

Indian-American Diaspora A Vital Resource For India

Several Organizations Have Launched High-Impact Programs In Various Fields

Over 31 million people of Indian birth or descent are part of the Indian diaspora spread around the world. Of them, 3.1 million, or 10 per cent, are Indian-Americans living in the US. The Indian-American diaspora has proven to be a vital resource contributing to the economic, political and social development of India.

Devesh Kapur highlighted the importance of the Indian diaspora in his classic 2010 book, "Diaspora, Democracy and Development: The Domestic Impact of International Migration from India". Kapur's analysis focused primarily on the period from the late 1960s until the end of the 20th century.

Indian-American influence, impact, and contributions were significant then and have grown even more so as we move forward into the 21st century. Part of the reason for this is that the Indian-American population on average stands head and shoulders economically and educationally above those in other Asian American subgroups and the US population in general.

A Pew Research study released in 2013 disclosed that the median annual household income for Indian Americans was \$88,000 compared to \$66,000 for all Asians and \$49,800 for the US population. The study also revealed that 38 per cent of Indian-Americans held advanced degrees compared to 30 per cent for all Asian Americans and 10 per cent for the entire population.

Indian-Americans excel as high tech entrepreneurs. A study by Vivek Wadhwa for the period from 2006 to 2012 showed that overall immigrant entrepreneurship "stagnated" compared to the period from 1995 to 2005. But start-ups by Indian immigrants increased seven per cent over the prior period and a full 33.2 per



cent of all start-up companies were founded by Indian Americans.

It's not just that Indian Americans are doing well. They are also inclined to stay connected with India through investments, philanthropy and personal involvement. The Indian Diaspora can bring broad economic benefits to India. They can make substantial contributions in the areas of innovation and entrepreneurship; health care; education; and skills development.

They can help in creating jobs and in creating new companies across India. They can create a platform by sharing best practices and technology with small and medium enterprises and helping them to access financing.

In its 2014 paper, "The Indian Diaspora in the United States", the Migration Policy Institute (MPI) reports that "The Indian diaspora community is noted for being very well organised and having a deep and multifaceted engagement with the homeland. Many consider giving back an

obligation and a welcome responsibility."

I am one of those who feel that responsibility. Through the foundation my wife Debbie and I have established, we have underwritten the building of a new management complex, Frank and Debbie Islam Management Complex, which was opened last year at my alma mater Aligarh Muslim University. We have also pledged to provide considerable financial support to develop a technical training school for women in India so that they can be empowered through higher education.

Indian-Americans who want to share their success philanthropically with those in India can do so easily because of American-based groups such as AIF, Pratham U.S.A. and Ekal which provide a structured and organised approach for giving across a wide range of areas.

Thanks to the work of these organisations and others, a number of high-impact initiatives have been launched in India in fields such as education, poverty alle-

viation and job training.

Indian-Americans can reach out to have an impact in India through a wide variety of organisations. As the MPI notes in its study: "The Indian diaspora has established countless highly organised, well-funded, and professionally managed groups. These organisations address a broad range of issues and take on many different forms, including philanthropic projects to improve health and education in India, advocacy organisations, business and professional networks, media outlets, and societies for the promotion of Indian culture, language and religion."

The Narendra Modi administration recognised the pivotal importance of the US-India relationship and that is why it established a Strategic and Commercial Dialogue during President Obama's Republic Day visit to India in 2015. After Donald Trump became President, it scheduled an India-U.S. two-plus-two dialogue.

That dialogue was to revolve

around India External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj and US Secretary of State Rex Tillerson. It was tentatively scheduled to take place on April 18-19 but was postponed due to Tillerson's firing by President Trump.

Now that Mike Pompeo has been confirmed as the new Secretary of State it appears that the two-plus-two dialogue will be set up for some time in May or June. This meeting is important to the future of India-US relations. But it is also important to note that two-plus-two only adds up to four.

India has grand ambitions and the success of its Make in India National Manufacturing Policy depends on the US being one of its key partners. This requires much more than ambition. It demands multiplication and exponential assistance in order to achieve its India's lofty goals.

Indian-Americans have been a vital resource in the growth and development of India to date and they have the wherewithal to be even more so. Because of their accomplishments in the US and understanding of India they are uniquely positioned to help India address pressing issues and priorities in order to achieve its full potential.

India needs to reach out to Indian-Americans and their organisations and make them central to its growth and development process. They will make the difference by being the vital resource and ally that India needs to convert dialogue and talk into action and results.

(Frank F. Islam is an entrepreneur, civic and thought leader based in Washington, D.C. The views expressed are personal. He can be contacted at ffislam@verizon.net)

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