



*Shefali Razdan Duggal*

PRESS CLIPS

## Indian Americans Struggle To Unite At Democratic Convention

By Ela Dutt



Courtesy of [News India Times](#)

Indian-Americans attended the Democratic National Convention in Philadelphia July 25-28, as delegates, volunteers, and staff, in much higher numbers than the GOP convention a week before. That chasm reflects what surveys have found – that 65 percent of people of Indian origin lean Democratic and 18 percent Republican, according to a 2015 Pew Research study.

But like the split in the Democratic Party, Indian-American delegates at the convention were also divided between supporters of former Senator Hillary Clinton of New York, and Vermont Senator Bernie Sanders. Some passionate Indian-American Sanders supporters loudly voiced their displeasure on the first and second day of the convention and even walked out. That rebellion largely ended with Clinton's nomination after Sen. Sanders' expressed his unqualified support for her.

However, while a majority of Indian-American delegates were Hillary supporters, those “feeling the Bern” left the convention undecided but satisfied they had succeeded in bending the Clinton agenda further left, to incorporate a number of their objectives including the \$15 minimum wage; and forcing the Democratic National Committee to implement rule changes for future presidential nominations. In her acceptance speech July 28, Clinton assuaged some of the ruffled feathers when she urged Sanders supporters to join her to make their aspirations a reality. “I heard you. Your causes are our causes,” she said. But millennial delegate from California Tejpal Singh Baniwal has adopted a wait-and-see attitude till November.

Almost all the Indian-American Clinton supporters News India Times spoke to, were glad there was dissension in the ranks. “We need the critical people among us,” said Robby Boparai, 23, delegate from Congressional District 23 in California. “As long as (dissension) is about substantive issues and not personality politics, it should be fine,” said Illinois candidate for Congress Raja Krishnamoorthi. “But at the end of the day, a small margin of victory may be needed,” Boparai cautioned, to defeat Republican nominee Donald Trump.

Jacobs, a Sanders supporter, concurred. “This is the most progressive platform the Democratic Party has ever adopted,” though some issues like the Trans Pacific Partnership, or fracking, are still to be fought out,” he said. “But what's beautiful about our convention is there's unity and even Bernie came out and appealed for it.”

Kaiser Khan, the father of a South Asian-American U.S. Military Capt. Humayun Khan who died in combat, appealed in a moving speech at the convention, to all immigrants, including Muslims, to “take the time out” to vote this November. Khan got a long standing ovation from the massive crowd, some openly weeping.

“We (Indian-Americans) are a passionate people,” Gautam Raghavan, former White House liaison to the Pentagon, told News India Times, and noted there were far more Indian Americans at this convention than in previous ones.

“Across the board what I see is significant interest from minorities. They know what's at stake,” he added. He noted that his personal friend is Sanders supporter Pramila Jayapal, a Washington state politician and activist running for the U.S. Congress. While they differed on which candidate to support “She and I completely agree the stakes are too high given the level of xenophobia.”

### “Don’t Boo — Vote”

Indian-Americans attending the convention believe their heft in the party and the country can be enhanced only if the community gets to the polling booth. Their focus over the next few months to Nov. 8, is to bring out that vote. Which is why, for Peter Jacob, candidate for U.S. Congress from District 7 in New Jersey, the key words in President Obama’s impassioned speech supporting presidential nominee Hillary Clinton, were – “Don’t boo – vote.”

Neera Tanden, a close Clinton associate for 20 years, said the community needed to get involved in this election cycle. “Having worked for Hillary for nearly 20 years, (I know) she will have a seat at the table for all of us,” Tanden said at a call-in briefing.

She noted there was a gap between voter registration and participation that needed to be bridged. Pleased with the higher involvement of millennials, she urged youth to find out if family members were registered to vote.

Shefali Razdan Duggal, nominated member of the Rules Committee of the Democratic National Convention, told News India Times she looked to the older generation to mobilize the youth, using their experience. she was “absolutely confident that every (Indian-American) delegate, from each state, is putting the entirety of their hearts into this very important moment of their lives,” adding, “They are representing candidates in, arguably, the most important election of our lifetime.”

### Minority’s Margin

“From being a marginal minority, we can be the margin of victory,” said Rep. Judy Chu, D-California, chair of the Asian American and Pacific Islander Caucus in Congress, declared from the podium, accompanied by among others, the only Indian-American in Congress, Rep. Ami Bera, D-California, and candidate for Congress Raja Krishnamoorthi from Illinois.

That did not prevent Khyati Joshi, delegate from New Jersey, from feeling “invisible” on the first night. But she acknowledged, “Our community needs to step up to the plate. The Indian-American voter turnout is pathetic,” she told News India Times. She conceded however, that activists had to target the community to energize it to participate and vote. Joshi said her analysis of voter turnout in various New Jersey districts, showed higher turnout when the community was targeted for mobilization.

Illinois Congressional candidate Krishnamoorthi believes the responsibility for getting the community to participate more lay all around, not just with the community but also the larger American political fabric. Nevertheless, “It’s very important that more Indian-Americans and South Asians participate in the process – vote, campaign, be delegates,” Krishnamoorthi said.

”There’s no way we can sit this one out,” Raghavan said.