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Non-Fiction

The Other One Percent review – selected for success

An analysis of Indian migration to the US tells a story of mutually beneficial exchange



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DECEMBER 16, 2016 by: **James Crabtree**

President-elect Donald Trump addressed a glitzy campaign rally in New Jersey in October, hosted by a previously obscure group called the Republican Hindu Coalition. He began in typically bombastic style. “I am a big fan of Hindu [sic]. And I am a big fan of India. Big, big fan,” he said, to applause from the crowd.

Trump’s appearance was widely viewed in India as confirming the diaspora’s conservative leanings. Indians in the US are often seen as enthusiastic supporters of Hindu nationalist prime minister [Narendra Modi](http://www.ft.com/topics/people/Narendra_Modi) and his centre-right Bharatiya Janata party — an impression underlined when tens of thousands

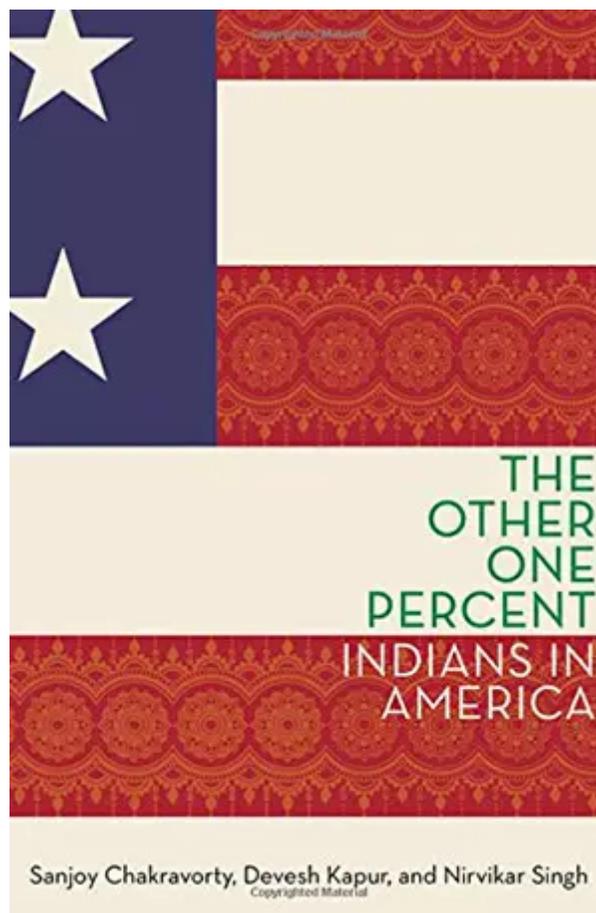
came to listen to Modi speak at New York's Madison Square Garden in 2014. If America's Indians backed Modi, the logic went, it was no surprise they also warmed to Trump.

This is one myth that is quickly punctured by *The Other One Percent*, in which three US-based academics offer by far the most comprehensive analysis yet of one of the world's most intriguing and successful migrant groups. As it turns out, Indian émigrés vote overwhelmingly for Democrats, and have done more consistently than any other sizeable minority bar African Americans.

Indians are also America's wealthiest and most highly educated migrants. Hinduism runs neck-and-neck with Judaism as the country's richest religion per capita. Indians do well in elite professions but their progress is especially marked in technology. They have become the most important migrants in Silicon Valley — a trend made clear by the recent appointment of Indian-born executives to lead companies such as Microsoft and Google.

Rather than putting this down to culture or the ability to speak good English, the authors explain these feats through filtering. Successive waves of Indians began arriving after the US relaxed its immigration laws in 1965. The earliest were not especially remarkable, working largely in retail or hospitality. But as time went by a “triple selection” process began to create a uniquely talented immigrant pool.

First, those arriving were drawn from the upper strata of Indian society, and especially its upper castes. Second, they were products of exacting Indian academic institutions, often with skills in engineering and computer science. Finally, they were thinned out by US immigration rules, which favoured clever students and skilled workers. “Indian Americans have been selected to be outliers — they have been selected for success,” the authors write.



Set against this backdrop, the book's title is pointed. Indians make up about 1 per cent of the US population, but their economic prowess means they are better integrated, and thus less visible, than other migrants. "Little India" neighbourhoods dot many cities, but there are only seven American urban areas in which Indian-Americans constitute more than one-fourth of the population.

That integration is all the more striking, given the population's rapid growth. Three-quarters of Indians in the US have arrived since the mid-1990s, drawn in mostly by the tech sector. Americans born in India now number more than 2m, the largest foreign-born group after Mexicans.

If present migration rates continue, the population will double again over the next few decades. Yet that is far from certain, not least because Trump plans to curb immigration. He has hinted specifically that he plans to scrap the H-1B visa category, which is dominated by tech-savvy Indians, often employed by software-outsourcing companies.

This would be a shame. Arguably, rather than a damaging brain drain, India's talent exodus to the US is a source of strength for both nations. Indian immigrants have been a potent

source of entrepreneurship and economic vitality in America. In return, India receives valuable remittances, business links and ideas. The diaspora also provides a basis for deeper future ties between the world's two largest democracies, a proximity that is likely to be pushed by geopolitical imperatives as both are driven closer together by the rise of China.

“Perhaps more than any other policy issue, immigration captures the contradictions and tensions of liberal, capitalist democracies, as they simultaneously pursue policies of openness and building walls,” the authors write. Yet the story of Indians in America is an instructive example of mutually beneficial migration. With luck, Trump's claim to be a big fan of India will help him to see it that way too.

[The Other One Percent \(https://www.amazon.co.uk/gp/product/0190648740/ref=as_li_qf_sp_asin_il_tl?ie=UTF8&camp=1634&creative=6738&creativeASIN=0190648740&linkCode=as2&tag=finantimes-21\)](https://www.amazon.co.uk/gp/product/0190648740/ref=as_li_qf_sp_asin_il_tl?ie=UTF8&camp=1634&creative=6738&creativeASIN=0190648740&linkCode=as2&tag=finantimes-21): Indians in America, by Sanjoy Chakravorty, Devesh Kapur and Nirvikar Singh, *Oxford University Press*, RRP £22.99/\$34.95, 384 pages

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