



Factoring Indian Diaspora in the Indo – U.S. Relationship

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I. Introduction

The United States and India are neither really friends nor foes. The relationship between both the countries has constantly fluctuated, starting from the neutral NAM stand of India to the separate paths during the Cold war and eventually to the present times of strategic convergence. ¹In the 21st century, India is significant for U.S. geopolitics and global strategies. This growing relationship between both the democratic countries can be viewed as “One of the Defining Partnerships of the 21st Century”.² This partnership is further strengthened by the India’s rising soft power in U.S. As rightly said by John Arquilla, that in present globalised era, the victory mostly depends upon whose story wins rather than whose army wins. This assertion is further quoted by Joseph Nye in 1990 – through the concept of ‘Soft Power’ in his book titled “*Bound to Lead: The Challenging Nature of American Power*”.³ Soft power illustrates the ability of a country to achieve coveted outcomes on international issues through attraction and co-operation and not through coercion - a decisive reality in the arena of International Affairs. The currency of soft power is cultural influence, political values and foreign policies. Similarly, India’s soft power is the rising influence of Indian Diaspora on the American soil.

The Indians in USA are referred as “Indo – American” as their ancestral roots are embedded in India. The US Census Bureau in 1980 in order to avoid confusion with the indigenous Americans coined an alternative term the ‘Asian Indian’.⁴ Their arrival in U.S. was marked by the Luce – Cellar Act of 1946, which enabled the naturalisation rights to the Indians on the soil of U.S.⁵ As per US Census 2010, the population count of Asian Indian is ‘4.4 million’ with a growth rate of ‘69.37%’ of a total population of 308,745,538 in America.⁷ This count makes Asian Indian as one of the fastest growing ethnic community in North America while being the third largest immigrants in the States after the Mexicans and Chinese. The Indian Diaspora has been channelled into U.S. mainly through student admission programs, beneficiaries of H-1B visa

program, family – based preference and temporary worker visa programs. Currently, a high percentage of Indian immigrants are young, highly educated and well established in science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) sectors. Indian students stand as the second largest international student groups enrolled in U.S. universities. The Indian population is widely distributed across all states of the U.S with majority settled in California (20%), New Jersey (11%), Texas (9%), New York (7%) and Illinois (7%).

II. Diaspora Effect on the Soft Power of India in the United States

The instrument of India's soft power is its Diaspora, which is its asset. The Indian Diaspora has evolved over three phases in U.S, firstly the pursuit of education and employment, secondly, as major source of remittances (\$10.657 Billion annual remittance from US to India in 2017) and thirdly as effective players in impacting the dynamics of U.S.⁸ Within America, Indian Diaspora is an effective public diplomacy tool and is acknowledged for its work ethos, discipline, non-interference and peaceful living with the locals. These values ultimately contribute to identity creation, image projection and image cultivation of the Indians in the U.S.⁹

The India Diaspora is not only a source of India's soft power but is also an agent of India's soft power, as discussed below.

Culture – Several Hindi radio stations are available in America like RBC radio, Easy96 radio, Radio Humsafar, Desi Junction, Radio Salaam Namaste, FunAsia Radio and Sangeet. Indian Cable channels like Sony TV, ZEE TV, Star Plus, Colours and regional channels are also broadcasted. Many Indian origin artists are a part of Hollywood. Some of these talented artists are Priyanka Chopra, Padma Lakshmi, Freida Pinto, Kunal Nayyar, Mira Nair and Madhur Jaffrey. Metropolitan districts also showcase Bollywood movies in theatres. Most Indian festivals are celebrated with equal zest and enthusiasm especially Diwali through Public celebrations and Bollywood dance.

Religious Communities of Hindu's (51%), Sikhs (5%), Jains (2%), Muslims (10%) and Christians (18%) from India have strongly established their religion in USA. The Hindu Indians have formed the Hindu American Foundation in U.S. These Indian religious communities aid in charity work whenever the need arises in U.S. Primarily the Khalsa Food Pantry and Khalsa Peace Corps on a regular basis provide assistance to low income families residing in US and also assist in the aftermath of any natural calamity. 'The Sikhness' organization provides aid in form of food and clothing and also by creating public service opportunities.¹⁰

Education- The ID is highly educated with 79% of them completing their bachelor's degree by the age of 25 as compared to 31% of overall U.S. population. Moreover, 44% of Indian Diaspora aged 25 and above have earned master's degree, PhD or advanced professional degree as compared to just 11% of U.S. general public.¹¹ Nearly 166,000 Indian immigrants were enrolled in U.S. higher education institutions in the 2015-16 school year, comprising 16 percent of the 1 million international students overall.¹² They outperform other nationals by working mainly in science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) fields.

Household Income- The Indian Diaspora is among the richest ethnic communities in America. The median annual income of all Indian descendants is approximately \$89,000 which is far higher than the median annual income of the U.S. national at \$50,000.¹³ In terms of investment income, 20% of Indian households had dividend income versus 15% of the U.S. households, while 52% Indians had interest income as compared to 43% of U.S. nationals.¹⁴ As per the U.S. Census report of 2000, the population of Asian Indian men had “the highest year-round, full time median earnings (\$51,094) whereas the Asian Indian women had a median income of (\$35,173).¹⁵ The ID own 50% of all economy lodges and 35% of all hotels in U.S, whose market value is approximately \$40 billion. In 2002 the ID owned over 223,000 firms in America and generating revenue more than \$88 billion.^{16 17}

Political Participation- November 2016 saw 5 Indian American candidates Ro Khanna, Raja Krishnamoorthi, Pramila Jayapal and Kamala Harris scripting the history by being elected into the US Congress with Ami Bera being re-elected. After attaining victory in 2016 US Presidential elections, Donald Trump highlighted the Indian American’s political participation by praising the Hindus by thanking them. 60 ID candidates are running for federal elections, state legislature and local office seats in America in 2018. Currently, around 9 Indian Americans are in charge of senior public positions within the Trump Cabinet like Mrs Nikki Haley - US Ambassador To The United Nations, Krishna R Urs — US Ambassador To Peru, Manisha Singh — Assistant Secretary Of State For Economic Affairs, Neil Chatterjee — Member Of The Federal Energy Regulatory Commission, Raj Shah — Deputy Assistant To The President And Principal Deputy Press Secretary, Vishal Amin — Intellectual Property (IP) Enforcement Coordinator, Neomi Rao — Administrator Of The Office Of Information And Regulatory Affairs (OIRA), Ajit V Pai — Chairman Of The Federal Communications Commission and Seema Verma — Administrator Of The Centers For Medicare And Medicaid Services. This clearly shows that American Politics is undergoing a transformation with more Indian origin conquering political heights through their hard work and determination

III. Achievements of Indian Diaspora

“We owe a lot to the Indians, who taught us how to count, without which no worthwhile scientific discovery could have been made” – Albert Einstein

S.NO.	Name	Achievement in U.S.
1.	Vinod Dham	Creator of Pentium chip
2.	Satya Nadela	CEO of Microsoft
3.	Indra Nooyi	CEO of PepsiCo.
4.	Vinod Khosla	Co-founder of Sun Microsoft company
5.	Shantanu Narayen	Head of Adobe Systems
6.	Sabeer Bhatia	Founder and creator of Hotmail
7.	Francisco D’souza	CEO of Cognizant
8.	Sunder Pichai	Creator of Google Chrome Browser
9.	Vivek Gundotraman	Designer of Google+
10.	Ruchi Sanghvi	First female engineer at Facebook and launcher of Facebook’s News feed
11.	Ajaypal Singh Banga	CEO of MasterCard

- 34% of Microsoft employees in US are of Indian origin
- 12% scientists in USA are Indians.
- 13% of XEROX employees are Indians.
- 36% of NASA scientist in US are Indians
- 28% of IBM employees are of Indian origin
- 38% of doctors in USA are Indians
- 17% of INTEL scientists are Indians.¹⁸

IV. Impact of ID's Soft Power on the Bilateral Relationship between India and the U.S.

The Indian Diaspora in the U.S. is contributing in reconstructing the relation between the two countries. India recognizes the emergence of Indian-Americans as an eminent community based on two reasons.

Primarily, the Indian Americans have surfaced as a significant vote bank in US electoral politics. Secondly, the Indian-Americans are immensely educated and wealthy. With increase in population and share in economic power, the focus of the Indian American's lobby has inclined towards the concerns of India. For example, regarding immigration law, the ID performed a significant role in favouring the immigration laws for the Indians in 1965 immigration policy of the U.S.¹⁹

Next, it was mainly the lobbying efforts by The National Federation of Indian American Association to crusade to relax the U.S. policy over sanctions on India. As a result, the sanctions Imposed on India by the NSG (after Nuclear Proliferation in 1998) were removed on the U.S. recommendation.²⁰ The former U.S. President Bill Clinton on his visit to India himself specified of immense pressure by the Indian Diaspora to uplift the sanctions.²¹ Another instance is the ID's notable persuasion towards finalizing of the Indo-US Civil Nuclear Co-operation Agreement. This '123 agreement' got confirmed in July 2007 and signed in October 2008 enabled India to enjoy all provisions of the Non- Proliferation Treaty.²²

The India's soft power aims in U.S. are strategic in nature. The Indian Americans can help in persuading the US government officials be more favourable and sensitive through methods like pressurizing and campaigning. The incoming FDI from USA is not sufficient and less than the potential expectation and requirement. Therefore, the efficient lobbying by the ID is crucial to seize adequate FDI from America.²³ Another area of Indian Diaspora assisting India is in overcoming the educational divide under the "The Foreign Education Providers Bill, 2010", approved by the former Prime Minister Manmohan Singh. The Indian Diaspora lobby can persuade the American government to collaborate by setting up U.S. university campuses in India. India also has diverse aspirations at domestic and global level which requires enormous foreign capital and acknowledgement.²⁴

Conclusion

The Indian Diaspora has rapidly, almost unprecedentedly developed from a rather small and apolitical group of first-generation immigrants in the 1960s and 1970s to an economically and socially well-established part of American society in 21st century. The Diaspora has undoubtedly traversed a long distance from the pioneering, uneducated and low-skilled Punjabi farmers to what is now a highly skilled over three million-strong community.²⁵ Indian Americans are the wealthiest (with household incomes almost double of the American average), most educated and law-abiding ethnic community in the US, a "model minority".²⁶ The community is also highly organised. A good proportion makes regular visits to India and many send remittances back to the country. Indian Americans have established several advocacy organisations and political action committees that have done seminal work in advocating issues of importance to India. For instance, the US-India Political Action Committee, Federation of Indian Associations and Indian American Forum for Political Education have aided in promoting fair and balanced policies and also eased the platform for Indians to enter into political processes.²⁷ These organisations particularly deal with legal immigration, counter-terrorism, business relations, global health, religious freedom, education, and US-India trade. India has bipartisan caucuses in both houses of Congress-the Senate India Caucus and the Congressional Caucus on India and Indian Americans. Given the small size of their population, the Indian American community's influence is disproportionate to the size of the population as members of the community have become major financial contributors to both parties. The perception regarding those who were once called as the snake charmers are now known for their rising soft power in the U.S.

The rich civilization and cultural ethos of the Indian Americans have become a part of American fabric with both countries recognizing Indian Diaspora as mutually benefitting. The role of ID in disseminating India's culture is also contributing in nation branding through non-governmental public diplomats and cultural diplomats.²⁸

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Disclaimer: The views expressed are that of the Researcher and not of the Council.*

Endnotes

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