Indian Community a Natural Leader in Global Governance

By Sanjeev Sinha

Author Sanjeev Sinha

India Not as a Country but a Global Community

With almost 1.3 billion people, India is world's largest and most vibrant democracy. Along with democracy India has a very proud tradition of freedom of movement and identity. Many foreign communities have come and assimilated in India, such as the Persians, Zoroastrians, Mughals, Mongols, Chinese, Europeans and also many other Asians. Many Indians have also moved out of the country to various parts of the world over the centuries, starting with the spread of Buddhism in ancient times up to more recent movement as traders and human resources.

Historically also the current boundaries of India are almost incidental, as India has at certain points in history covered what is currently Afghanistan, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Myanmar and Thailand. This is strongly reflected in the cultural mix of India as well as in Indian influences that have taken root abroad, such as in the Hindu temples of Cambodia and Bali.

In modern time, Indians have been prominent in higher education and have made an impact on the global economy as the leaders of some of the world's most influential corporations like Google and Microsoft. I myself live in Japan, and there are now about 30 million people of Indian origin living outside India.

On the other hand, the diversity within the political boundaries of India makes it difficult to unify everyone within a single culture and sense of belonging. For all these reasons, and a persistent, open and strong debate about Indian identity, India is better understood as a global community than as a politically demarcated country on a map.

New World Order

I want now to look at the question of the new world order necessitating a new style of leadership. Telecommunications and convenience of travel have made the world truly a global village. With the Internet the spread of information is unprecedentedly instantaneous and modern-day travel has brought about a new style of economy. With cross-border services and trade having grown tremendously, the interdependency among countries is creating a new order. Large corporations as well as national economies need to understand the culture and economies of other countries in order to survive in the new global competition. This requires a new style of leadership not just at corporate level but also at national and transnational levels. By virtue of its diversity, openness, cross-

cultural communicational strengths and inherent leadership qualities, the global Indian community stands out as the most natural leader in the new world order. I will discuss these aspects one by one.

Diversity

India is arguably the most diverse large country in the world. The language often varies even from state to state. I myself come from a desert town in the country, but India also has the place with the highest rainfall in the world. India has the Himalayas in the north and beaches in the south; it has many of the richest people of the world but also a huge number of poor; and it has a significant representation of most religions of the world. Naturally a person growing up in such an environment becomes very adept at working with differences of culture, as seen in the number of Indians working for global organizations, and several leaders of other countries could trace their origins back to India.

Transparency & Trust

The transparency of the Indian community makes it also a very trusted one. Indians are known to be argumentative, but underlying that is an individuality and desire for expression. Indians love to argue for the sake of philosophy and knowledge.

This is reflected in the Indian media which is one of the most vibrant in the world, with constant debates on local politics, social issues, religion, economy and defense. Different media houses are known to have opposing views and hence almost nothing important remains hidden from debate. Given the multiple regional languages of India, most national-level debates take place in English and hence are open to the scrutiny of the whole world.

Logic & Acceptability

Indians tend to be very philosophically inclined and driven by a deep form of logic. The Hindu religion is a great example of this. If looked at closely, Hinduism started over 5,000 years ago more as a social system of science and philosophy than as a religion. Over the course of its history Hinduism has provoked numerous instances of debate and argument that have led to important changes in society. "Shastrartha" — a practice of public debate in Hinduism — was adopted by many saints to reach conclusions on important matters

of philosophy or society. Essentially the love of logic and public argument is one of the foundations of the social structure. Historical figures such as Gautama Buddha and Mahatma Gandhi have made huge and permanent contributions to the world in this regard.

A more recent example is Sri Sri Ravi Shankar, founder and leader of Art of Living — a global organization which has touched the lives of millions of people. Despite the common though false perception of Hinduism being in conflict with Islam or other religions, a recent World Cultural Festival organized by Art of Living in New Delhi was attended by around 4 million people from more than 150 countries, including perceived rival Pakistan and countries from the Arab world. The philosophy of Sri Sri Ravi Shankar has made him one of the most acceptable spiritual figures in the world. He has also helped resolve some difficult and long-standing conflicts, such as the war between the Colombian government and the FARC guerrilla movement.

The love of logic also makes India a country with a strong civil code-based institutional framework, with firm foundations on important principles such as non-violence, equal opportunities, and protection of intellectual property. Equally it has enabled many Indian scientists to gain recognition with top universities and journals, especially in the theoretical fields of physics and mathematics. And one other characteristic of the Indian way of thinking is that it mingles well with other cultures, rather than replacing them. Hence an Islamic country can well adopt the Indian practice of yoga and meditation without any conflict.

Debates on Identity

The question of Indian identity is often hotly debated within Indian communities globally. Many people of Indian origin living overseas often don't identify themselves as Indians. But I would like to share an experience I had when working to set up a Japan office of a global network of Indian entrepreneurs called TiE to demonstrate the nature of the global Indian community.

TiE, originally called The Indus Entrepreneurs, was started by a group of people from the "Indian Subcontinent" in Silicon Valley in the mid-1990s. Until then India was not much recognized as an attractive economy and Indian human resources, though recognized by academics in the United States, had a tough time gaining recognition in the business world. While some Indian people chose to fight this lack of recognition, many also tried to assimilate themselves into American society and started to prefer being recognized as Americans, with the added advantage of US citizenship for many. Though TiE was started as an organization of people of Indian origin, over time there was a movement within TiE to identify itself as a global group of entrepreneurs.

While the US now has about 3 million people of Indian origin,

Photo: Author

The author with Sri Sri Ravi Shankar, founder of Art of Living, at the Indian Embassy residence in March 2015

Photo: Author

The author with Indian friends based in Japan and the UK at a Japanese restaurant in December 2015

Japan has only about 30,000. This leads to an interesting difference in the levels of bonding between fellow Indians. When I came to Japan in 1996, I remember even crossing the road to greet a new Indian face because there were so few of them. Naturally with 3 million such people in the US that level of bonding with a stranger is not there, but Japan still has an element of it. TiE head office had a vision of reaching beyond the Indian community, but in Japan many Japanese entrepreneurs and supporters joined in efforts to build a TiE chapter in Tokyo because they had a strong interest in Indian identity and connecting with TiE, rather than with the American roots of it, as they already had good connections through other Japan-US organizations. This led to a big debate on the identity and vision of TiE in Japan, and finally to the suspension of the original plan, but it was a typical example of the open and transparent way in which Indian communities abroad debate issues related to their identity.

Cultural Adaptability

Because of the innate diversity of Indian culture, people of Indian origin overseas tend to be very adaptable to the local culture. It's not just a matter of understanding the local culture but of learning to enjoy it. The linguistic diversity of India also makes it common for many Indians to speak several languages within the country. At my university, the Indian Institute of Technology (IIT), there were students with different mother tongues from many parts of India living and studying together. English was naturally the common language, but knowing multiple languages from early in life gives Indians a facility for learning a foreign language quickly and well.

Photo: Author

A get-together between Indian and Japanese community members and the CEO of Bombay Stock Exchange in February 2016

I have been promoting the IIT in Japan as its alumni representative and recently many Japanese companies have started to hire directly from IIT campuses in India. I have also advised these companies to teach Japanese to their new hires even before they come to Japan, and that has been very encouraging as these young Indian graduates are able to learn a significant level of Japanese in just a few months before arriving in Japan.

Communication Strengths

The diversity of India makes communication within the country a significant challenge and hence citizens tend to acquire special skills in communication and expression. A comparison with Japan is noteworthy here. In Japan there is an expression *"ishin denshin"* which refers to communication without the use of words. In contrast with India, Japan is a very homogenous country with a long and, until modern times, largely uninterrupted history. It has developed strong codes of social behavior and a lot can be communicated just by body language. Even the seating places in a meeting room imply the seniority and stature of the people attending. This has most likely resulted from the so-called "village culture" of Japan in which external forces have been very light.

By contrast, in India one cannot assume any common code of behavior and hence one needs to be very clear in verbal communication. Over its long history of invasion and immigration the country has been exposed to various external cultures and Indian people have grown to develop good cross-cultural communication

CHART
Overseas Indians (30 million+)

UK 1,400,000
Nepal 4,000,000
Japan 30,000
US 2,800,000
Singapore 600,000
Australia 405,000

Source: Wikipedia

Deputy Prime Minister of Singapore Tharman Shanmugaratanam at a gathering in April 2012

skills. These skills have led many Indian professionals to senior positions in some of the most influential global organizations, such as Google, Microsoft, United Airways and Pepsico.

Notable Figures

With more than 30 million people of Indian origin outside of India, the Indian community is truly a global one. In the US, the Indian community has been actively involved in global businesses for many years, and the leaders of several major players in the corporate world are of Indian origin, including Sundar Pichai (CEO of Google), Satya Nadella (CEO of Microsoft), Rajeev Suri (CEO of Nokia), Ajaypal Singh Banga (president and CEO of MasterCard), Indra Nooyi (CEO of Pepsico), and Shantanu Narayen (CEO of Adobe).

Other notable figures of Indian origin in other countries include Tharman Shanmugaratanam (deputy prime minister and former finance minister of Singapore), Anand Satyanand (former governor-general of New Zealand), Basdeo Pandey (former prime minister of Trinidad and Tobago), Bobby Jindal (former governor of Louisiana), Navinchandra Ramgoolam (former prime minister of Mauritius), Sanjay Gupta (CNN chief medical correspondent), and S. R. Nathan (former president of Singapore).

In Japan, meanwhile, former Indian Ambassador Aftab Seth was recently awarded the highest civilian award by Emperor Akihito for his contributions to Indo-Japanese relations.

Conclusion

The world is undergoing unprecedented and irreversible globalization. The Internet and global media have made communication instantaneous, leaving every country affected by

The author and his wife with the former Indian Ambassador to Japan Aftab Seth and his wife on the occasion of Seth's receiving the highest civilian award of Japan from the emperor in November 2015

political and cultural developments in other countries. The convenience of travel and movement of goods have also made countries leverage their relative strengths and have made the world economically more intricately connected. This new world order requires a new kind of governance and leadership which can understand, deeply connect and work across different cultures.

Cultural diversity has been a natural element in India and is also founded on the philosophical basis of "Vasudheva Kutambukam" — meaning the world is a family. Indian strengths in objective and logical thinking, communication skills across cultures, and trust earned through transparency of thinking, as well as Indian movements overseas, make people of Indian origin good candidates for leadership in new global governance, not through power but compassion. 　JS

Sanjeev Sinha is president of IJIP Asset Management Co. Ltd. and a keen promoter of investments between India and Japan. He previously worked with Goldman Sachs, Mizuho Securities and as chief representative of Tata Asset Management in Japan. He has lived in Japan since 1996 and is the author of two books — "Sugoi Indo" (Amazing India) and "Indo to Nihon ha Saikyou Combi" (India-Japan: The Most Powerful Combination) — both published in Japanese.