

Sensing the Political Values: The Emergence of Indian Diaspora as an Important Factor in USA Politics

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ABSTRACT: *After the Second World War, USA shown the world it's mightiness. It's not only about the military tactical power but economic and political dominance as well. The world leader is approaching its latest presidential election in 2020. Though there are some familiar faces around but Indian American Kamala Harris has been making headlines for quite some time now. She has been nominated for the vice-presidential post in the elections. The study tries to show how Indian Diaspora climbed the ladder up to this position in the US. Indian Diaspora is settled worldwide. They have made a name for themselves across the globe for all the right reasons.*

The study aims at how a working-class Indian diaspora climbed to the ranks of top US officials' candidature. The study has been backed by several facts like rapid population growth, characteristics of Indian Diaspora, their occupation, their adaptively and their dominance in IT sector. The study also enlightens the efforts of some of the important non-political outfits including prominent politicians as well. Some of the major questions addressed by the study were the detailed increase of Indian Diaspora in the US. How is the Indian Diaspora distinct from other Asian as well as Mexican Diaspora in the US? In what occupations the Indians have engaged themselves? How did the non-political organizations play an essential role in creating new politicians? When and how Indian origin politicians had been featured in the US politics and administration from time to time? At last, the study throws light upon the recent development in the US presidential elections 2020 where Kamala Harris has been emerged and had widely been considered a 'high profile' candidate for the 2020 Democratic Party presidential primaries since 2016. In this study, I will try to touch every aspect of the Indian Diaspora in the US and especially politics and political representation.

Key Words: *Diaspora, India, Kamala Harris, United States of America, US election, politics*

Introduction

Last four decades have shown a visible demographic change in the population of the US. The Indian community in the US is one among many ethnic communities which have registered a massive growth in recent times. Since 1895 itself the migration towards the US took place. But it was the 1965 historic immigration legislation of the US, since when the real impact had been felt.

The Indian Americans are one of their kinds. They are considered as a very distinct group among the clusters of migrant communities. One of the outstanding qualities of them is their exceptional scholastic standard. Their rapid consolidation of economic indicators remarkable. The internal mobility of the community viable (**Gottschlich, P :2012**). Few facts and demographic profile of the Indian immigrants are elaborated in the following subheading.

Some Facts on Indian Diaspora in the US

As stated by United States Census, 2010,¹ the population of Indians in the US increased from nearly 1,678,765 in the year 2000 (which was 0.6% of the total U.S. population) to 2,843,391 in the year 2010 (which was 0.9% of the total U.S. population). With a whopping 69.37% growth rate registered by the Indian Diaspora was the fastest expanding ethnic Diaspora in the US.² If we look at the last decade of the 20th century, Indians staying in the US has shown an overall growth of 105.87 per cent. On the other hand, the Asian American community had registered 48.26 per cent of growth for the very same period. With a whopping 7.6 per cent annual growth rate, this is the largest growth of any Asian American community. The Asian Americans are in total 10,242,998 and constitute 3.6 per cent of the American population. In those

¹"*American FactFinder — Results*". Archived from *the original* on February 14, 2020. Retrieved January 30, 2016.

²"*Census shows growth among Asian Indians*". *USA Today*. May 17, 2011.

numbers, Indian Americans comprise 16.4 per cent. Looking at the numbers, China (5%) comes first followed by India (4%) in the Asian Indian Community (**Whatley and Batalova:2013**). China is also slightly ahead of India, being the largest American largest constituency. India is ranked second followed by Filipino American Community.

Major Occupations, Per Capita Income etc.

Nearly 3% of the Indian Diaspora constitutes the total number of American engineers working in America, 7.1 per cent of workers in the field of information and technology and around 8% of surgeon and physicians. Sixty-nine per cent of Indian Americans have college degrees. The median income of Indian Americans was \$83,000 while that of White Americans was \$55,000 per annum (as per 2007 estimates). Most Indian Americans reside in California (19.9 per cent), New Jersey (11.4 per cent), New York (9.5 per cent), Texas (8.1 per cent) and Illinois (7.6 per cent). Among the Asian American population, Indian Americans have the highest percentage of English proficiency at 76.9 per cent with Japanese Americans at 72.8 per cent, the Chinese Americans at 50.4 per cent and the Korean Americans 49.5 per cent as per some studies and data. The per capita income of Indian Americans is estimated at \$60,093 contrasted to the median per capita income of mainstream Americans at \$38,885. There are 200,000 Indian American millionaires. Seventy per cent of Indian Americans aged 25 and older had college degrees in 2010, by far the highest rate among Asian Americans and 2.5 times the rate among the overall population. As per data from the 2013 American Community Survey,³40.6 per cent of Indian Americans 25 and older had graduate or professional degrees, 32.3 per cent had bachelor's degrees while an additional 10.4 per cent had some college education(**Whatley and Batalova:2013**). In the workforce, 43.6 per cent of Indian Americans are employed as managers or professionals. There are 35,000 Indian American physicians. Three hundred thousand Indian Americans work in high-tech industries. Fifteen per cent of Silicon Valley start-up firms are owned by Indian Americans. More than 5000 Indian Americans are on the faculties of American universities. There are 74,603 Indians studying in the US—the largest group of foreign students in the country.

Growth of Population of Indians in the US

The advent of Indians started in the 19th century and most of the Indians came as untrained or low skilled workers or laborers. The number since keep on adding. As of 2015, almost 2.4 million resident Indian immigrants are staying in the US. Mexico is ranked one in the foreign-born list followed by India in this chart. India accounts for around 6% of the total of 43.3 million foreign-born inhabitants.

There were around 12,000 Indian migrants resided in the US during the 1960s. It was roughly about 0.5% of the total population of 9.7 million immigrant population. But sudden changes were observed in the Migration pattern between 1965 and 1990(**Varma, R. :2011**). A string of legislative changes was brought by the government in this period. This include removal of national-origin quotas, introduction of provisional skilled worker programmes. Further, employment-based permanent visas were also being given. Since then, Indians are the top recipients of high-skilled H-1B temporary visas. Furthermore, they constitute the 2nd largest group of overseas students studying in US.

If we look at the skillset of the Indian Diaspora residing in US, they are young and highly educated. They have an excellent command on the English language too. Indian immigrants are engaged in various occupations(**Mehta, R., Belk, R. :2013**). Some work in the field of science & technology, some have their jobs in the engineering and manufacturing sector and some are related to math (STEM) fields. As per the following figure, within more than four decades, the number of immigrants has grown whopping 11 times. It had been roughly doubling ever since per decade (See Figure 1). India and China both have outnumbered Mexico in 2013. Now the top source of newly arriving immigrants is India and China.

³American Community Survey, 2013 Reports,https://www.census.gov/newsroom/press-kits/2014/20141204_acs5yr2013.html

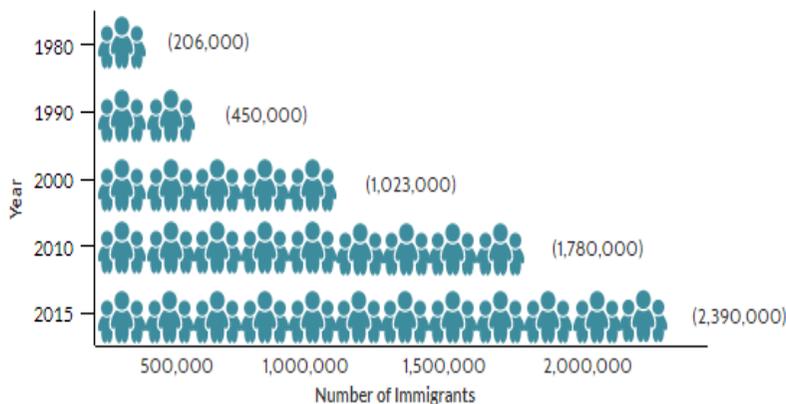


Figure 1. Sources: Data from U.S. Census Bureau 2010 and 2015 American Community Surveys (ACS), and 1980, 1990, and 2000 Decennial Census.

UAE and Pakistan are the most popular destination for Indian immigrants internationally. The US is the 3rd most popular country in this list. This fact was estimated by United Nations Population Division in the mid-2015. Saudi Arabia (1,894,000) comes 4th in this list followed by Kuwait (1,062,000) being 5th, Oman (778,000) being 6th and the United Kingdom (777,000) in the 7th position.

Indians residing in the US have distinct attributes too. As compared to overall population foreign and native born, immigrants of India are considerably better skilled, trained and educated (Mehta et al, 2013:398). Hence, they are more likely to be employed in management jobs. It further contributes to higher household incomes. As per the studies, during the fiscal year 2015, every second Indian who attained the citizenship as well as legal permanent residence in the US done by the help of sponsorship of employer. The chain of close relatives of U.S. citizens has resulted to acquire citizenship for the rest population. Some of them through other family-sponsored channels.

U.S. Census Bureau

The record of the U.S. Census Bureau (2011-15 ACS data and the 2015 American Community Survey [ACS]),⁴ the World Bank's annual remittance data and the Department of Homeland Security's *Yearbook of Immigration Statistics*,⁵ has provided details of the Indian population residing in US, to focus on the geographic distribution, and socioeconomic characteristics.

During 2016, around 2.4 million Indian immigrants resided in the US. Founding says that the age-sex pyramid of the non-native residents from India has numerous same attributes as the diamond-shape residents pyramid of the immigrant residents (Sahay, A.:2011). High number of population comes under the bracket of active age of 20 to 54 is one of the main features of the pyramid. They are relatively smaller in the age group under 20 and above 54 as well. However men have the upper hand as compared to women in the number game like Mexican immigrant population.

Indians and US Politics

Over the years, Indian Americans have taken a proactive interest in the political process of the US. During John F Kennedy's administration, Dilip Singh Saund a member of the Indian ethnic community was elected to the House of Representatives of the US Congress. Since then, a number of people of Indian origin have contested for various political offices under both party tickets (Democrats and Republicans) (Gupta, A.:2004). This political participation by Indian Americans and their affiliated groups was reflected in the 2016 presidential race of Donald Trump and Hillary Clinton as well as other Republican and Democratic contenders in the primaries. In a way, it shows the maturity of the Indian ethnic community and its willingness and determination to participate in the politics of the US.

India League of America and the Association of Asian Indians

⁴American Community Survey, (2011-2015) Statistics Reports, <https://www.census.gov/programs-surveys/acs/technical-documentation/table-and-geography-changes/2015/5-year.html>

⁵ The Department of Homeland security, Yearbook of Immigration Statistics 2011, <https://www.dhs.gov/immigration-statistics/yearbook/2011>

They have taken leading steps in this direction. Realizing the need to be organized and to articulate their interests in a collective voice, a number of Indian political associations were created in the latter half of the last century—the Association of Indians in America (1967) and the India League of America (1972). However, except for the Association of Indians in America strongly and successfully lobbying for a separate classification for Indians in the 1980 census, the other associations have not achieved much in terms of political gains—their political activities being restricted to donations and taking photographs with prominent politicians (Badrul Alam, M.:2011).

Indian American Forum for Political Education

A leading India friendly body is the Indian American Forum for Political Education which was established in 1982. A premier organization is with 28 chapters across the US. It is a prominent political voice of over two million Indian Americans. The headquarter was in Washington DC. It was complete non-political and non-profit forum. The sole purpose of the forum is to spread awareness among the people about political education (Gupta, A.:2004). Many political matters are discussed by members from across the country. Members from all over the country discuss political issues of concern, participate in their communities and find meaningful ways to strengthen ties between the US and India.

The United States India Political Action Committee (USINPAC)

The US India Political Action Committee (USINPAC), another influential ethnic Indian American organization. USINPAC was established in 2002 in the month of October. Its first main office was opened in 2003 in the national capital in Washington DC. In 2005 Indian office was also established in New Delhi. Two primary goals of the organization were to put forth a united and consistent voice of the Congress. USINPAC had close ties with the American counterpart groups. Both the organization worked for a common platform for the promotion of fair and sensible policies. They also paved the way for the introduction of Indians into mainstream US politics. It has also facilitated the setting up of a caucus group for India in the US Congress by enlisting the support of over 100 members of Congress in both houses from both parties. Noteworthy occasions in the USINPAC history remember its accomplishment for convincing Bill Clinton to ask Nawaz Sharif government in Pakistan to pull back from Kargil during the 1999 emergency and affecting the entry into law of US Indian Civilian Nuclear Cooperation arrangement of 2008. The organization spearheaded actively in regard to advocate and to create lobby for the Congress of US and policymakers of India since the inception of the nuclear deal in 2005. It was the efforts of the organization which resulted in the US Congress asking the Department of State to present an account on Pakistan's position on safeguarding and fighting against mass destruction weapons production, in recognizing the magnitude and stock of Islamabad's fissile material as well as summarising Islamabad's efforts to battle international terrorism, demolish terrorist sites and reinforce democratic foundations. The efforts of USINPAC led the US Congress for the first time to acknowledge Islamabad's backing for jihadi extremism perpetrated in opposition to India. During President Barack Obama's visits to India in 2010 and 2015, Asian Indian associations including USINPAC were instrumental in shaping several important policy measures including voicing support for India's access to UNSC -United Nations Security Council as a permanent member, supporting India's full membership to the four multilateral export control regimes (the Nuclear Suppliers Group, the Missile Technology Control Regime, the Australian Group and the Wassenaar Arrangements), US-India High Technology Cooperation, Commitment for United Nations Democracy Fund and the Singh-Obama Twenty-First Century Knowledge Initiative—all geared towards inclusive growth, mutual prosperity as well as economic and strategic cooperation between the world's two largest democracies. The USINPAC condemned the Uri army base attack on 18 September 2016 and has committed to working with the US Congress to declare Pakistan a source and sponsor of terrorism in South Asia.

Role of Indian Organizations in the US Politics

Through the efforts of these and other Indian American associations, in 1994 Kumar Brave (Maryland) and Upendra Chivukula (New Jersey) were the first Indian Americans elected to their respective state legislatures. In 2000, Satveer Choudhary became the first state senator to be elected in Minnesota and was re-elected in 2006. Swati Dandekar (Democrat) is a three times Iowa state representative. If we talk about the elections of Mayor, several Indians have had the opportunity to serve this post. Several names are there who have served as Mayor in the United States like Arun Jhaveri (Burien, Washington), Bala K Srinivas (Hollywood Park, Texas), John Abraham (Teaneck, New Jersey). Raja Krishnamoorthi (Illinois), Pramila Jayapal (Washington State) and Ami Bera and Ro Khanna (California) are all currently in the House of Representatives. Kamala Harris is the junior senator from California. This is the highest number of Indian Americans in the US Congress and a major landmark for an assertive ethnic diasporic community in search of greater political clout.

Prominent Indian American Politicians

Several Indian Americans have been prominent at the national level as well. For example, Neil Dhillon was appointed as Deputy Assistant Secretary of Transportation. Arati Prabhakar was appointed Director of the National Institute of Standards and Technology during the Clinton administration. Rajen Anand was appointed as Executive Director of the Centre for Nutrition Policy under the Department of Agriculture. Bobby Jindal was given the responsibility of Assistant Secretary of Health. Gopal Khanna headed the Peace Corps as Chief Technology Officer. During the George W Bush administration, Karan Bhatia was the Deputy Undersecretary in the Department of Commerce. In the Barack Obama administrations several Indian Americans were appointed to key positions. Farah Pandith was one of them who was appointed as representative of the Muslim community in the State's department. Rashad Hussain was appointed as a diplomat of the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation consisted of 57 members. Islam Siddiqui was given the charge of Chief Agricultural Negotiator in the US administration. The US Agency for International Development was headed by Rajiv Shah being the Administrator it, etc office (Bhatia, S. :2007). In the elections held for the US Congress on 6 November 2006, kicking the anti-Republican tendency, current Bobby Jindal achieved a hammering success and was re-elected from Louisiana's First District to the House of Representatives, securing 88 per cent of the total vote share. Subsequently, he was elected as Governor of Louisiana on 20 October 2007, thus turn out to be the first person of Indian American origin to hold such an august. Similarly, Nimrata Nikki Randhawa Haley won the 2010 South Carolina gubernatorial election and in the process became the second person of Indian American origin to serve as governor and the first woman to hold the office in South Carolina. Earlier in the race, Nikki Haley had won the party's nomination in a runoff election by gaining 65 per cent of the primary vote. She is the current US Ambassador to the United Nations. All candidates were actively supported by the Indian Diaspora residing in the US (Bose, P.:2009). In the past few elections, Indian donors have financed and campaigned for members of both political parties. In some cases, donors have supported candidates from both the Democrats and Republicans in a single Congressional district. It will however still take time before the Indian presence becomes more visible on the political landscape.

Issues of India

It is noteworthy that on matters of importance to India, be it the signing of the NPT (Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty) and CTBT (Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty), the outsourcing of jobs, the sale of sophisticated offensive weapon systems to Pakistan that could be used against India, a proactive role for New Delhi in Afghanistan, negotiations on climate change and global warming, the civilian nuclear deal, etc. The Diaspora has courted support on both sides of the political aisle for promoting and enhancing India's national interests (Kapur, D. :2010). Perhaps the most significant influence was in garnering support for the passage of the civilian nuclear deal. It began with a warming of relations between the two countries during the Clinton era that continued into the Bush presidency and culminated in the passage of HR 7081 on 8 October 2008. USINPAC performed a foremost role in influencing the ratification of the deal. A coalition pattern, in conjunction with other ethnic groups, such as Greek Americans, Italian Americans, Japanese Americans, Mexican Americans, etc may be an ideal for Indian Americans to pursue. At the formative stage of building a political front, steps leading towards ethnic solidarity are an interesting proposition.

Kamala Harris

The 2020 Presidential campaign of Indian American Senator Kamala Harris' officially began on January 2019, with an announcement on Good Morning America. It has made headlines all over the world. Both the US and India is looking forward to this exciting development in the US politics. This has indeed sparkled excitement and sense of joy among the Indians residing in the US as well as Indians in India. People are responding positively to this step and Harris is already gaining momentum through this.

Harris has identified herself as Afro-Indian Black in the political atmosphere of the US. But she has been taking about her Indian roots ever since her nomination. It could be judged as a diplomatic step or rather an attempt to cater nearly 4 million decisive Indian American constituency. She used some Tamil words which sent all the Tamils across the world into frenzy during her acceptance speech. She said "family is my uncles, my aunts and my chithis"- aunt in Tamil during her speech. Not to mention, Tamil is one of the most ancient languages spoken in India specially in Tamil Nadu. Tamil is also spoken in majority of the parts of Sri Lanka as well as by the Tamil diaspora. Indians are already seeing this event as success in politics of overseas. The "feel-good" factor for the Indians is not just confined to Kamala Harris' success in the foreign soil. But it is considered as a historical moment as she achieved this feat in the US, the so call "white man's world." This would not only give Indians a new identity but of course they will look after Harris as the light

of hope in near future. This event already has made a ground breaking impact on the polarizing society as it has triggered the sensitivity and emotions of the people. Not only that, both plebeians and elite are also getting attracted to this. Some sections of Indians are of the opinion that Harris could be a game changer in a possible her presidency. Although bilateral assistance for a robust US-India relation is very much anticipated underneath a Democratic indulgence, a few members of Kamala administration might be inclined to be excessively critical of India. Reason behind could be pronounced pro-Trump inclination in the recent past.

Kamala Harris as always projected herself as a guardian of Human Rights and she is well known for that. Critics of the contemporary government of Narendra Modi in India are optimistic that if the democratic system doesn't function accordingly, then Kamala and other members of the management would not be reluctant to intervene. In recent years, India's reputation on the global stage has escalated significantly. The US has recognized India as a key partner in Asia and hence, on matters involving two sides have conflicting stands, negotiations would possibly be carried out behind closed doors, not in the public domain (Bhalla, V. :2006).

It is likely that Kamala Harris would take a firm stance on an issue related to human rights all over the world especially in India. It will not only help her for her presidential elections but also benefit the people who were the victim of violation of human rights. It has also been assumed by many that she will play an important role in the movement of skilled professionals which has been throttled by the current government.

Kamala has become the turn out to be the first person of Indian origin and African-American woman to be contesting to a national office that too by most important political party in the US. Both Indians and Africans are appreciating such success. US is going through some major issues recently and racial justice is one of them. Women participation and representation is also one of them though many women have taken offices before. Kamala Harris has repeatedly referenced her grandparents as a source of her inspirations. Even though she has highlighted her heritage, but she has given equal importance to her Indian ancestry.

It was very surprising that while interviews to various news channels and newspapers, she did not mention the concept of Indo-Pacific relations. It is noteworthy that the concept itself is a focal point of India's bilateral ties with the US. As no surprise, she has been asked by many journalists about her outlook towards the US-China and US-Russia relations. She addressed it with her firm stance on democratic values as well as human rights as being the most importance aspects of the bilateral agenda in near future. Regarding Russia she said that she would definitely stand up to Vladimir Putin for safeguarding the values of democracy unlike the current government of United States. She also added that human rights and rule of law must prevail. While dealing with China, she stressed that awful records of human rights will be featured in her strategy towards Beijing. United States and China made some trade agreements last year amid issues like Uighur Muslims and pro-democratic protests in Hing Kong. She believes that these burning issues aren't making the headlines. She also blamed Trump administration that they aren't looking into the matters accordingly. She said that it is now high time that US must reclaim the position of world leader and resolve the international human rights issues. She also advocated that US has the responsibility to maintain peace in world and must salvage the moral authority. She was of the view that US should work together with like-minded nations to combat issues of human rights in not only China but elsewhere too.

Conclusion

Indians came to the US as workers and labourers. But today they are one of the major diasporas in the US soil as Indians are nearing almost 1 percent of the total population of the US. It may seem very less in number, but Indians have a visible participation in the sectors of IT, engineering, manufacturing, healthcare, academics and so on. They are not only helping the US economy with their skills and brilliance but also bridging the gap of India and the US relations. Many associations and pressure groups worked very to bring the Indian Diasporic issues into the limelight. In doing so, they created many politicians and leaders for the coming generations. After Nikki Haley one of the most important politicians come from the ranks of Indian Diaspora is Kamala Harris. She had a wonderful career as a human rights activist, a senator and a prosecutor. Indians are also looking forward to see an Indian in the top positions in the government. The US Elections 2020 is not only important for the world as US has been influencing the world since becoming the superpower, but it has become more exciting with the introduction an Indian into the mainstream politics. Many political pundits have different views regarding the elections, but they have finally recognized the India factor this time. Results may or may not be in Kamala's favour but collectively it is a huge victory for Indians seeing Kamala, an Indian, to may be a presidential candidate in the United States of America.

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