

# **Harvard College US India Initiative 2017 Report**

HUII, or the Harvard College US-India Initiative, is a student run organization that aims to create dialogue between Indian and American youth to address some of India's most pressing social, economical and environmental issues today.

The main aim of this conference was to:

- (1) Create a dialogue between students and exchange ideas regarding issues related to India.
- (2) Help foster long term relationships between young leaders around the globe.
- (3) Provide resources for social entrepreneurship in India.

I attended the following panel discussions:

## **Society:**

### **Building Voice and Empowerment for Vulnerable Groups**

#### **Panelist:**

Jacqueline Bhabha – Professor at Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health.

#### **Abstract:**

India is home to 2.5 million homosexuals, more than 25 million persons with disabilities and roughly 15% of the world's population that suffers from some form of mental disorder. Despite these figures, far too many individuals belonging to marginalized communities lack access to the tools, institutions and resources that can help them thrive on an equal footing with the rest of the society. What measures can we take, individually and collectively, to transform India into a bastion of empathy and inclusion?

## **Culture:**

### **The Role of Silver Screen in Indian Society**

#### **Panelist:**

Ashish Shakyra – Member of popular Indian comedy group - AIB

Rytasha Rathore – Indian TV Actress

Vinod Ranganath – Screenwriter and Actor

#### **Abstract:**

The rapid penetration of technology means that Indians are watching more television than ever. Globally, television is a provider of entertainment and information. But that does not even begin to capture the entirety of what it can be in the Indian context: a harbinger of different attitudes, a disseminator of values, and even a force for societal change. However, television often plays a role in reinforcing harmful stereotypes and perpetuating existing hierarchies, such as those related to gender and caste. How do we allow for increased socially positive programming even if the alternative attracts more viewership and interest?

## **Science and Innovation:**

### **IPR as a means to an end: Creating a regime to meet India's needs**

#### **Panelists:**

Pratibha Singh – Senior Advocate on Intellectual Property Rights

Dilip Shah – Chief Executive Officer of Vision Consulting Group

**Abstract:**

The government's recently released National IPR Policy. Treating IP protection as an end in itself, the policy does not meaningfully grapple with India's concerns, such as the need to ensure that IP rights do not impede access to affordable medicines or the need to promote country's burgeoning informal economy. This being the case, how can we create an IP regime that is tailored to meet India's unique needs as a developing country, and yet is consistent with her international commitments?

**Economics:****The Role of VC in Supporting Startups****Panelists:**

Kunal Shah – Founder and Chairman, FreeCharge

Sasha Mirchandani – Founder and Managing Director of Kae Capital

Prashant Mehta – Partner at Lightbox

**Abstract:**

The number of startups in India is expected to nearly quadruple from 3,100 in 2014 to over 11,500 by 2020. It is widely believed that India's startup ecosystem has the potential to be an engine for sustained economic growth. However, despite these developments, limited access to capital continues to constrain the growth of these startups. In this context, what role do Venture Capitalists play in connecting these young entrepreneurs with the knowledge and capital to be successful?

**Politics:****Engaging With Separatist Movements****Panelists:**

Ashoke Pandit – Filmmaker, Social Activist, Member of Central Board of Film Certification

Vivek Agnihotri – Bollywood Film Director, Producer, Screenwriter

Muhammed Khan – Former Officer on Special Duty to Jairam Ramesh

**Abstract:**

When we talk of "India", who do we include and who do we leave out? This question is particularly relevant in the light of movements such as the United Liberation Front of Assam, Naxalite groups, and Kashmiri separatists, whose very foundation is to question the authority of Indian state. In what ways is our democracy, if at all, failing these marginalized communities? How do we constitutionally engage with these movements, especially when they use violent methods of protest? How have recent developments in our politics and foreign relations affected their legitimacy?

\* Apart from these panel discussions, following eminent personalities were the Keynote speakers in this event:

**(1) Sunil Bharti Mittal:**

Founder and Chairman of Bharti Enterprises, one of India's leading conglomerates with diversified interests in telecom, insurance, real estate, agri, and food, besides other ventures.

**(2) Amitabh Bachchan:**

Fondly dubbed as 'Big B', one cannot deny the stature that Amitabh Bachchan holds, both in the film industry, and outside of it.

**(3) Prakash Javadekar:**

With an illustrious political career that began in his college days, Sh. Prakash Javadekar is the incumbent Union Minister of the Ministry of Human Resource Development, Government of India. He was also previously in-charge of the BJP's Economic Forum and Cells. Additionally, he has authored five books in Marathi, and over 300 articles in various newspapers on contemporary issues.

**(4) Vikram Patel:**

Named as one of TIME Magazine's 100 most influential people, Dr. Vikram Patel is iconic for his work on child development and mental disabilities in low resource settings. His work is now increasingly revolving around mental disorders and developmental disabilities in children.

**(5) Arundhati Bhattacharya:**

The 25<sup>th</sup> most powerful woman in the world, the first woman to lead a Fortune 500 company in India, Ms. Arundhati Bhattacharya is the Chair-MD of the State Bank of India.

**(6) Chanda Kochhar:**

Ms. Chanda Kochhar is the Managing Director and Chief Executive Officer of ICICI Bank Limited, India's largest private sector bank. She is widely recognised for her role in shaping the retail banking sector in India, her leadership of the ICICI Group, and her contributions to various forums in India and Globally.

**(7) Shikha Sharma:**

Ms. Shikha Sharma is the Managing Director and CEO of Axis Bank, India's third largest private sector bank. Under Ms. Sharma's leadership, Axis Bank has received many awards notably 'Bank of the Year in India' for 2014 by the Banker Magazine, Financial Times.

**(8) Sandhya Vasudevan:**

Ms. Sandhya Vasudevan is Deutsche bank group COO and MD, and former head of services centres. Additionally, she is involved in Diversity and Inclusion, Innovation and R&D programs. She is one of the founding members of the Bangalore Chapter of the Women Leaders' group in CII.

**(9) Neerja Birla:**

Ms. Birla's passion towards the cause of children's education and mental health has seen her taking up the mantle at various organizations. She is the founder and chairperson of Mpower, an organization that works towards tackling mental health issues among youth.

**I would like to thank IRIAA for giving me an opportunity to attend this conference which gave me a chance to interact with brightest minds of the country.**