

Over \$490,000 Raised at AIF Gala

■ The success of the sixth Southern California charity gala organized by the American India Foundation (AIF) at the Omni Hotel in downtown Los Angeles on Nov. 15 was evident from the closing remarks of the CEO, Sanjay Sinho when he announced that close to \$490,000 had been collected and the count was increasing. It was thus indeed a rousing finish to a spectacular event which had gathered together with the aim of helping the needy in India.



BY K.B.NAIR

LOS ANGELES, CA - At the event with the theme "India Rising" two of India's most recognizable faces were on hand to receive the year's AIF's Spirit of India Awards, tabla maestro Ustad Zakir Hussain and actor Anil Kapoor, both of whom were gracious in accepting their respective awards, but quickly acknowledging that it was not they who should be honored but AIF and its volunteers who have devoted their time to improving the lot of their less privileged countrymen.

Addressing the audience Hussain said that the Indians in the US are the ones who 'made the bus' and are doing well, but it is not enough to sit back and enjoy the success. He added it is important to look back and understand how they made their way up the ladder and then help others to see the way through and shine the

torch so they can also take similar steps to a better life. To the accompaniment of a storm of applause, he announced that he was ready at any time to perform at any benefit for AIF. He proceeded to congratulate Anil Kapoor and express his appreciation of the performance of the band in attendance, Outta Control Punjabi.

Kapoor said he had devoted the major part of his life to the field of entertainment but after having made, for selfish reasons in the hope of getting a meaty role, a Public Service Announcement Plan India at the request of Govind Nihlani he found his focus shifting and what gives him the most satisfaction today is not the awards and accolades but being the ambassador for the movement. He added that it is the volunteers who should be applauded as his role is just a facilitator as he had done when he had connected Fox with Plan India for arranging a gala charity dinner for 'Slumdog' which ended with Boyle and the studio not only making substantial monetary contributions but with the appointing of the organization as custodians of the funds set aside for the education and housing of the children in the movie.

Hussain was introduced by Vice Chair Navneet Chugh in his inimitable humorous style, touching on his own forays into tabla playing which came to a dramatic halt at his very first public performance at a house kirtan session. The award was presented by Gala Chair B.U.Patel. Hollywood superstar Keifer Sutherland in introducing

Kapoor stated what attracted him and the staff to Kapoor is his unbelievable grace and kindness. He went on to say his friend is the emblem of a Rising India, 'a self made man who has shaped his own destiny and a role model for millions of young Indians.' The privilege of presenting him with the award went to Vice Chair Manu Shah.

Earlier, the evening had commenced with a quick welcome statement from Vice Chair Tania Kapoor who made way to the emcees for the evening Noreen DeWulf and Sendhil Ramamurthy. The pair fell quickly in the groove and for the rest of the evening proceeded to keep the function rolling at a brisk pace, their dialogue alternating between serious observations and light hearted banter while they urged audience members to donate generously.

Film star Tanisha Mukherjee also appeared briefly on stage when she remarked that anyone charitably disposed will go a long way in life and she fully endorses AIF's education program as that is the way to tackle any important issue. The younger crop of Indians in the entertainment industry were also at the event which included Rupak Ginn, Kunal Nayyar, Janina Gavankar, Sunil Malhotra, Ravi Patel, Geeta Patel, Sunkrish Bala and Kavi Ladnier.

The opening speech was made by Gala Chair Vandana Tilak who made a fervent appeal to all to share what they think they deserved for their own endeavors with those who they believe deserve more. If they thought a child in India deserved an education, toys and 3 meals a day, she said they can make it happen. She added the key factor was the power of intent and asked listeners to stop seeking and start searching in their hearts instead to make a donation and watch those intentions come true.

Lata Krishnan, Founding President and Vice Chair took the congregation on a journey through her 8 years with AIF. She informed the audience about the various programs of the organization, one of the most

important being the Digital Equalizer program which takes technology to underprivileged children. Others include education focused on marginalized migrant children who have no identity, vocational training for poor women and unemployed youth and its Fellowship programs which has so far sent over 220 young Americans to India for a few months to work with local NGOs. In its 8 years, she said, the AIF had succeeded, through its association with industry leaders, State Govts and NGOs, to build a robust infrastructure and evolve innovative methods to make philanthropy work.

CEO Sanjay Sinho in his concluding remarks announced that Ravi and Vandana Tilak have joined the Trustee Council and thanked the celebrity guests and hosts for their support. He also individually expressed his gratitude to Navneet & Ritu Chugh, Nimish & Nancy Patel, Tania Kapoor, Dulari Amin, Azad Oommen and DJ Rishi.

Speaking for the AIF's Junior Chapter which has collected over \$70,000 for its education program, Aditi Ghai expressed that in her time with abandoned and orphan children in India she grasped the difference that the American children had made and can make financially, emotionally and psychologically in the lives of their poorer counterparts back home.

Caterers for the event was Chakra Cuisine and as guests enjoyed the Indian meal served, comedian Paul Varghese entertained them with a standup routine filled with ethnic Indian situations. Throughout the evening the group Outta Control Punjabi livened proceedings with its music and cut loose as soon as official business was done when the invitees rushed to the dance floor for some spirited bhangra.