

‘Leaving their mark on the world stage’

Describing the Indian American Achiever Awards as the symbolic strength of the Indian diaspora on September 13, MP Deepak Obhrai said Indians settled in both the United States and Canada face the same challenges

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Washington

INDIANS settled in Canada and America face the same challenges, said Deepak Obhrai, Member of Parliament and Parliamentary Secretary for Foreign Affairs, while speaking at the Indian and American Achiever Awards (IAAA) organized by the CineMaya Media Group (CMG) at the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts in Washington, DC on September 13. Indians have entered the global stage and the world is becoming a small village, he added.

“At this time, both our communities are involved in their country affairs and engaged in continent-wide issues. My coming here would open the bridge for more dialogue and communication between the community settled here and the Indian Canadian community to work towards a common goal. The challenges faced by the Indian American community are the same as the Indian Canadians face, and working together will provide a cohesive approach to find solutions to these challenges”, said the MP who was the guest of honor at the event.

The awards ceremony was organized to commemorate India’s 60th anniversary of independence. The awards recognized individuals and companies and were given in four different categories—Innovation, Science and Technology, Arts, Entertainment and Media, Multi National Company and Gandhi Lifetime Achievement.

“These awards have been instituted, in four separate categories, to recognize individuals and companies who have excelled in their fields and join in the worldwide celebrations for the 60th anniversary of India’s independence. There were two honorees in each category: one Indian and one American,” said CMG chairman Sunil Hali.

“These achievement awards are symbolic of the strength of the Indian diaspora all over the world. It shows that people of Indian origin are leaving their mark on the world stage, no matter where they are,” Obhrai said.

At the awards ceremony, Bill Gates’ name was announced for the American section of the Gandhi Lifetime Achievement category. He beat former presidents Jimmy Carter and Bill Clinton and vice president Al Gore to get the award. Late Dhirubhai Ambani was selected for the Indian section of the Gandhi Lifetime Achievement award.

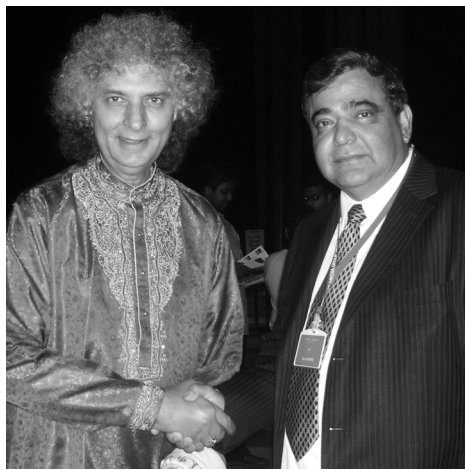
A.R. Rahman was his humble self as he received the Art Entertainment & Media Award (Indian category), expressing gratitude for the honor bestowed on him. “I can see where this (Indian & American Achiever Awards) is going,” he said. “Communication is what is needed the most, between the East and the West.”

The Arts, Entertainment and Media Award in the American category went to actor Richard Gere. New Jersey Assemblyman Upendra Chivukula received Gere’s award since he could not attend the event. He said jokingly that he too would want to be like Gere, but more for his humanitarian deeds. Bollywood actor Kunal Khemu, who looked dapper and suave in a flowing *sherwani*, which he later changed for a formal dinner jacket, was the master of ceremonies for the evening.

Rahman, who also performed at the event, expressed his approval for a scholarship endowment initiated by CMG. Four scholar-



Pandit Birju Maharaj performs with Saswati Sen



Clockwise from above: Pundit Shiv Kumar Sharma with MP and Parliamentary Secretary for Foreign Affairs Deepak Obhrai; (L to R) CineMaya Group chairman Sunil Hali, Chef de Cabinet, United Nations, Vijay Nambiar, Indian Ambassador to the United States Ronen Sen, Mrs Nambiar, Mrs Sen and Obhrai; A.R. Rahman performing the Indian national anthem with members of the Penn Masala group. Photos by Mohammed Jaffar and Renu Mehta



ships—one per category of award-of \$5,000 each, to be given to Indian American undergraduate students, were announced at the event. The scholarships aim to encourage the efforts of deserving students, who have displayed potential in various subjects, and give them knowledge, resources and mentoring. “The institution of this endowment will pave the way for Indian American students to excel in their fields with mentoring and opportunity for international exposure. It is a wonderful thought, and I look forward to doing my role of mentoring through this endeavor,” he said.

The Multi-National Company Award went to the Tata Group of Companies and the New York Life Insurance. The latter, which is the largest insurance company for the South

Asian community in the United States, has endeared itself to customers because of its innovative, appealing and emotionally resonating advertisements, which have struck a chord with the community.

The event saw performances by doyens of Indian classical music. Pandit Shiv Kumar Sharma gave a flawless santoor performance, while Pandit Birju Maharaj presented a captivating performance of Kathak. Dr Balamurali Krishna and Pandit Ajoy Chakraborty rounded off the performances with an enthralling *jugalbandi*.

However, the biggest applause went to Rahman, who performed a rendition of *Jana Gana Mana*, the Indian national anthem. Vocalists of Penn Masala, one of the world’s



finest Indian a-cappella groups, who started the evening’s proceedings with the American national anthem, joined him.

About 1,000 people attended the black tie event including India’s ambassador to the United States, Ronen Sen, who gave out the awards for the Gandhi Lifetime Achievement and India’s former permanent representative to the United Nations and Chef de Cabinet to UN Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon, Vijay Nambiar.

