

The Age of Hindish: America India, Bhai Bhai!

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As John Edwards is poised to commence his state visit to India, one recalls the visit of his adversary and one-time predecessor, George W. Bush, some fifteen years ago. A much loathed figure around the world, Bush was nonetheless received with respect by Indians. We weren't much pleased with the fact that Bush, confused by something in common between Man *Mohan* Singh and *Mohan* Das Gandhi, believed that he was encountering in India a political dynasty equal to that forged by his own father. Some of our leftist countrymen and countrywomen, who mocked ideas of development and progress, and called our hard-working youth who stayed up all night to resolve the medical bills of Americans cyber-coolies, greeted Bush with abuses and burnt his effigies at monster rallies. Unfazed by all that, Bush told us that he was glad to see democracy in action in a different part of the world.

We then had friendship treaties with Iran, Russia, and many other states, but for most of us our love-affair had always been with America. So many of us thought, 'No place like America.' Even those of us who had never been to America had heard of the Patels in their motels, and though we didn't like donuts very much, we would have given anything to run a Dunkin' Donuts shops, even in neighborhoods peopled largely by blacks and Hispanics. We were then just emerging as an economic power, but much to our disappointment, China was still occupying the lion's share of the news. No matter how well we did, we never seemed to catch up with China.

Today Edwards will be arriving in a different India. Our Satwinders are no longer someone else's Sams, nor do the Jaswinders of Jullunder have to pretend that they are John or James. All right, the Americans didn't ever take to curry as much have the Brits, who with their boiled peas and steak and kidney pies did the only smart thing, but Michael, David, and George have all learned to eat *appam* and *avial* in Cochin and Trivandrum. Today the Americans come here not just to visit the Taj Mahal, go trekking in the Himalayas, or smoke cheap joints at Kovalam, but because we are a 'happening place'. Whoever thought that Americans would come here to hang out? China's next door, but no one's going there. Most of the Chinese never really got to learning English, and the Americans, who have a hard enough time with English, found that the Chinese have far too many characters in their language. Hindish is now spoken widely around the world and Americans are slowly switching to it. *Are yaar*, let's have chai-shai.

We have made common cause with Americans. Some will call it conceit, but we both have every reason to be proud. We have the oldest civilization in the world, they have the oldest democracy. No one has come up with as many schemes to make money as have the Americans; and our scriptures command us to pay as much attention to *artha* as to *moksha*. In both our cultures, we respect women as harbingers of wealth. We have our Lakshmis, they have Ayn Rand. True, we're still doing the bidding of the Americans, helping them to hunt for Muslim terrorists and letting them run their intelligence agencies from offices in Mumbai and Delhi. We've known a thing or two

about terrorism, and could teach Americans some things about terrorism as much as about spirituality, but at any rate what choice do we have? Our Duryodhana, Dusshasana, and Ravana missiles have a long reach, but the Americans still have much bigger bombs. *America India, bhai bhai!*