conferences and celebrations similar to PBD in order to reassert their close relationship with diasporic populations ("World of Exiles"). PBD is significant not because it is a unique political event but because it represents a larger worldwide phenomenon. By analyzing the rhetorical organization and political effect of the 2003 PBD, we aim to understand the structural logic underlying the proliferation of such conferences. We believe this to be the first step toward addressing broader questions about the relationship among nations, states, and diasporas in the present epoch of globalization.

This essay is divided into three sections. First, we examine the manner in which PBD, as a central ethnographic and rhetorical site for the (re)production of the modern Indian state, was distinguished by its reliance on *an* Indian diaspora. Whereas the categories of NRI and PIO nominally referred to different histories of migration as well as different class positions, PBD consolidated these two categories in order to produce a singular historical narrative for the diasporic subject.[5] We argue that this shift marked a conscious attempt by the Indian state to weld together diasporic communities across East and South Africa, Europe, Australia, the Caribbean, and North America and to shape these diverse populations into a coherent national body. But the government's attempt to suture the difference between various diasporic populations and to mend the divide between those who reside at "home" and those living "abroad" faced serious contestation. Many of the conference delegates were ambivalent about the Indian state's rhetorical and political commitment to their conditions overseas and demanded that the government revise its understanding of what constitutes the Indian diaspora. In the second section of the essay, we analyze this ambivalence by locating the PBD celebrations within a longer

history of interactions between the colonial and postcolonial Indian state and its various diasporic populations. We argue that PBD marked a distinct shift in the policies and rhetoric of the postcolonial Indian state toward its diasporas, a shift necessitated by the Indian government's ambitions to redefine its place on the world stage. Third, we examine the ways in which the new "global" India produced onstage at PBD was prefigured through the institutionalization of neoliberal economic policies from 1991 onward. We conclude by arguing that this series of economic "reforms" articulated a fundamental shift in India's postcolonial identity. By redefining its allegiance to other decolonized nations, the contemporary Indian state recruited its diasporic populations into an expansive national body that asserted India's prominence in the twenty-first century as a leading free-market destination within a global capitalist economy.

I

The Pravasis and Bharat

> "Vishwa Bharati Parivar ke Visisht Pratinidhigan: aap sab ko mera vandana hai, su swagatam. *[Distinguished delegates of the global Indian family: my greetings to you, welcome.]"*
>
> —A.B. Vajpayee, inaugural address

Inaugurating the 2003 Pravasi Bharatiya Divas celebrations, Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee declared that the welcome he was extending to the delegates was far from ordinary. Speaking in Hindi, Vajpayee noted that these were delegates who had established their homes "in scores of countries near and far." By becoming citizens of foreign lands, they had contributed their physical and intellectual labor to countries far removed from India. Yet, he insisted, these delegates also shared a common identity—their "Indianness"—as they journeyed to the "motherland of [their] forefathers." For Vajpayee and numerous other government officials gathered at the conference, PBD was the long-awaited gathering of a territorially dispersed *Vishwa Bharati*, or Global India. From the descendants of nineteenth-century indentured laborers from the Caribbean and Indian Ocean region, to business entrepreneurs from Australia and Southeast Asia, to professionals from North America and Europe, delegates from more than sixty countries had assembled for this inaugural event. These were the *pravasis*—men and women who lived outside of the geographical "homeland"—whose return to Bharat (the Sanskrit word for India) deserved to be celebrated.[6]

Press releases in the national media framed the conference as a celebration of Indians overseas, but they also emphasized that the conference was an opportunity for India to showcase what it had to offer the diaspora. Thus PBD was advertised not only as an ideal venue for the diasporic subject to engage professionally with Indian business and government representatives but also as an extraordinary encounter with India itself: with the cultural monuments, religious traditions, and historic sites that India had to offer. Many of the delegates combined their participation at PBD with family reunions, visits to places of religious worship, and sightseeing. By staging an encounter between those living inside the homeland and those living outside it, PBD operated as a professional networking event, a trade show, and—for at least a few delegates—a nostalgic homecoming.

Between 9 and 12 January 2003, more than 2,000 delegates flocked to the Pragati Maidan fairgrounds in central New Delhi. The sessions that offered daily speakers featured Indian government ministers, state representatives, prominent literary figures, and film stars, as well as government officials of Indian origin from Mauritius, Fiji, Canada, and the United Kingdom. Over the three days of the conference, the Indian government sponsored a series of exhibition booths, featuring Indian and multinational banking industries and financial corporations as well as information technology, health-care services, and nonprofit organizations. The proceedings were covered extensively in the national press, as well as on government and satellite television channels. Throughout, PBD was consistently described as an event that promoted contact not only between Indians in India and Indians abroad but also among Indians from various regions of the world.

The experience of PBD expanded beyond the government-organized speaker sessions and trade shows. Between sessions, the delegates were wined and dined at lunch and dinner events that featured cuisine from almost every region of India. The most popular events of the conference took place away from Pragati Maidan, at the Indira Gandhi National Stadium. For two consecutive nights, the delegates and more than a thousand private ticket holders attended lavish cultural shows, titled *Awaaz Anek, Sur Ek* ("Many Voices, One Melody"). While the first evening featured artists from the Indian diaspora, including singers from Guyana, dancers from Fiji, and musical stars from the United Kingdom, the second featured live Bollywood entertainment with a star-studded cast of Indian actors, beauty-pageant winners, and singers.

Vajpayee's invocation of a "Global India" was therefore created through the organizational framework of the conference, equally constituted by the professional speaker sessions that structured

the daytime events and by the panoramic cultural shows that entertained delegates in the evenings. This expansive spatial and temporal idea of India dynamically brought together conference delegates who otherwise occupied distinct geographical locations and histories of immigration. However, while the diverse backgrounds represented by the delegates were constantly cited in promotional brochures for the conference, as well as in the national news media, the rhetorical organization of the conference itself was invested in the production of a singular narrative of diaspora. PBD enabled a universal story of migration from and return to the homeland, which was disseminated through the official and unofficial events that composed the conference. Equally important, this universal representation of diaspora was reproduced, in ambivalent and contestatory ways, by the delegates themselves.

The proliferating use of "diaspora" as a singular, rather than pluralist, social construct at PBD deliberately underscores the ways in which diasporic communities have been actively reimagined within the nationalist practices of the contemporary Indian state. Whereas, for example, categories such as NRI and PIO nominally referred to the different histories of migration, as well as class positions, that have defined diasporic communities around the globe, PBD consolidated these two categories in order to produce a single history of cultural, economic, and political affiliation to India. At the same time, differences of regional origin between diasporic subjects (e.g., between immigrants from Kerala, Gujarat, and the Punjab) were eliminated in favor of a common "Indian" identity. In turn, this new subject—the Pravasi Bharatiya—was recruited into the national body of the postcolonial state.

As the prime minister and several other speakers at the conference repeatedly asserted, PBD honored not only those migrants who left India voluntarily in search of better economic opportunities in the late twentieth century but also the descendants of those who "went to distant lands as traders, monks, teachers and temple builders" in "ancient times," as well as indentured laborers who emigrated during the colonial administration of the subcontinent.[7] At PBD, the temporal parameters of what was known as "India" incorporated a precolonial and colonial past as well as the postcolonial present; the spatial boundaries of the nation exceeded the geographical limits of the state. It was this spatially and temporally expansive definition of the national body that enabled *pravasis* to become known as "Indian." However, by incorporating these diasporic subjects into the nationalist domain of the Indian state, the organizers of PBD excluded migrants who were forced out of national borders—those men and women who were violently displaced from India to Pakistan and Bangladesh during Partition in 1947—and who were physically

as well figuratively absent from the conference proceedings. This was made clear prior to the conference in a pronouncement by the Indian Ministry of External Affairs:

> The Indian Diaspora is a generic term to describe the people who migrated from territories that are *currently within the borders of the Republic of India*. […] The Diaspora is very special to India. Residing in distant lands, its members have succeeded spectacularly in their chosen professions by dint of their single-minded dedication and hard work. What is more, they have retained their emotional, cultural and spiritual links with the country of their origin. This strikes a reciprocal chord in the hearts of [the] people of India. (emphasis added)

In this official view, the term "diaspora" was integral to what it meant to be Indian. As the ministry noted, diasporic Indians were to be admired for their ability to succeed "spectacularly" in their professional capacities; in turn, the emotional, cultural, and spiritual affiliations they retained with their homeland should be welcomed and reciprocated by Indians in India. In this definition of diaspora, the productive labor of the migrant subject was distinct from histories of immigration, conditions of settlement, and experiences of racial and class discrimination in their countries of residence. Indeed, the very fact that migrant labor had contributed to the wealth of other nations was a source of nationalist pride and, thus, central to the ways in which national sovereignty is asserted at home. Through this familial logic, the (male) Indian immigrant became part of a coherent cultural and spiritual national body of India that stretched seamlessly across state boundaries.

The return of the diasporic subject?

At PBD, the paradigmatic figure of the Indian abroad was Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, whose arrival in India on 9 January 1914 after a twenty-year sojourn in South Africa became a template for the conference festivities. Gandhi, who studied in Britain and subsequently worked as a barrister in South Africa between 1893 and 1914, was deeply influenced by the conditions of the apartheid state and by his own experience of racial discrimination in South Africa as an immigrant and as a subject of the British Empire. It was in South Africa that Gandhi developed his non-violent campaign of *satyagraha*, or "truth-action," against colonial rule.[8] When he returned to India to propagate *satyagraha* among the rural and urban masses in the early twentieth century, his non-violent political work circulated transnationally from Africa to the Indian subcontinent; it was later invoked as a model for the Civil Rights movement in the United States. His dedication to ameliorating the

social and political conditions of Indian immigrant laborers in South Africa, as well as his later campaigns against British colonialism in India, came to stand in for the patriotic loyalty and labor that were demanded of the conference delegates. Promotional materials such as Web sites and press releases advertising PBD emphasized the symbolic value of 9 January as the starting date of the conference, establishing a coeval temporality between Gandhi's work with the anticolonial nationalist movement in the twentieth century and the investments of capital, intellect, and labor that were solicited at PBD in the early twenty-first.

Gandhi's leadership of Indians in South Africa, as well as of Indians in India, framed the dominant representation of NRIs and PIOs at PBD. Like the frequently evoked Gandhi, the delegates at the conference were consistently addressed as patriotic subjects of the Indian state and as migrants who were nevertheless assimilated into the national body of India. Yet reading the delegates-as-Gandhi obscured the very different forms of intellectual and capital investment that were solicited of diasporic subjects at this conference. As an icon of anticolonial nationalism, Mahatma Gandhi represented the ways in which migrants could shape the future of the Indian state. For many of the delegates assembled at PBD, however, a political investment in India—not to mention the prospect of resettling there—was far removed from their experience of being professionally successful immigrants abroad.

Whereas the Ministry of External Affairs invoked Gandhi's nationalist contributions, the government-appointed High Level Committee on the Indian Diaspora argued that recent social and economic changes in India necessitated a redefinition of diaspora. The committee acknowledged that while emigration from India was characterized during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries by indentured labor migration to the Caribbean and Fiji, and in the post-independence period by service-industry workers in the Persian Gulf, more recently "India's emergence as a modern society, destined to play a role in knowledge-based industries, particularly in the field of information technology … has helped to change the image of the Indian Diaspora globally." Specifically, the emergence of a professional class of Indian immigrants in the United States, Canada, and United Kingdom has coincided with India's "resurgence as a global player and as a country of stature in the comity of nations" ("Report of the High Level Committee" vii). As the committee proceeds to note, it was this latter-day diaspora of professional emigrants in the West who had the capital resources to contribute toward India's development and, more generally, to its increased prominence in a global economy. By repositioning diasporic subjects as a strategic resource of the state, the High Level Committee's report illustrates the ways in which professional Indian immigrants

in Europe and North America best represent, in the early twenty-first century, the political and economic ambitions of modern India.

Throughout the conference, these two definitions of diaspora—the anticolonial activism of Gandhi and the professional eminence of migrants in Europe and North America—were invoked simultaneously in order to constitute a universal category of subjectivity. Thus, the diasporic Indian subject represented ancient histories of migration as well as more recent travels; established residence and acquired citizenship in developing as well as industrialized countries; and accumulated wealth through manual as well as intellectual labor. These competing representations of what it means to be a diasporic subject of India were made visible in the selection of ten individuals who received the newly instituted Pravasi Bharatiya Samman ("Honoring Indians Abroad") Award. Honoring those individuals recognized for their contributions to the cultural and political lives of their countries of residence, as well as for their dedication to the development of the Indian state, the award ceremony was a highlight of the conference.[9] Yet the ten awardees were characterized as much by their distinct histories of migration as by their different political contributions. The first annual Samman Awards were given in 2003 to the South African anti-apartheid activist Fatima Meer; the managing director of McKinsey and Company, Rajat Gupta; and Aniruddh Jagannath, prime minister of Mauritius, among others. Whereas Meer was lauded for her contributions to the African National Congress and specifically for her work with Indian communities in South Africa, Gupta was celebrated as the first Indian-born individual to head the world's largest management consultancy firm. Despite the divergent experiences of gender and class that demarcated Meer, a freedom fighter, from Gupta, a multinational entrepreneur, the awards ceremony brought these disparate individuals together in the service of the Indian state. In the process, the awards also eliminated the complex histories of migration that shape the different racial and national locations occupied by Indian immigrants in South Africa, the United States, and Mauritius.

The ways in which the conference prioritized a universal narrative of diaspora created feelings of ambivalence among the delegates, several of whom questioned the government's attempt to homogenize their various experiences. A plenary session on the first day of the conference, titled "India and the Diaspora—Forging a Constructive Relationship," provoked heated discussions on the matter. Chaired by Yashwant Sinha, India's minister of external affairs, the panel was composed of politicians of Indian origin, including members of parliament from the United Kingdom, Guadeloupe, Malaysia, and South Africa as well as the former prime minister of Fiji. Sinha praised the panelists for their political work

in their countries of residence, but he also suggested that they use their offices to contribute to India's development. Consistently comparing the panelists to Gandhi, whom he described as the "original" Pravasi Bharatiya, Sinha argued that these delegates should represent Indian interests as well as their local constituencies in their political work. In response to Sinha's constant citation of Gandhi, however, Bhiku Parekh, a member of the UK House of Lords, remarked, "the suggestion of ninth January cannot be entirely innocent […] Does that mean that we'll return for good?" Sinha, visibly taken aback by Parekh's retort, jocularly responded, "It means you'll return not permanently, but to *do* good!"

While Gandhi's return to India in 1914 became a trope for soliciting overseas investment in the development of modern India, Parekh's refusal to return to India "for good" illustrates the complexity of permanently incorporating diasporic populations as national subjects of the Indian state. As Sinha suggested, politicians of Indian origin represent a source of cultural and political capital overseas that can be used to benefit nationalist objectives in India—for example, to aid in the development of India's nuclear program or to develop the health-care and telecommunications industries. At the same time, as Parekh noted later in the panel, "Any relationship between state and diaspora cannot be based on patriotism and affection alone. We too have interests in India." Sinha's initial response to Parekh—that diasporic subjects should simply transfer their political capital to "do good" in India—critically elides Parekh's contention that the relationship between diaspora and nation-state is mutually constitutive. As Parekh pointed out, diasporic subjects are characterized by their political and economic investments in multiple sites of home, which, in turn, complicates the Indian government's claim to the patriotic loyalty of these new national subjects.[10]

During the same plenary session, Mewa Ramgoobin, a member of parliament from South Africa, forcefully articulated "a deep distinction between Silicon Valley graduates and the graduates of indentured labor." Unlike professional immigrants in Silicon Valley, who had for the most part been raised in India, Ramgoobin insisted, "South Africa [was the] only country" known to the descendants of indentured laborers. By reinscribing the latter group within the racial and political formation of the South African state, Ramgoobin pointedly reminded Sinha of the costs of national patriotism. It was neither possible nor desirable for South Africans of Indian origin to "sit on the fence," Ramgoobin argued, because their patriotism to South Africa was necessary to the success of the post-apartheid nationalist project. By distinguishing between Indian entrepreneurs in Silicon Valley and the descendants of indentured laborers in South Africa, Ramgoobin also criticized the Indian government for prioritizing a recent pattern of professional emigration from India

overseas over a more contentious history of labor migration under colonial rule. The cost of the government's emphasis on professional emigrants, Ramgoobin noted, was the loss of India's role in the Non-Aligned Movement of the 1950s and 1960s and of its leadership in South–South relations during the same period. Not only had the Indian state compromised its political principals of socialist-nationalist government but the organizational structure of PBD also marginalized the longer history of labor migration from the subcontinent to the Caribbean, Fiji, and Indian Ocean region in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries. As Ramgoobin implicitly noted, this new relationship between diaspora and nation-state was premised on early-twenty-first century models of capital accumulation. Although both Bikhu Parekh and Mewa Ramgoobin refuted Sinha's rhetorical claim on diasporic subjects as nationalist subjects of India, their criticisms were never acknowledged either by Indian government officials at the conference or by the mainstream news media.

Both on- and offstage, PBD mediated the encounter between diasporic subjects and representatives of the Indian state. Although we were independent delegates, both of us were aware that our participation in this conference complied with the multivalent demands of a publicly funded national event. These demands were most forcefully articulated through the explicit solicitation of capital and political investment in the development of modern India. For many of the delegates we spoke to, however, PBD was also characterized by a series of contradictions. Whereas the conference was meant to foster dialogue between the Indian state and its diasporic populations, there was not a single official occasion for audience members to comment on or participate publicly in the proceedings onstage; nor did the conference provide an opportunity for delegates to articulate their own desires and expectations. Rather, each plenary session highlighted the hierarchical relationship between Indian government officials, who led the panels, and the delegates who were selected as respondents. While the dominant rhetorical organization of PBD defined the diasporic subject as a subject of modern India, this universal narrative of diaspora elided the diverse historical narratives and geographic locations embodied by the conference delegates. Moreover, the attempt to forge a new relationship based on capital and political investment bypassed the contentious political history that previously characterized the relationship between the Indian state and its diasporas. Confronted by the "new India" onstage, several delegates at the conference articulated feelings of ambivalence, resentment, and disenchantment. In order to understand the complexity of these sentiments, we locate the celebration of PBD within the broader historical context of the Indian state's policies toward overseas immigrants.

II

India Abroad: Migrations, Nationalisms, and the Postcolonial State

The tense relationship between the postcolonial Indian state and its diasporas was not easily refigured by the new alliances produced between state officials and invited guests at PBD. As several delegates pointed out to us, the conference made visible the disparity between the historically alienated attitude of the Indian state toward overseas Indian populations and the new patriotic and capital investments demanded of diasporic subjects at this event. At an opulent dinner buffet prior to the cultural entertainment program on the first evening of the conference, a group of delegates from Fiji expressed dissatisfaction with the fact that the former prime minister of Fiji, Mahendra P. Chaudhry, had not been duly recognized during the inaugural ceremonies. Chaudhry, who was elected to parliamentary office in 1999 by an Indian-majority population in Fiji, was deprived of his electoral victory in an ethnic Fijian–led military coup in 2000. During the race riots that followed, as the delegates pointed out, the Indian government did not intervene, despite the fact that the economic and political interests of the Indian community in Fiji were under attack. At the conference, the government's refusal to honor Chaudhry (by, for example, presenting him with a Pravasi Bharatiya Samman Award) provoked feelings of resentment among the Fijian delegates.

For these delegates from Fiji, and for others as well, it was clear that the Indian government was using PBD to rewrite a past history. Indeed, PBD could succeed only by renegotiating the legacy of difference and distance between the Indian state and its diasporas. Marking a dramatic change in domestic and foreign policy toward Indians abroad, PBD was the culmination of a series of new policy measures undertaken by the Indian state since the 1990s, including the provision of tax incentives to facilitate domestic investment by overseas Indians, the establishment of the first High Level Committee on the Indian Diaspora, the institution of a visa-free regime for diasporic subjects through the POI scheme, and an ongoing dialogue on dual citizenship. Further, the conference constituted an implicit apology on the part of what Vajpayee had called "Mother India" for not fulfilling her duties toward her "children abroad" in the immediate aftermath of independence. In contrast to its attitude of the past, as Vajpayee declared in his inaugural address, India was now willing to accept its "parental charge."

The prime minister's pledge to create a new cultural and political contract between the Indian state and Indians overseas was greeted by delegates with what can best be described as cautious optimism.

For one particular group of delegates, representing the Indo-Canadian Chamber of Commerce at the concurrent trade show, the conference was not primarily about developing business contacts or furthering capital investment in India; instead, these delegates emphasized the "cultural ties" that bring together diasporic subjects and Indians in India, ties of sentiment, affection, and nostalgia that overlook the political errors of the Indian state. As a Canadian businessman of Indian origin who had originally emigrated from East Africa remarked, "India didn't do anything for us in Uganda [when Idi Amin expelled Asians of Indian origin in 1972] or in Fiji … but [maybe] this is a different kind of India." The difference between the "India" of the past, which had distanced itself from diasporic communities, and the India of the present, which courted active investment by diasporic subjects, was noted by many of the participants at PBD. While we will return to the issue of a "new" India in the final section of this essay, we want to emphasize here the processes that led to the formation of—and gave meaning to—the India of the past, particularly in terms of its much-maligned relationship to its diasporas.

When India became independent in 1947, there were nearly four million "Overseas Indians" spread across various parts of the British Empire.[11] With roots generally traced to the colonial migration that began in the early decades of the nineteenth century, groups of emigrants were discursively constituted as a community variously described as "Indians abroad" and "overseas Indians" through a series of political struggles that took place both in settler colonies and within India itself. Despite what a prominent sociologist once described as a "lack of migratory instincts" (Sundaram 4), a significant number of people from the subcontinent had initially migrated as part of the indentured labor forces demanded by British capital, and were followed later by small groups of voluntary migrants who helped create South Asian diasporic enclaves in regions ranging from East Africa to Southeast Asia (Sundaram 4). At various points in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the colonial state cast itself in the role of the "protector" of the various diaspora communities, occasionally even taking up cudgels on their behalf in other dominions, as well as in the British Parliament. With the emergence of a nationalist consciousness among Indian political elites in the early twentieth century, however, there was a distinct shift in the nature of this relationship. Beginning with attempts to pressure the British Indian government to ban recruitment of unskilled labor and appoint commissions to investigate charges of abuse against plantation and mill owners, nationalist involvement in causes pertaining to overseas "Indian" communities soon took on distinct political overtones. This was due in part to the different problems faced by the voluntary middle-class migrants,

namely, those of political disenfranchisement and systematized racial inequality.

By establishing common cause with overseas Indians, the Indian nationalist movement initially articulated its demand for "equality within the Empire," a demand already being made by settlers from India in East African colonies such as Tanganyika. By the early decades of the twentieth century, however, it had become obvious not just to the settler communities but also to the leaders of the Indian nationalist movement that these demands would never be met within the framework of the British Empire, despite its patina of political liberalism.[12] It was at this juncture that the Indian nationalist movement began to move away from its own moderate past. Making a direct connection between the problems faced by migrant communities and British rule, nationalist leaders further claimed that the reason "Indians abroad" faced institutionalized discrimination was that India was a colonized nation and could not respond to the needs of her people. Writing about Canadian reactions to the moderate success of Indian immigrants in North America, Lanka Sundaram remarked in 1933 that

> The fact that India is a subject country has a lot to do with the recrudescence of race prejudice, and since the people of India cannot be expected to protest even if they were hit under the belt, the Canadians scored numerous technical triumphs. (126–7)

The colonial British state was not representative of the "people of India," Sundaram claimed, and was indifferent if Indians abroad "were hit under [*sic*] the belt." This was the sole reason that other countries could enact discriminatory legislation against Indians abroad with impunity. Usually the Indian case was contrasted with the Chinese. Some Indian nationalists argued that although China had not necessarily been regarded as a great power prior to the Japanese occupation, the Chinese government could still, because of its independence, afford to look after the interests of its citizens. By this logic, it was only by gaining political independence that the Indian state could begin to protect the interests of the Indian nation in all its territorially dispersed glory.

The connections made between India's status as a subject nation and the mistreatment of overseas Indian communities suggested that the emergence of an independent Indian state would ensure a closer relationship between India and "overseas Indians," wherein the former would actively intercede to protect the interests of the latter. But this was not merely a unilateral relationship. Several nationalist leaders noted that Indians abroad, through their participation in the struggle for Indian independence, had earned their

right to the protection and guidance of the Indian state. As a leader of the Indian National Congress noted,

> Indians abroad, it may look like a paradox to say so, paved the way really for Indian emancipation within the frontiers of India. It was the gospel of passive resistance that was conceived, developed and implemented in Transvaal in 1908 that paved the way for the development of non-cooperation, passive resistance, civil disobedience and *satyagraha* in the years 1920 to 1945, and it was really the implementation of the teachings of Mahatma Gandhi, subject to the principles of truth and non-violence over a quarter of a century, that made Indian freedom possible. We therefore owe all that we *are* to the initiative, the originality, the daring and the sacrifice of Indians abroad. (Rajkumar 5–6)

In this context, it would be natural to expect that after independence in 1947 the Indian state would begin to represent overseas Indians by fighting for civil and political rights in their countries of residence, while also institutionalizing its own relationship to overseas Indians through official means such as dual citizenship. The actions of the Indian state ran counter to these expectations, however. Despite initial attempts to negotiate with the governments of Ceylon (now Sri Lanka) and Burma (now Myanmar) over the question of overseas Indians, Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru summarized the relationship between independent India and its overseas communities in the following statement:

> We have left it to the Indians abroad whether they continue to remain Indian nationals or to adopt the nationality of whichever country they live in. *It is entirely for them to decide*. If they remain Indian nationals, then all they can claim abroad is favourable alien treatment. If they adopt the nationality of the country they live in, they should associate themselves as closely as possible with the interest of the people of the country they have adopted and never […] become an exploiting agency there. (emphasis added)

As Nehru argued, the *pravasis* (Indians living abroad) had a choice. They could choose to remain Indian nationals, in which case they could make claims on the Indian state, but not on their host countries; or, on the other hand, they could become citizens of the countries in which they lived, in which case their relationship to India would remain only in the realm of cultural and sentimental ties. Rather than operating as a representative of Indians abroad, the Indian state repositioned itself as an observer. As members of Indian communities in countries as varied as Burma (now Myanmar), Kenya or Tanganyika (later, joined with Zanzibar, Tanzania) soon

discovered, Nehru's declaration was far from mere rhetoric. In each of these countries, newly decolonized governments carried out nationalization policies that had a severe impact on Indian property owners and businessmen. In response to these nationalization policies, the government of India refused to come to the rescue of overseas Indians, defending instead the right of newly independent nation-states to safeguard and develop their economies as they saw fit. How can we make sense of this seemingly contradictory response on the part of the Indian government? The answer to this question lies in examining the nature of the Indian state that emerged after independence in August 1947.

Postcoloniality and the Question of the "Overseas Indian"

As numerous scholars have pointed out, the construction of the postcolonial Indian nation-state long preceded the actual moment of independence. This was a historical process that not only rested on a critique of the nature of the colonial state but also provided the rationale for the anticolonial nationalist movement.[13] The colonial state, according to nationalist leaders, existed to serve the needs not of the Indian "nation" but of metropolitan capital.[14] As such, the colonized state facilitated the exploitation of the national people, extracting its resources and siphoning away the material wealth of the nation. As Himadeep Muppidi has persuasively argued, in this context a viable articulation of the colonized "Self" as distinct from the colonial "Other" had important implications for the nature of the postcolonial Indian state that emerged in the aftermath of independence (*Politics*; "Postcoloniality"). If the colonial state was characterized by unfettered economic exploitation, then postcoloniality, in the Indian context, came to embody the removal of what was essentially an economically exploitative relationship. Translated into state policy, what this meant was that the postcolonial Indian state was focused on protecting national resources not just by staving off foreign investors (the "exploitative Other") but also by investing heavily in the public sector and building an indigenous technological base. In the other words, the economic policies considered essential by the postcolonial Indian state to restore the health of the nation after the colonial encounter were those generally grouped under the banner of nationalization. In order to understand how this particular postcolonial definition of India helped to shape the attitude of the Indian state toward "overseas Indians," we need to examine the international dimension of Indian postcoloniality.

In the decades leading up to independence, the Indian nationalist movement had established alliances with anticolonial struggles in both Asia and Africa by arguing that imperialism could only be defeated through a united front.[15] These political alliances centered

once again on the differentiation of the colonized "Self" (this time a "Self" unlimited by the territorial boundaries of the nation-state) from the colonial "Other" (the exploitative imperial regime). Equally importantly, the alliances established by the Indian nationalist movement did not end with the official declaration of independence.[16] Even as colonies across Asia and Africa attained their freedom, the postcolonial Indian state recognized and supported the right of the former colonies to embark on projects that were necessary to rebuild and revitalize their respective national resources. Thus, when nation-states such as Burma, Kenya, and Tanzania began to nationalize their economies, the Indian state offered its support of these economic policies, even though the capital and property interests of persons of Indian origin in these countries were adversely affected.

Consequently, the post-independence Indian state framed its relationship with *pravasis* in terms of a larger transnational alliance against colonial exploitation. As Nehru declared, Indians abroad had a responsibility to identify closely with the interests of the country they were residing in, even if it went against their own personal interests and economic investments. Any attempt to uphold economic investments at the cost of the larger national interest of the host country would lead to an equation between Indians abroad and the colonial powers, described as "exploiting agents." By the same logic, any intervention by the postcolonial Indian state on behalf of the various Indian communities abroad could also be viewed as an attempt to reinscribe exploitative relationships in a different political context. It was this commitment to a transnational anticolonial alliance that shaped the Nehruvian policy in the immediate aftermath of independence. Despite various political events over the decades, the essence of that policy shaped the relationship between the *pravasis* and *Bharat* until the late twentieth century.

III

Neoliberal Formations, Postcolonial Futures

In June 1991, following the most severe economic crisis in its four decades of independence, the Indian state embarked on an ambitious program of neoliberal economic reforms. The reforms, allegedly essential to ensure India's global competitiveness, were perceived as marking a fundamental rupture from past policy. The new economic agenda included a deliberate state withdrawal from the public sector, which was now characterized as "unproductive." At the same time, these reforms were geared toward removing obstacles to foreign investment in the national economy ("General Budget"). In both cases, the structure of economic reforms prescribed a path diametrically opposed to the policy measures the postcolonial

Indian state had followed until the late 1980s. While the reorganization of the public sector, as well as state solicitation of foreign investment, deserves greater scrutiny, for the purposes of our argument we focus on the reforms package introduced by the finance minister of the time, Manmohan Singh. This set of proposals, we suggest, brings to light the ways in which the Indian state re-articulated its relationship to Indians abroad.

The economic reform package included specific provisos regarding NRIs. Declaring that it was time to carry out a comprehensive review of the Indian state's policy toward NRIs, Singh announced the establishment of a new government office—Chief Commissioner of Non-Resident Indians—to coordinate the interactions between the Indian state and NRIs. In addition, he clarified that the Indian government would focus its energies on attracting NRI investments into the country, both as a long-term policy goal and as a short-term measure to expedite the inflow of foreign exchange.[17] At one level, the actions of the Indian state appeared comprehensible—if Indians overseas has accumulated capital through their labor abroad, it was a logical first step for the Indian government to court these diasporic subjects to invest in their so-called home country. Singh's proposal was also puzzling, however, because the Indian government proposed to strengthen its relationship with NRIs in the aftermath of an economic crisis that was blamed, in part, on the behavior of Indian communities overseas.

In the months prior to the introduction of the neoliberal reforms, the Indian government requested and received two International Monetary Fund loans and devalued the Indian currency for the first time since 1966.[18] The devaluation of the rupee, perceived by outside observers as a measure that made subsequent economic reforms inevitable, was largely precipitated by NRIs who had withdrawn large sums of money from their Indian investments.[19] This led to widespread, though somewhat exaggerated, claims that NRIs were pushing the country's economy to the "edge of the precipice" ("Discussions"). In the aftermath of this economic crisis, the figure of the NRI was much reviled by Indian government officials, as well as by the national news media, particularly during parliamentary debates on the 1991 budget. Given this initial backlash against NRIs at the beginning of the 1990s, how do we understand the Indian government's attempt to rebuild its relationship to overseas Indian communities? The contradictory relationship between the state and its diasporic populations underscores the fact that in 1991 the Indian government faced a crisis that was much more than merely economic.

Supporters of the neoliberal agenda reiterated the assurances of Prime Minister P.V. Narasimha Rao and Finance Minister Manmohan Singh, arguing that the reforms did not change the

state's commitment to the welfare of the Indian people. However, these assurances did not hold much water with political opponents who claimed that the reforms, initiated as they were by the demands of the IMF, compromised Indian sovereignty by "selling out" to foreigners.[20] The allegation that the government was "selling out" and enabling foreign exploitation was particularly incendiary given that the postcolonial Indian state premised its identity on the fact of operating as a guardian of national resources. As discussed earlier, it was this role (as guarantor and guardian) that marked the distinction between the exploitative colonial state (the "Other") and the postcolonial Indian state (the "Self"). By extension, the postcolonial Indian state could sustain and reproduce itself only through a series of active state interventions in different national realms, particularly the economy. The economic policies adopted by the Indian state in the immediate aftermath of independence—primarily policies pertaining to the nationalization of major industries, state-sponsored industrial development, and strict control of foreign investments—were essential to, and a result of, this fundamental distinction between the colonial and the postcolonial state. Regardless of domestic and international pressures, successive post-independence governments had based their economic policies on similar principles. The adoption of neoliberal reforms in 1991, therefore, marked a dramatic departure from this path and posed a critical challenge for the Indian state. By instituting a series of unprecedented reforms, the Indian government was turning its back on, and tacitly acknowledging, the failure of nationalist principles that had guided India's economic policies since independence. In doing so, the government was also seen as undermining the very *raison d'être* of the postcolonial Indian state. To prevent the further erosion of state legitimacy, the government needed to re-articulate the meaning and nature of independent India. It is in the context of this series of re-articulations—of what "India" was, and what it meant to be "Indian"—that we can begin to comprehend not only the specific NRI provisos of the 1991 budget but also the changing nature of the Indian state's relationship with its diasporas, culminating in the 2003 PBD.

In the decade that followed the introduction of neoliberal reforms, successive governments argued that removing barriers to foreign investment did not in any way symbolize the failure of the Indian nation-state; rather, it indicated a sense of confidence in India's ability to compete and succeed in the global economy. In the past, officials argued, Indians had been hampered by an "inferiority complex" that made them highly suspicious of foreign investment, as well as of their own entrepreneurship. Now, however, this situation had changed—as Narasimha Rao opined, India had emerged as "global player" imbued with a sense of "national confidence."

Moreover, as other government officials suggested, this newfound confidence was not unfounded: Indians had in the past taken on global challenges and succeeded despite immense obstacles. The proof of Indian entrepreneurial skills could be found in the spectacular achievements of the Indian diaspora, who, many insisted, were still the "children of Mother India." As these officials recounted, the government's mistake in the past was not only its restriction of foreign investment (ascribed to a so-called inferiority complex) but also its refusal to take on the responsibility of representing this group of national subjects. Just as the restriction of foreign investment was rectified through the introduction of the neoliberal reforms, so also the Indian state's relationship to diasporic communities could be overcome through an institutional commitment to the organic bond between "Mother India" and "her children abroad." Moving away from the anticolonial alliance that characterized the post-independence Indian state, the new "globally oriented India" of the early twenty-first century needed national subjects who would legitimize its new path and potentially consolidate its economic and symbolic power. The PBD celebrations in 2003, therefore, marked the beginning of a radically different journey for the Indian state from the path followed in the immediate aftermath of independence.

Conclusion: A Global India?

The neoliberal economic policies that shaped PBD illuminated the ways in which notions of Indian citizenship were being redefined through the engagement between diaspora and nation-state. As the anthropologist Aihwa Ong writes,

> Neoliberalism interacts with regimes of ruling and regimes of citizenship to produce conditions that change administrative strategies and citizenship practices. It follows that the infiltration of market logic into politics conceptually unsettles the notion of citizenship as a legal status rooted in a nation-state, and in stark opposition to a condition of statelessness […] The elements that we think of as coming together to create citizenship—rights, entitlements, territoriality, a nation—are becoming disarticulated and rearticulated with forces set into motion by market forces. (Ong, *Neoliberalism* 6)

As a form of governmentality, neoliberalism adjudicates the relationship between the private citizen and the nation-state, a relationship that is increasingly articulated by global market forces. The neoliberal subject, as Ong suggests, "is therefore not a citizen with claims on the state but a self-enterprising citizen-subject who is obligated to become an 'entrepreneur of himself or herself'"

(*Neoliberalism* 14). At PBD, the Indian government's recruitment of entrepreneurial diasporic subjects produced a contestatory understanding of what it means to be Indian today. Whereas the series of new economic policies announced at the conference created an expansive and global understanding of India, these same policies belied the fact that what it meant to be "Indian" was experienced by the delegates in distinctly different ways.

The economic policies that formed the mainstay of the conference agenda enabled professional immigrants settled in Europe and North America to articulate their rights over and demands on the Indian state, including a demand for dual citizenship, investment incentives, and rights to property. Yet the claims to Indian citizenship for those delegates who came from the Caribbean, Southeast Asia, and Africa were marginalized by the very same economy of market-driven reforms. Indeed, at PBD the relationship between descendants of indentured laborers and the modern Indian state was primarily represented in "cultural" rather than economic terms—for example, through the profuse display of Indo-Caribbean music and dance during the evening cultural show. As we learned during our interviews with conference participants, the uneven encounter between delegates from industrialized and developing countries, and between these two groups and the Indian state, illustrates the disparities and fissures within the singular category of "diaspora" that was foregrounded at PBD. As the cultural critic Tejaswini Niranjana argues, events like PBD make visible the "selective disavowal of certain kinds of 'Indians' in the process of fashioning the new citizen of India as well as the new Indian in the world at large" (22).

The ways in which "India" is differently understood, embodied, and practiced in diaspora are thus central to the ways in which we understand the emergence of a new global India at PBD. Equally important, the relationship between this imagined global India and the nationalist concerns of the incumbent Indian government is central to the form of "Indian" identity that is reproduced at the conference. At the 2003 PBD, the conference proceedings were underscored by the Hindu nationalist concerns of the BJP-led central government.[21] Along with speakers such as Prime Minister Vajpayee and Deputy Prime Minister L.K. Advani, the conference prominently featured emergent national leaders of the BJP, including Gujarat Chief Minister Narendra Modi. In the spring of 2002, Modi reconsolidated his power base by condoning the systematic destruction of Muslim communities, businesses, and individuals in Gujarat by Hindu nationalist groups (apparently in "retaliation" for an attack on Hindu pilgrims in February 2002). Although Modi was accused by both Indian secularist groups and international human-rights organizations of masterminding an ethnocidal regime

of violence that resulted in more than 2,500 deaths and the displacement of more than 200,000 Muslims from their homes, he was reelected as chief minister of Gujarat that same year by a landslide.[22] At the 2003 conference, Modi's entrance onstage was met with a standing ovation from delegates in the audience. In this context, it bears considering that the communal destruction wrought on Gujarat was financially supported by diasporic Indians and overseas Hindu organizations.[23] Indeed, the Hindu nationalist identity that is tacitly produced at PBD is also reflected in the choice of individuals who receive the Pravasi Bharatiya Samman Awards. Although the array of awardees generally reflects a diversity of countries of residence (e.g., Hong Kong, South Africa, Southeast Asia, Europe), recent recipients of this award have also included US-based professionals who are politically allied with Narendra Modi and actively finance Hindu nationalist religious and cultural associations.[24] As an anonymous observer representing the Communist Party of India (Marxist–Leninist) wrote, while PBD encouraged overseas Indians to

> overcome linguistic divisions and strengthen the broader Indian identity, there was no mention of bridging communal divisions in this process. The identity that NRIs are to strengthen is implicitly a Hindu one. ("Pravasi")

In the years since the first PBD conference in 2003, the Indian government has organized the event annually in three major cities: Delhi, Mumbai, and Hyderabad. The conference has survived changes in political regime, from its inauguration by the BJP government to its current organization by the Congress-led coalition government. Despite these changes in administration, PBD maintains a remarkable consistency in its emphasis on economic "reform" and development fostered by foreign investment. In return for the participation of NRIs and PIOs in this endeavor, the government continues to promise various tax incentives for investment, promote the PIO card, and discuss dual citizenship (without voting rights) for select categories of NRIs. In recent years, the conference has also highlighted special topics: the 2004 and 2005 PBD featured panels on the health-care industry in India and on youth in the Indian diaspora. Beginning in 2005, the conference has also recruited young delegates through a Diaspora Youth Intern program that has brought college-age participants from Mauritius, Malaysia, Britain, Singapore, and North America. In part, these special topics and youth internship programs were developed as a means of integrating participant demands into the conference and building opportunities for feedback from, and audience interaction with, the assembled delegates.

While PBD continues to attract delegates from around the world, the image of a "global India" showcased onstage at the conference is increasingly propagated abroad. As a forum for bringing diasporic subjects as well as foreign professionals in contact with the modernizing ambitions of the Indian state, PBD has been replicated overseas in a series of weekend-long celebrations of Indian culture and industrial innovation (most recently in 2007 in New York City), as well as at the World Economic Forum (WEF). At the 2006 WEF in Davos, Switzerland, the Indian government invested more than US$4 million in a multimedia advertising campaign titled "India Everywhere." Like the global brand image of India created at PBD, "India Everywhere" showcased the country as a destination for foreign investment, critically expanding the domain of foreign investment beyond diasporic Indians to include multinational corporations. At Davos, "India Everywhere" operated as a multifaceted advertisement strategy: the campaign promoted India as a tourist destination on large billboards across the city and commissioned special cultural performances during the conference, in addition to presenting each of the conference delegates with an iPod MP3 player loaded with Bollywood dance songs. These strategic interventions enhanced the Indian government's large delegation at Davos, drawing attention to economic opportunities in the country. By many accounts, "India Everywhere" was one of the most successful advertising campaigns mounted by any national government at the WEF.

The advertising campaign for "India Everywhere" expanded on the ambitions of PBD with a single message: it "presented the country as an attractive destination for foreign investment, as an emerging manufacturing hub and as a credible partner for world business" ("Delhi in Davos"). Like PBD, the campaign was the product of collaboration between the Indian state and the private sector: in this case, between the government of India and the Confederation of Indian Industry (CII). As India's most prominent business advocacy group, CII generated support from leading Indian businesses for the Davos campaign, as twenty-two Indian companies paid approximately US$150,000 each for the five-day event. The Indian government contributed another US$2 million, working in tandem with the India Brand Equity Foundation to produce the visual, rhetorical, and political strategy for the campaign.

The "India Everywhere" campaign at Davos capitalized not only on India's increasing prominence in the international news media (as an emerging world market in competition with China) but also on the intellectual and political capital of powerful Indian businessmen who live abroad (including Rajat Datta of McKinsey and Company, as well as executives from Infosys, Cisco Systems, and Microsoft, among others). In this respect, "India Everywhere" not

only foregrounded the neoliberal economic reforms of the postcolonial Indian state but also specifically marked the global domain of India through the entrepreneurial capacities of its diasporic subjects. In so doing, the campaign became the latest and most visible attempt by the Indian government to rewrite the meaning of "India." As Kamal Nath, India's commerce minister, commented, "We wanted to project [India] as the fastest growing free market economy in the world" (qtd. in "Delhi in Davos").

By advertising India as a leading free-market destination within a global capitalist economy, the Indian government, CII, and numerous diasporic Indians participated in repositioning and re-branding the postcolonial Indian state. No longer beholden to the anti-imperialist policies of the Non-Aligned Movement, India was now characterized by what Fareed Zakaria, editor of *Newsweek* magazine, described as "vast and growing numbers of entrepreneurs who want to make money." At Davos 2006, diasporic Indians, primarily entrepreneurs based in North America and Europe, as well as Indian government officials participated equally to re-signify the relationship between citizenship, nationhood, and territoriality. The private entrepreneur—or what Ong calls the "self-enterprising citizen-subject" (*Neoliberalism* 14)—became critical to this project, operating as a link between the neoliberal ambitions of India and the globalization of a world capital market. The "India Everywhere" campaign at Davos 2006, therefore, built upon the refashioned relationship between the postcolonial Indian state and its diasporas that was first forged at PBD. Indeed, the success of the campaign relied on the ways in which the government could demonstrate that diasporic Indians—of the professional and entrepreneurial kind—were everywhere. The private labor of the immigrant abroad, extolled at PBD and later consolidated into the singular historical and economic category of the professional diasporic subject, became central to the redefinition of the Indian nation-state on the world stage.

In his essay "The Diaspora in Indian Culture," novelist Amitav Ghosh describes the relationship between the Indian state and diasporic Indians as a "historical anomaly." Noting that Indians abroad and Indians in India share no similarity in terms of language, religion, caste, or kinship, Ghosh contends that the intimate relationship assumed between India and its various diasporas is bereft of systems of social and cultural reproduction. Nonetheless, he writes,

> We are left then [to understand] the simple fact that the links between India and her diaspora are lived within the imagination. It is therefore an epic relationship: an epic without a text, which is all for the better perhaps, for if that text were ever written it would be a shabby, bedraggled, melancholy kind of epic. (247)

In our view, this epic relationship between the Indian state and its diasporas comes to life through the rhetorical organization and political practice of the annual Pravasi Bharatiya Divas conference. Like Ghosh, we believe that what brings many thousands of delegates from around the world "back" to India for this conference are not similarities of language, religion, or kinship but, rather, imagined histories of the past and shared aspirations for the future. Yet instead of what Ghosh characterizes as the "bedraggled" relationship between the nation-state and its diasporas, we argue that PBD produces a spectacular display of nationalism that incorporates diasporic subjects within a global vision of India. Moving away from a contentious history of indifference toward overseas Indian communities, the Indian state uses PBD as an opportunity to create a transnational network between diasporic populations that is nationalist in origin, character, and aspiration. In turn, the delegates who assemble at this conference ambivalently occupy their positions as national subjects, producing contestatory meanings of what it means to be both "Indian" and "in diaspora." Rather than undermining forms of national sovereignty, PBD demonstrates how diasporic populations have become crucial to the reimagination of the postcolonial Indian state and constitutive of India's place in a neoliberal global order.

Notes

1. Earlier versions of this paper were presented at the annual meetings of the American Anthropological Association and the South Asian Studies Conference. Throughout the many months we worked together on this collaborative project, we received assistance from, and would like to thank, Emanuele Saccarelli and Mario Ruiz, for their patience and thoughtful engagement with our work, and Khachig Tölölyan for his insightful editorial comments.

2. In a series of conference brochures and Web-site announcements related to Pravasi Bharatiya Divas, the Indian government advertised that an estimated 20 million persons of Indian origin live in 110 countries around the world, accounting for an economic output of US$400 billion (Consulate General of India). This population estimate is not verifiable; a 1990 study lists South Asian peoples living outside the subcontinent at 8.6 million, or less than 1% of the current combined populations of Pakistan, India, Bangladesh, Nepal, and Sri Lanka (Clarke, Peach, and Vertovec 1–2).

3. This tendency is the somewhat questionable aspect of seminal works in the field such as those by Arjun Appadurai and Stuart Hall. For a critique, see Ong, *Flexible*; Mitchell.

4. In *The Spectre of Comparisons*, Anderson describes "long-distance nationalism" as the increasing tendency of diasporic populations to intervene in national politics in their "home" countries. He cites the recent destruction of the Babri Masjid in Ayodhya, India, in 1991, an event that was orchestrated not only by the ruling BJP but also by the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (World Hindu Council), which solicited donations for the construction of a Hindu temple on the site of the original mosque from diasporic Indian populations in Asia, Europe, and North America. Further, Anderson suggests that the participation of overseas Tamils in the struggles of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam as well as support for Khalistan from Sikhs based in Canada, the United Kingdom, and United States also counts as long-distance nationalism, although we would argue that the formation of these new nation-states entails a more complex relationship between

diasporic imaginations, nationalist movements, and globalization. On the diasporic politics of Tamil Eelam, see Jeganathan; on Sikh diasporic nationalisms, see Axel.

5. The term "non-resident Indian" (NRI)—initially introduced in 1973—was meant to signify the professional migrant in Europe and North America, whereas "person of Indian origin" (PIO)—a category that became more prominent in the late 1990s—was meant to be an umbrella term that included third- and fourth-generation immigrants in Southeast Asia, the Caribbean, and Africa whose forebears had initially left the Indian subcontinent during the period of colonial occupation to provide unskilled and semi-skilled labor in other colonial territories.

6. The antonym of *pravasi* is *nivasi*, which usually refers to the "resident."

7. While these words are quoted from the inaugural speech made by Prime Minister Vajpayee, similar sentiments were articulated by most, if not all, of the government speakers during the three-day proceedings. For the text of various speeches made during the conference, see Ministry of Overseas Indian Affairs and FICCI.

8. Gandhi provides an autobiographical account of his sojourn in South Africa in his memoir, *Satyagraha in South Africa*. For a cinematic depiction of the effect of apartheid on Gandhi's political thought and activism, see Benegal.

9. For a list of Pravasi Bharatiya Samman Awards, see Ministry of Overseas Indian Affairs. Although the MOIA Web site lists only those who received the award between 2003 and 2006, each year twelve recipients are chosen from around the world. Nominations are accepted through Indian embassies and consular offices overseas, and candidates are subsequently reviewed by India's Ministry of External Affairs and foreign secretary and finally approved by the president. In 2008, A.P.S. Mani, Bakirathi Mani's father, received the Pravasi Bharatiya Samman Award, representing Japan. His leadership and social contributions to the NRI community in Japan, as well as his professional employment by IT-related businesses in both India and Japan over the past thirty years, demonstrates how the government of India is integrating more recent migrations of Indian professionals into its ideal of national citizenship.

10. For a detailed ethnographic discussion of the multiple ideological and economic affiliations that shape diasporic subjectivity, see Lok Siu's insightful discussion of the Chinese in Panama. Siu argues for "diasporic citizenship" as a means of conceptualizing the transnational affiliations between, for example, the Chinese in Panama and Chinese communities elsewhere in Central America, as well as between Chinese migrants and the governments of the Republic of China and the People's Republic of China.

11. These included the following: (a) colonies of the Indian system: Ceylon, Malaya; (b) colonies of the Pacific Ocean: Fiji, New Caledonia; (c) colonies of the South Indian Ocean: the Union of South Africa and East Africa in general, Mauritius, Reunion; and (d) colonies of the West Indian system: St. Croix, Guadeloupe, Martinique, Cayenne, Surinam, Demarara (British Guyana), Trinidad, Jamaica, Grenada, St. Vincent, St. Lucia, St. Kitts, Nevis. In addition, there were considerable numbers of Indian settlers in British Columbia, California, Mexico, Cuba, Brazil, Gibraltar, Hong Kong, and New Zealand. For a detailed account, see Sundaram.

12. This became patently obvious through policy proclamations such as the Devonshire Declaration of 1923, in which the British government used the pretext of protecting "native African interests" to undermine any efforts by non-white settlers to improve their lot. For further analysis of the Indian nationalist reaction to these colonial policies, see Lall.

13. See, e.g., Partha Chatterjee's seminal analysis of the ways in which the project of nationalism—of imagining India—was formulated, contested, and reformulated over a period of more than five decades.

14. For arguably the most compelling exposition of this view, see Dutt.

15. Ironically, in many cases, it was through the active efforts of persons of Indian origin in these overseas colonies that the Indian National Congress (INC) could establish an anti-imperialist united front. For instance, in 1924, Indian expatriates in East Africa set up the East African

Indian National Congress, drew up a list of grievances that it presented to the local and imperial governments, and sent delegations to establish contact with the INC. Following this, the INC sent a series of missions to South Africa, Fiji, Malaya, Ceylon, Kenya, and Zanzibar, actively trying to create associations that were tied to it and could be seen as part of a broader struggle against the British Empire. For more detail, see Lall.

16. Recognition of the right of former colonies to craft their own policies and become active subjects (as against passive objects) of international politics lay at the heart of the Non-Aligned Movement. For an argument on how this logic of non-alignment shaped foreign relations in post-colonial India, see Muppidi, "Postcoloniality."

17. The first scheme involved India Development Bonds, to be issued by the State Bank of India. These bonds were to be denominated in US dollars and made available for purchase by NRIs and the overseas corporate bodies they controlled. There was to be no ceiling for investments in the bonds, which had a maturity period of five years, after which both the face value and the non-taxable interest earned on the bonds were fully repatriable overseas, with exchange-rate protection. Furthermore, the scheme allowed for the "gifting" of such bonds to resident Indians, who were entitled to exemptions from income tax similar to those enjoyed by NRIs. The second scheme proposed that all foreign-exchange remittances into the country from NRIs would be subject to neither scrutiny (under the Foreign Exchange Regulation Act) nor the gift tax that usually applied to such transactions.

18. In July 1990 and January 1991, coalition governments preceding P.V. Narasimha Rao's cabinet drew IMF loans amounting to Rs. 1,173 crores (ca. $300 million) and Rs. 3,334 crores ($845 million) respectively.

19. During this period, nearly US$80 million was being withdrawn by NRIs every week. For details on NRIs' withdrawals and the 1991 crisis, see "What Price"; Gordon and Gupta.

20. For an elaboration of the debates surrounding the economic reforms of 1991 see Muppidi, *Politics*; Varadarajan.

21. The representation of a secular nationalist India was central to the concerns of the conference organizers, particularly in the aftermath of the 2002 election in Gujarat. Although cultural events during the conference symbolically represented Hindu–Muslim unity (e.g., through musical performances featuring a duet between Pandit Ravi Shankar and Ustad Bismillah Khan), the government's commitment to secular nationalism was vigorously contested by many delegates. See Mody.

22. Rakesh Sharma's film *Final Solution* provides a vivid documentary analysis of the 2002 Gujarat riots.

23. The BJP is responsible for organizing several "cultural" associations of Indian overseas, many of which donate to various Hindu nationalist projects in India. Among these associations is the US-based Vishwa Hindu Parishad—America (VHPA), which maintains close ties with BJP political leaders. See "Campaign to Stop Funding Hate."

24. In January 2006, Sudhir Parikh, a US-based anesthesiologist, was awarded the Pravasi Bharatiya Samman Award for his contribution to India and Indians in diaspora. Parikh was prominently associated with Narendra Modi and sponsored Modi's visit to the United States in 2005 (Modi was later denied a US visa following protests by secular Indian organizations in the United States). Parikh was also a major funder of the Vishwa Hindu Parishad—America. During the PBD awards ceremony in 2006, three delegates at the conference protested against Sudhir Parikh by staging walkouts and distributing flyers on Parikh, Modi, and the Gujarat massacre of 2002. For further details on these protests, see Ahmed and Rajagopal.

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