

WHEN Vivek Chari, now 28, applied for a seat in the University of Michigan to study industrial operations and engineering, he wrote in his statement of purpose that he wanted to come to the US so he could bring something back to India.

"At that time, I didn't know exactly what I'd bring back," he says.

Upon graduating in 2003, Chari returned to Chennai and joined TAG Corp., a family firm that enables the testing of conductors for Indian and global firms such as Hydro-Quebec, a leading energy distributor in North America.

"I spent the first two years just observing and listening. Only after my dad and my uncle felt confident that I knew what I was doing did they let me implement my ideas," he says.

He had ideas such as how the production process could be made more efficient.

"One of the very important things I learned at the University of Michigan was waste minimization. We (TAG) were literally flushing money away by holding inventories for four to five months," he explains. "I reduced that to one month."

Today, Chari manages a 250-strong workforce and has more ideas up his sleeve. "But implementing something new in a small company like ours is not easy. You have to prove to your employees that it works before you convince them to do it," he says.

When asked if he regretted not working in the US, Chari says "No way. Coming back to India was the best decision I made."

Rakesh Raghunathan, 25, is poised to graduate with a MBA from the University of Hartford this year. "I definitely want to go back because the quality of life in India is much better," he says.

Raghunathan has no plans of joining his father's software company in Chennai. "Maybe I will someday, but not now. I want to work elsewhere and see how things are outside."

Sheetal Asuri, 29, returned to Hyderabad in 2004 after graduating with an MS in electrical engineering from Tennessee Technological University.

"The main reason was my family," says Asuri, who works for IBM. "But it's very competitive. Those days are gone where people look up to graduates from the US. Employers value experience. At the end of the day, my employer expects me to get my job done."

Chari, Raghunathan and Asuri represent a growing ilk of Indian graduates from the US

India Calling

With the increased salary levels and better quality of jobs, especially in the technology sector, the trend of returning to India has gone up. And the growing interest of students is spurring universities to come up with more India-focused programs, reports SUJATA SRINIVASAN

"Their interests range from microfinance and solar energy to starting a hedge fund for the Indian market," he explains. "I know a lot



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of students who are going to India after graduation. Some go to get experience and if it doesn't work out, they will come back. It's an asset in the US job market if people have worked in India and understand the culture."

The growing interest from students is spurring universities to come up with more India-focused programs.

"So many of our students are interested in an experience in India," says Prof Sridhar Narayanan of Stanford University. So beginning last fall, a batch of MBA students from Stanford visited the Indian Institute of Management (IIM), Bangalore, on a recently formed exchange program.

"Our students teamed up with IIM students for an internship at Narayana Hrudayala (a 1,000-bed for-profit state-of-the-art hospital that provides free treatment to the poor) on the possibilities of offering affordable health insurance to the people of Karnataka."

And it's not just Indians in the US who want to intern in India. Originally from Mexico, Alejandro Basterra, 31, is set to graduate

with an MBA from Darden School of Business, University of Virginia. Basterra chose to do his internship at Infosys in Bangalore.

"Coming from Mexico, also a developing country, I thought the experience of working for one of the most recognized companies in Asia would be great," he said. "I think Infosys culture is great

and I loved India."

The firm offered Basterra a job with Infosys Consulting in the US. "They offered a signing bonus, a pretty competitive salary and an annual bonus. But I turned it down because I wanted to go back to my home country," he says.

"However I would love to go back to India some time. Great things are happening in India right now, so it is a very dynamic environment." Darden Prof Rajkumar Venkatesan says more Indian companies are recruiting MBA graduates from the US. "Infosys began on-campus recruitment last year," he adds.

But getting a job in India is not exactly a piece of cake.

"There is market segmentation in both the US and India for MBA candidates. Students who graduate from mid-level and tier-three

business schools in the US face tough competition in India from students graduating from, say, the IIMs," says Prof Bharat Kolluri, University of Hartford. That's because top Indian companies are looking for top tal-

ent. Prof Pradeep K. Chintagunta of Chicago University's Graduate School of Business (GSB) says India has "a ready environment for people to add value in the Indian context from their training here."

People like GSB graduate Jason H. McDannold, executive vice-president in-charge of the HC Kothari Group's petrochemical business in Chennai. "So far it's been an incredibly challenging and rewarding experience to lead an Indian company in India," he says.

McDannold relocated to India in 2007, two years after graduating from GSB, during which time he worked in the US. He was an entrepreneur for several years prior to obtaining his MBA.

His decision to work in India was driven, in part, by his Indian wife Alka.

"Through the Chicago GSB alumni network, I had lined up interviews with about 16 companies in India and in 2007 I toured India to evaluate the opportunities. One of my professors facilitated an introduction to the chair-

Americans are currently going to areas of the world where the entrepreneurial spirit is quite strong, and where careers, especially for young people, are open to talent. In the age of globalization, it is relatively easy for an educated American to live in India because of similarities in work ethic, language, and the ability to tap into Western cultural mainstreams via the Internet, Sky TV, iPod, etc

Jack R. Wennersten

Author of *Leaving America: The New Expatriate Generation*

man of the Kothari Group. The chairman and I had a series of conversations about the vision he has for the firm, his challenges and potential solutions. These conversations evolved into an offer for me to join."

McDannold says he was recruited to help restructure and change the Kothari Group from a 20th century Indian conglomerate into a 21st century global competitor.

"Without a doubt, the University of Chicago's emphasis on pragmatic application of theory and value-driven execution allowed me to come to India with a conceptual tool-kit that I could apply from the day one. Since joining, we've implemented a number of strategic and operational changes throughout the company as we prepare to double in size and service the global market on an entirely new scale," he explains.

And the lifestyle matches the job satisfaction, he points out.

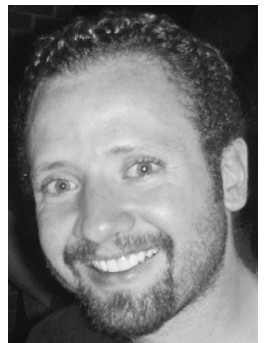
"My wife and I can exercise regularly and spend time together as a family—a rarity in the States where live-in help is expensive and careers often get in the way of quality time. Every morning the servants make fresh juice and lay out the newspaper for me. The driver then takes me to the club where I work out with personal trainers. In the afternoons, the driver brings a hot lunch to the office from home."

Jack R. Wennersten, author of *Leaving America: The New Expatriate Generation*, estimates that by the end of the decade, 10 million Americans, representing an estimated \$136 billion in wages, will be living and working overseas.

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Individuals who are motivated by social development spur part of the relocation to India.

Upon graduating from The Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy at Tufts University in 2006 with an advanced degree in environmental resource policy, Neeraj Doshi joined the Cambridge, Massachusetts-based Small scale sustainable Infrastructure Development fund (S3IDF), a non-profit that implements small-scale infrastructure provision such as lighting, energy, water and sanitation in remote areas of southern India.

In 2007, Doshi moved back to India to spearhead an environmental initiative focused on supporting sustainable and locally rooted projects in S3IDF's focus areas. "I came to the US to gain some knowledge and to eventually use my skills for the benefit of (Indian) society. So, I moved back to contribute in my little way after living in the US for over three years," he says.

Prof Walter Andersen of South Asian programs at Johns Hopkins University says there is an increasing trend among graduating students to work in the field of social development. "Many of our students do internship in India typically for NGOs. There's a greater sense of idealism now than in the past," he says.



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universities who are choosing to return to India to either work for family-owned firms, public corporations or start their own ventures.

"The trend (at Berkeley) of going back to India has increased in the last two years because the economy is growing faster compared to the US. So salary levels and the quality of jobs, especially in the technology sector, are going up," says Prof Ganesh Iyer, Haas School of Business, University of California, Berkeley.

Prof Sunil Gupta of Harvard University says that students talk to him all the time about starting companies and launching products in India.

