



From Ancient Legacy to Modern Triumphs

The Indian Diaspora in the UAE

By Amrita Oak, Sreekumar Nair, and Manjula Manoj



Art by Jeena Raghavan



About Indiaspora

Indiaspora, a nonprofit organization, is a network of global Indian-origin leaders from diverse backgrounds and professions who are committed to inspiring the diaspora to be a force for good by providing a platform to collaborate, build community engagement, and catalyze social change.

Indiaspora is a nonpartisan organization that builds bridges between the global community leaders of the diaspora and leaders in India. By convening curated events, connecting leaders, and spearheading thought leadership, Indiaspora aims to bring together the professionally, geographically and religiously diverse Indian diaspora toward collective action worldwide to increase philanthropy and social impact, foster entrepreneurship and innovation and build political and civic engagement.



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Introduction: A Partnership of Growth and Vision

The United Arab Emirates (UAE) has emerged as a key player on the global stage, leveraging a strategic geographic location, economic vision, and pro-business environment to shape international trade and investment. Situated at the literal centre of the geographic world, the UAE serves as a link between Asia, Europe, and Africa, making it a preferred hub for businesses seeking access to global markets. Over the years, it has transformed into a leading financial powerhouse, a gateway for global commerce, and a strategic hub for multinational corporations looking to expand across regions.

Home to some of the world's largest free zones, state-of-the-art logistics networks, and progressive trade policies, the UAE continues to attract global enterprises, investors, and entrepreneurs. Its growing influence in sectors such as finance, AI, renewable energy, and advanced technology has further solidified its position as a global economic leader. With business-friendly regulations, a stable political environment, and ambitious national initiatives, the UAE is now seen as the destination of choice for international corporations, startups, and high-net worth individuals, fostering an ecosystem of innovation and enterprise.

The Indian diaspora in the UAE has played a significant role in shaping the nation's economic and social fabric for decades. A diaspora population estimated to be around 5,000 in 1975 has grown to a 3.9 million strong expatriate community today. In an increasingly multipolar world, the UAE's influence on the global stage is growing. The Indian diaspora, a key stakeholder in this partnership, is supporting the Gulf Cooperation Council's (GCC) international relations and, in turn, gaining greater visibility and influence in global affairs. In a world shaped by rapid geopolitical changes, economic transformation and technological progress, it is important to evaluate the influence and future path of this community.

The Indian diaspora is also a part of the UAE's transition beyond oil dependency towards a knowledge-based economy driven by high-growth sectors such as AI, technology, and fintech. Their expertise and entrepreneurial spirit will add to the UAE's competitive edge and global positioning. Understanding the contributions, challenges, and evolving role of Indian expatriates in the UAE is essential to harnessing their potential in the next phase of UAE-India relations.

1.1 India and the UAE: An Evolving Relationship Through the Centuries

Long before skyscrapers dotted the UAE's skyline, the Arabian Gulf and India were bound by trade. This relationship perhaps goes back to 3000 BC, from the Indus Valley to the Sumerian civilization when traders in the Gulf often passed through India while on their way to what is now Europe. Gulf merchants sourced silk, spices, and gold from India, while Indian traders sailed in with rice, textiles, and spices, returning to India with the world's finest pearls. Captivated by their brilliance, many rich Indians relied on the Tatta Bhatia traders to procure exquisite pearls from the Gulf. Over time, Sindhi and Gujarati merchants became familiar figures in the Gulf markets, forging deep ties with the region's ruling families and expanding the trade basket. Many eventually made the UAE their home, laying the groundwork for an enduring and prosperous partnership. The Emirati philosophy of Wasl which means to connect seamlessly and the Indian ethos of Karma Bhoomi and Janma Bhoomi, which means honouring both one's workplace and birthplace have since long created a unique resonance for the two communities to bond.

The Indian expatriate community's profile has evolved in response to the UAE's changing economic needs. As the discovery of oil in the 1960s reshaped the UAE's economy, it also altered the composition of the Indian diaspora. During the 1970s and 1980s, Indian migrants primarily filled the need for blue-collar workers required to support infrastructure development, making up around 85-90% of the Indian diaspora community. Since the 1990s, the Indian diaspora in the UAE has seen a significant shift, with an increasing

number of entrepreneurs and skilled professionals in sectors like finance, IT, and healthcare. Today, approximately 35% of the UAE Indian diaspora consists of professionals, entrepreneurs, business leaders, and other white-collar workers.

As of 2025, the Indian expatriate community stands at approximately 3.9 million, making up around 30% of the country's population. Approximately 20% of this community resides in Abu Dhabi, with the rest spread across the six northern Emirates, including Dubai, Ras Al Khaimah and Sharjah. Historically, Indians from Kerala have constituted the largest share of this diaspora, followed by migrants from Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh. However, the more recent expansion in migration from North Indian states has added to the regional diversity of the Indian diaspora in the UAE.

Though the UAE rarely grants citizenship to non-Emiratis, it has eased visa restrictions and fast-tracked the processes (e.g., the Golden Visa). The Indian diaspora is drawn to the openness, ease of doing business, and shared cultural elements in the UAE.

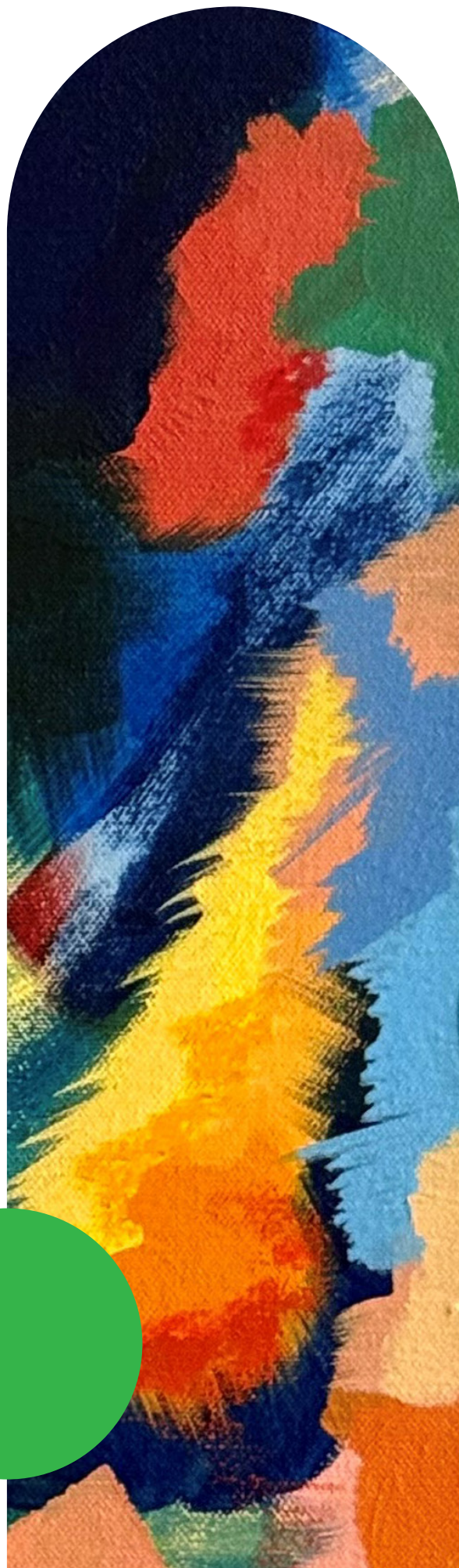
Despite this increasingly positive ecosystem, significant challenges remain, particularly for the blue-collar diaspora. While labour conditions have improved over the years, issues related to workplace safety, long working hours, and the quality of accommodation persist. Additionally, the high cost of living, healthcare, and education prevents many blue-collar workers from considering a long-term stay in the UAE. With

many hesitating to bring their families with them, only about 10% of the Indian expatriate community consists of non-working dependent members.

To address these concerns, both the UAE and Indian governments have introduced initiatives such as the Life Protection Plan to provide financial security for workers' families, skill development programmes to enhance employment opportunities, and bilateral agreements to safeguard labour rights and ensure fair treatment. While these efforts signal progress, ongoing collaboration remains essential for improving living and working conditions for the Indian workforce in the UAE.

The Indian diaspora is more than just an economic contributor to the UAE. It is integrated into the nation's success story, bridging economies, cultures, and policies, and continuing to drive a thriving and limitless India-UAE partnership. Their influence extends beyond trade and business, complementing the GCC's growing role in global affairs and supporting the region's economic growth and development goals. As the UAE cements its position as a global hub, the Indian diaspora's contributions will only deepen, driving innovation, investment, and collaboration across sectors.

This report examines the evolving role of the Indian diaspora within the UAE. It begins with an overview of the Indo-UAE trade and policy landscape, then delves deeper into the economic, educational, healthcare, and cultural impacts of the Indian diaspora in the UAE. The report concludes with opportunities for growth and impact for the diaspora in the coming years.



02

Bridging Legacies, Building Futures

Between 2000 and 2023, India received over \$16 billion in cumulative foreign direct investment (FDI) from the UAE, while Indian investments in the UAE during the same period amounted to \$19 billion. Governments on both sides have demonstrated a commitment to mutual prosperity, creating growth platforms for entrepreneurs, businesses, and professionals. Trade between India and the UAE has witnessed exponential growth, fuelled by strategic initiatives such as free trade agreements and local currency settlements. As both economies diversify, this partnership is poised to expand beyond traditional

sectors, cementing their roles as key global trade partners. The Indian diaspora in the UAE is one of the largest globally and has been instrumental in shaping the socio-economic and cultural landscapes across six continents. In 2023, this community sent nearly \$21.6 billion in remittances to India, making up 18% of the total remittances from the Indian diaspora worldwide. They foster innovation, drive growth, and strengthen their host nation's trade ties with their home country. They are also known to contribute to governance and diplomacy, furthering India's presence on the global stage.

2.1 A Dynamic Bilateral Trade Partnership, Bolstered by CEPA

The Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA) marks a significant milestone in the economic relationship between India and the UAE. The landmark agreement seeks to boost bilateral trade to \$100 billion within five years by reducing tariffs, facilitating market access, and promoting investment flows. CEPA was signed

on 18 February 2022, during a virtual summit between Shri Narendra Modi, Prime Minister of India, and His Highness Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan, the Crown Prince of Abu Dhabi. Concluded in a record time of 88 days, the swift negotiation was driven by a shared commitment to deepening economic ties.

In its first year, CEPA facilitated a 16% growth in bilateral trade, from \$73 billion in 2021 to \$84 billion in 2023-24, with India's exports to the UAE witnessing a notable increase. The agreement has strengthened collaboration in over 100 service sub-sectors, creating new opportunities for professionals and businesses. A new Bilateral Investment Treaty (BIT), signed on 13 February 2024, which came into effect on 31 August 2024, has built on this momentum further. BIT offers a robust framework for investment protection, thereby encouraging greater cross-border

investments. High-level engagements have created an environment of trust and cooperation, setting the stage for the success of current and future efforts. Mr. Paras Shahdadpuri, Chairman of Nikai Group and a prominent diaspora member with a diplomatic background, has been an advocate of strengthening the UAE's global connections. He views CEPA as a strategic milestone in bolstering the ties between India and the UAE.

2.2 India and UAE : The Enablers

While CEPA has firmed the foundations of Indo-UAE trade, organisations such as the UAE-India Business Council (UIBC) are amplifying its scope and impact. Set up by the foreign ministries of both nations, UIBC is working towards propelling non-oil bilateral trade to \$100 billion by 2030 and attracting \$75 billion in UAE investments. Bringing together a network of 18 founding members from leading Indian and Emirati businesses, the Council represents companies that hold \$1 trillion in assets under management. Chaired by Mr. Faizal Kottikollon, the UIBC champions projects such as the India-Middle East Corridor project, Bharat Mart, and India Hospital. Each of these projects holds the potential to catalyse deeper economic engagement between the two nations.

In 2023, India and the UAE took a new step forward by signing a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) to establish a Local Currency Settlement System (LCSS), facilitating cross-border transactions in Indian Rupees (INR) and UAE

Dirhams (AED). This system will facilitate current and permitted capital account transactions between the two nations, reducing reliance on third-party currencies and enhancing economic cooperation. This MoU has paved the way for integrating India's Unified Payments Interface (UPI) with the UAE's Instant Payment Platform (IPP), streamlining cross-border transactions and making them increasingly accessible for both consumers and businesses. The collaboration extends to mutual acceptance of domestic card schemes by interlinking national card switches, further enhancing the payment ecosystem. These initiatives will strengthen economic ties by simplifying financial transactions, lowering transaction costs, and accelerating the adoption of local currencies in bilateral trade.

The synergy between "Make it in UAE" and "Make in India", ongoing initiatives in both nations, has also unlocked new investment opportunities for both sides.

2.3 Shaping the Economic and Policy Landscape

Indians have played an important role in driving the UAE's non-oil trade and economic diversification, seamlessly aligning with the country's growth and development vision. While they may not hold direct political roles, they have influenced the UAE's economic infrastructure and forward-looking policies.

Mr. Maghanmal Pancholia, an Indian diaspora businessman, played a pioneering role in developing Dubai's electricity sector. In 1957, he co-founded the Indo-Arab Electricity Company with fellow Indian expatriates, bringing electricity to Dubai with three generators. He continued to lead the Dubai Electricity Company from 1961 to 1980, until it was nationalised and transitioned into Dubai Electricity and Water Authority (DEWA). In recognition of his contributions, he was later appointed DEWA's honorary chairman. He made history when he became the first Indian citizen to be given a seat on the board of the Dubai Chamber of Commerce and Industry by former Prime Minister of the UAE, Rashid bin Saeed Al Maktoum.

At the turn of the century, the UAE faced a severe shortage of seats in K-12 schools and a lack of world-class higher education institutions. The Knowledge and Human Development Authority (KHDA) was established to address this challenge.

In 2005-06, Indian diaspora member Mr. Punit Vasu joined the Dubai Education Council. Transitioning into a founding member of KHDA's senior management team, he dedicated 13 years to shaping UAE's education sector. His wife, Jhaanavi Vasu, continues to drive impactful work as a senior project manager at the Authority and contributes to the sector's broader transformation. During the 2024-25 academic year, Dubai's 227 private schools saw a total enrolment of 387,441 students. The significant improvement in quality since KHDA's establishment is demonstrated by Dubai's current global rank in the International Reading Literacy Study soaring to 6th from 33rd in 2011.

Historically, the Indian diaspora has advocated for policies to improve the expatriate experience in the UAE. For example, the two-year visa restrictions and mandatory 51% local ownership in businesses posed an issue for investors and businesses. Leading members of the Indian diaspora made persistent efforts through platforms such as the Indian Business & Professional Council to drive reforms. A shift to full foreign ownership in most sectors, the extension of visa duration, followed by the 10-year Golden Visa, and laws allowing freehold property ownership by foreigners have together created a welcoming ecosystem for all diaspora.

2.4 UAE: Strategic Gateway for Global Expansion

The UAE's strategic geographic location and business-friendly policies make it a preferred base for businesses looking to expand into the Middle East, Africa and beyond. Free zones such as JAFZA, DMCC, Sharjah and Ras Al Khaimah offer tax benefits, streamlined processes, and full foreign ownership without requiring local partnerships.

Assidus, founded by Indian diaspora member Dr Somdutta Singh, has successfully expanded into the GCC, capitalising on emerging market opportunities. Recent UAE expatriate and diaspora member Mr. Vivek Oberoi launched tech-driven companies in agriculture, finance and education in the UAE. His lab-grown diamonds brand, Solitario, has found international traction with the UAE as its base. Well-established Indian businesses such as Himalaya and Wipro have strengthened their international presence with their R&D and innovation centers in the UAE.

The Sharjah Entrepreneurship Center (Sheraa) and the Sharjah Investors Services Center (SAEED) have together made it easier for entrepreneurs to establish their ventures. The Sharjah-India Business Roundtable, organized by the Sharjah FDI Office (Invest in Sharjah) and the Consulate General of India, Dubai, aimed to expand cooperation in high-priority sectors. It has helped to deepen economic ties, encouraging Indian investment in the Emirates. Indian tech startup 90+ My Tuition App and risk advisory firm Aujas Cybersecurity have set up bases in Sharjah. Attracted by policies such as 100% profit

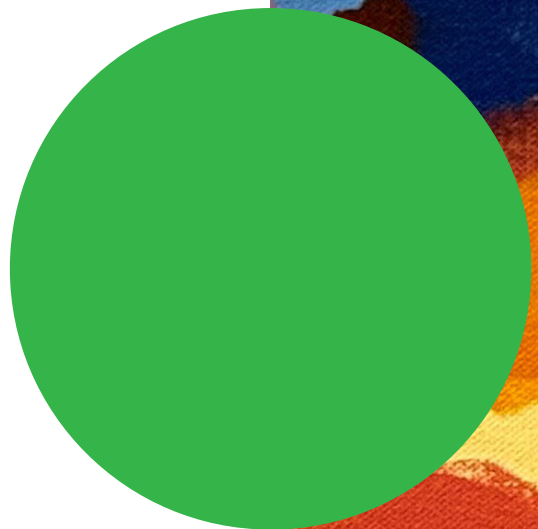
repatriation, over 5,300 Indian companies have registered in Ras Al Khaimah Economic Zone (RAKEZ). RAKEZ is proactively seeking investments from Indian companies offering tailored services and incentives to improve the ease of setting up operations.

The UAE's emergence as a global technology hub, its seamless capital-raising processes, operational support and encouragement for global expansion have created unparalleled opportunities for Indian technology startups. New-age businesses in AI technology and cryptocurrencies are also launching their global presence from the UAE. Funds such as the Abu Dhabi Investment Authority actively back ventures in technology, data analytics, and sustainable energy, sectors where Indian startups have a significant and growing presence.

The establishment of the world's first Ministry of Artificial Intelligence has positioned the UAE as a global pioneer in high-tech innovation. Led by His Excellency Omar Sultan Al Olama, the ministry is creating a regulatory framework that ensures stability and avoids retrospective policies. Government-backed AI research hubs and accelerator programmes provide the necessary infrastructure for scaling innovations in automation, big data, and machine learning. Against this backdrop, the UAE has become a preferred destination for Indian AI entrepreneurs and startups.

The Ministry also takes a progressive approach to cryptocurrency and blockchain technology, unlike several other jurisdictions, including India. The UAE's well-defined regulatory environment, supported by free zones such as the DMCC and ADGM, offers clarity and operational flexibility for crypto businesses.

Indian professionals lead advancements in AI, fintech and blockchain, strengthening the UAE's innovation ecosystem. As demand for STEM talent grows, retaining skilled professionals remains a challenge, alongside banking compliance hurdles. Yet, the UAE's investor-friendly policies and a seamless regulatory framework have attracted many Indian entrepreneurs specialising in blockchain-based financial solutions, digital payments, and decentralized finance (DeFi).



03

Economic Impact

The UAE, a capital-surplus nation, has strategically invested its post-oil wealth into several high-growth opportunities globally, with India being a significant beneficiary of these investments. Over the last few decades, Indian entrepreneurs have been at the forefront of the UAE's economic transition to a non-oil economy, fuelling growth in key sectors such as retail, finance, and real estate. While this presence strengthens the UAE's

economic landscape, Indian businesses find the nation the ideal springboard for global expansion. Indian women entrepreneurs highlight that the UAE's safety, world-class healthcare, and inclusivity offer an unparalleled ecosystem for them to thrive. With several women in leadership, government and investment roles, the stage is set for female entrepreneurs to succeed.

3.1 Indian Businesses Fueling the UAE's Economy

The UAE has emerged as a global business powerhouse offering a pro-business environment, world-class infrastructure, and strategic geographic advantages. Beyond the contributions of the Indian diaspora to the UAE's economic landscape, India-based businesses have also made substantial investments in the country. Over the last two decades, Indian investments in the UAE have reached an estimated \$80 billion, positioning Indians among the top investors. The economic footprint of over 90,000 Indian-owned companies registered with the Dubai Chamber of Commerce is vast and influential. The registration of 6,717 new Indian-owned companies in Dubai in just the first half of 2023, marking a 39% year-on-year growth, reinforces their dominant impact on the UAE's economic landscape.

Technology and Manufacturing:

The Nikai Group of Companies, founded by Mr. Shahdadpuri, has rapidly expanded into one of the fastest-growing OEM manufacturers, now operating in 52 countries. Indian conglomerates such as Ashok Leyland, Mahindra & Mahindra and Dabur have made significant investments in the UAE, capitalising on the country's pro-business policies and strategic location.

Retail:

Indian entrepreneurs have been instrumental in shaping the UAE's retail and hospitality landscape, establishing some of the region's iconic brands and names. Prominent businesses such as Lulu Group (founded by Indian diaspora member Mr. Yusuff Ali), Landmark Group (founded by

Indian diaspora member Mr. Micky Jagtiani), Joyalukkas (founded by Indian diaspora member Mr. Joy Alukkas), Malabar Gold and Tanishq have established a strong presence, catering to both local and expatriate consumers.

Lulu Retail, the Lulu Group's retail business, is the largest full-line retailer across the GCC, generating an annual revenue of \$7.3 billion of which \$2.6 billion comes from the UAE. A large percentage of Landmark Group's annual turnover of \$7 billion is generated from GCC countries. Tanishq's recent launch of its largest global showroom in Dubai reflects the deepening of the Indian businesses' footprint in the GCC. Many large GCC-based companies, such as Pure Gold Jewellers, Al Adil Group, Dana Group, among others have Indian founders or co-founders.

Hospitality:

Hotel chains such as the Indian Hotels Company Ltd, which owns the Taj brand, and The Oberoi Group have a significant presence in the UAE. While the Taj Hotel's three properties in Dubai have an almost 100% occupancy, they are planning to expand their presence to other cities as well. Mr. Kabir Mulchandani's FIVE Holdings has

redefined luxury hospitality, with its three UAE properties setting new benchmarks in the sector. The Lulu Group's investments in the hospitality sector are led by Twenty14 Holdings, which operates several of its hotels across the UAE.

Real Estate:

Indians are among the top investors in the UAE's thriving real estate sector. With annual housing demand outpacing supply by almost 38,000 units, Indian buyers contribute significantly to the expansion of this sector. Their investments span both luxury and affordable housing, bolstering the nation's real estate growth.

Construction and Infrastructure:

Large Indian business houses such as L&T and Punj Lloyd Ltd have played a key role in defining the UAE's skyline. Delivering large infrastructure projects, they have contributed to the nation's economy and growth. The DP World Bharat Mart project is a significant milestone aimed at facilitating trade between Indian manufacturers and GCC markets. This initiative reinforces the strong trade corridor between the two nations, further cementing the UAE's position as a global trade hub.

3.2 Economic Impact of Tourism

The UAE's proximity to India, with over 500 direct weekly flights and a short two-to-three-hour journey from major Indian cities makes it a preferred destination for tourists as well as diaspora families. For many Indians, the UAE serves as a compelling alternative to the West, combining cultural familiarity with world-class infrastructure. The UAE thus welcomes a significant number of Indian tourists. In 2023,

2.2 million of the 17 million tourists received by the UAE were Indians. This number marked a 22% increase over the previous year and a 12% increase compared with the pre-pandemic peak of 2019. The estimated expenditure contributed by Indian tourists stood at AED 23 billion (approximately \$6.26 billion at a conversion rate of 1 AED = 0.2723 USD).

04

Impact on Education

The Indian diaspora has played a transformative role in the UAE's education ecosystem, responding to the evolving needs of a growing nation. The challenge of finding high-quality, affordable and accessible education became increasingly evident with a shift in the Indian diaspora's demographics. Mr. Pancholia, the visionary who brought electricity to Dubai in the 1950s, along with Ms. Hemkala Behn, collaborated with His Highness Sheikh Rashid Bin Saeed Al Maktoum, Ruler of Dubai, to establish the first Indian school in Dubai. The Indian High School, which predates the country's formation by a decade, is currently led by CEO Mr. Punit Vasu. Over 15,000 students, primarily of Indian origin, are enrolled in this school. Indian-owned companies operate almost 95% of the private schools in the UAE. Among them, GEMS Education, led by the Varkey family, has emerged as the largest private school operator in the world.

Despite this remarkable progress in K-12 education, the UAE's higher education space has faced a gap with a limited presence of homegrown or global players. Recognising this issue, several Indian institutions such as SP Jain, BITS Pilani and IIT Bombay have expanded into the UAE. These campuses go beyond serving the Indian diaspora, attracting students from across the world.

Complementing these efforts, the Dubai Knowledge Park is emerging as the world's only free zone for human resource management and learning, fostering an environment for knowledge-driven organisations. The UAE is also witnessing a surge in ed-tech collaborations. iScholar, an ed-tech company backed by Indian entrepreneur, Mr. R. P. Nadella, has been invited to establish a presence in the UAE. Through its 'phygital' i.e. physical and digital model, the company is set to empower diaspora and local students, particularly those aspiring for admission to IITs, by providing global and local support. As Dubai cements its reputation as a hub for educational excellence, the Indian diaspora's influence is driving innovation, accessibility, and global recognition for the sector.



05

Impact in Healthcare

A significant number of the 26,000 doctors and 55,000 nurses in the UAE are of Indian origin, making them an integral part of the nation's healthcare ecosystem. With nearly 40% of the UAE's population being South Asian, Indian medical professionals not only bring expertise but also cultural and linguistic familiarity, making them highly sought after.

Indian entrepreneurs have pioneered world-class healthcare infrastructure in the UAE, addressing the needs of both local and expatriate populations. Hospital networks such as Aster Healthcare (founded by Dr. Azad Moopen in 1987), VPS Healthcare (established by Dr. Shamsheer Vayalil in 2007), and Zulekha Healthcare (founded by Dr. Zulekha Daud) have set new benchmarks in medical excellence in the Emirates. Dr. Thumbay Moideen's Gulf Medical University is a leading medical education institution in the UAE. Indian entrepreneur-led pioneering solutions, such as post-COVID telemedicine platforms, are reshaping the healthcare ecosystem. Platforms such as Sama Health, founded by Ms. Misha Akbar, offer culturally relevant therapy by connecting users with qualified therapists, catering specifically to the South Asian community in the GCC.

The unveiling of the India Hospital project by the Prime Minister of India in 2024 is a testament to

the deepening cooperation between India and the UAE. The land for the hospital was granted by His Highness Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum, the Ruler of Dubai. The project is spearheaded by Indian diaspora member Dr. Nawab Shafi Ul Mulk, Founder and President of Mulk Med Healthcare and is set up in collaboration with the DY Patil Group. This hospital will offer high-quality medical care at costs comparable to India, improving healthcare access for underserved communities from all nationalities, especially blue-collar workers from India. The initiative will also facilitate training and deployment of Indian nurses across the GCC and eventually Africa, creating life-changing employment opportunities for many more Indians.

Beyond institutional impact, the Indian diaspora continues to drive humanitarian efforts in the region. Dr. Shamsheer Vayalil Parambath, founder and chairman of Burjeel Holdings, announced a philanthropic initiative in January 2024. Burjeel, one of the largest healthcare service providers in the Middle East and North Africa region, sponsors 50 life-saving heart surgeries for children, particularly from conflict zones and underserved areas.

06

Cultural Influence

The India-UAE bond, rooted in centuries of trade and cultural familiarity, is continuously evolving. Unlike Indian communities in distant countries that often preserve an outdated version of Indian identity, seamless connectivity between the two nations fuels the dynamic exchange of culture, lifestyles, traditions and ideas. Whether through frequent travel, business exchanges or family connections, Indians in the UAE are preserving their traditions while embracing the multicultural dynamism of their host nation.

Many Emiratis effortlessly speak Hindi and Urdu, a testament to decades of interaction and a reflection of many having been educated in India. Hindi movies have left their imprint on the Emiratis, familiarising them with Indian music, and festivals. As they openly embrace Indian festivals, it is not uncommon to see homes of many non-Indians lit up for Diwali. This resonance with Indian culture and languages has furthered the deep sense of familiarity and created lasting bonds between people from both sides.

A recent Mata Ki Chowki, hosted at the World Trade Centre in Dubai by the Indian diaspora drew over 7,500 attendees from diverse backgrounds beyond the Indian community. Performances

by renowned artists such as Anuradha Paudwal, Kailash Kher and Sonu Nigam, among others, were a key attraction.

The Cricketers Benefit Fund Series (CBFS) in Sharjah, initiated in the early 1980s, marked the beginning of cricket's significant cultural and economic influence in the UAE. This series catalysed Sharjah's emergence as a cricketing hub, drawing substantial South Asian crowds and boosting local economies through increased demand in the hospitality and retail sectors. Modern tournaments, such as the T20 and the Champions Trophy, have built upon this legacy, with the T20 alone contributing to a notable surge in economic activity. For example, during cricket seasons, hotel occupancy in the UAE has been known to increase by up to 30%, significantly boosting local business revenues. The 2020 IPL season, hosted in the UAE due to pandemic restrictions, not only demonstrated the country's logistical capabilities but also generated over \$100 million in economic benefits through tourism, broadcasting rights, and increased expenditure across various sectors. This enduring tradition highlights cricket's role as both an economic catalyst and a cultural bridge between the UAE and India.



The UAE is also home to several temples, reflecting the commitment to religious tolerance and cultural inclusivity. The first temple, Dubai Hindu Temple, was built in 1958 in Bur Dubai, but has now been relocated to Jebel Ali. The BAPS Hindu Mandir in Abu Dhabi, consecrated in February 2024, stands on 27 acres of land gifted by His Highness Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed Al Nahyan, President of the UAE and Ruler of Abu Dhabi. The engraving of an intertwined falcon, and a peacock in the BAPS Hindu Temple is a sculptural narrative of co-existence. The carvings of camels, oryxes, and falcons, animals that are native to the UAE, alongside 14 depictions of parables from Arabian, Egyptian, Mesopotamian, and other civilisations truly embody the principle of co-existence.

Indian classical music, art, fashion and cuisine also thrive in the UAE. Institutions such as the Malhaar Music Institute and numerous Indian-owned restaurants enrich the experiences of the diaspora and Emiratis alike. The willingness and interest in integrating South Asian culture into the Emirates' rapidly developing multicultural landscape are creating a harmonious blend of Indian and Emirati traditions.



07

India-UAE: A Partnership for the Future

India and the UAE are poised for deeper engagement, focusing on innovation, sustainability, and economic diversification. Indian STEM professionals and businesses are driving UAE's technology and financial sectors, while strategic agreements in clean energy, healthcare, and infrastructure promise sustained collaboration. Projects such as the proposed Dubai-Mumbai undersea tunnel could further enhance trade and connectivity.

The Indian diaspora in the UAE exemplifies how deeply our lives are intertwined, bridging geographical divides and enriching the cultural and economic landscape. Their contributions echo through the bustling markets and towering skyscrapers, reinforcing a sense of belonging and community that has transcended borders from a very long time ago. This vibrant intermingling underscores the emotional resonance of cross-cultural ties, fostering a powerful sense of unity and collective ambition. As we celebrate these achievements, we are reminded of the profound impact that shared human experiences could have in crafting a future that is harmonious and prosperous for all.



Authors



Amrita Oak

Principal, The Boston Consulting Group

Amrita Oak leads strategy and ops projects in Energy and Healthcare in her current role as Principal with BCG. Prior to that, Amrita obtained her PhD in Chemical Engineering where her research focus was to investigate the effect of fatty acids on the incidence and progression of hepatocellular carcinoma. Amrita grew up in India in the Konkan region in Maharashtra. Currently she resides in Houston, Texas. In her spare time, she enjoys hiking, running marathons, and baking.



Sreekumar Nair

CEO-India & Vice President – Global East, Indiaspora

Sreekumar Nair is the CEO-India & Vice President – Global East at Indiaspora. With a distinguished 25-year tenure at the Confederation of Indian Industry (CII), he played a pivotal role in charting India's global economic engagements as Chief Relationship Officer – International. A strategist and thought leader, he navigated trade and investment landscapes, fostering bilateral business cooperation while working closely with governments, think tanks, and industry leaders. His extensive global travels and international postings in the USA and Singapore have enriched his expertise in diplomacy, commerce, and policy evolution.



Manjula Manoj

Director of Operations and Community Relations, Indiaspora

Manjula Manoj has been Indiaspora's Director of Operations and Community Relations since 2023. Previously, she spent 27 years at the British High Commission in New Delhi, including 20 as Private Secretary to the British High Commissioner, managing high-level engagements with royalty, prime ministers, and senior dignitaries. With deep expertise in government relations, event management, and protocol, she is passionate about fostering cross-cultural connections within the global Indian diaspora. In her free time, she enjoys long-distance walking, hiking, and singing.

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