

Citizen's Republic

First there was the brain drain and now, thanks to a new, resurgent India, there is a reverse trend where highly educated Indians who left to live out their dreams have come back with dreams of a cleaner, greener, prosperous India. These are driven, passionate people who are out to make the country a citizens republic in every sense of the word, says Marianne de Nazareth

In the not too distant past, the worry was, India was losing all the best brains of the country to the West. All the top Indian doctors and engineers headed West to find their fortune, never to return to the place of their birth. It was an accepted fact and the exodus was colossal, with the country losing all its talent, big time. Those countries offered great jobs, a superb infrastructure, the quality of life was far superior, everything was rosier out there and so people left to live out their dreams. Today, there is a definite reverse trend happening and not only are highly educated Indians coming back home to India, they are returning and voluntarily giving up the 'good life' they found there. Instead, they have returned to live their dream, of giving back to the country of their birth. It is a passion that drives them, otherwise what could explain their burning desire to give of their time and energy to the country that nurtured them?

"I think it's important for people to come back home to their roots. I needed to come back, so that my country can benefit from what I have learned," said Dinesh Katru one of the hundreds of young software engineers who came back from California. "I did originally leave India because I could not bear the corruption and pollution here, but I am coming back to help control it. We have to change our mindset and realise this is our country and we must use our education to help ourselves and not someone else and some other country."

Building castles

Bhagya Rangachar, a couple of years ago, was better known only as the sister of Captain Gopinath of Deccan Aviation Systems, who had come home to India after having spent decades in the US. "I did not plan on coming back," explains Bhagya, "I got married when I was 18 and went away in the 1960s to the US. There, I did a degree in Computer Science in Maryland and lived in the US for close to 30 years with my family. In '97 a window opened allowing me to come home for a year and I brought my youngest daughter Radhika with me. I stayed in an apartment that I rented in Basavanagudi and there I saw the construction workers' children, attending a makeshift school. One day I went along with them to the school they attended. There I saw kids of security guards, flower sellers, servants and construction workers attending a sort of

school. "

"The year 1997 was when the boom was happening in Bangalore, there was money everywhere and yet these kids had nothing. By the sixth grade most of them were pulled out of school by their parents to work and earn to support the family. There was a stirring inside me to do something, but what? I was clear I wanted to start a support system for these kids, not a school. I was determined not to start anything which I would dump in a year when I return to the US. That is more cruel than leaving them where they are. "

"As you can see, I never returned and the programme took on a life of its own and evolved to what it is today. I signed a MOU with the department of education and began with a couple of trustees. Today the institution that I run called Love Castles Trust (CLT) in Jakkur is a set up to strengthen the already existing educational system, for children in underserved communities. I set up the CLT after school learning centre and the children come after school, to enjoy a self directed learning experience . I have mentors or facilitators, so the children do not feel they are back in school. The children do projects on flash animation and corporates help me by sending their executives to do community service. They then match grants with the number of hours logged in which helps fund CLT."

Walk into Bhagya's institution and you will be swamped by the energy of the village kids, who enjoy every minute of their time spent there, in surroundings which can match the best facilities in the city.