

# What India has to say to Nigeria

INDIA's historically discernible influence on Nigeria began a century ago with Lugard's conquest of what became the Protectorate of Northern Nigeria. Lord Lugard, the British architect of Nigeria as it now stands, grew up in India as the son of missionaries. His experience in India greatly influenced his years establishing colonial administration first in the Northern Protectorate and then in the unified colony of Nigeria from 1914. In the Sultan and the Emirs of the Sokoto Caliphate Lugard observed a culture and system of rule similar to what he remembered from India, and thus he used India as a model for his celebrated system of indirect rule.

Indirect rule, however, was not the only element Lugard borrowed from India. He also adapted an Indian cultural ceremony where lesser officials could pay homage to their superiors through an elaborate ceremony. This ceremony taken from India was adapted to the Caliphate's cavalry tradition and is now incorrectly recognized as one of the key elements of traditional Caliphate culture. The ceremony is well known in Nigeria and is called the 'darbar', a Hindi and Urdu word for 'king's court.'

Besides the similarities of sharing the same colonial overlord, independent Nigeria and India have a lot in common. Both countries are heavily populated and extremely diverse linguistically, geographically, ethnically, culturally, and religiously. The major difference between the post-colonial histories of the two countries is that faced with similar circumstances and internal dynamics, India has been able to maintain a democratic system while Nigeria has not. How to maintain a democratic system in the midst of diversity and poverty is one area in which Nigeria can learn a lot from India.

There is another shared dilemma each country has

had to face, and that is the problem of the brain drain. Since the late 1960s, tens of thousands of India's best and brightest have gone abroad to seek greater opportunities than were available at home. A large percentage of these were graduates of India's prestigious institutes of technology. These institutes, perhaps the most competitive in the world, remain to this day among India's only institutions to which entry is gained purely on merit. Their graduates are highly skilled professionals, sought after around the world.

Probably more than in any other field, the graduates of these technical institutes as well as Indians trained within the United States have made huge contributions to the American information technology (IT) industry. Thousands of Indians work at all levels of the most lucrative and booming industry in the United States, some in high management positions and others owning their own companies. It is estimated that there are now 750 Indian owned companies in Silicon Valley, California, the centre of the American computer/IT industry, alone. These companies employ 16,000 people and generate revenues of over \$3.5 billion.

The American Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) has taken note of the importance of Indians to the booming American economy. Last year, one third of the visas given out by the INS to skilled workers were to Indians. Sources say that Indians are now the wealthiest group per capita in the United States. It is obvious that due to their vast contributions and abundant wealth, the American image of Indians and India has changed dramatically.

This dramatic change was exhibited during Bill Clinton's recent visit to India where he praised Indians for their contributions to the booming American economy. He also praised India for their growing inter-



Indian Prime Minister, Atal Gehari Vajpayee

nal IT industry. According to the *New York Times*, 30% of the world's computer software engineers are Indian and 25% of the world's undernourished people are Indian. With these seemingly contradictory facts in mind, Clinton called for India to set an example of how the 'new economy' based on computing and the internet could be used to uplift a nation with more people living in poverty than any other.

An important part of the IT industry based economic growth in India has been the contribution of those same engineering superstars who left India's shores for greener pastures abroad. Hoping to turn the 'brain drain' into a 'brain trust,' and taking advantage of a more liberalized economy, many Indian emigrants are seeking opportunities to give something back

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Perspective of a Nigerian-American



to their country of origin. Considering the billions of dollars India's diaspora computer engineers possess, it is not surprising that India's government is increasingly looking for ways to accommodate them and encourage them to spend their wealth back home.

These men and women are indeed spending money at home, some on philanthropic enterprises, others on entrepreneurial activities focused on the computer industry that made them wealthy abroad. Now that India itself offers great economic opportunities inter-

nally, many now operate businesses in both the United States and India. The IT industry in India is growing so rapidly that Bangalore is now known as the Silicon Plateau and graduates of India's technical institute now have increased incentives to stay at home.

In short, India's investment on technical education, an investment which for so long seemed to do little more than provide tickets for the best and brightest to get out of the country, are now paying dividends. The contributions of Indians to the American economy heralded by

President Clinton is now providing the finances and know how to kick start India's economy.

Nigeria is another country which has suffered from the brain drain, producing professionals and intellectuals who have contributed greatly to the development of other countries. Although not as numerous and not as overwhelmingly successful as India's diaspora community, Nigerians abroad do have the means and the experience to help "make Nigeria great again." As one learns from India's example, however, these Nigerians abroad cannot be expected to rush back at the first sign of change. It took several decades of internal changes in politics and economics before significant numbers of wealthy Indians abroad began to repatriate their wealth and knowledge to their country of origin.

The democratic Nigerian government cannot therefore expect their citizens abroad to start returning home immediately. They should also not seek to impose on their diaspora community the pressures Eritrea has placed on theirs. While at least allowing the Eritrean diaspora elected representation in government, Eritreans abroad are all but required to send large amounts of money home to help 'build' Eritrea. In reality, most of the money is used to keep the ruling Eritrean People's Liberation Front in power and finance the nation building exercise disguised as war against Ethiopia.

Nigerians who have made it abroad did not become successful overnight, and thus an overnight move back to Nigeria is not likely. However, my experience with both Nigerians and Indians abroad is that even after years of being away from home, there is still a strong desire to go back and contribute. Let us hope that Nigerians abroad will not have to wait as long as their Indian counterparts before they return home in large enough numbers to provide the best kind of investment Nigeria could ask for, investment from people who love their country and have a stake in it.

**'How to maintain a democratic system in the midst of diversity and poverty is one area in which Nigeria can learn a lot from India'**