

SHEFALI RAZDAN DUGGAL

HARIDWAR TO CALIFORNIA: DREAM RUN

By Prashant Tandon

Gorgeous, glamorous, and a go-getter, Shefali Razdan Duggal redefines the concept of 3G. These days it's her fund-raising talent for President Barack Obama's second-run at the White House that everyone's talking about.

When you are raising funds, it helps being articulate. Good communicators like President Obama have always inspired her. Right from the time when as a young girl she'd watch political campaigns on American television and then one day would decide to support Al Gore's campaign, Shefali has looked at effective communication as a means to relate better to the world. Communication has been her strength and greatest ally, and perhaps not without reason. She received an MA in Political Communication from the New York University and a BS in Mass Communication from Miami University.

She was only two-years-old when in 1973 her family immigrated to the United States from India. She was born to Kashmiri parents in Haridwar, Uttarakhand. In the USA, she grew up in Pittsburgh, Cincinnati, Boston and New York, and now, at just 40, is one of the more prominent Indian Americans making waves in California. In fact, earlier in 2012, the National Diversity Council, a not-for-profit organization that champions diversity in workplace and communities, chose Shefali as one of the "Most Powerful and Influential Women of California." That also makes her one of the most prominent Americans of Indian descent in the West Coast.

She's a member of Obama's Presidential Partners, is on the National Finance Committee and Northern California Finance Committee and is co-chair at the Obama Victory Trustees (OVT). Apart from having joined the Al Gore campaign, she's played an active role in fund-raising for Hillary

Clinton's presidential candidature in 2008, before Clinton stepped down in favour of Barack Obama.

FUN-RAISER

She also manages to raise plenty of fun during interviews. Like when she discloses how the surname Duggal got added to her original name, i.e. Shefali Razdan. In her own words, this is how it went: "When I was 13 years old, I noticed, for the first time, a particular 15-year-old desi boy walking down the hallway in my high school. This boy and I never once spoke during our days at high school. To my surprise, destiny stepped in some 10 years later when our mothers first met and then later encouraged us to meet over coffee. This boy, Rajat Duggal, my childhood crush, would then become my husband."

It was during the Razdan family's stay at Cincinnati that Shefali started taking interest in the developments in American politics. Politics is something that she saw her father deeply interested in, and she let it slowly become a part of her life as well. At New York University, her master's thesis revolved around the presidential campaigns of Reverend Jesse Jackson between 1984 and 1988.

Apart from politics, she is also actively involved in Human Rights Watch and is hugely inspired by Mahatma Gandhi, Abraham Lincoln, Mother Teresa and Hillary Clinton. An avid reader, she is firmly rooted in her origins and culture. She follows Indian classical music, and savours Kashmiri cuisine. Married for fourteen years, Shefali is mother to two growing children and loves to play the part of fun-raiser within the family. She keeps visiting India and spends quality time with her brother's family in Delhi. □

“Vision counts more than dollars”

SHEFALI RAZDAN DUGGAL:
Showing much enterprise



We received tragic news of shootout at Wisconsin Gurudwara where six people belonging to Sikh community got killed and several others injured. Your views on this act of violence...

It was a tragic and sad event that highlights some of the extremism and ignorance that unfortunately remains on the fringes of society in the United States. Fortunately, the vast majority of the population does not

share in these extreme views, which is highlighted by the outpouring of support towards the Sikh community from across the political spectrum.

Do you see any pattern or involvement of a group behind this act?

Based on what we know now, there does not appear to be any pattern or specific group involved, though there are reports that the shooter was involved in some white supremacist organizations.

The suspect killer Wade Michael Page had a tattoo of 9 / 11 and apparently went on shooting out of revenge. We received news of attacks on Sikhs in US after 2001 terror attack confusing them with Taliban owing to their appearance. Why does not the US establishment and social groups launch an awareness campaign saying that turban wearing Sikhs are not Islamic fundamentalists? According to you who should get this awareness campaign launched?

There have been attempts, both politically and in the media, to raise awareness of the beliefs and background of Sikhs to help avert these types of tragedies. This animosity directed towards any community is reprehensible and not to be tolerated.

Coming to your role as key fund raiser for Barak Obama’s second term in White House – Romney and Republicans are leading in fund raising with July figures of 101 million dollars against 75 million dollars for Democrats. Looks like you are facing a challenging time. How will you overcome this gap?

The Obama campaign has built the most extensive grass roots campaign in U.S. history which I’m confident will deliver the votes and resources necessary for an Obama victory. Ultimately, it is not solely about dollars, but rather about the candidate with the vision and experience to guide the United States. There is no doubt in my mind that President Barack

Obama is that candidate.

Though Obama is marginally ahead of Romney in opinion polls – does fund raising have any bearing on electoral turnout? If so, how?

President Barack Obama has been and continues to be consistently ahead of Governor Romney in all polls, especially in the swing states. It is clear that President Obama's message of fairness and equity is resonating with the electorate. At some point, message and vision mean more than pure dollars in electoral turnout and I believe that is why we continue to see President Obama leading in the polls.

What are the no go areas of political funding in US? What are broad guidelines of fund raising for a political party?

There are clear and very defined rules and limits around the fundraising for the Presidential campaign.

In India political funding is being debated widely. How transparent is the entire process of political fund raising in US?

Although it is not perfect, political fundraising has been very transparent in the United States. However, the rise of Super PACs, particularly how they have been used by Republicans, has created much less transparency in the most recent election cycle.

South Asian community has a strong and influential presence in US. Indian professionals have contributed hugely in business, medicine, technology, academics and in other key areas including in politics with people like you playing an important role. How does it help in protecting the interest of South Asian community?

Though the South Asian community has shown great success in so many fields within the United States, we have been under-represented in our political clout in relation to this success, both in terms of political engagement and also in terms of those elected from our community. I have been passionately focused on supporting South Asian candidates and in engaging the South Asian community in the political process to help alleviate this underrepresentation to achieve the influence we justify.

What are the challenges before US Indians?

The challenges and opportunities for all minority groups in the United States are quite similar. The key is to mobilize the community to address these challenges while also embracing the opportunities that we are blessed to have in the United States.

Regarding your political career – how and when



this political journey started?

Although I had a deep interest in politics since my youth, my political activist journey truly commenced during the 2000 Al Gore Presidential campaign where I first became actively involved with community outreach, political grassroots work and ultimately as an At-Large delegate to the Democratic National Convention in Los Angeles that year.

You hold important position in Obama's campaign for second term and are a leading South Asian face. What role you play and how were you selected for this role?

I am a member of President Obama's National Finance Committee and a Co-Chair for the Obama Victory Trustees. Both of these organizations are responsible for raising money for the President's reelection effort. I was also recently appointed to the Credentials Committee as a "Party Leader" for the 2012 Democratic National Convention in Charlotte North Carolina.

Besides your political and social engagements you are a wife and mother of two growing children. How you manage two lives?

I've always prioritized my children and their needs first, while also realizing that the time and passion I give to politics is ultimately for their benefit. It can be challenging at times to find the proper balance, although having a deep comprehension of what is most important in my life, my children's well-being and happiness, allows for me to manage my time effectively. □