

'Reverse brain drain swifter'

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AHMEDABAD: Why is that Indian academia trained in the US is coming back to India so frequently? Has India become more favourable for them in terms of growth? Similar questions on the concept of 'reverse brain drain' were discussed at the Indian Institute of Technology, Gandhinagar (IIT-Gn) recently. Dr Meghna Sabharwal, assistant professor at the [University of Texas, Dallas](#), shared her ongoing study, funded by the National Science Foundation, with students and faculty of IIT-Gn and many statistics and perspectives were exchanged.

The study, 'Should I stay, should I leave? Reverse migration of India-born scientists and engineers' threw light on why academicians are opting to return. "The trend became noticeable after recession. Our preliminary survey findings show that Indian scientists and engineers are returning due to increasing career and growth opportunities in India, improved funding, job security, family and cultural ties and cumbersome immigration policies," she explained.

Foreign-born faculty and researchers contribute enormously to America's economic growth, scientific discoveries, technological innovations and most of these scholars come from India, China, Taiwan, Japan and Korea. But now a lot of Indians trained in the US are returning after acquiring PhD or post-doctoral degrees, some of them most successful.

Forty five per cent of the survey respondents indicated that they returned due to career prospects. They find better growth opportunities, flexibility in type of research, ease in availability of funds and job security in India. 36% returned for family reasons; taking care of aging parents, family ties and raising children, while 32% returned due to cultural ties with most 'not fitting in the US'. Many also wanted to contribute to India.

"A good 27% returned due to immigration issues, with their educated spouses unable to get work there. This is known as brain waste. Constant renewal of H1-B visa, J-1 visa restrictions added to the factors," said Sabharwal, who investigated these findings along with Professor Roli Varma, University of New Mexico.

However, for academia that opts to stay back, the reasons are mainly poor visibility of scientists, lack of hi-tech labs and industry-university-government partnerships, lesser salaries and corruption in India.