



## Identity Politics in America: A Case of Indian Americans

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### I. INTRODUCTION

In his most famous speech, Dr Martin Luther King Jr said: “When the architects of our republic wrote the magnificent words of the Constitution and the Declaration of Independence, they were signing a promissory note to which every American was to fall heir. This note was a promise that all men – yes, black men as well as white men – would be guaranteed the unalienable rights of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.”

He dreamt of an America in which all are equal and race and skin colour doesn't matter. (King, Martin 1963)

King's ideals – the ideals of the American Left that captured the imagination and hearts of the public and led to real change – transcended group divides and called for an America in which skin colour didn't matter. America indeed turned out to be a dream nation, free and democratic but not equal like King thought. Racial inequalities continued to be a part of America's life and manifested in the form of social movements like 'black lives matter'.

### II. METHODOLOGY

This paper will explore the issue of identity and politics in the context of Indian Americans, their identity construction and assimilation in the United States. It will be an exploratory research on Indian Americans and identity politics and would try to throw insights in to the concept of identity and politics through a case study of Indian Americans.

The paper aims to build a deeper understanding of the concept of identity politics and the fill gaps in the literature on Indian Americans, their quest for dominance and as an influential factor in U.S. politics.

### THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

If we look at theoretical explanations, we see that Liberal philosophy did not recognize politics of difference and was Universalist in character. John Rawls', A Theory of Justice, published in 1971, called on people to imagine themselves in an “original position”, behind a “veil of ignorance”, in which they could decide on their society's basic principles without regard to “race, gender, religious affiliation, [or] wealth”. (Rawls, 1971)

In the 1980s and 1990s however identity politics and politics of recognition became important issues for political scientists with the rise of social movements based on gender, race, colour, nationality etc.

The concept of Imagined community by Benedict Anderson highlighted the issue of identity. Identity politics slowly got recognized as an ignored aspect of international politics. (Anderson, 2006)

The problem and injustices and inequalities faced by particular social racial group and form of cultural imperialism inflicted on them leads to identity conflict and the voicing of those concerns triggers movements. Identity politics has emerged as the most important issue for philosophers. Perhaps most important for philosophers, any idea of identity itself appears to be in a period of rapid evolution. Changing technologies are having a profound impact on our philosophical understandings of who we are like attempts to decode human genetics.

Issue of Identity has been an important part of the multicultural education, so prominent in Western educational systems. It believes in the identification of individuals into groups, specifically focusing on the groups that have been excluded from mainstream society.

In the latter part of the twentieth century in the United States, political movements arose around the acknowledgment that the experience of injustice was systemic and was connected to one's being identified with

an oppressed group. Identity became an important tool in political discourse as the phrase identity politics indicates. Common or shared experience was the unifying force that propelled such movements. There is also the assumption that some type of authentic experience connected to group identity has been suppressed but deserves recognition and respect (Taylor, 1994) and must be reclaimed. Identity politics involves a demand for recognition “on the basis of the very groups on which recognition has previously been denied.

However, Instrumentalist theorists within political scientists argue that elites manipulate the masses by using ethnicity to incite fear or panic, or to get constituents to ‘rally around the flag’. (Baum, 2002) Given their advantaged political position, dominant groups tend to engage in ethnic identity politics as a means to secure or consolidate power, as mentioned in the preceding section on politics. So for them, ethnicity and identity politics merely an elite project to expand their power base.

Webster defines International Politics as politics in which groups of people having a particular racial, religious, ethnic, social, or cultural identity tend to promote their own specific interests or concerns without regard to the interests or concerns of any large political group.

According to Orlando Patterson, Identity Politics took its modern form during the second half of the last century. It emerged as an emancipatory mode of political action and thinking based on the shared experience of particular groups – notably blacks, women, gays, Latinos and American Indians.’ (Webster, Merriam)

From the philosophical point of view, identity politics rests on a suspect idea, about “shared identity” amongst people of a particular group. It ignores heterogeneity within the group and calls for essentialism. Politics of identity can be divisive too as blamed by critics as it creates schism in the society. According to communitarians each group identity and demands and concerns must be voiced and represented to prevent inequality and oppression.

Indian Americans have a unique relationship with the United States and their identity has continually been redefined and reconstructed over the last century and a half. In the upcoming 2020 Presidential elections in U.S., attracting Hindu votes has become a popular election strategy that is being adopted by both Republicans and Democrats.

## **OBJECTIVES**

This paper will try to answer the following questions:

1. How politics in United States is manifested in the ethno cultural identity of Indian Americans
2. What factors have affected the political engagement of Indian Americans in the U.S. politics?
3. In what ways the American politics is shaped by ethnicity, multiculturalism and identity construction?
4. What is the future of identity politics in America with a focus on Indian Americans?

## **III. LITERATURE REVIEW**

The concept of Imagined community by Benedict Anderson highlighted the issue of identity. An Imagined community is a concept developed by Benedict Anderson in his 1983 book *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* introduces a popular concept in political sciences and sociology that of imagined communities named after it. It was first published in 1983, and reissued with additional chapters in 1991 and a further revised version in 2006. Anderson depicts a nation as a socially constructed community, imagined by the people who perceive themselves as part of that group.

In *Identity Politics in the United States*, Khalilah L. Brown-Dean (Brown, 2019) analyses how contemporary controversies emanate from longstanding struggles over power, access, and belonging. She deftly deals with current issues such as voter suppression, the Me Too movement, the Standing Rock protests, marriage equality, military service, the rise of the Religious Right, protests by professional athletes, and battles over immigration to show how conflicts over group identity are an inescapable feature of American political development. Brown-Dean explores issues of citizenship, race, ethnicity, gender, sexual identity, and religion to argue that democracy in the United States relies on different viewpoints, depending on how related to how we see ourselves, how we see others. It explores deep historical divides in the U.S. society on the ground of race, religion, colour etc.

In the book *Plot to Change America: How Identity Politics is Dividing the Land of the Free*, Mike Gonzalez (Gonzalez, 2020) talks about eliminating identity politics and offers a strategy to do so. Identity politics evolves with the formation of groups and then on giving people motivation to develop it. If group making is eliminated and the incentives too, identity politics can be removed. Identity politics is not a grass root movement but rather an elite project.

In *Identity: Contemporary Identity Politics and the Struggle for Recognition*, Francis Fukuyama (Fukuyama, 2018) argues that by the early nineteenth century, the politics of recognition and dignity had

reached a fork in the road with the emergence of two kinds of needs – universal recognition of individual identities, and rights that sought to provide citizens with an ever-expanding scope of individual identity, and assertion of collective identities which had two major manifestations: nationalism and politicised religion. Fukuyama claims that “identity politics has become a cheap substitute for serious thinking about how to reverse the 30-year trend in most liberal democracies toward greater socioeconomic inequality.

This book provides a comprehensive and critical assessment of the ways in which Anglo-American political theorists have responded to the emergence of a politics of identity in democratic society. It examines the merits and weaknesses of the ideas associated with the major schools and thinkers in contemporary philosophical liberalism

It also provides a critical exploration of the arguments of their pluralist rivals, including advocates of multiculturalism, ‘difference’ and recognition.

In *The Politics of Identity: Liberal Political Theory and the Dilemmas of Difference*, Kenny (Kenny, 2004) debates such concepts as identity, difference, recognition and culture are intertwined with political theorists’ characterizations of democracy, citizenship and civil society. He questions that there is no place for identity based political argument in the public life of a democracy. At the same time he also challenges the pluralist belief that the re-emergence of collective identities signals the demise of liberal culture and political thought.

Hakan G. Sıcakkan and Yngve Lithman, (2005) discuss identity politics in *Theorizing Identity Politics, Belonging Modes and Citizenship* in book, ‘Changing the Basis of Citizenship in the Modern State. Political Theory and the Politics of Diversity’. They explain that, what characterizes the political and academic tendencies in the period after 1990 is an increasing focus on individuals’ and social groups’ claims to certain identities and certain belonging modes. Right to identity and belonging has begun to be perceived as a social good and a political end in itself.

Further elaborating on identity and politics of Indian Americans, In *American Karma: Race, Culture, and Identity in the Indian Diaspora*, Sunil Bhatia (2007) explores how the Indian American community is one of the fastest growing immigrant communities, marked by a high degree of training as medical doctors, engineers, scientists, and university professors. These highly skilled professionals have been inserted into the racial dynamics of American society and transformed into “people of color.” Focusing on first-generation, middle-class Indians in American suburbia, it also sheds light on how these transnational immigrants themselves come to understand and negotiate their identities. To fully understand migrant identity and cultural formation, it is essential that psychologists and others think of selfhood as firmly intertwined with sociocultural factors such as colonialism, gender, language, immigration, and race-based immigration laws.

In 2014, awarded President Barack Obama presented the National Medal of Arts and Humanities to Pulitzer Prize winning, Indian-American author Jhumpa Lahiri. Her most well-known book, “The Namesake (2008),” in a story of a Bengali family in Cambridge, Massachusetts, and the unanticipated pleasures and complications of life in America. Lahiri’s explored the cultural conflicts between traditional Indian values and modern American life.

How does an immigrant become an ethnic American? And does American society fundamentally alter because of these newcomers? In *Ethnic Routes to Becoming American*, Sharmila Rudrappa (2004) examines the paths South Asian immigrants in Chicago take toward assimilation in the late twentieth-century United States, where deliberations on citizenship rights are replete with the politics of recognition. She takes us inside two ethnic institutions, a battered women’s shelter, Apna Ghar, and a cultural organization, the Indo American Center, to show how immigrant activism, which brings cultural difference into public sphere debates, ironically abets these immigrants’ assimilation. Ethnographic details are intertwined with political-philosophical debates on the politics of recognition and redistribution. In this study on the under-researched topic of the incorporation of South Asian immigrants into the American polity, Sharmila Rudrappa compels us to rethink ethnic activism, participatory democracy, and nation-building processes.

To sum up literature on identity politics Indian diaspora explores the good and bad of the concept of identity politics from a philosophical point of view.

A majority of the literature available on Indian diaspora talks about their socio-economic and cultural experiences and experiences of adaptation and assimilation in host societies.

They captured the struggles of the Indian immigrants in United States. The quest of these Indian Americans to be called American and White, and at the same time understanding their uniqueness as an Indian immigrant. The urge to acquire citizenship and recognition in this land by the first generation Americans and the dilemma the second and the third generation faces of their confused identity. Grounded in American roots, yet being ethnic. The inequalities faced on grounds of being an Asian and from hailing from different religions. The fear faced by the Indian Muslim community for being called terrorists in the aftermath of 9/11 attack. Within these different explanations, the notion of ethnic activism, participatory democracy, nation-building processes, and multiculturalism all are dealt in the literature on Indian Americans identity.

## **HISTORY AND LIFE OF INDIAN AMERICANS**

In his 1782 article, "What Is an American?," Frenchman J.Hector St. John Crevecoeur wrote, "*He* is an American, who, leaving behind him all his ancient prejudices and manners, receives new ones from the new mode of life he has embraced, the new government he obeys, and the new rank he holds."

The United States Census Bureau uses the term **Asian Indian** to avoid confusion with Native Americans. The beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century marked a huge wave of migration from India to the United States. The implementation of Privatization and liberalization had facilitated the entire outflow of migrants, especially from the IT sector in cities like Bangalore and Hyderabad.

The Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965 dramatically opened entry to the U.S. to immigrants other than traditional Northern European groups, which would significantly alter the demographic mix in the U.S. (Aaron, 2010)

The first significant wave of Indian immigrants entered the United States in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. By 1900, there were more than two thousand Indian Sikhs living in the United States, primarily in California.

Since 1782, the definitions of Americans have drastically changed. Although the post-1965 Indian-American adhered to the new government, they have simultaneously transplanted their cultural and religious heritage, and integrated them into their distinct hybrid lifestyle. (Asian Indian Americans)

The relaxation of immigration laws in 1965 cleared path for Indian-Americans to immigrate to the United States. (Jong and Batalova, 2017)

First-generation Indian Americans were keen to preserve their religious and cultural heritage. They also erected temples and formed local organizations representative of the subcultures like Sindi, Gujarati, Tamil, Bengali etc., from which they came.

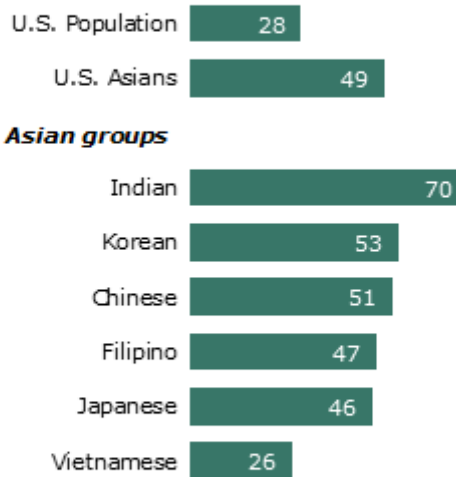
The Second-generation Indian-American assimilated the culture of both their parents and the larger American culture that surrounds them. They accepted a set of Indian-American values a kind of hybridized culture that would be passed to the third generation.

The Third generation grew up as an American. But it is seen that after college this age group too shows interest in Indian culture and heritage and identifies themselves as Indian American rather than simply American.

Indian Americans are the second largest group in America after Mexicans and also an affluent community. If we look at the immigration of Indians in U.S., we see there is a combination of push and pull factor in the Indian emigration to U.S., the push of inadequate opportunity in South Asia along with a desire to settle in greener pastures in America which is a land of opportunities and affluence. (Jhaveri) Some also came with the desire to complete higher education and ultimately fell in love with the country. Professional migration of skilled workers often termed as 'Brain Drain' to United States in search of lucrative jobs is important characteristic of Indian emigration to U.S. since 1990s.

## College Education, Ages 25 and Older, 2010

% with a bachelor's degree or more



Note: All Asians (and each subgroup) include mixed-race and mixed-group populations, regardless of Hispanic origin.

Source: Pew Research Center analysis of 2010 American Community Survey, Integrated Public Use Microdata Sample (IPUMS) files

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Indian Americans are among the most highly educated racial or ethnic groups in the U.S. 70% of Indian Americans aged 25 and older had college degrees in 2010, by far the highest rate among the six Asian-American groups studied and 2.5 times the rate among the overall U.S. population. More recent (2013) data from the American Community Survey provides more detail: 40.6% of Indian Americans 25 and older have graduate or professional degrees, and 32.3% have bachelor's degrees; an additional 10.4% have some college education. (PewResearch,2014)

Indians are categorized as Asians, South Asians, Hindus or Indian American community. They identify themselves as Indians. Identity is contextual. Country of origin is the most used self-identification. Till the 1990s, Gujarati and Punjabi speakers were the biggest groups. But Telugu speakers are the largest community after Hindi speakers now, and there has also been a rapid growth of Tamil speakers. These groups have the Maratha Sangham, Telugu Association, etc. So that is about a cultural identity, it is not a political identity.

Cultural identities dominate for the first generation, their eating and lifestyle. Often we found their concentration on the basis of distinct groups, for e.g., Gujaratis in New Jersey and Illinois, Punjabis in California and New York. But when it comes to identity they identify themselves as Indians.

Upper castes, Christians, Jains are over-represented relative to their share in the population while Muslims and many caste groups are underrepresented not having less access to education, comparatively.

As one of the fastest growing immigrant communities, there are nearly 4 million Indians, Growing up as Indian American is growing up connected with a diasporic community in their hometowns In an effort to give their American-born or raised children a sense of their Indian identity, each one of them had some distinctly Indian experiences cultivated by their parents—from Bharatnatyam classes, to Hindu Sunday School, to the food they ate and the language they spoke at home. Several of them reported visiting India for the summers through elementary and middle school (though often spent the majority of that time within their relatives' homes); others got to know India and Indian culture through film and TV.(AIF,2019)

In particular, Indians in the US have permeated the establishment, the traditional power bastions that for immigrants can often be virtually impenetrable: Ivy League universities, Hollywood, the media, the judicial system and, most notably, politics. There are several prominent Indian-origin politicians: among them, Democratic party senator and presidential hopeful Kamala Harris; former US ambassador to the United Nations and governor of South Carolina Nikki Haley; and former Louisiana governor and 2016 Republican presidential nominee hopeful, Bobby Jindal. (There is also a long list of mayors, senators, state representatives and city

council members who are from a South Asian background.) Prominent New York prosecutor Preet Bharara has also made no secret of his political ambitions. (Valdai Club, 2020)

A number of political action groups have sprung up, aimed at promoting the voices of their members. The nonpartisan United States India Political Action Committee was founded in 2002, and works to elevate concerns involving Indians, such as promoting the H-1B visa as a temporary specialist work permit, the US-India Civil Nuclear Agreement, global health, religious freedom and US-India trade.

South Asian Americans Leading Together, or SAALT, is a more inclusive organisation that draws immigrants from nearby countries including Pakistan and Sri Lanka, along with diaspora from places like the Caribbean and Africa. Its focus is on policy advocacy, community activism and informing the national dialogue.

The Sikh American Legal Defense and Education Fund is aimed at promoting and protecting the needs of Sikhs, such as in the aftermath of the 11 September, 2001 attack. (Lowy Institute, 2019) The second generation families tried their best to maintain ethnic identity and Indian culture as to maintain Indianness and pass that to the third generation.

Bollywood films and dance moves along with folk dance like Bhangra are highly popular amongst the second generation Indian Americans giving rise to an Indian American youth sub culture.

### **ETHNICITY AND POLITICS IN U.S**

Ethnicity has been an important issue for different racial groups. Blacks have always fought against discrimination and to get equal rights. Hate crimes against Blacks have increased manifold.

But identity conflict in America is not limited to Blacks alone. But it is also about the Indian communities in America. Indian Americans, unlike any other American ethnic group, constantly had to prove their identity, which in turn, forces them to adopt whatever Indian histories or identities are needed to convince themselves and others of their Indian identity, and thus their unique cultural heritage. In American identity politics, race serves as a basis for the exclusion or inclusion of mixed bloods in the United States society. This has become one of the great issues of contestation in an increasingly multicultural and multiracial society.

After the 9/11 incident hate crimes against Muslims and people of Asian origin grew. In America feeling marginalized or left out is a feeling felt by every group from time to time be it Asians, Indian Americans, Hispanics, Latinos, Italians, Jews or Muslims. Feeling discriminated and mistreated from time to time is a common feeling among the ethnic groups.

Whiteness or White superiority has been established in America through centuries by primarily white Protestant males and this trend continues giving birth to racial inequality. However, the trend is slightly changing with the increasing population of Blacks and Browns in America.

Political parties are wooing this ethnic population to win elections. On the other White population to an extent is also feeling left out and has fear of becoming marginalized in their own country with the browning of America. So Trump's win in the elections with the dream of making America great again was largely fashioned by the support of White population who feared being demographically marginalized.

To sum up America which was founded with pro civil rights activists and liberals believing in universalism, now celebrates multiculturalism with distinct ethnic identities all embedded in the American societies.

### **WHITE IDENTITY POLITICS**

The white identity politics has been put forward around idea of whites as an endangered, discriminated-against group.

For decades, the Right has claimed to be a bastion of individualism, a place where those who rejected the divisive identity politics of the Left found a home.

For this reason, conservatives typically paint the emergence of white identity as having been forced on them by the tactics of the Left. At its core, the problem is simple but fundamental. While black Americans, Asian Americans, Hispanic Americans, Jewish Americans, and many others are allowed – indeed, encouraged – to feel solidarity and take pride in their racial or ethnic identity, white Americans have for the last several decades been told they must never, ever do so.

The real paradox is how; different identities will assimilate in to one American culture. In many ways, this notion came from the Anglo-Saxon legal and political traditions, which believes in freedom and minimal prohibitions.

Indian Americans are also popularly called East Asians or Browns. With the evolution of the political system in the United States, all new social groups started receiving recognition and guarantees of their rights. At the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, with the formation of the state system,

an aristocratic republic was actually established in the United States. Under that system, only wealthy male citizens were able to establish their civil rights.

The result reforms of the “Jacksonian Democracy” by the end of the 1850s was equality of opportunity. President Jackson’s reforms helped ensure equality of opportunity for larger numbers of American citizens, but large strata of the population continued to lack civil rights. The abolition of slavery marked the beginning of the struggle for black citizens’ rights. A significant victory for the black population was the adoption of the 1964 Civil Rights Act. In 1920, as a result of a large-scale suffragist movement, women’s civil rights were recognised.(History,2019)

In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and especially in recent decades, various social groups have sought representation in power structures through the Democratic or Republican parties.

At the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, social groups were formed, with identities built around completely new ideas that had nothing to do with politics before. For example, in the 1990s, the LGBT community became a growing influence in the United States. Often, the struggle for rights went beyond reason and took completely wild forms, such as political correctness, which, at times, could threaten freedom of speech.

The well-known contemporary democracy researcher Francis Fukuyama, an opponent of identity politics, notes that identity politics weaken political strategy. “The decline of the American political system observed in the modern world is associated with an extreme and unprecedented polarisation that has turned ordinary governance into a balancing act on the brink of war.”(Fukuyama, 2020)

The driving force behind polarisation is the self-identification of interest groups with one of the two principal political parties in the United States. A voter’s belonging to one or another group of interests also determines his political views. By 2020, the situation had deteriorated sharply, and public dissatisfaction with the anti-crisis measures taken by the presidential administration in the fight against coronavirus was added to the overdue political contradictions.

#### **IV. CONCLUSION**

First and Second-generation Indian Americans at best have tried to maintain link with their co-ethnics and maintain culture with the Indian American community. They want their children to participate in the cultural festivals and marry coethnics preferably. Second generation Indian Americans wants the best of both the worlds for their children i.e., both American culture and Indian values. They are not only a huge voter community but also they are occupying top ranks in government and politics..In some case we see reverse migration too with some Indian Americans born to Indian American parents coming back to their homeland. In general Indian Americans are an influential and vibrant community. For the quest to be called American and get acceptance, many of them have also converted to Christianity to run for public office and try their luck in politics.

Obsession with white skin colour and socio-economic status are inextricably linked. White men’s burden and notions of colour superiority existed in the colonial India already, where white race was supposed to be culturally superior and civilized. This is also seen to be dominating Indian American mindset. The aspiration to be called white amongst Indian Americans can be understood as former South Carolina governor and US Ambassador to the United Nations, born as Nimrata Nikki Randhawa, Haley had been marked “white” on her voter registration form in 2001. (Khan,2017)

America is a mix of different cultures and nations, inhabited by Browns, Blacks, Hispanics, Asians etc. Nonetheless, culture of White supremacy still runs deep in to the American minds. Indians in America have the same desire to be included amongst Whites which are privileged. So American society though a multicultural society which cherishes cultural plurality,there are some limitations too.

Identity politics is also manifested in U.S. in the form of Feminists, LGBT rights, Queers, and Blacks, native Indians etc. Identity politics is an expression of a human need for justice, a need largely unaddressed. These social movements have time and again brought to forefront identity politics and lead to polarisation of issues, as culture is an important aspect of one’s identity.

Furthermore, progressive identitarians usually focus on parity between groups, which is not to be confused with egalitarian society, as Adolph Reed Jr., professor of political science, has said. They seek proportional representation for their group in existing power structures (say, via positive discrimination, or voting based on identity) which may help make social institutions more representative of a society’s demographics, but it often also means not agitating for a more egalitarian society for all. This, Reed suggests, comes at the expense of joining hands with others to reform the system itself. (The Riot)

Critics in Liberal academics like Francis Fukuyama at Stanford and Mark Lilla at Columbia have criticised progressives for supporting Black Lives Matter and transgender rights. This they argue will defeat progressivism. They stand for liberal principles of commonality and not difference.(The Digger,2019)

Amidst the search for new identity and essence, Indian Immigrants have carried the nostalgia of their motherland, their food, culture, language and assimilated and adapted to the American culture. The fear of getting alienated and lost has contributed to the process of acculturation. The Second and Third generation have more or less a hybrid identity, mix of Indianness and Americanness. They carry multiple identities and multiple experiences. The Second and Third generation do not have emotional root in India and neither feel displaced, fully acculturated with the host country.

Thus Identity Politics in case of Indian Americans in U.S. has been a long journey. From a poor and ignored community, searching for identity, to a sought after community which is at the mainstream of politics and business. Indian American community has been an importance source of remittances to India. US is the second-largest source of remittances to India. In 2018, the total remittances to India from the US stood at USD 11,715 million. The reason for this trend could be a stronger dollar and robust economic conditions in America.(Xpressmoney,2019)

Indian Americans though felt singled out too and discriminated on grounds of religion and colour, they have established themselves as rich and affluent community compared to Indian emigrants in other countries. Indian Americans have excelled in science, medicine, business and politics and have been able to outperform American counterparts.

We can also say that identity and politics in case of Indian Americans has not been divisive as this community has not challenged the structures of power in America but rather made niche for themselves within that power structure. They have struggled to preserve their cultural legacy and at the same time adopted wholeheartedly Americanness. They have excelled in every field and got recognized as an influential group in America.

The 2020 U.S. elections show how the Indian Americans have created a position in the power structure in American politics and civil society. Amidst the coronavirus pandemic the election results were indeed intriguing. America got its first Women Vice President of mix ethnic identity. Kamla Harris the new Vice President is half born to a Black father and an Indian mother. So beside being the first women Vice President she was also first women of Indian origin to have come to this position. 2 million Indian American voters emerged a stronger lobby than in previous years. Dosa caucus and samosa caucus as Krishnamurti named the South Indian and American communities respectively indeed played an important role this time in 2020 elections as a voting block and making the difference, especially in states like Michigan and Pennsylvania. Indian Americans have emerged as winners(Pandey:2020)So Race and identity politics have come a long way in America. It has been divisive sometimes and uniting most other times.

Indian Americans community is itself divided on the basis of religion and language. Issues like protecting Hindutva ideology and faith and Hindu heritage has cause rift in the community. Despite the unity, the community had been more divided in the run-up to this election than ever before. Anti-India and Anti Hindu rhetoric from some of the democrats had led to shifting of the voters towards Republicans, though they traditionally support the democrats. Indian Americans are a heterogeneous groups consisting of people of different languages and religion but largely they identify themselves as Indians. There has been tension in the Indian American community recently. Muslims showing support for Anti-CAA protests and Hindutva ideology. And some Indians Americans showing Hindu nationalist sentiments and projection of their religious identity is a projection of that internal rift.

Another point is that though traditionally the Indian-Americans, like most other Americans, usually focus on local issues while voting, this year foreign policy issues played an important role for the community, which has been gaining political power.

Trump's open embrace of Hindus has also helped – he was the first presidential candidate to attend a rally organised by a group called “Republican Hindu Coalition” in New Jersey in 2016. It led to the slogan “Ab ki baar, Trump sarkar” for his ad campaign.

In 2020 election year a new group calling itself “Hindus4Trump” made waves in some states, claiming attendance by 100,000 Indian Americans at a recent virtual rally for the president. The claim can't be independently verified but organisers insist 30,000 people watched it live on various social media platforms while 70,000 watched it shortly after. (Siroshi, 2020)

The Democratic Party's list of pro-India policies includes Biden's strong support for Indo-US civil nuclear deal. They also cite the fact that former president Barack Obama visited India twice, including as the chief guest at the Republic Day parade. He was the first US president to be invited as chief guest. Obama also became the first US president to support India's bid for a permanent seat in the UN Security Council and declare India a “major defence partner” of the US to allow for transfer of sophisticated weapons and technology.



But over the past year, Democrats have got attention for attacking and criticizing India more than for supporting it. Many Democrats have strongly criticised Modi's policies in Kashmir and his Hindutva philosophy. They have held Congressional hearings, which many said were driven by special interest groups, not by a genuine need for inquiry.

Divisive politics has entered US politics which is not good for Indian Americans. Democratic candidate, Sri Kulkarni has been accused of being close to Hindu nationalists. The violence and the exclusionary politics of Hindu nationalism and PM Modi toward Muslims are well documented. Kulkarni's critics insist that while he talks compellingly about his commitment to human rights and opposition to Islamophobia, he has not done enough to condemn the Hindutva ideology or the human rights violations of Muslim minorities in India. Nor has he distanced himself from Hindu nationalists in the US. (Khan,2020). This is one area of concern.

Republicans and Democrats both tried to woo Indian American community like never before.

As we see the case study of Indian Americans, to study Identity politics we find that they have used their distinct culture and ethnicity to their advantage to become a part of the American power structure which has traditionally been dominated by Whites but now claimed and fought for by multiple ethnic groups.

Democrats choice of Kamala Harris' selection as Joe Biden's running mate for the 2020 presidential nomination is indeed historic as she is the first Black woman *and* the first Asian American woman to share a major-party presidential ticket and then, to win the Vice Presidential post.

In the year 2020 U.S. Presidential elections, the Indian American community played an influential role in the swing states, in the election of John Biden as President. This shows the ever increasing influence of Indian Americans in the administration.

There can be little doubt that in choosing Kamala Harris as his running mate, Joe Biden was very much influenced by the factor of identity politics. Biden's choice of Harris as the Vice President who became the first black American, the first Indian American, and the first woman elected as the District Attorney of San Francisco and later as the Attorney General of California, and now sits in the US Senate as the first Indian American. (lal:2020)

Thus Identity Politics promotes multiculturalism and group representation as opposed to universalism promoted by liberals. It seeks

- proportional representation for their group in existing power structures
- promotes voting based on identity which may help make social institutions more representative of a society's demographics,
- but it often also means not agitating for a more egalitarian society for all and leading to divisive politics.
- Besides as Fukuyama said it leads to elite gaining power by exploiting people's sentiments and an insufficient substitute for socio economic equality.
- It perpetuates group identity politics as a political end that at times also leads to divisive politics.
- In the case of Indian Americans it has been inclusionary. Moreover the politics of identity of Indian Americans has also been influenced by identity and communal politics in India.

Identity politics has its own merits and demerits. Russian expert on American society, Vladimir Sogrin explained the issue of multilateralism and he believes the principle groupings among Americans are: 1. Racial and ethnic; 2. Class-economic; 3. Religious; 4. Gender; 5. Generational. Sogrin explained that "In conflict were: the ethnic groups of whites, blacks and Indians; bourgeoisie and slave owners; capital, proletariat and farmers; Protestants and Catholics; men and women; adults and youth."(Narlikar,2020)

If we agree that there is a conflict for identities and power struggle in America, fight for more proportional representation and parity in decision making, it is for the benefit for the whole American society which is based on the principles of equality and freedom.

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