

## FROM THE EDITORS

For his enduring commitment to the spirit of India spanning 50 years; for being an articulate spokesperson for a better India-US relationship and for being an extraordinary cheerleader for India.



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# The Indiawallah



PARESH GANDHI

Scholar and diplomat **Marshall Bouton**, winner of the third **India Abroad Friend of India Award**, discusses his 50-year love affair with India in this eloquent discussion with **Vaihayasi Pande Daniel**.

**O**n a likely warm day in August 2014, a sprightly, tall, 72-year-old, New York-born American, most likely dressed in smart casuals, will disembark at New Delhi's Indira Gandhi International Airport with his elegant India-born but American wife.

Unlike a Pope he may not kiss the tarmac on arrival, but in the deepest, softest corner of his heart he certainly would have — so special is his affection for India.

August 2014 will mark 50 years since his first visit to India. He has, he counts, made more than a hundred trips after that.

Marshall Melvin Bouton, scholar and diplomat, adopted India as his second motherland, shortly after arrival for the first time in 1964.

He landed in India, aged just 22, to work for the Ford Foundation, on a Quaker American Friends Service Committee scholarship. After a brief induction course at Delhi University, and a three-month intense course of spoken Tamil at Annamalai University in Madras (now Chennai), Bouton headed to a little hamlet 10 miles from Tanjore (now Thanjavur) on the road to Nagapattinam, in the largest rice paddy growing area in the country, to pitch in with the Green Revolution and do his bit for global food security.

His brief: To help boost agricultural cooperatives that introduced farmers to new seed varieties and farming techniques.

His idealistic endeavors were abruptly abort-

Marshall Melvin Bouton adopted India as his second motherland, shortly after arrival for the first time in 1964. He has made more than a hundred trips there.

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ed when government of India rules changed and they decided they did not want an American meddling with Tamil agricultural cooperatives.

Bouton was forced to hastily rummage around for fresh altruistic opportunities. The name of Dora Scarlett came up. This eccentric, but compassionate, British Communist social activist was running a free clinic in a remote village in the Kambam Valley, near Kodaikanal, on the then Madras (now Tamil Nadu state)-Kerala border, taking care of leprosy victims.

So Bouton ventured to Scarlett's mud hut clinic in a sleepy village. He helped around at the clinic which in addition to supplying salves and drugs to leprosy victims also provided medical care, of any variety, to the poor.

When his paperwork was set right, Bouton returned to Tanjore, spent the next 15 months dispensing advice on agricultural techniques and developed an abiding bond for South India ("in my heart I am a Southerner," he says).

Those adventurous two years in India as a young man ensured that the country was "in his blood" for good. The trip was what Bouton terms a "life-transforming experience." From then on he had a sense that India would be the focus for the rest of his life.

There is something very comfortably Indian about the man facing you, even if he is a white American, with a French surname, in a grey suit and sharp tie, sitting in an elegant Michigan Avenue, Chicago, office overlooking sparkling Lake Michigan.

Strands of his conversation are sprinkled with Tamil or Hindi words and he adopts a particular Indian intonation as he manfully ushers those Indian words with the tricky Indian Ts ("retroflex Tamil T") into the conversation.

"Long story short" is an expression he leans on often in conversation and then proceeds to tell you the long story, especially when he reminisces about his sojourns in India. Like when a collector in Tamil Nadu summoned the courage to ask the 22 year old how he became a Marshall so early on in the US Army. Or like the time when he was traveling by train in India and someone asked him that though his name was Bouton (pronounced like the Himalyan kingdom), he did not look like he came from Bhutan!

After earning a master's at the University of Pennsylvania, Bouton opted to spend another year in Delhi and later did his University of Chicago PhD dissertation in Tanjore on the Naxalite movement and the absence of an Indian peasant revolt.

His India-born and schooled wife Barbara Linn Bouton and he have two



COURTESY: MARSHALL BOUTON

Marshall Bouton with some of the villagers he was closest to while living in Saliangalam outside Thanjavur, Tamil Nadu. He had landed in India, aged just 22, to work for the Ford Foundation, on a Quaker American Friends Service Committee scholarship. His brief: To help boost agricultural cooperatives that introduced farmers to new seed varieties and farming techniques.

## INDIA ABROAD FRIEND OF INDIA AWARD

Diplomat and thinker **Strobe Talbott** was awarded the inaugural India Abroad Friend of India Award in 2010 for being a key protagonist in shaping the relationship the US and India now enjoy.

Professor **Susanne H Rudolph** and Professor **Lloyd I Rudolph** were awarded the India Abroad Friend of India Award 2011 for their insightful perspective of India spanning six decades; for their deep engagement with Indian society and history; and for being steadiest friends of India.

sons — Chris, a computational scientist, and Alex, a software tester and hip hop musician. Alex was born in India and Chris, he confides, was conceived in India and he tells them that they are honorary Indians.

His subsequent work — during two long stints at the Asia Society, three years at the US embassy in New Delhi and 12 rich years at the Chicago Council on Global Affairs — was faithfully devoted, through a variety of creative and innovative ways, to relentlessly enhancing and nurturing the India-US relationship.

Bouton was the scholar who took his head out of history-sociology-political science textbooks, stepped out of university corridors, to bring his love for another country literally alive.

If he, as an American, could be so fond of India, he could not see why every other American could not be, after all there were so many essential likable similarities between the cultures.

Nor could Bouton possibly ever fathom why the United States, as a nation, should not have a special relationship with India and has devoted many hours of his 71 years till date to undoing the US' 1960s-1970s 'Tilt' away from India, participating in the little-step-by-little step building efforts that has brought the US closer to India, from 2000 onwards.

He fondly calls it the Ship of India-US Relations and his life's mission, as a committed sailor, probably the first officer on that vessel, has been to find robust ballast to keep the ship constantly sailing in delightfully serene waters.

### How did you first get interested in India?

I was a senior at Harvard, doing history and pre-medicine and was short of a semester on non-Western history. The only course that fitted into my schedule was a course on India, then taught by the great Sankrist Daniel Ingalls and Susanne Rudolph, who was your honoree last year.

The Rudolphs (*India scholars Lloyd and Susanne*) were still at Harvard. It was their last year at Harvard. So I took the course.

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About the same time Nehru died. There was an Indian graduate student living in my house at Harvard by the name of Ashok Khosla. I got to know him in the dining room and began to ask him questions about India.

About that time I decided I didn't want to go to medical school. I needed a break. So, I decided on a whim that I was going to go to India.

I told my parents and my mother nearly passed away. On the night before I left for India, in August 1964, she was in bed weeping inconsolably. I said: "Mom what's the problem?"

She said: "When you were a baby I stood in line and bought you lamb chops to make you strong and now you are going to go to India and will starve."

Thus began my adventure with India.

## When did you go back after that first trip to India?

I completely dropped the idea of medical school. What I really wanted to do was to come back to the United States and try to make sense of this amazing experience I had had — a life-transforming experience.

To console my parents I applied to law school. I never had any intention of going to law school. I got a scholarship to do my master's in South Asia studies at the University of Pennsylvania. Along the way I met and married my wife.

She grew up in India. She is American. People often ask if we met in India when they hear about our lives. We say no — we met in a course on Indian civilization at the University of Pennsylvania.

Her grandparents and parents were medical missionaries. Her grandfather (*Hugh Harrison Linn*) came to India in 1904 and wound up setting up a pharmaceutical industry to manufacture and supply at cost very basic medicines — aspirin, eucalyptus ointment — stuff like that to hospitals all over the country.

He started his practice as a physician in 1904 and was living in a rural area. (*When he discovered the desperate need for pre-dosed medicines in India*) he wrote to a friend who was then working for the Upjohn company (*a Kalamazoo, Michigan-based company, now part of Pfizer*) to send (*him*) cast off tablet-making machines. He started making tablets for his own practice.

Then all the doctors around said we want some of those too. So, he got another two or three tablet-making machines. He was making tablets all the time. He set up a little industry. Started out near Vikarabad in Andhra (*west of Hyderabad*) and eventually he moved the (*All India Missions Tablet*) industry to a little town called Bangarpet (*it was originally Boweringpet*) 5 miles from the Kolar gold fields.

My wife's father took over the industry and ran it. He got a PhD in pharmacy in Purdue University and he moved back to India. He grew up in India, of course, and went to the Kodaikanal School (*the 102-year-old Kodaikanal International School*) as did my wife. My wife was in India until she came to college (*in the US*).

## Why did you return to India?



CENTRAL PRESS/GETTY IMAGES

December 1971: An elderly refugee is pushed aside by Indian troops advancing into East Pakistan, later Bangladesh, during the war. According to Marshall Bouton, during this time 'the Nixon administration was tilting to Pakistan in its infinite stupidity.'

I decided I wanted to go back to India to do my dissertation research in Tanjore on the impact of the Green Revolution on agrarian politics in India, using Tanjore as the case study.

My wife gave up her job (*in Chicago; Bouton was doing his PhD and teaching at the University of Chicago under Lloyd and Susanne Rudolph*). We gave up our apartment and moved to North Carolina to spend a couple of weeks with my mother before we went to India. Then the Bangladesh crisis began.

The Nixon Administration was tilting to Pakistan in its infinite stupidity. Mrs (*then Indian prime minister Indira*) Gandhi decided, amongst other things, that there would be no more visas issued to Americans coming to India to do research.

So, we were stuck in North Carolina. I worked as a carpenter's helper on a construction crew that was building a Holiday Inn along an interstate highway.

As the crisis developed and American policy became such a big factor, Ralph Nicholas, an anthropologist specializing in Bengal, then at the University of Chicago, decided to organize graduate students around the United States, who were working on India, to go talk in any forum they could find on why US policy was mistaken and how we should be supporting the liberation of Bangladesh, India, and not Pakistan and its very ruthless suppression of the Mukti

Bahini liberation movement (*in then East Pakistan*).

So, I was giving speeches in South Carolina, Georgia, Mississippi, Alabama and North Carolina. The folks in Delhi (*must have*) got wind of this, decided I must be a good guy after all and they gave me a visa.

So, we went. Barbara's parents were still there — we spent time with them (*in Bangarpet*) and then we went to Tanjore. We rented a little house in Yagappa Nagar, a new suburb of Tanjore town. I started my research. It went on for 15 months.

## Why were you studying the Naxalite movement out of Tanjore?

I became very interested in agrarian politics in India. By that time there was a lot of talk about — the expression was 'The Green Revolution is turning Red' — (*how*) these technologies were making some farmers poorer and some farmers richer and was creating a new divide in the Indian countryside which the Communists were exploiting.

The real Naxalite movement was in West Bengal, Andhra (*Pradesh*) and a little bit of Madhya Pradesh. I was using Tanjore as a test case because of the violence that occurred

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there (*the Kilvenmani massacre when 42 striking Dalit agricultural laborers influenced by the Communist Party of India were burnt alive in 1968*).

The CPI had a base going way back to the 1930s in this particular area of Thanjavur district. So, that was one of the questions in the study. Why did the Communists have a support base there even after the rise of the DMK (*Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam, a Tamil Nadu-based political party*)? What was going on here?

It was really the larger scholarly question I was trying to answer. Why did India never have a peasant revolution? China had a peasant revolution. Vietnam had a peasant revolution. Algeria had a peasant revolution. Even Indonesia in some respects had a peasant revolution although it was a little more complicated because of the way the Dutch colonized Indonesia.

India was the great glaring exception to the rule that part and parcel of the Independence movement process at some point was an uprising among the peasantry.

**How did you get to be Ambassador Robert F Goheen's special assistant?**

I was on the job market in 1975, but the bottom had fallen out of the academic job market. I was approached by a man named Robert Goheen (*who later became the ambassador to India*).

In (*October*) 1974 (*Henry*) Kissinger paid his first visit to India after The Tilt. The origins of this sub-commission of education and culture, that I came to work for (*under Goheen*), is called Kissinger's Penance.

Kissinger went to Delhi, and as unaccustomed as he was to doing such a thing, he accepted Mrs Gandhi's proposal that there be a joint commission (*between the US and India*) in very Soviet style!

The joint commission consisted of the Indian minister of external affairs and the secretary of state. Underneath that joint commission were to be sub-commissions, one on the economy, one on science and technology, one on commerce and one on education and culture....

The State Department approached the Asia Society, New York, and asked if it would house the secretariat for this to be formed Indo-US sub-commission of education and culture.

The State Department invited (*Vengurla, Maharashtra-born*) Robert Goheen (*son of Presbyterian missionaries to India and a president of Princeton*) to head this. This was 1975.

Goheen was the US co-chair and the Indian co-chair was G Parthasarthy, who was sort of cut from the (*virulently anti-American Congress party leader V K*) Krishna Menon cloth.

We had one meeting of the sub-commission every year, alternately in the US and India. We created a committee on museums, a committee on universities, a this and a that, we started organizing exhibitions back and forth and we organized fellowship programs to send American scholars, who were not India scholars, to India.

Then (*Jimmy*) Carter got elected and he turned around



COURTESY: MARSHALL BOUTON

Marshall Bouton, left, with then Indian prime minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee at the Asia Society in 1999. Much before Vajpayee became prime minister, Bouton had told his friends in the State Department that the Indian politician would conduct a nuclear test if he came to power. They didn't believe him.

and asked Bob Goheen to be the ambassador. Goheen asked me to become his special assistant. That was 1977.

So, we moved to Delhi and I worked as Bob's special assistant for three years.

I arrived in Delhi just before Indira Gandhi went to the slammer. Morarji Desai was prime minister. The Janata (*Party*) government was struggling.

**What was it like living in India?**

I had developed a passion for the place. A passion born of experience. A passion born of enquiry.

I found India to be an enormously attractive, intriguing and frustrating place...

In every way — intellectually or otherwise — I was drawn to it. There was a lot of political change going on. The economy was stuck in low gear. Early on, I became one of those people who argued for what later became the reforms and liberalization.

When I first went to India, that was the time when India was — as it is today, but in a much more complicated way — the counter balance to China.

Do you take a traditional society and modernize it under an autocratic system or a democratic system?

Which works better?

What's the fate of Asia, which is what it comes down to?

The under-girding of the rock bed of my involvement with India is about two things — it is about the people and it is about the enormity of what India means to human civiliza-

tion.

(*It is about having*) a civilization, which is complex, diverse, old, really modern eventually, in every important respect and to do so without violence and in a way that preserves the unique character and contributions of that civilization.

So, those are the conceptual and human connections I have had with India, through all this thick and thin of my different involvements.

**How did you sustain your relationship with India over the years?**

There has never been a year when I haven't been there at least a couple of times.

There were many years I was there six or seven times.

I have sort of roughly counted that I have been there probably a hundred times, apart from my periods of residence.

During the 1980s, because my job with the Asia Society was not just India — my second stint at the Asia Society began in 1981 — I spent a lot of time traveling all over the rest of Asia and taking that aboard...

I became vice president at the (*Asia Society*) and then executive vice president in 1991. My duties were broader. I had a little more discretion about how I could use my time. The

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combination of the collapse of the Berlin Wall and the beginning of the reforms in 1991 (*in India, made me decide*) I was going to mount a big project on South Asia after the Cold War.

It went on for two years and involved putting a big task force led by (*later US Trade Representative*) Carla Hills and (*Ambassador*) Arthur Hartman and had many, many, facets to it.

That was my first deep dive back into India and South Asia after I joined the Society in 1981.

Then over the rest of the decade, as the reforms went forward two steps, sideways two steps, backwards one step, but began to (*really*) take hold, we at the Society began to do a lot more.

That became more than a sideline of my role at the Asia Society.

## And what did that achieve?

I became very centrally involved in the evolution of the (*India-US*) relationship.

Frank Wisner went to Delhi as ambassador from 1994 to 1997. Frank and I met before he went and agreed to be partners in crime, in trying to bring some new life to the relationship.

I became a kind of US conspirator and he became the Delhi conspirator and as co-conspirators we were doing lots of things together.

The Society began to do our corporate conferences in India — the first was maybe 1994-1995 in Delhi.

We became *the* platform for Indian leaders to come and talk — political leaders, business leaders, others.

I had gotten to know Atal Bihari Vajpayee in 1978 when he was foreign minister in the Janata government. He and my boss Bob Goheen liked each other. He was a very likeable man. A thoughtful man. They used have tea together, and I would be there in Roosevelt House, at Atalji's bungalow, at the office, wherever, just to talk.

Once he stepped down as foreign minister that didn't go on, but they were in touch. After he was no longer in office he used to come to the embassy and visit.

Bob Goheen was a very principled man, but a very apolitical man. He wasn't hung up on political brands or identities or labels.

What interested him was what he perceived to be the quality of the person. That is what attracted him to Vajpayee.

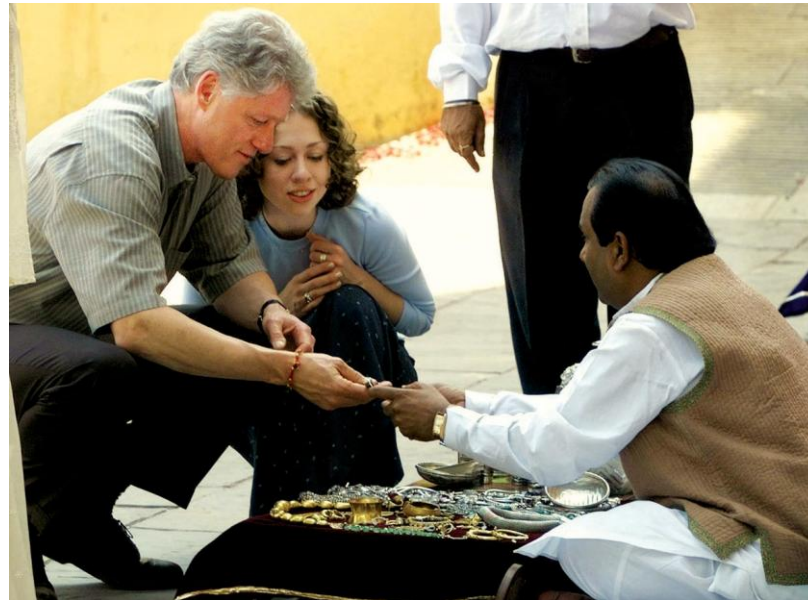
When I was going back (*and forth*) to India in the early 1980s, the Congress was back in power.

Vajpayee was the only BJP (*Bharatiya Janata Party*) Member of Parliament. This was 1980, 1982.

When I used to go to Delhi I would call on him and have these very interesting conversations.

I would say something and there would be a 40-second silence. Brilliant (*man*). Not as fluent (*in English*). Oh yeah, (*his Hindi speeches were*) stem winders. He spoke pretty good English, it was not difficult to carry on a conversation with him.

When John Whitehead became chairman of the Asia



President Bill Clinton with daughter Chelsea in Rajasthan during his visit to India in March 2000. Marshall Bouton gives Clinton a lot of credit — for the persistence of his intent and for finding a way to go after India conducted nuclear tests.



President George W Bush in New Delhi in 2006. Though no big fan of Bush, Bouton, for many reasons, gives him huge credit on India.

Society in 1988, I took him to Asia for the first time. Whitehead had come from Washington, where he had been deputy secretary of state, former head of Goldman Sachs.

I took him to see Vajpayee. We were at one of these strange meetings where there were long silences. After we left, John said to me, "Why did we see that guy?"

I said: "Mark my words, someday this man will be prime minister of India." Many years later I reminded John of that.

As the BJP started getting nearer to power in the mid 1990s I would go see Vajpayee. Two months before the 1998 elections I was in Delhi and Jaswant Singh (*the senior BJP leader*) took me to see Vajpayee.

I said if the BJP wins the election and you form a government, will you conduct a nuclear test. And he said: "Yes."

That's the way he spoke. I thought I know this man a little bit. I know how he speaks. He means yes. So, I came back and talked to my friends in the State Department. (*I said:*) "I just talked to him. He said yes." They didn't believe me!

## Why didn't they believe you?

Lack of imagination. I dunno. Because (*India would not conduct the tests*) was the conventional wisdom.

So, when India did conduct the test the relationship went into the tank. But we — Frank and I ; Frank was by then back in New York — knew that President Clinton really wanted to go to India.

## Was the Clinton Administration the best for the India-US relationship?

Bill Clinton deserves a great deal of credit.

The (*nuclear*) tests were in May 1998. Even before that he was planning to go to India in the second term. Hillary went (*during his*) first term (*in 1995*).

Then the tests happened. US law and prevailing public opinion put the kibosh on any idea of a Presidential visit to India. All the sanctions were applied.

But we knew — Frank had served as Bill's ambassador to India — that the President was interested in India, intellectually.

## Why was he interested in India?

He was interested in India, as a country, as a place, as an emerging nation, as an emerging economy.

Remember by now, this is the late 1990s and the reforms are beginning to take hold. The reforms started in 1991. Bill Clinton came to office in 1993, less than two years later.

## So, Clinton's was an instinctive interest?

A combination of an instinctive interest and a sort of geo-political interest.

Frank and I put together a project, with a small group of people, largely in New York, to figure out a strategy by which the Administration could address, in the required fashion, the fallout from the tests and at the same time open the possibility of rethinking the relationship, including a Presidential visit.

Of course, it wasn't long after that that Strobe (*Talbot, then deputy secretary of state and the winner of the India Abroad inaugural Friend of India Award*) and Jaswant began to have their talks.

So we weren't the only ones who were thinking along these lines. But we were the main group outside of the government. We prepared a paper for the Administration. We gave





it to (Clinton) sometime in 1999 and laid out a series of steps that would possibly reopen the door to a Presidential visit.

We argued in favor of a Presidential visit. We thought it would be a good thing for the relationship. After all, there hadn't been a Presidential visit since Nixon and Carter.

The President went in March 2000.

Bill Clinton deserves a lot of credit — not only for the persistence of his intent and, being the very politically creative guy he is, for finding a way to go.

But then the visit itself!

I didn't go, but I was in India shortly before the visit, and shortly after the visit, and I cannot remember in my lifetime — not that I have been close to a lot of Presidential visits — a single visit by a President to another country that has had as electric an effect on the attitudes in that country, about the United States, and on the relationship, that Bill Clinton's visit did.

I remember (*members of*) the Lok Sabha climbing over tables to get to him! Mind you this is 2000 when Bill was through the Monica (*Lewinsky*) thing.

**He changed the way Indians looked at America...**

Yes, *overnight*.

**And George W Bush?**

George Bush, in a very different way, also deserves a lot of credit.

I am no big fan of George Bush and George Bush's Administration for a lot of reasons, but I give him *huge* credit on India.

Underlying or behind or impelling or motivating the civil nuclear agreement was this more fundamental proposition (*by the Bush Administration*).

The proposition was that India is an emerging power and that it is high time that the United States began to deal with India as responsible emerging power — not as a client or as an unruly child — and began to take steps to set that relationship on a new and better ground and (*that*), among other things, meant putting the whole nuclear thing behind us.

My three years in the embassy in Delhi were consumed with the United States government's concerns over nuclear issues, particularly over the fueling of Tarapur (*the nuclear plant outside Mumbai*).

We built that reactor in Tarapur. It was US fuel. The fuel was running out. The reprocessing rods were all stuck in the ponds. They couldn't get rid of them because they couldn't send the fuel back to the US.

It was a mess.

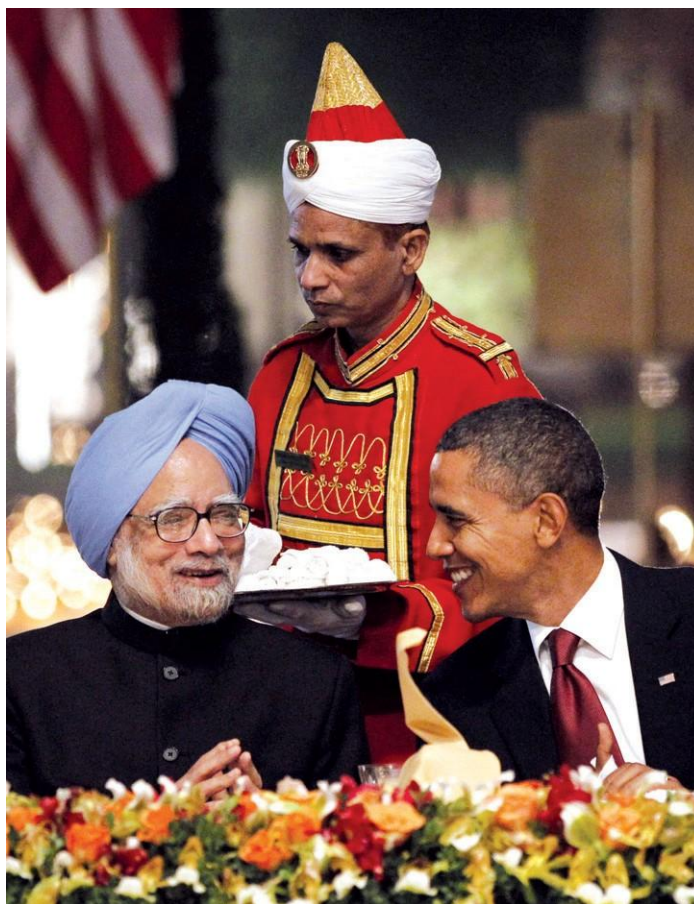
The United States was attempting to use this as a lever to get India to submit to full scope inspections/safeguards. Of course, India was not willing to do that.

So, Bush broke through all of that and, of course, the non-proliferation community hated it, and opposed it. He didn't flinch and I think he was right.

Does that mean that all of a sudden (*between*) India and the United States — remember the old expression during the 1950s *Hindi-Chini bhai bhai* — that there was going to be *Hindi-Yunkee* (*Yankee, Bouton cutely uses an Indian pronunciation*) *bhai bhai*?

That was a naïve, at best, expectation.

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JASON REED/REUTERS

President Barack Obama, right, with Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh in New Delhi in November 2010.

Marshall Bouton believes 'You can't have a big idea every four years.'

The principal task of the Obama term, he says, was to consolidate the India-US relationship that had been so transformed between 1998 and 2008.

In the 10 years since Bill Clinton went to India, the United States-India relationship was transformed more fully, than any other relationship other than the US-China relationship between 1971-1972 and 1981-1982.

And that's saying something.

So I think they both get credit.

**What does it take to be a specialist on India? What special skills does it require?**

I do not know that it requires special skills.

It requires a sense of connection.

This is true for anybody who specializes — whether in scholarship or in other walks of life — in a particular country, or particular region.

At some point in your life, your career, you form a connection to the place and it is usually a multi-stranded connection, part intellectual, part personal, part emotional. It is part a values issue.

I was socialized early in my first two or three experiences in

India and formed that connection in a very important and lasting fashion for me.

To follow a country — I want to hasten to add here I am a follower; it is India that is doing things, I am the follower. You need to kind of go through the ups and downs; you can't be a fair-weather friend.

I think with India you need to have an openness about it. Because the place, the society, the culture, the way it operates, they are all so complex and varied and deep that you have to be constantly open.

People sometimes ask me — people who don't know India — they say, 'Well, you must know so much about India.' I say: "Look, I feel I don't know much more than I did when I first landed 49 years ago."

**Often when you think you know India, is it a mirage?**

Yes.

**You know India in a way that I don't know India.**

**Is there always a moment in your relationship with India when you realize you do not know India still?**

All the time.

What you develop over time is more...

**Expect the unexpected?**

That too. But you also develop a set of instincts about — and I use the word advisedly — I think they are more instincts than intellectual frameworks.

Maybe it is a little of both for how you interpret things.

I have certain convictions about the place. And those are abiding. Those are developed over five decades involvement with India. Those are kind of bed rock convictions I have about the place that are huge oversimplifications of the reality of India, but for me they are pan holds on how I think about it.

I would say I never feel like — *how can you?* — I know India. That's a ridiculous statement.

In my 10 years here (*at the Chicago Council of Global Affairs, where he has been president*) I have had even less time to be there and follow it.

I have got a whole library of books in our home in Massachusetts, which is going to be our principal residence when we leave here. Those are just the books I haven't read in the last 12 years (*on India*) that I have been studiously collecting so that I can start reading again.

**What has been your greatest contribution to a vibrant US-India relationship?**

Let me change the question, (*what has been*) my participation in the relationship, rather than my contribution to it.

Number one, I am part of a generation of Americans whose life experience included early in our lives *this* involvement with India.

There has been nothing like it starting with the Peace Corps. Of course, Mrs Gandhi got rid of the Peace Corps (*from India*).

There were lots of us who went on to make the study of India a professional pursuit. So, that created a cohort of Americans, of my age and younger, who became involved with India early on in their lives and throughout their lives followed it and participated in it in some way and sought to contribute to it in a variety of ways.





Secondly, I was able to — in a very marginal fashion — contribute to trying to start the rebuilding of the relationship after the trauma of Bangladesh and the estrangement that set in after that, which was partly the result of the mistakes made in US policy, partly the result of the way those were manipulated politically on the Indian side.

That caused the two sides to pull away from each other, including very much on the private sector. There had been a fair amount of private sector involvement, including business involvement in India in the 1950s and 1960s.

By the mid-1970s, and certainly by the late 1970s, that was gone because (of) the political reactions to the Bangladesh crisis, Mrs. Gandhi's suspicions, her anti-American rhetoric. Not that that did not happen before. LBJ (*President Lyndon Baines Johnson*) would stop PL480 food shipments to India every time Mrs Gandhi criticized the Vietnam War.

So the two sides really moved apart from each other, including in the private sector. Young scholars like me couldn't get in. The scholarship began to be interrupted. The study of India became a less attractive field to many by the mid-1970s. Then in the course of all that (*India*) threw IBM and Coke out.

They were the sort of iconic American companies — one on the consumer side, one on the capital goods side. The for-profit private sector dimension of the relationship virtually disappeared. Very few businesses stayed in India through that time. So, I guess with the sub-commission we were starting the re-building.

My mantra, my metaphor, about this relationship has been that the India-US relationship is like a ship — a sailing ship.

It has been a ship without ballast, without the ballast of private sector involvement between the two societies, business involvement, universities, museums, non-governmental organizations, people-to-people exchange, you name it.

Very little of that, for two societies so similar in their values.

Every time the political storms blew up over some issue between the two governments, this little ship would get blown up onto the rocks, because it had no ballast.

After three or four years the ship would be pulled off the rocks and limp back out to sea until the next storm came along to blow it back up on the rocks again.

So, there needed to be private sector ballast put in the ship of India-US relations. That is what I think began to happen all over again in the 1990s.

The reforms made it possible for American companies to go back.

The animus following Bangladesh and all the other political alienations of the 1970s began to dim. After the (*nuclear*) tests all the think tanks in Washington suddenly discovered India; organizations like the Asia Society never forgot it.

Between 1992 and today we now see a substantial private sector relationship that continues even when the governments aren't too happy with each other.

One of my worries now is what is happening economically



Marshall Bouton with his wife Barbara and children outside her childhood home in Bangarpet, Karnataka.

COURTESY: MARSHALL BOUTON

## The Indiawallah

in India, and policy-wise as well.

If we lose the American business in India in any substantial measure we will be going backwards.

I feel the same way about the need to have a framework for American universities and other organizations to be in India in a way that serves India's interests, but also supports the relationship over time.

**So, your role has been sort of to keep track of these threads? Helping to weave the threads.**

Of private sector connections between the two societies in my role in the sub-commission on culture, in my role at the Ford Foundation, in my role at the embassy, in my role at the Asia Society.

I feel those are profoundly important. I spent most of my career working with private sector institutions that seek to inform and engage Americans in understanding about other parts of the world.

Because the nature of our society is that if private citizens or private institutions aren't somehow engaged in the relationship, the governments can come and go in the way they like, but you are never really going to have a sustainable relationship.

That's even more true of India, because of the character of Indian society.

**How is the India-US relationship progressing now?**

**What has been President Obama's contribution?**

**Does he understand the nuances of the relationship?**

The principal task in the first Obama term was to consolidate because the India-US relationship had been so transformed between 1998 and 2008, between Clinton and Bush and on the Indian side with the Vajpayee-BJP government and Manmohan Singh and the UPA (*United Progressive Alliance*) government.

Even governments — especially governments — have to stop and take a breath.

There was a lot of concern, right after the President came to office, that he was not paying enough attention to India, that there was lack of appropriate priority being given to India. I was never concerned about that.

Everybody said: What is the big idea the Obama Administration is bringing to the US-India relationship?

If every time was a time for a big idea, there wouldn't be such a thing as a big idea.

A big idea defines a time and then it is passed.

So, the big idea from that period — from 1998 to 2008 —





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was just the idea that these two democracies could actually be un-estranged, and that's what Bill Clinton started.

He demonstrated that the two societies could come to a point of mutual respect and potential affection.

And then the Bush Administration brought the second big idea — which was to normalize the nuclear relationship and in so doing, to put the overall political relationship on a better path for the future.

You can't have a big idea every four years. So, I think the consolidation was right.

I think in its second term the (Obama) Administration *does* need to pay some closer attention to the relationship.

I am concerned that with everything else on the President's plate, domestically as well as internationally — the Middle East is once again in turmoil — I am worried about it getting appropriate attention.

**So, there is not enough stoking of the fire at this point?**

The fire is burning, but it is unattended. It is not being stoked.

**And there is a new Secretary of State.**

Secretary (John F) Kerry is going to India this month.

I don't necessarily take it that John Kerry will neglect India compared to Hillary Clinton.

Clearly, Hillary Clinton has a connection with India going back to the early 1990s, an affection for the place and is held in high regard there.

During her time as secretary she spent a lot of time in India and deepened those relationships.

I am not yet ready to judge how the Kerry term will compare to that. I think the larger and more important question is: Will the Obama Administration have the ability to focus on the relationship?

Especially, given the two elections, first the one here, and then the one in India, have basically taken two years out of the realm of possible attention. Then we will be closing in on the 2016 election.

**Why do we no longer see India experts like yourself, who got to know the country better than we do?**

**Why do they not make your kinds of India experts any more?**

I was privileged to be part of a generation of people who had that opportunity, because of the Peace Corps and similar programs and because of, frankly, the US government presence — the number of Fulbrights, the number of exchange scholars, the number of AFS (*American Field Service*) students who were going to India at the time.

Those opportunities have diminished for a variety of reasons.

I would say going back to our conversation about the private sector ballast and the ship of India-US relations, that is still missing — the real people to people (*relationships*), particularly young (*people*).

Young Indians come here to go to school and they know America. They know America through lots of ways. One way or another, they have gotten here as young people.

That is very much not as common among young Americans. Programs like the one I participated in or high school



Marshall Bouton at the Chicago Council on Global Affairs. He made his expertise available when American policy makers began to reassess the relationship with India.

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exchange programs like the American Field Service, which I went on to go to France in 1959, (*don't exist for India*).

For instance, if there were more universities that had stay abroad exchange programs (*by which*) you could study in India for a year, either they have campuses, or they have joint ventures with Indian universities and students can go and study there, the way they do in Europe.

I know lots of young Americans who have studied in China for a year or half a year. It's embedded in them. (*They are*) injected with an interest in China that will last their lifetime.

They don't send students to India. Very hard to place students in India for a year of school. There needs to be more of that.

My experience is that when young Americans go to India, four out of five of them get it in their blood for the rest of their lives.

**What are your plans after your retire from the Chicago Council of Global Affairs? Is India part of that picture?**

Will India be a very central part of the next chapter of my professional and personal life?

Yes, for sure.

I am going to have other professional involvements, but the one that is going to be my principal vehicle for re-engagement with India will be my role as the Senior Fellow at the Center for Advanced Study of India at the University of

Pennsylvania.

I was chairman of that advisory board for nine years. CASI is an absolutely unique institution in the United States. It is the only university-based research program on contemporary Indian politics, society, economy, international relations anywhere in the United States.

I hope to find other ways to be involved with India — to go back and forth.

My real dream and hope is that, over the next several years, my wife and I will be able to live in India for three months a year every year.

August 14, 2014 will be the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of my first arrival in India. I plan to be on the tarmac in Delhi in August 2014!

**What has India added to your life?**

(*Sighs exaggeratedly*) Do you want to start the interview all over again?!

An enormous richness, a passion, I am sure you can discern.

I have a passion for the place. Ultimately, our lives — if we don't have some passions in our lives — are pretty dry stuff.

India has given me a source of endless intellectual engagement, but I really want to underscore this: The personal relationships, the friendships I have developed in India over 50 years have been far and away the greatest reward I have had.

To me, that has been the most constant and stimulating and enjoyable and fulfilling aspect of my relationship for five decades.

I count that very, very, high among the great pleasures of my life. •

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