

NRI getting ready to celebrate 'India@60'

'Life begins at 60' is coming true for India. Although 60 years is just a moment in time during the history of a country as ancient as India, 60 years after independence is a major landmark. And NRIs are gearing up to celebrate the event. Many NRI social welfare groups have set up special committees to hold the celebrations in different forms and styles.

Inviting top celebrities from India, be they film stars, classical musicians, poets, gurus or politicians, is the usual first step. At the same time, the local NRI talent must be showcased. So the community leaders are contacted to put together 'a cultural programme' of classical and traditional dances by young NRIs learning at local Indian dance schools, musicians and theatre enthusiasts.

This brings a colourful panorama and festivity of India to the local scene that makes many NRIs sentimental about their 'motherland' or 'grandmother land'. The third element is honouring NRIs for their contribution to the community at special banquets organised by a prominent personality from India or the national government leader of the country of NRIs.

Here is an idea for NRIs round the world to emulate to make these celebrations more meaningful to the community and involve them more intensely.

Taking a cue - no doubt from the Oscars - Friends of South Asian American Communities in California have come up with a novel idea of instituting special annual awards at a glittering banquet: Mahatma Gandhi Award for Outstanding Contribution to Society, Mother Teresa Award for service to the Needy, Kalpna Chawla Award for Outstanding Woman, Dhirubhai Ambani Award for Outstanding Entrepreneur, Rajiv Gandhi Award for Outstanding Proactive Leadership, Sir C.V. Raman Award for Outstanding Contribution to Science, Rabindranath Tagore Award for Outstanding Teenager, Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose Award for Outstanding Patriot, Raj Kapoor Award for Outstanding Contribution to Films, Dr Zakir Hussein Award for Outstanding Contribution to the Arts and Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel Award for Outstanding Leadership, among others.

Selecting local leaders for these awards can be controversial if carried out by a few behind closed doors. But in this age of email and SMS, NRI groups are inviting the local community to vote for the nominated candidates publicised. So the contenders are known but the recipient is a surprise until the last moment! Commercial companies sponsor these awards; so the honours have a cash component, goods and services of some value and not just a plaque.

Another element is the local media - print, radio or TV. This enables these cultural programmes to be aired or special articles to be published. Weekend fun fairs, food festivals, sports meets, youth festivals, fancy dress competitions, India quizzes, exhibitions of fine art, crafts and handicrafts are other tried and tested NRI options to mark this event and make a splash.

More novel suggestions are welcome. A common element is loads of planning, coordination and raising funds for all these activities. Producing special TV programmes involves a great deal of input in terms of talent, rehearsals and production. Since many countries have TV channels dedicated to NRIs, these are already engaged in preparing these programmes. Countries with fewer NRIs have to book slots on the radio or TV stations and produce the programmes after getting sponsors.

It is well worth the resources invested as it points out the NRI contribution to the country and

generates goodwill. The Indian media has already started its countdown for Aug 15 - when India will mark 60 years of independence -- with a special spot on TV channels and articles in the print media.

Public functions like street parades in the US or stage programmes in Britain and other countries are being planned. Sometimes, a play is commissioned and performed. For the 50th anniversary of independence, an exceptional event was a play 'Saare Jehan Se Acchha' written by London based poet Chaman Lal Chaman in 1997 with music by Jagjit Singh. It was so successful that it was performed in other cities after its premiere.

This year, 'India@60' celebration is expected to be more than hoisting the tricolour, singing the national anthem or painting faces in national colours. The celebrations could be designed to proclaim that India deserves a seat at the top table of world nations.

(A media consultant to a UN Agency, Kul Bhushan previously worked abroad as a newspaper editor and has travelled to over 55 countries. He lives in [New Delhi](#) and can be contacted at: kulbhushan2038@gmail.com)

Kul Bhushan (© IANS / India eNews)