Better Late Than Never – After Three Decades Government of India grants real voting rights to Non-Resident Indians (NRIs)

At the First International Conference of Non-Resident Indians held at New Delhi on the 6th and 7th January 1984, Foundation for Critical Choices for India presented a well developed proposal for granting voting rights to NRIs and their representation in Rajya Sabha. Since then the Foundation has been following these proposals at different meetings and conferences. It also submitted petition on this and other proposals of the Foundation to the Petition Committee of the Rajya Sabha which commented on
them in their 93rd Report presented on 29th March 1988. It also submitted petitions to the Election Commission and Prime Minister of India on this subject. As a result of these efforts of the Foundation and also demands made by NRIs all over the world, Prime Minister Man Mohan Singh announced at the 10th Pravasi Bharatiya Divas on 10th January 2010 grant of voting rights to NRIs in national, state and local elections on two conditions. One, that their name should be registered in the voters’ list and Two, that they should be physically present in their constituency on the day of election. Fulfilling these conditions was very difficult for most NRIs. As a result a miniscule percentage of NRIs availed of this. After the formation of the new Modi government in Delhi, Foundation also
brought to the notice of the new leadership its erstwhile proposals for postal ballot giving background information about its desirability and practice in more than 100 countries. Prime Minister Modi has expressed his keen interest in closer relations with Indian Diaspora at different national and international get-togethers. At the recent Pravasi Bharatiya Divas 2015 in Ahmedabad he announced the decision of lifelong visa to holders of PIO Card and he had also asked Election Commission to examine the feasibility of granting voting possibility for NRIs without traveling to India. On the recommendations of the Election Commission on Monday the 12th January, Government of India informed Supreme Court that it has accepted EC’s recommendation to allow NRIs to vote
through e-ballot system or proxy. In E-ballot NRI gets a ballot paper by e.mail from the EC which he fills up and returns to EC by post. It is also possible for NRIs to authorize one of their relatives to vote on their behalf. The details of the process are being worked out.

Foundation is very happy that its proposal of 1984 is finally being put in to practice enabling millions of NRIs to exercise their franchise without traveling to India. It is a pity that NRIs will not be able to exercise their right for the Delhi Assembly elections on 7th February, 2015. But they can do it definitely for the forthcoming state assembly elections in some states. Foundation is still pursuing the other part of its 1984 petition, namely representation of NRIs in Rajya
Sabha by the President nominating some MPs in Rajya Sabha to represent them.