

Indians head home in 'brain gain'

By John Sudworth
BBC News, Delhi

For much of the last century India suffered a "brain drain". Generations of Indians set off in search of a better life in other countries. Today, an estimated 25 million people of Indian origin live overseas. But could the tide be turning?

"My dad was against me moving back to India," Manish Amin tells me in his new flat in Delhi where he lives with his wife and two sons.

Three decades ago Manish's parents moved from India to the UK. He has just moved back.

"My dad's idea was that everyone wants to get away from India", Manish says. "But now he's seen the big high rise flats, the big shopping malls, even he's amazed. You get Marks and Spencer, Debenhams, everything's here now."

Manish has set up his own online travel company. He's already taking 200 bookings a day.

India's breakneck economic growth seems to be enticing the country's scattered diaspora back to the motherland.

In the sixties when people left India the buzz word was 'brain-drain'. We see it now as 'brain-gain'."

Mr Gurucharan, Ministry of Overseas Indian Affairs

In Bangalore, one of India's booming high-tech centres, an estimated 35,000 overseas Indians have set up home.

In the last few years people born overseas who are able to prove their Indian descent have been able to apply for a special immigration status.

The Overseas Citizenship Certificate provides many of the benefits of full citizenship without the need to give up a foreign passport.

Mr Gurucharan, Joint Secretary in the Ministry of Overseas Indian Affairs, says they are proving popular.

"In the last six months or so we've issued over forty thousand Overseas Citizenship Certificates, and I believe that this trend will grow," he says.

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Career prospects

India's healthcare system is benefiting. Doctors who have trained in overseas health services are finding faster career advancement.

Dr Shabnam Singh recruits doctors for a private hospital.

"The Indian private sector facilities are at a par, and dare I say it, in some cases better than what is available in the west," she says.

"In the last six years I would say that from a trickle at first there is now a constant flow of people

wanting to relocate back home."

The Indian government does not have the detailed figures to prove whether "reverse migration" is increasing at a significant rate.

Many of those applying for the Overseas Citizenship status may simply want the convenience of visa-free travel, without intending to relocate to India.

But there can be no doubt that many young people of Indian origin no longer see the best opportunities as being in the West.

Lifestyle choice

Ferena Scott was born and raised in Glasgow. She now has a successful career as an actress in Bollywood.

"There's something for everyone here," she says.

"And because you have a luxurious lifestyle you can enjoy yourself more."

It is an attraction some find hard to resist. The yawning gap between the new rich and the old poor means the wealthy in India have a very high standard of living.

When I was young, growing up in the UK, we used to play football in the streets. Kids can't do that there now
Returned Indian Manish Amin

There is also the emotional bond. Scott says that despite being born in the UK she has always felt a strong tie to India.

"As a young kid in Britain people would look at me and ask me where I was from. I'd say, 'Scotland', and they'd say, 'yes, but where are you really from?'

"Somewhere at the back of your mind you're wondering about this country that your parents came from and wondering if maybe you belong there."

Despite its so-called "economic miracle", India still has shocking levels of poverty, a burdensome bureaucracy and crumbling infrastructure. But many overseas Indians feel the country's time has come.

"When I was young, growing up in the UK, we used to play football in the streets," says Manish Amin.

"Kids can't do that there now. Here though, there's open ground, the kids can play by themselves. I think the main thing for us was just to have that comfortable life here."

Story from BBC NEWS:

http://news.bbc.co.uk/go/pr/fr/-/2/hi/south_asia/5290494.stm

Published: 2006/08/27 12:41:26 GMT

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