

The United States



Late Mr. Dilip Singh Saund – first Asian American in the US Congress



*Ms. Indra Nooyi, first lady President of PEPSICO
(Photo Courtesy: Business Standard)*



Gadar Hall, San Francisco. Headquarters of Gadar Party



Malibu Temple, San Francisco

Basic Facts

1.	Total Population of the United States	281,421,906*
2.	Indian American community	1,678,765*
3.	Percentage of Indian Americans in Asian American population	16.4%
4.	Percentage of Asian Americans in US population	3.6%
5.	Percentage of Indian Americans of the total population of the US	0.6%

*2000 Census.

From 815,447 Indian Americans recorded in the 1990 US Census, the number reached 1,678,765 in the US 2000 Census, representing a phenomenal growth of **105.87%** - *the highest among all Asian origin groups*. Annual immigration from India between 1990-2000 at around 30,000 - 45,000, recorded by the Immigration and Naturalisation Services (INS), consisted of highly skilled knowledge workers and dependants of Indian American relatives. The Indian American population now ranks third in the Asian American Group in the US after the Chinese and Filipinos, having overtaken the Japanese since the last census. California has the largest concentration of Indo-Americans, followed by New York, New Jersey, Texas and Illinois. Other States with a sizable Indian community are Florida, Pennsylvania and Washington, DC. In addition to the above, a large number of illegal immigrants of Indian origin enter the US through the southern States through Mexico, unofficially estimated at a few hundred thousand.

Economic Profile

- 13.2. The per capita income of the community is currently estimated at US \$ 60, 093 compared to the average per capita income of US \$ 38, 885. High levels of education have enabled Indo-Americans to become a very productive segment of the US population and to contribute to the unprecedented economic boom of the 90s. More than 87% of Indo-Americans have completed high school while 62% have some college education compared to just over 20% for the US population. The majority acquired their higher educational qualifications in India, particularly in the engineering and IT sectors, although some have studied in US institutions. 72.3% are employed, of which 43.6%

occupy managerial and professional positions, 33.2% are in the technical, sales and service sectors, and the remaining 23.3% are skilled labours. Indian Americans are found in the following broad occupations:

- (a) **Medicine, engineering and law:** These professionals arrived in the US in the 1960s and 70s following the easing of immigration rules, and established themselves well before the IT influx took place. One of the many areas in which Indian Americans have done the country of their origin proud has been in science and technology - engineering, biotechnology and medicine. In biotechnology, Indian Americans have done extremely well. A large number of Indian scientists and engineers work in sensitive US government owned laboratories, including nuclear laboratories. Boeing and NASA employ a significant number of Indian Americans in their technical work force. It is estimated that 35% of Boeing's technical work force is Indian. Amar Bose established the finest acoustics systems company in the world, while Sam Pitroda, CEO of World Tel contributed to the expansion of telecommunications in India.
- (b) **Information Technology:** About 300,000 Indian Americans work in technology firms in California's Silicon Valley. They account for more than 15% of high-tech start-ups and their average annual income is estimated at \$200,000. There are around 650 to 700 Indian owned companies in the Silicon Valley, with more appearing every day. The impact by prominent Indians in this field is nothing short of extraordinary. Vinod Dham, Father of the Pentium chip, Sabeer Bhatia, founder of Net based email (*Hotmail*) Vinod Khosla, Kanwal Rekhi and K.B. Chandrashekhar, are just some of the illustrious names in this field.
- (c) **International finance and management.**
- (d) **Higher education:** Several American Universities, including those of the Ivy League, have prominent Indian Faculty members. The Indian community has also started to fund Chairs on Indian studies, like the Chairs on Indian History at Brown University and University of California and a Jagdish Bhagwati Professorship on Indian Political Economy at Columbia.
- (e) **Mainstream media, journalism, writing, films and music:** Prominent journalists, writers, musicians and film-makers have made a noteworthy contribution. Indian writing in English is now recognised, with Jhumpa Lahiri's *Interpreter of Maladies* winning the Pulitzer Prize in 2000, while Bharati Mukherjee and Anita Desai won acclaim earlier. Dr.Fareed Zakaria, after a distinguished stint as Editor of the prestigious *Foreign Affairs*, has taken over as Editor of *Newsweek*. Pankaj Mishra and Shashi Tharoor write regularly in the *NYT*. An association of South Asian journalists has been launched in Washington. The recognition given to Pandit Ravi Shankar, Ali Akbar Khan and Zakir Hussein who settled in the US, brought Indian music into mainstream consciousness, while Zubin Mehta's success was also a tribute to the talent in the Indian community. Mira Nair's off-beat films on Indian

themes have won much acclaim. Her film *Monsoon Wedding* won the Venice Film Festival *Golden Lion Award*. Famous Anglo-Indian Hollywood actors are Vivien Leigh and Ben Kingsley.

- (f) Traditional businesses: real estate, retailing etc., and
- (g) Taxi drivers, factory workers, newsstand workers and farmers.

Socio-cultural Profile

- 13.3. The Indo-American community is recognised as one of the influential ethnic communities in the United States and is often referred to as a model minority. It is known as law abiding, and is appreciated for its hard work and adaptability to local conditions. Their high educational profile, economic success, knowledge of English and experience with democracy in their home country has won them acceptance. Americans have traditionally been appreciative of hard working and successful workers/entrepreneurs and the Indian Americans are perceived to have fulfilled this criteria. Indians are also renowned for their mathematical abilities and technical expertise and have earned the distinction of being the largest ethnic group on the mathematical faculties of all American universities. They are rated among the best doctors, engineers, economists and scientists.
- 13.4. The Indo-American community in the US reflects the diversity of India. The first generation Indian Americans remain deeply attached to their culture and traditions. The community has preserved its close family bonds and linguistic, religious and cultural traditions. Virtually every regional group and religious denomination flourishing in India has its representative body in the US and its own cultural organisation, which celebrate national functions and Indian festivals such as Republic Day and Independence Day. Ethnic, linguistic and regional cultural organisations such as the Federation of Kerala Associations in North America (FOKANA), Federation of Gujarati Associations in North America (FOGANA), Telugu Association of North America (TANA), and the Bengali Association of North America (BANA) hold national conventions. Members in thousands along with their families gather at these conventions to participate in cultural, culinary and handicraft extravaganzas. A large number of temples, Gurudwaras and even Churches are flourishing as centres of religious, cultural, educational, charitable and social activities and more are being built. The Hindu Swayam Sewak Sangha, Vishwa Hindu Parishad, Ramakrishna Mission, Chinmaya Mission and the Swaminarayan Sanstha have national and regional units. All major religious festivals of India like Holi, Deepavali, Dussehra and Gurupurab are celebrated with traditional enthusiasm.
- 13.5. It is interesting that Indian religious preachers have a large and enthusiastic following amongst the Indian American community, and incidentally, also amongst the mainstream American communities.
- 13.6. Indian Christians formed an umbrella organisation – the Indian American Christian Association - in Los Angeles in 2000. The major organisation representing Indian Muslims is the “Federation of

Indian Muslim Associations”, which mainly coordinates relief work for Muslims in India. It has maintained links with Muslim organisations from other countries based in the US.

- 13.7. There are larger political organisations such as the American Indian Foundation and various professional organisations, such as The IndUS Entrepreneurs (TIE), Indo-American Chamber of Commerce, Network of Indian Professionals (Netsap) etc., which function as umbrella organisations. There is considerable scope for better networking with other minority groups in the US like Afro-Americans, Hispanics, Chinese and Jews.
- 13.8. A worrying trend of spousal abuse and wife battering, especially among a certain strata of society, is on the rise. A number of women’s social organisations with help lines have been set up to deal with the problem.

Links with India

- 13.9. The Indian community has access to all the information on India through Internet, e-mail, access to Indian TV channels etc. There are a number of Indian television and radio programmes. The most popular Indian TV Channels are *TV Asia*, *Zee TV*, *Sony Entertainment*, *B4U*, *Zee Gold*, etc. In addition, there are local TV channels like *Darshan TV* and *Namaste* and several publications on India issued by the community. There is a profusion of printed material on India such as *India Abroad*, which has a balanced coverage of Indian events. The *India West* and *India Post* also enjoy a wide readership amongst other publications. Indian film stars Aishwarya Rai and the current crop of young actors remain very popular, even among second generation Indians. Young girls of Indian origin aspire to become Bollywood stars. Bollywood shows are big hits. Films like *Lagaan* and *Taal* were big hits with second generation Indian Americans also in the US. Eminent Indian artists perform to sold out audiences in the US.
- 13.10. Having witnessed India’s success in the IT field, Indian Americans feel that the future holds tremendous potential for India. However, negative experiences while dealing with immigration and customs officials at the airport or sorting out family affairs has reinforced their perceptions that *corruption is rampant and unchecked in India*. This has a major impact on their perceptions and attitudes as they contrast life in the US and in India, and conclude that not enough has been done to enforce the right values, particularly in the lower echelons of the bureaucracy with which they are forced to deal with.
- 13.11. While some of these are legitimate concerns, some of the criticism takes on an abrasive tone. Underlying the above ambivalence are undercurrents that need understanding. The eminent Indian writer in English Shashi Tharoor traces the paradox of conservative religious tendencies and even support for extremist causes back home (witness the support for *Khalistan* in Canada) manifesting themselves particularly in the first generation of Indian Americans, to the ‘very nature of expatriation’. While Indian-Americans are generally far better off in the United States than they would have been in India, many suffer from homesickness. There is even a mixture of

nostalgia and bitterness about having had to leave a land they secretly miss. The emotional insecurity and stresses caused by an alien environment play an important role in the psychological make-up of Indian Americans. This is one of the major reasons why high priority is given to the construction of places of worship. This is one way of affirming their proud cultural heritage and roots. As the community has not yet fully integrated into the mainstream, there is also an unconscious desire to secure recognition of their concerns and role from their Indian counterparts. Hence some Indian citizens may be taken aback at the vehemence with which they criticise some aspects of Indian life, which even foreigners hesitate to condemn quite so openly.

- 13.12. While they feel genuinely concerned about Indian issues, and have donated generously during national calamities (Latur, Orissa Cyclone, Gujarat earthquake), barring a small minority this support cannot be assumed to extend to investment and business decisions, where they are far more cautious than their mainstream counterparts. Their desire to help is manifested more in philanthropic gestures for their hometown or university, although this is thwarted to some extent by the lack of a smooth mechanism for implementation of such projects.
- 13.13. While first generation Indians continue to be attached to their culture, and keep links with India alive through frequent visits, second generation Indo-Americans have a distinctly different and even more complex attitude towards India. Their interest in Indian tradition springs from the realisation that Indian culture provides a viable approach for peace of mind and stable family values. The heightened awareness in the mainstream communities of the uniqueness of Indian culture has reinforced their pride in it. In America's top universities, second generation Indians continue to form lively Indian-American student associations devoted to interpreting and popularising Indian philosophy and culture. Significantly, first generation Indian student university associations, while also projecting traditional themes, try to highlight current issues also and invite eminent speakers from India to address mainstream audiences. Second generation Indo-Americans justifiably seek to cultivate pride in their cultural and ethnic inheritance, but contrast India's economic performance with East Asian success stories. Since they are able to better explore the diverse opportunities provided by the American university education system, they try very hard to blend into the mainstream. The traditional drive for educational excellence has endured. The focus is shifting to marketing, law, finance and management.

Political Contribution

- 13.14. The 1.68 million Indian-American community comprises a sizable voting force. The need for political empowerment dawned following the attacks on Indian women in the late 80s. Lately, although a substantial portion continues to remain aloof from political activities, a small but influential section of the community has begun to test its new-found political leverage. Indo-Americans have even resorted to the quintessential American practice of fund-raising for political candidates at the federal, state and local levels – including at the level of former President Clinton and Vice-President Al Gore – to draw the attention of mainstream politicians to their concerns.

President Clinton, the only American president who has paid two visits to India (one after his term was over), made it a point to include a sizable number of eminent Indo-Americans in his entourage. They were also involved in the visit of the Indian prime Minister Shri Atal Bihari Vajpayee to the US. Organisations like the IAFPE (Indian American forum for Political Education), IACPA (India Abroad Centre for Political Awareness), US-India Business Council and the congressional India Caucus and many others have effectively put across issues of concern to the Indian community including on issues affecting their country of origin.

- 13.15. Second generation Indian Americans are also increasingly drawn to national politics. They are also active in generating a favourable climate of opinion on current issues. Indo-American political organisations have started to cultivate prominent Congressmen and Senators. 118 out of 435 legislators in the US Congress have become members of the India Caucus, which has played a crucial role in influencing opinion in Congress and defeating anti-India legislation, as well as advocating India's stand on issues ranging from the nuclear tests in 1998 to Kargil. Similarly, in answer to India's long-standing demand, the number of visas approved by Congress shot up from 65,000 a few years ago to a projected 200,000 from next year, thanks to pressure from InfoTech companies, many headed by Indian Americans. Earlier they had succeeded in getting Indians recognised as a separate category in the US census.
- 13.16. Amongst prominent Indo-Americans are Satveer Choudhary, who was recently elected State Senator from Minnesota; Nimi McConigley, an Indian born American citizen, currently a State Legislator from Wyoming, who is contesting a United States Senate election and Kumar Barve, a second generation Indian American, who is a legislator in the Maryland Assembly. At least 3 Indian Americans have held the position of Mayor: Bala K. Srinivas in Hollywood Park, Texas; John Abraham in Teaneck, New Jersey, and Arun Jhaveri in Burien, Washington. Indian Americans were also appointed to various levels of government by the former Clinton Administration. An Indian American Vishwas More, was named a Bob Dole delegate on the 165-member slate to the 1996 Republican National Convention. In 1992 ten Indian Americans were chosen as delegates to the Democratic National Convention. The Democratic Party has recently launched an Indian American Democratic Campaign Committee with Sunil Aghi, President of the Indian American Political Foundation based in Los Angeles - as its Chairman.
- 13.17. As a result of this activity the State Department now regularly consults representatives of the Indian American community on matters of concern to it and even on Indo-US issues. President Clinton recognized the importance of the Asian American community and constituted the *White House Initiative on Asians and Pacific Islanders*, which was headed by an Indian American.
- 13.18. A weakness of the Indian community has however been its failure to unite. The formation of the *Indian American National Foundation*, a conglomerate umbrella body of four major associations viz. Asian American Hotel Owners Association (AAHOA), Association of American Physicians of Indian Origin (AAPPI), National Federation of Indian Americans (NFIA) and Indian American Forum for Political Education (IAFPE) in 2001 was welcomed as a move by the community to

forge unity among Indian groups at the national level. However, although the Foundation has established a liaison office in Washington DC, real unity in terms of action oriented policy and programmes is yet to be established. This has inevitably adversely impacted the community's ability to leverage its substantial strengths and capabilities in the political sphere.

- 13.19. For the first time, India has a constituency in the US with real influence and status. India is known as a quality source of knowledge and service sector workers, which are the leading sectors of the US economy. The demand for these workers will continue to grow despite a recent slowdown. With the recent liberalisation of H1-B visas – 100,000 Indians are expected henceforth to enter the US annually. Many will stay on. The Indian American community will therefore continue to grow, in numbers, power and influence.
- 13.20. As mentioned earlier, the September 11 terrorist attacks, have underscored the need both for political mobilisation to protect the community's interests, as well as for closer links with India, whose leaders have unhesitatingly taken up the issue of safety for the Indian community with their US counterparts. A sympathetic and sensitive handling of the issue is required on all sides.

Economic Contribution

- 13.21. So far, the working class/ professional status of Indo-Americans had precluded economic links with India along the lines of the Chinese Diaspora and China, or even the Gulf Indians, who as temporary workers in their host countries had an incentive to send their remittances home. Fortuitously, the economic reforms launched in 1991 in India and the stellar rise of the Indian Information Technology sector opened up new business opportunities for the Indian community in the United States. As India's only world-class sector, the Indian Information Technology (IT) sector has recorded a compounded annual growth rate of 55% between 1992 and the present. Many IT professionals relied heavily on strengths back home - the huge pool of skilled computer experts and software professionals – to sub-contract work to their country of origin, **thus creating several virtuous cycles for the Indian IT sector and economy**. Today Information Technology collaborations connect, admittedly a small but influential section of Indian industry with the best and most innovative companies in the United States, many of which are led by Indian Americans (Government policy is helping this by easing provisos for acquisition of software firms overseas). It is no accident that some of India's best-managed companies are also the ones most globally integrated – the IT companies.
- 13.22. Several IT graduates had left India and emerged as important entrepreneurs in Silicon Valley, where 15% of the start-ups today are supposed to be by people of Indian origin. Overnight Indians have risen to the top in one of the fastest paced sectors in the US, whose contribution to increased American productivity fuelled the 90s US economic miracle. This fact did not go unnoticed in the US, and other developed countries, where the doors to hi-tech Indian immigration have since opened.

- 13.23. The list of Indians who have made it to the top is impressive (in the next section the contribution of successful Indians who have engaged in substantial philanthropic work in India is discussed). Some of the luminaries are - Sanjiv Sidhu and Ken Sharma of *i2 technologies*; Ajay Shah and Mukesh Patel of *Smart Modular*; Romesh Wadhvani of *Aspect*, Naveen Jain of *InfoSpace*, Sanjay Kumar of *Computer Associates*, Mukesh Chatter of *Nexabit Networks*. Steve Sanghi of *Microchip*, Vinod Gupta of *InfoUSA* and Steve Sanghi, chairman and CEO of *Microchip Technologies*. Indians hold the top posts at *Citibank* and *Lucent Technologies' Bell Labs* – IIT alumni Arun Netravalli is the President of *Bell Labs* and Arun Kripalani - Senior Vice President of *Qualcomm*. 2 hi-tech magazines have been launched just for the high-tech Indian community – *SiliconIndia* and *TechMantra* – while websites proliferate.
- 13.24. The success and achievements of Indian Americans have also attracted the attention of major multinationals to India's potential in the IT sector. Thus India is today one of the few, if not the only, developing country which has attracted investment not in one, but scores of R & D centres wholly funded and established by reputed MNCs like GE, CISCO, Sun Microsystems, Microsoft, IBM, Hughes Software, etc. **Intel's** R&D centres in Delhi, Bangalore and Mumbai service its global operations. **Oracle** has two development centres, in Bangalore and Hyderabad; **Sun Microsystems** is doubling its Indian investments. **Texas Instruments** reportedly applied for several patents in the US based on the work on integrated circuits and software at its Bangalore centre. **Phoenix, ABB, IBM, America Online (AOL)** and **Chase** are in the process of setting up new R&D centres. **Lucent Technologies and Microsoft** are in India. Bill Gates has reportedly referred to India as an "IT superpower". India's fame in IT has spread to Asian countries traditionally wary of investing in India.

NRI/PIO Philanthropy

- 13.25. Some Indian Americans realise the debt they owe to the country of their origin, in terms of the value systems which have helped them rise meteorically in American society, and also for the high quality education they have received in India at virtually no cost. Such Indians have been contributing towards charitable causes in India, motivated by a desire to give back something to India. In their own words, the reasons for these charitable acts are – "One is the obvious emotional attachment to India. Two is when you do something like this, there is much more satisfaction than the consumption of the same wealth. The third factor is that each one of us believes our image over here is strongly influenced by where India stands in the world. " A number of eminent Indian Americans told the Committee that they would like to do something for India and it was now "pay-back time."
- 13.26. Donations have been made by Silicon Valley Indians towards educational projects such as the IITs, to which most credit their personal professional success. IIT alumni associations have been most active in this regard. According to them, the tradition of philanthropy in the West (American educational institutions routinely canvass funding support from former students) fits in with the traditional Indian concept of *guru dakshina*. A number of organisations have been formed to

support social welfare projects in India such as child welfare, literacy and rural community programmes. Academicians of Indian origin have held seminars/conventions on India thus giving prominence to current issues of importance to India, which have attracted substantial interest. Some Indians are keen to fund development projects in their home towns or help to channel foreign investment to India.

- 13.27. Concerned members of the Indian community have however repeatedly raised the issue of creating a hassle-free environment to encourage such philanthropic activities. They have suggested a nodal point which could process charitable donations, facilitate investment and trade, voluntary work, transfer of technology and know-how etc. According to them there is a vast suppressed desire to help India in whatever way possible provided the right mechanisms are put in place.
- 13.28. Several successful Indians in the US have demonstrated a strong desire to make a solid contribution to India's economic development. Examples abound. US-based IT magnate and venture capitalist Kanwal Rekhi helped to found *The Indus Entrepreneurs*, or *TiE*, a non-profit professionals' network established to foster entrepreneurship through venture capital funding, to help Indo-Americans join the mainstream and aspire to the highest levels of the American business community. *TiE* is active in India and has a similar mandate. Each chapter in India is headed by a famous Indian IT CEO (Satyam, Infotech, Infosys, Wipro). Of Rekhi's several protégés, K.B. Chandrashekar, a former Wipro software engineer, and now co-founder of Exodus Communications, is in his turn, helping Indian angel investors. Another protégé, Naren Bakshi, is mentoring other Indian IT entrepreneurs.
- 13.29. *TiE's* collection target for the five IITs is \$500 million. Rekhi himself donated \$2 million to IIT-Bombay. K.B. Chandrasekhar contributed to a centre at the Madras Institute of Technology. Fellow co-founder B.V. Jagdeesh donated \$1 million towards schools in Bangalore. Vinod Gupta of *infoUSA* founded the *Vinod Gupta School of Management* in India and set up a polytechnic for women in his native Rampur. A San Jose pathologist, Dr. Nilima Sabharwal, founded *Home of Hope* which raised \$20,000 in 1999 for a Chennai orphanage. A New York taxi driver, Om Dutt Sharma, set up a girls' school in his native village and now hopes to build a hospital. A retired cancer-stricken plastic surgeon from New York, Sharad Dixit, has been nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize for performing and supervising some 44,000 free surgeries to fight deformities in India. Pavan Nigam, co-founder of *Healthon WebMD*, is launching a free IT training institute in Kanpur and investing in an Indian dotcom. Prabhu Goel, founder of *Gateway Design Automation* has contributed \$10 million to set up the *Foundation for Excellence* to fund the education of deserving underprivileged students in India.

Demands and Expectations of the Diaspora

- 13.30. As the demands and expectations of the Diaspora in the United States are almost identical with those of the Indo-Canadians, they have been catalogued in one place at the end of Chapter 14: Canada.



