Contributing to India and Australia

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Australia has always been a very attractive destination for Indian students given its lower tuition fees and affordable cost of living as compared to the US or UK. With a drastic decrease in the number of Indian students opting for the US universities in recent years, more Indian students are arriving in Australia for acquiring a degree. In this context, Australia is doing her best to welcome Indian students by offering quality education and training, modern facilities and a high standard of living, one of the highest in the world! In 2008, 80,000 Indian students arrived in Australia to attend various universities. Even though some unfortunate events caused a drop in the number of students applying in 2009, causing a loss of 174 million dollars to Australia, on average, the trend has been showing an upward slope in the number of students coming every year since the beginning of 90s. Such strong dynamics between economy and service sector would not have been possible without a strong bond of mutual benefit between these two countries and the Indian student community which extends beyond economy, education and cricket.

The direct contributions of Indian student community to Australian economy are reported by Australian council for Private Education and Training (ACPET). According to ACPET, in 2008, education services ranks as the third largest export category earner in Australia, creating an export value of 15.5 billion Australian dollars. In 2009, Indians accounted for a fifth of total international student enrolment. It is the second largest nationality after the Chinese among international students in Australia. If you count all South Asians, they account for a quarter of total enrolment. Over the last two years, while the enrolments have grown at 18% annually, South Asians were increasing at double that rate: 36% annually. The expenditures of Indian students contribute to the local and national economy of Australia, which is not a small amount, it is estimated to have generated just over 122,000 Full Time Employment (FTE) positions in the Australian economy in 2007-08, with 33,482 of these being in the education sector. The share of education-related travel services has increased from around one per cent of total services exports in the early 1970's to 27 per cent in 2007-08, which is again another boost for Australian economy.

Indian student community's contribution to Australia is not limited to these figures alone. Indian students provide for the multicultural Australia by bringing more tolerance and cultural diversity and thus making it an international country. Various Indian groups, which mostly include Indian students and former Indian students, celebrate Indian festivals on Australian soil and many Australian citizens take part in these festivals with equal enthusiasm-sharing joy and peace. Such occasions indeed send the supreme examples of tolerance, trust and brotherhood to both countries strengthening the bilateral relations.
The educational culture in Australia has been “earning and learning”. Unlike in India, it is a common practise for students to do part-time jobs which not only help the students to support themselves, but also give them rich life experiences, chances to meet and learn from local and international people outside university campus. While Australia enjoys the abundance of workforce and increased productivity, Indian students work on laying foundations for their international relationships. Also, many of the students sign up for different volunteer works throughout Australia enjoying the same benefits.

On the other side, Indian students bring home quality training, education and international exposure which benefit the Indian industries and organizations in great deal. India receives world quality professionals who are ready to take their nation to the highest altitudes of achievements and glory. The small percentage of students, who chose to work in Australia after completing their degrees here, brings home the foreign currency which accrues to a not so insignificant amount.

As the world shrink to a global village, the problems that we face have gained dimensions of global crises. In the light of the good relationship flourished between India and Australia, the two countries have signed up for numerous joint projects ranging from Information Technology (IT) to renewable energy. A number of such projects are on its way to realization. Many are still in the making. Both the countries have understood the importance of solving the common problems together. The various joint funds, grants and scholarships are some of the indications in that direction. Australia-India Strategic Research Fund (AISRF) supports joint research of Indian and Australian universities on issues like global warming and climate change. Asia Pacific Partnership program provides scholarships for Indian students to do their post graduate studies in Australia. These are just a few in the long list of joint programs between these two countries.

Partnerships work best among equals. In order for these two countries to truly work out the partnership in education, science and technology, they should support each other in those critical areas which need immediate attention. Even though India provides a large number of medical students, doctors and nurses to Australia, the number of joint projects that has been signed up shows that there is a big scope for improvement there. Same is the case with agriculture, irrigation, literacy and child care. More attention to these areas can bring about more opportunities for research in these chronic problems.

The exchange programs in each other’s field of strength are to be welcomed for many reasons. In the fields like IT and non-conventional energy studies India and Australia have established their presence in the global community. Exchanging students in the similar fields will help in the transfer of technology in both directions. It helps to understand each other’s problems and allocate resources like manpower, funds, technology and infrastructure wisely.

We can hope that both governments are moving towards these goals. The signs have been giving good hopes, especially 2009-10 Australian budget, and Prime Minister Julia Gillard’s announcement of the ‘study Australia 2010 strategy’. Prime Minister’s words, “by providing world class education while planting the seeds for Australia’s future growth and positioning Australia as an education leader in academic and professional education sector”, shows Australia’s determination to succeed in this plan.