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## **Guests who came for The Dinner**

**I**f a man is known by the company he keeps, you wonder what his guest list for a dinner tells you about him. President Bush and First Lady Laura Bush invited 126 people for the official dinner they hosted for Prime Minister Manmohan Singh and his wife Gursharan Kaur.

About two-thirds of the invitees were Bush's cabinet members, establishment figures, and their spouses. There was Vice President Dick Cheney, National Security Advisor Stephen Hadley, Secretaries Rumsfeld, Rice, Bodman, Gutierrez and others in this group. There were three Senators (Lugar, Brownback and Feinstein) and three Congressmen (Delay, Pallone and Jindal).

There were second tier Bush administration officials -- State Department's Christina Rocca, NSC's Michael Green, Cheney's aide Lewis Libby, among others. There was a top general (Peter Pace), a Supreme Court judge (Clarence Thomas) and a lobbyist (Tom Loeffler, a Bush buddy). There was also the so-called military-industrial complex that is going to sell billions of dollars worth of goods to India -- the heads of Boeing, Lockheed Martin and other companies.

After counting about 80 of these American movers and shakers, there remained 45 Indian and Indian-American invitees. Of these, about 20 were from the visiting Indian delegation, including the PM and other high officials. The remaining 25 invitees give us some idea of the Bush crowd's view of Indian-Americans.

The most striking aspect in this list of Indian-American guests is six of them are physicians, including three who are big contributors to the Republican Party (Dr R. Vijayanagar, and Dr Zach Zachariah and his brother Mammen). There were a few from the corporate world -- Subha Barry of Merrill Lynch,

Indra Nooyi of Pepsico, and Farooq Kathwari of Ethan Allan. There was a major league realtor (Narendar Reddy of Sterling Realty).

But there are very few with an engineering background, unless you count Dr Praveen Chaudhari, a former IITian who heads the Brookhaven National Laboratory, and Amar Bose of Bose Corporation. It was contrast to the Clinton dinner for Vajpayee, which was teeming with Silicon Valley tycoons including Vinod Dham, Vinod Khosla and Desh Deshpande, although that 700-person jamboree allowed more leeway.

The other interesting aspect was the glamor deficit in the list. As I recollect, the Clinton guest list had Goldie Hawn, Richard Gere, Vijay Amritraj, and Chevy Chase (who accidentally spilt wine on Vajpayee) among many celebrities. I dredged this list for color and only found a certain Brandon Chillar, who plays in the National Football League as line-backer for the St Louis Rams. His India connection comes from his parents – he is, as they say in India, s/o of Kathy and Ram Chillar. Yeah, I feel for Manny Malhotra, who plays in the National (Ice) Hockey League for New York Rangers but is Indo-Canadian.

I'm guessing the Bush White House is still finding its Indian-Americans and don't have a clue about their range. If they had only looked around they would have found dozens of worthy guests – contemporary writers (Suketu Mehta, Fareed Zakaria etc), movie folks (Naveen Andrews, Mira Nair), singers (Norah Jones and jazz vocalist Sachin Vasandani), musicians (pianist Vijay Iyer, saxophonist Rudresh Mahanthappa) -- and even a top class soprano (Indira Mahajan) who is going to play the lead role in Porgy and Bess in the Washington Opera this season. They are all making waves in the United States.

The other conclusions I could draw from the list are that President Bush likes his dinners small and intimate, prefers his colleagues and people he knows for company, doesn't care for the arts, and likes NFL.

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