PHILANTHROPY AND INDIAN DIASPORA IN THE 21ST CENTURY

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INTRODUCTION
My interest on philosophy of Indian diaspora philanthropy began after attending the Fourth Pravasi Bhartiya Divas, held from 7 to 9 January, 2006 in Hyderabad. During the three days conference, the Indian diasporic communities manifested certain solidarity though they came from different nations with diverse backgrounds such as castes, class, ethnicity, religion and the like. Some of the wealthy entrepreneurs and industrialists were seen to have invested heavily in India. These aspects enabled me to contemplate on them. Secondly, my association with an Indian diaspora Non-Profit Organization “CARTHA” (which means Doer in Sanskrit) in Iowa City, USA prompted my interest on the topic. Personal observations and secondary sources were mostly used in writing this paper. In order to collect secondary data, I visited the Charities Aid Foundation (CAF) India, Ministry of Overseas Indian Affairs (Government of India), Jawaharlal Nehru University Library and Teen Murti Library (all are based in New Delhi) in June 2008. The issue of poverty alleviation and Indian diaspora philanthropy has been extensively debated since the past few years especially within the academic spheres or circles.

INDIAN DIASPORA
Who constitutes the Indian diaspora? Butalia (2003:5) affirms that the Indian diaspora might be understood as “those millions of Indians who now live outside the subcontinent”. Indian diaspora comprises of Persons of Indian Origin (PIO) and Non-Resident Indians (NRI) who are scattered in different parts of the world. Wirsing & Azizian (2007:79) mentioned that the NRIs are Indian citizens, holding Indian passports and residing abroad for an indefinite period, whether for employment, or for carrying on any businesses or vocation or for any other purpose. In contrast, the term PIO is applied to a foreign citizen of Indian origin or descent. Ministry of Overseas Indian Affairs (Annual Report 2006-07), calculates the Indian diaspora to be approximately over 25 million in 130 countries wherein their diversity grew out of a variety of causes such as mercantilism, colonialism, and globalization and over several hundreds of years of migration in different waves. Some of them have become remarkable people. With the increasing number of Indian diaspora across the globe, the Indian diaspora philanthropy is becoming a well-heeled and contentious public discourse.
INDIAN DIASPORA & PHILANTHROPY
In recent years, a few scholars have undertaken research on Indian diaspora philanthropy. However, many of these studies have presented a cursory glimpse at the role played by the Indian diaspora through NGOs in promoting welfare, social development and emergency assistance in India. This paper attempts to examine the contours of Indian diaspora philanthropy with special reference to Indian Americans. I focus on the Indian diaspora philanthropy which functions directly through NGOs in India at one level and on the other hand, through United States based international NGOs with operations in India. It has been generally perceived that Indian diaspora funds were distributed through formal and mostly in informal channels for various development projects. And, it has become trendy for Indian diaspora to give back to their villages and towns. Their inspirations for philanthropic activities are a combination of traditional concerns of family, kinship, castes and religious sentiments and the added modern idea of doing something good for the poor and the needy. The Indian Diaspora especially those who migrated to the U.S. after the liberalization of U.S. immigration law in 1965, along with the immigrants of the 1990s constitute a “Successful Knowledge Diaspora.”

DIASPORA, NGOs & REMITTANCES
According to the World Bank, India obtained the biggest remittances in 2007 at the global level with an enormous amount of $27 billion. And, India perceives the Indian American diaspora as one of the most significant overseas community, particularly in terms of obtaining her foreign exchange. The Government of India introduced the tax exemption to the overseas Indians willing to homecoming with their accrued savings in 1950. With a major aim to catch the diaspora funds for investment in India, the government drew a scheme leading to ‘non-residential external accounts, which allowed free transferable accounts in foreign exchange (Kanjilal ibid).

Tamil Nadu, Kerala and Andhra Pradesh are three states with large diasporic communities and they have a huge number of NGOs with FCRA. Interestingly, in Gujarat and Punjab, the number of NGOs with FCRA is small in spite of the presence of large diaspora. Punjab is much more surprising, given the strong religious philanthropic traditions in Sikhism. Perhaps, the volume of giving may be bulky though there is a small number of NGOs with FCRA and most Sikh diaspora contributions are in cash during visits to Gurdwaras such as the Golden Temple in Amritsar, the center of Sikh communal life. Another reason may be attributed to the assumption that majority of the Sikh diaspora, especially those living for several generations in Canada, Southeast Asian countries including Britain maybe increasingly disconnected from India.

Mark Sidel (2004) asserts that extensive fund raising has been conducted within the Indian community to support the construction and operations of major Hindu temples in and near a number of American cities, as well as other religious institutions. He also argues that fund-raising has been conducted within the Indian community to support Hindutva activity in India. That fund-raising and the variety of diaspora philanthropy to which it has led sparked a famous article co-authored by the Indian Entrepreneur Kanwal
Rekhi, global chair of The Indus Entrepreneur, in the Wall Street Journal in May 2002. Rekhi directly and strongly criticized the use of some diaspora philanthropy funds contributed by overseas Hindus to Hindu groups such as RSS and VHP in India. It alleged that “the Parivar is using its money to train killer gangs who wreak murder on the minorities, torture and rape the Dalits, and otherwise work very hard to demolish the plural heritage of the country and the secular character of its democratic Constitution” (source: 29 November 2008, http://www.letindiadevelop.org/thereport/chapter7.html). There were counter allegations against Kanwal Rekhi by the RSS/VHP leaders for his audacious and blatant criticisms on their activities and their way of mobilizing resources from the United States, U.K. and Canada to utilize it in India.

Undoubtedly, data on Indian diasporic philanthropy are very limited as I have already mentioned in the beginning. The only source of reliable data on foreign inflows to NGOs in India is those maintained by the Home Ministry under the statutory Foreign Contributions (Regulation) Act (FCRA). The private remittances of Indian diaspora from the year 2002 to 2007 as documented by the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) are provided by the Ministry of Overseas Indian Affairs, which indicate huge funds being flown into the country. For instance, in 2001, the remittances went up to $12,162 million and in the years 2003-04, it was $18,885 million. However, in 2006, the remittances have fallen to $11,157 million. Perhaps, it is attributed to the fact that some Indian diaspora professionals, mostly IT employees might have return to India to work in the Indian Silicon cities like Bangalore, and Hyderabad.

CONCLUSIONS
A huge concentration of Indian diaspora philanthropy has been mobilized and allocated particularly on health, education, relief, and rehabilitation that should be normally provided by the Government of India. Such alternative assistance raises critical questions that Indian diaspora giving would be accepted in India continuously as substitute of the Government. Therefore, Indian diasporic community needs to move beyond the question of how much financial supports can be generated in their country of residence, to how these finances can be used in the most advantageous manner towards the poor and needy people. In other words, the diasporic community needs to strategically influence its philanthropy. Essentially, they have to cultivate welfare and development programs in India with their new creative and innovative ideas. At another level, they have to focus on effective NGOs which have been engaging in poverty alleviation projects and also put pressure on the government to make greater commitment to remove poverty.

Most of the research undertaken in the past years has been conducted among the small groups or specific professionals and income groups like the industrialists, entrepreneurs, soft-ware engineers, medical doctors, etc. We could have a glimpse of Indian diaspora philanthropy from a rigid perspective. Hence, it becomes necessary to conduct a larger rigorous sociological research to document blueprints and preferences of Indian diaspora in giving back to various religious, ethnic, occupational, geographical and castes groups in order to get clearer understanding of their philanthropic involvement. Moreover,
intensive dialogues are required within the Indian diasporic communities on important issues such as the effects of post-9/11 regulatory scrutiny by the American Bush Government on giving back to India, and also towards the support for their religious organizations specifically the Indian Muslim community, and also implementation, governance and effective use of donor funds. Finally, the Indian diasporic community must also challenge the various forms of inequalities and unjust structures of the Indian society and must be open to criticism.

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