

In the US 2000 Census, the number of Indian-Americans reached 1,678,765 people. It is the second largest Indian diaspora in the world preceded only by that in Myanmar, which comes near to three million.¹ In January 2008, the Indian-American community gained a very important victory in politics through the appointment of Bobby Jindal as the Governor of Louisiana.² Although his political views and decisions have been a source of disappointment and have provoked serious criticism, he is nonetheless the first Indian-American to reach higher echelons of power.

The American cultural sphere has also felt 'the Indian touch'. In 2000 Jhumpa Lahiri, a young Indian female writer, was awarded the Pulitzer Prize for her collection of short stories. Aishwarya Rai has successfully avoided being remembered only as the 1994 Miss World and has appeared in numerous Bollywood and Hollywood productions. In 2003 she was the first Indian actress to be a member of the Cannes Film Festival jury. Her male colleagues have yet to wait to be thus honoured.

The Indian community in the US obviously does not exist in a vacuum. With no physical borders limiting the interaction with the American majority, the two cultures mix and influence each other. The Indian community is neither isolated nor homogeneous. It reacts outwards to the American environment, and simultaneously it evolves within itself. The constant struggle to remain Indian enough is combined with the attempts to settle down peacefully in a country which may judge one as being Indian too much. The reality of everyday life includes prejudice, stereotyped attitudes, and often mistrust—on both sides. The exploitation of clichés by various religious doctrines and political factions leads to misinformation and misunderstanding of the two cultures. Also, the standpoint of the American political representation towards minorities (especially after 9/11) has become of crucial importance to the diaspora.