

Deserters and dreamers



Why do they abandon India?

Those who go to America to create Hotmail and Junglee, design the Pentium processor and power computing companies to worldwide success.

Here in India, those who leave are either envied or despised. Considered smart to have got out of a country ‘...with no future’ or traitors betraying a nation that has given them its best.

So why do they desert? Usually, because we make them.

Yes, most of those who forsake their native land do so for the self-centred reason of finding a more materially fulfilling life. But there are others to whom the dollar fortunes in stock options do not matter. What they want is to see their dreams come true. But sadly, fragile dreams cannot be sustained only on the intellect. They need a supportive environment.

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The United States of America leverages brilliance not because of the economy, but because of a favourable social environment—friends, family and social institutions.

When Bill Gates dropped out of Harvard, he had no guarantee of success. The odds were more that he would have failed in his attempt and died in anonymity. For a near certainty of passable achievement, he probably should have become an accountant. But the point is that the environment was supportive of his extravagant dream.

But a young Indian who has ambition in his heart and the next Hotmail in his head, is singularly unfortunate. Assorted relatives will assemble to talk him out of his foolishness, alternating between the emotional cajoling about the state of his mother’s heart and the threat of withdrawing the father’s financial support. ‘Wise’ parents will scoff and ‘well-wishing’ friends will jeer at the outrageousness of his hopes.

The business-minded will ask ‘What will you contribute?’ No, your outstanding intelligence, unstinting hard work and unquestioned sincerity are not enough. For commerce demands numbers, and anything that cannot be expressed in them is worthless.

So now we know why ‘our’ Sabeer Bhatia had to be in the USA to fulfill his dream. When genius is established, we rush to claim it as ours. But if we have to support it, we slink away.

If we trust in dreams, and believe in genius, we should prepare for victory, but expect no security. Because in life, mediocrity has many guarantees, but genius has none.

So make your choice.

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