

OCI Cards for 6th-Generation Indians in Trinidad & Tobago

As of July 2025, Prime Minister Narendra Modi announced that the Overseas Citizen of India (OCI) card would be extended to the sixth generation of Indian-origin people in Trinidad and Tobago. The announcement was made during his official visit to the country, emphasizing the move as a way to strengthen ties with the Indian diaspora.

Key details of the announcement:

- **Historical context:** This extension is directed toward the descendants of indentured Indian labourers, often called "Girmitiyas," who were brought to British colonial plantations starting in 1845. The policy acknowledges and reinforces the historical and cultural connections that have endured over generations.
- **Eligibility:** The new rule makes descendants of Indian immigrants up to the sixth generation eligible for an OCI card, provided they can furnish documentation to prove their lineage. This expands upon previous rules, which typically limited OCI eligibility to the fourth generation.
- **Evidence of lineage:** Applicants are expected to submit a family tree and a birth certificate, attested by the National Archives of Trinidad and Tobago, to serve as evidence of their heritage.
- **OCI card benefits:** The OCI card provides multiple benefits to foreign nationals of Indian origin, including:
 - A lifelong, multiple-entry visa for travel to India.
 - Exemption from reporting to the Foreigners Regional Registration Office (FRRO) for long stays.
 - Parity with Non-Resident Indians (NRIs) in economic, financial, and educational matters, with some exceptions.
 - Permission to own residential and commercial property, but not agricultural or plantation land.

Significance for India's foreign policy and diaspora relations

- **Strengthening ties:** The policy aims to strengthen cultural, economic, and emotional bonds with the Indian diaspora in Trinidad and Tobago, which makes up over 40% of the population.
- **Diaspora engagement:** It sets a new standard for how India engages with its diaspora, particularly communities with ancestral roots dating back to the indentured labour system.

- **Precedent setting:** The decision could potentially pave the way for similar extensions for the Indian diaspora in other Caribbean and "Girmitiya" countries with large Indian-origin populations.

Explanation of Exam Oriented Key Terms

01

Overseas Citizen of India (OCI)

Overseas Citizens of India (OCI) are foreign citizens of Indian origin with a lifelong visa to India, but cannot vote, hold constitutional or government positions, or purchase agricultural land. OCI cardholders have parity with NRIs in many economic and educational matters, enjoy parity with Indian citizens for domestic airfares and monument entry fees, and can reside in India permanently.

What is an OCI Card?

- The OCI card is a scheme introduced by the Indian government to strengthen ties with its global diaspora by granting privileges to foreign nationals of Indian origin.
- It's a lifeline for those who were citizens on or after January 26, 1950, or belonged to territories that became part of India after August 15, 1947.

Eligibility

- Must be a person of Indian origin, or a child/grandchild/great-grandchild of such a person.
- Also eligible are a spouse of an Indian citizen or an OCI cardholder.
- No OCI is granted to individuals who have ever been citizens of Pakistan or Bangladesh.

OCI vs. NRI

- An NRI is an Indian citizen residing outside India.
- An OCI is a foreign citizen of Indian origin, with the OCI card serving as a lifelong visa for India.

Benefits of OCI Status

- **Lifelong Visa:** A multi-purpose, lifelong visa for visiting India.

- **No Police Reporting:** Exemption from registering with local police for any length of stay in India.
- **Economic/Financial/Educational Parity:** OCI cardholders have parity with NRIs in these matters, including the right to pursue professions like doctors, lawyers, architects, and chartered accountants, as per applicable acts.
- **Property Rights:** OCI cardholders can buy residential and commercial property in India, with an exception for agricultural land and farmland.
- **Domestic Travel:** Parity with Indian nationals for domestic airfares and entry fees to national parks, wildlife sanctuaries, and monuments.
- **Adoption:** Equality with NRIs in inter-country adoption of Indian children.

Key Restrictions

- **No Dual Citizenship:** The OCI card is not dual citizenship.
- **No Political Rights:** OCI holders cannot vote in Indian elections or hold constitutional or public offices like President, Supreme Court Judge, or Member of Parliament.
- **No Government Jobs:** OCI holders are not eligible for positions in public service, except those specifically permitted by the Central Government.
- **Agricultural Land Restriction:** Cannot purchase agricultural or plantation land.
- **Special Permissions:** Special permission from the Indian authorities is required for activities like research, mountaineering, journalism, and missionary work.
- **Restricted Areas:** They need a Protected Area Permit (PAP) or Restricted Area Permit (RAP) to visit designated regions.

02

Girmitiyas

Who were the Girmitiyas?

- **Origin of term:** The word 'Girmitiya' is derived from "girmit," the local Indian pronunciation of the English word "agreement." It refers to the indentured labour contracts signed by Indian labourers.
- **Recruitment and background:** Mostly recruited from impoverished areas in Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Odisha, and Tamil Nadu, these labourers were lured by agents ("arkatis") with false promises of better wages and economic opportunities.

- **Period:** This system operated primarily from the 1830s to the early 20th century, between the abolition of slavery and the system's eventual end.
- **Migration scale:** Over 1.2 million Indians were transported overseas under this system during the period.

Resistance and abolition

- **Early resistance:** Despite the oppressive conditions, many Girmityas resisted through desertions, strikes, and petitions to colonial authorities.
- **Gandhian movement:** Mahatma Gandhi, who called himself the "First Girmitya," was a prominent figure who opposed the system during his time in South Africa.
- **Role of nationalists:** Mounting criticism from Indian nationalists and humanitarian activists in the early 20th century exposed the abusive nature of the system, leading to its eventual decline.
- **End of the system:** Recruitment was officially stopped in 1916, with the last contracts expiring in 1920.

Major destinations

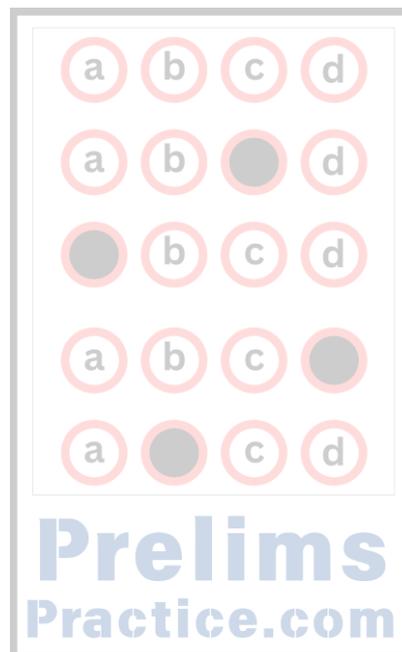
Significant Girmitya populations were sent to:

- Mauritius
- Fiji
- South Africa
- Caribbean Islands (Trinidad and Tobago, Guyana, Suriname)

Legacy and significance for India

- **Cultural survival:** Despite the hardships and forced assimilation, Girmityas preserved many aspects of Indian culture, language, and traditions. This includes festivals like Ramleela and Diwali and languages like Fiji Hindi and Sarnami Hindustani.
- **Economic and political contributions:** Descendants of Girmityas have contributed significantly to the economic and political development of their host countries, with many reaching high government positions.
- **Promoting soft power:** The global Indian diaspora, including the Girmitya community, acts as a cultural ambassador, promoting India's soft power and strengthening diplomatic ties.

- **Pravasi Bharatiya Divas:** Celebrated annually on January 9, this event honors the contributions of overseas Indians and provides a platform to engage with Girmitya communities.
- **Modern initiatives:** The Indian government actively engages with the Girmitya diaspora through programs like the Overseas Citizen of India (OCI) cards and by creating a global database to document their history.



Practice Questions:

1. Consider the following statements:

Statement I: OCI cardholders from Trinidad & Tobago can purchase agricultural or plantation properties in India.

Statement II: OCI cardholders have nearly all the rights of Non-Resident Indians (NRIs) concerning economic, financial, and educational matters, including property ownership.

Which of the statements given above are correct?

- a) Both Statement I and Statement II are correct and Statement II explains Statement
- b) Both Statement I and Statement II are correct but Statement II does not explain Statement I
- c) Statement I is correct but Statement II is not correct
- d) Statement I is not correct but Statement II is correct

Answer: d

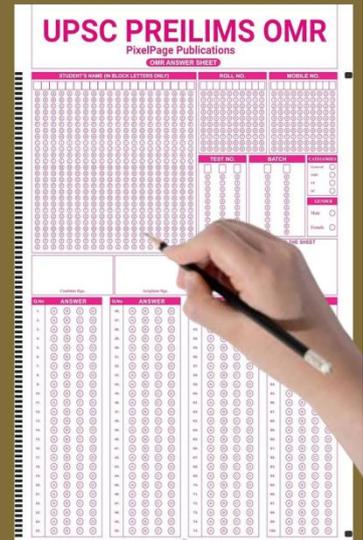
Explanation: Statement I is incorrect: Under the Foreign Exchange Management Act (FEMA) and Reserve Bank of India (RBI) guidelines, Overseas Citizen of India (OCI) cardholders are explicitly prohibited from purchasing agricultural land, plantation property, or farmhouses in India. This restriction applies regardless of their country of origin. They can, however, inherit such property from a resident Indian. **Statement II is largely True**, but with a crucial exception. OCI cardholders do enjoy parity with NRIs in most economic, financial, and educational fields, including the ability to purchase residential and commercial properties without prior RBI approval. The key exception to this parity is that they cannot purchase agricultural land, plantation properties, or farmhouses, whereas the rules for NRIs on this specific matter are generally the same (NRIs also face this prohibition on purchase). Thus, in the context of general property ownership rights (residential/commercial), the reason is true, and the property restriction is a specific, well-defined limitation within that parity.

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