

Original Research Article

India and the Commonwealth in the 21st Century: A promise to Growth

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ABSTRACT

India has been a member of the Commonwealth since 1947, one of the world's oldest association of states. The Commonwealth has about 54 member states and India have 55% of the Commonwealths population, which makes India a strong power within the commonwealth. The Commonwealth that members countries from Asia, Africa, Europe, and small island nations of the Pacific and Caribbean. It also of great importance that China one of India's neighboring countries and a super power is not a member of the Commonwealth. This ensures that India's membership in the Commonwealth is of great advantage to the nation as China will not be able to involve in the agenda of the Commonwealth and non-interference in India's relationship with the other Commonwealth member nations. This paper tries to establish the role of India in the Commonwealth and the various advantages it has on India's growth. The findings of the study prove that India being a member of the Commonwealth benefits in terms of economic growth and diplomacy.

Introduction

The Commonwealth is one of the oldest association of states in the world. The Commonwealth is a Political association that initially included member nations that was under the British Empire. The commonwealth is a collection of 54 Independent and equal nations. The commonwealth is a voluntary association since 1949. The commonwealth is home to 2.4 billion people. Both developed as well as developing countries are members of the commonwealth. However out of the 54 nations 32 are small states mostly including island nations. The last country to join the commonwealth was Rwanda in the year 2009. Although the commonwealth initially was a collection of nations under the British Empire, today any country can become a member of the Commonwealth.

India joined the Commonwealth in the year 1947. The Commonwealth is a great forum for India to develop her ties with nations from Africa, Asia, Europe, the Pacific and the Caribbean. The Commonwealth although having its colonial roots deep in India was the first institution to provide India with the views of the world even before India achieved independence. Once India gained independence in the year 1947 the Commonwealth has helped India in various areas of interest like maintaining relations with various other former colonial powers, other countries from the western bloc, the commonwealth also gave India the platform to show solidarity towards other African Countries and also other small island countries. India was able to form new trade ties with countries in Africa and small island countries through the Commonwealth. The Commonwealth also provided India with a possibility of showcasing her diplomatic ties by organizing the commonwealth summit and the Commonwealth games.

In 2017, Prince Charles visited India on behalf of Queen Elizabeth II, the organizations head. In his visit to India the Prince extended an Invitation to the biennial Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM). Some viewed this move by the United Kingdom to use the conference to boost the commonwealth due to the uncertain situation caused by the decision to quit the European Union. Since India is a major contributor and a rising power, India is viewed as an important partner. On the other hand, India's active participation will also hopefully increase her diplomatic visibility.

Objectives of the Study

1. To explore the role of India in the Commonwealth.
2. To explore the trade circle and India's trade ties with the Commonwealth nations and how it benefits India's bilateral relations.
3. To understand the various benefits of India as a strong Commonwealth member.

Methodology

The study adopts a descriptive-analytical method. It is diagnostic and non-experimental in scope of analysis. Given the scope of the issue, the study explored the secondary sources identifying the major categories of India's role in the Commonwealth over the years which was available in the forms of books, articles, monographs, book reviews and reports.

India and the Commonwealth in the contemporary world

The Contemporary Commonwealth comprises of some eighty official bodies and nonofficial bodies. The official bodies along with the nonofficial bodies work towards promoting partnerships between member governments. The official and nonofficial bodies also promote the partnerships between businesses and civil societies among member nations. Commonwealth also act as a consultation agent for its member nations on international peace and security. The commonwealth also enables nations to consult its fellow member nations on various other avenues, such as International peace and security, law and good governance, democracy, the environment and sustainable development, multilateral trade and debt management, education and youth affairs, human rights, healthcare services and gender equality, small states issues and information and communication technology.

India has been a major part of the Commonwealth and is one of the top sources of funder. In order to promote innovation and peace within the members of the Commonwealth India is in discussion with the Commonwealth countries over the introduction of new targeted funds. Commonwealth Secretary General Baroness Patricia Scotland even suggested that one of the funds can be named after India's first Home Minister Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel. At the Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting India has said it will double its contribution from GBP 1 Million to GBP 2 Million to the Commonwealth Fund for technical cooperation (CFTC). India has also been a part of the trade circle among the member nations. There is a great deal of focus on how to increase trade within the Commonwealth. Attention has been focused on trade as well as business ties within the Commonwealth countries. According to a study by the Commonwealth trade within members of the Commonwealth, which was around \$592 billion in the year 2013, is expected to rise to a \$1 trillion by the year 2020. India's contribution to the Commonwealth will not only benefit the nation in terms of trade but also will benefit the nation in terms of a leadership role within the Commonwealth. As the largest funder of the Commonwealth India is bound to expand her leadership within the Commonwealth.

In 2015-2016 India was the fourth largest contributor to the Commonwealth. The same year India was the third largest funder of the joint office at the United Nations in New York. In 2009 the contribution by India was doubled approx. \$2 million to the Commonwealth media development Fund. India also did an annual contribution of \$80,000 to the commonwealth small states office in the UN.

In 2018 Prime Minister Narendra Modi attended the 25th Commonwealth Head of the Government meeting in London. This marked as a new political interest in the Commonwealth as the India marked her presence almost after a decade in a Commonwealth meeting. This initiative by the Prime Minister promised a possible leadership role for India both multilaterally and bilaterally.

India's active role in the Commonwealth has been noted as a promising move for the nation. There are various reasons that can be analyzed for India's active participation in the Commonwealth. First, the commonwealth is an organization that consists of nations from all around the globe. The Commonwealth unlike some organizations is not a regional organization. Although it was started as an organization that had members who were colonized under the British Crown the membership today has expanded vastly to nations that were not under the British Crown too which makes it an organization that comprises of nations with varied interest and from all over the globe. The organization also has member nations that are developed nations as well as developing nations. For a country like India that shows promising growth an organization like the Commonwealth will help in developing her bilateral ties. The Commonwealth will also help with the fast and growing economic interest of India. India views the membership as a great opportunity for economic growth of the country.

Apart from the benefits in terms of economic growth the role of India in the Commonwealth can also be viewed as a great opportunity to develop her bilateral relations with her neighboring nations. This is very crucial as India's foreign Policy as well as security policy mainly focus on her neighboring countries, countries in the Indian Ocean region, countries in the Indo-Pacific region and Africa.

Next, the South-South cooperation and its growth has given India a reason to show her interest towards the Commonwealth. The shift in the global economics that has dawned its light on the east and the south is a major reason for India's interest in the Commonwealth. Many of the Commonwealth countries deal with emerging economies to a great extent. The Commonwealth also has many of the emerging economies as its members. India is the largest economy in the Commonwealth. Until early 2019 India was the second largest economy next to the United Kingdom. India has raised its rank with the world economies and is the worlds 5th largest economy making India the largest economy in the United Kingdom. This makes many member countries especially the smaller states to show more interest in the South-South cooperation rather than the usual North-South cooperation. The India- UN Development Partnership fund is a dedicated facility within the United Nations. It is a fund that was specifically started for the South-South Cooperation which was established in the year 2017. It drew attention after Prime Minister Narendra Modi announced the launch of a US\$50 million Commonwealth window. This announcement was made at the Commonwealth head of government meeting held in 19 April 2018 in London. This announcement is in addition to the US\$100 million pledged in the year 2017. This makes India's multi year contribution to a US\$150 Million.

The Commonwealth acts as a huge platform for India's diplomatic policy. The Commonwealth has so many small states as its members spread across the globe. This helps India with her foreign policy. The Commonwealth helps India develop a diplomatic dialogue with small states that are member countries. Usually diplomatic contact with smaller states happens in the United Nations but the Commonwealth acts as a platform too to reach out to these small member states that comprises of almost 60% of the Commonwealth membership. India and Australia have had a strategic partnership since 2009. Both the countries share a strong political and economic tie which strengthens their relation. The bilateral relation between both these countries has evolved over time. The visit of both the Prime Ministers in 2014 has further strengthened the bilateral ties between India and Australia. In 2017 when Australia released their foreign policy blueprint, they see India as a front runner of Australia's international partnership. The Australian Prime Ministers visit to India in 2020 was cancelled due to the Australian bushfires however the virtual summit that happened on 4th June 2020 is expected to be an inflection point in the bilateral relations between India and Australia.

The present Modi government considers the role of small states valuable which is established by its diplomatic contact with these small states. The new role of India amongst the smaller members states might also help India in the United Nations in the future in times of voting for what India might be involved in.

However, the most important aspect that has to be considered when we discuss about India and the Commonwealth is the absence of China. Unlike other international organizations where China dominates the agendas in the Commonwealth, they do not have a role to play. However, India has to pay attention towards Pakistan as Pakistan is a member of the Commonwealth and might work along with its biggest ally, China. Pakistan has already tried to attain the interest of certain African countries who are members of the Non-Alignment Movement on China's position in the South China Sea. Thus, the role of Pakistan can be a problem for India in the Commonwealth if India fails to maintain a healthy relationship with the rest of the members. In accordance to this India has shown interest with several projects such as solar energy, digitization, trade and investment.

PM Modi's attendance in the 2018 Commonwealth summit has only made it clear that he is interested in expanding India's role in the Commonwealth. The British on the other hand has also extended their interest to decentralize the Commonwealth and welcome other countries to lead projects within the Commonwealth which gives scope for India as a member. Thus, India views the Commonwealth as a great platform for its economic advancement.

This study tried to explore the role of India in the Commonwealth and the evolution of India as the strongest nation amongst other Commonwealth countries. The study also mentions that over the period of time India has made a stronger impact for herself in the Commonwealth and expects to develop her bilateral and diplomacy relations with the other Commonwealth nations. the study also explains the various trade scope that the Commonwealth provides for India that can benefit the

Country in the future. Thus, the recent interest shown by the Modi led government towards the Commonwealth can be highly advantageous for the country.

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