Based on the Foundation’s petition to Government of India and to the Petition Committee of Rajya Sabha in 1980s, Government of India has already granted the right to vote for Indian elections to NRIs on two conditions, namely (i) that their names are registered in Voter’s list of their constituency and that (ii) they are physically present in their constituency on the day of election. In view of the difficulties of fulfilling the second condition, only a handful of NRIs have made use of this provision so far.

Anticipating such problems the Foundation for Critical Choices for In India had requested the grant of postal ballot to NRIs as is being done by more than 100 countries in the world for their overseas citizens. Foundation and others have been pursuing the demand for postal ballot from time to time and the most recent requests were sent in September 20013. This issue was also raised at the Pravasi Bharatiya Divas, New Delhi in January where Prime Minister Dr Manmohan Singh promised to look into it for further action. Accordingly a GOM (Group of Ministers) which included Mr Vayalar Ravi, Minister for Overseas Indian Affairs, Law Minister Verrappa Moily and Parliamentary Affairs Minister Pawan Kumar Bansal, was appointed to consider a new bill – Representation of People (Amendment) Bill which will incorporate the process by which NRIs will be equipped to vote. The Parliamentary Standing Committee on Personnel and Public grievance had also recommended the Government to draft a comprehensive bill containing details regarding the manner of enrolment of NRIs, mode of voting and the conditions for contesting elections. Such a comprehensive bill to be prepared by the Ministry of Law will be presented to the Cabinet in due course.

Though the Election Commission has rejected the idea of internet voting rights to NRIs due to feasibility and security problems, the method of postal ballot which has been in use for a long period can be a suitable option. In countries which are using this system like USA, Canada methods and processes have been designed to remove the possible drawbacks of internet voting. Foundation hopes that Government of India will take a positive decision on the grant of postal ballot in time for more than 8 million NRIs to exercise their right to vote in the forthcoming General Elections, from where they are abroad.

Vasant Moharir, Dr
NRIs can now vote for parliamentary elections in India - Proposal of Foundation for Critical Choices for India in early 1980s finally being implemented

Foundation for Critical Choices for India, a Think Tank of Non-Resident Indians and People of Indian Origin set up in the Netherlands in 1980, had quite early on taken up this issue along with other issues relating to relationship between Indian Diaspora and Government of India. A Background paper based on comparative analysis of pros and cons, as well as an analysis of similar practices in other countries was prepared and presented to the First European Seminar of Non-Resident Indians in Noordwijk, the Netherlands in April 1982 and also to the First International Conference of NRIs in New Delhi in January 1984, attended by late Rajiv Gandhi and many ministers and VIPs..

Based on reactions in the above Seminars Foundation presented petitions to the Prime Minister of India as well as to the Petition Committee of Rajya Sabha requesting favourable decisions on the issue of Voting Rights as well as on related issues of representation of NRIs in Indian Legislature, possibility of NRIs standing for elections in India, creation of a special Ministry for Overseas Indians and appointment of a separate Ambassador for Overseas Indians. The Petition Committee of Rajya Sabha selecting Foundation’s petition from among hundreds submitted to it and examined it thoroughly and sympathetically. They consulted the State Governments in India with a sizable NRI residents abroad, concerned ministries of Government of India, eminent legal experts like Nani Palkhiwala and also visited some countries with sizable concentration of NRIs/PIOs. In its 93rd Report presented to the Rajya Sabha on 29th March 1988 the Petition Committee commented extensively on various proposals of the Foundation, including that of Voting Rights.

Foundation has been continuously focusing attention on these issues at its various conferences and in interactions with Indian leadership visiting Europe. As a result some of the proposals relating to creation of a separate Ministry of Overseas Indians, appointment of Indian Ambassador for Indians Abroad, nominating certain members of Rajya Sabha to raise issues relating to NRIs, grant of dual nationality, etc, were already implemented. Ultimately

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1 Over a period of more than 25 years the Foundation for Critical Choices for India (FCCI), a Netherlands based organisation has published different policy papers and submitted to government of India, the European parliament etc. The Indiawijzer intends to bring to the attention of the public some of the research papers. Here is one such publication. In this publication a proposal on representation of NRIs in Indian Legislatures is mentioned. A background paper on this issue will follow soon.

Wahid Saleh
at the Pravasi Bharatiya Divas at New Delhi in early January 2007, Minister for Overseas Affairs, Hon’ble Vayalar Ravi announced Government’s willingness to look at the issue of Voting Rights sympathetically. Finally, at the Pravasi Bharatiya Divas held from 7th to 9th January 2010 in New Delhi, Prime Minister Man Mohan Singh announced Government’s decision giving Voting Rights to NRIs and the procedure for it.

Foundation is very glad that though it has taken a long time for the Government to realize its proposals, finally government and the people of India have appreciated the rationality of Foundation’s proposals. It is in the nature of the work of Think Tanks like Foundation to be patient, work on issues systematically and present policy oriented proposals to the authorities concerned. It takes time but if the proposals are sound and will lead to better development of India, they will receive sympathetic attention.

The detailed text of these proposals as well as comments on their present status can be seen in Foundation’s recent book “Foundation for Critical Choices for India : A Quarter Century of Service to India, 2008, pp. 89-98, 388-392).

A complimentary copy of Foundation’s book (399 pages) can be obtained against payment of postage and packing charges from:
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