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Indians dominate U.S. patent ranks in 2006, study says

Group grabbed one in 10 patents granted last year

By JULIE MASIS

While Indians make up less than one percent of the American population, more than one out of every 10 inventions patented in the United States in 2006 had an owner or a co-owner with an Indian name, new research by a team of scientists at Harvard Law School, New York University and Duke University revealed. Of the 42,019 international patent applications filed through the U.S. receiving office in 2006, 13.7 percent — or 5,761 applications — had an inventor or a co-inventor with an Indian-heritage name, according to data the researchers obtained after analyzing the World Intellectual Property Organization database.

Researchers also found that people of Indian origin came up with more inventions in 2006 than eight years ago: The number of international patents filed by people with Indian heritage names more than doubled from 2,225 in 1998 to 5,761 in 2006. The percentage share of people with Indian-heritage names also increased — from 9.5 percent of total patents in 1998 to 13.7 percent in 2006.

With assistance from native Indian graduate students, the authors of the study analyzed every single patent that was filed through the U.S. receiving office in 1998 and in 2006 for authors who had Indian-heritage names. If one of the people who filed the patent had an Indian name, the whole patent was considered to have an Indian contributor.

Singh and Patel were the two most commonly encountered Indian names in the patent applications, according to Harvard Law School researcher Ben Rissing, who worked on the study. “It is probably due to increased contributions of foreign nationals residing in the United States,” Rissing said. “It suggests (that) more companies in the United States are hiring workers from India.”

A CLOSER LOOK

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Boston-based attorney Gaytri Kachroo, who specializes in international corporate law and is currently writing a book about outsourcing to India, said the increase in the number of people of Indian origin who file patents in the United States is attributable to the movement of talented labor to the United States for work and immigration, as well as to increased confidence in the Indian community.

“They’re learning they are just as good as the American guys. They come up with as many ideas, if not more,” Kachroo said. “I think the environment is different. There is more confidence now than there was 10 years ago. You can sense it in India, and I think you can really sense it in the Indian community here.”

Kachroo said that she personally knows of two Massachusetts Institute of Technology graduates of Indian origin who invented a new drug to treat Deep Vein Thrombosis about seven years ago, and started their own pharmaceutical company shortly thereafter. The founders of the company are currently doing research for other drugs, she said, though she would not reveal the name of the drug or the company.

Overall, the authors of the study determined that Indian inventors filed the most patents in the field of “preparations for medical, dental or toilet purposes,” with 922 patents; “electric digital data processing” with 638 patents; transmission of digital information with 534 patents; and semiconductor devices with 381 patents.

The new research study, which came out in August, expands on a previous report, in which the contributions of Indian citizens to the number of international patents that were filed through the U.S. receiving office were studied.

The name-heritage analysis was necessary to truly evaluate the contributions of Indian immigrants to patent-filings because without looking at the names the study team would not have been able to obtain information on immigrants from India who became U.S. citizens, Rissing explained.

The previous study found that foreign citizens who were residing in the United States were inventors or co-inventors on more than a quarter of all international patent applications filed in the United States in 2006.

This was an increase from 1998, when foreign inventors living in the U.S. were responsible for only 7.6 percent of all patent applications. Indian and Chinese inventors are the two immigrant groups that file the greatest number of international patents through the U.S. receiving office, Rissing said, although Chinese inventors are still outdoing those with Indian-heritage names, according to the study. In 2006, 16.8 percent of international patent applications from the United States had an inventor or a co-inventor with a Chinese-heritage name.