

# HOME BOUND

They went to the US in search of better opportunities. Now many of the Non-Resident Gujaratis are returning home to settle here. And it is the changing face of Gujarat, which will celebrate its 51st birthday on Sunday, that is luring them back. Priya Adhyaru-Majithia tracks their journey and their transition from pardesi to desi again

What is hidden beneath the reverse brain drain phenomena? Does it signify that attraction towards the US — the dream destination is abating or that rising opportunities back home are working on the non-resident-Indians like a magnetic pull?

To understand the complex dynamics of what pushed many skilled natives firstly to move towards the US and secondly what in turn pulled them back to India, DNA caught up with a group of dual citizens. Many of them have uprooted themselves from the US after an extended stay of nearly a decade or more, and have again ventured to undergo the process of rehabilitation. And this time, they are trying to settle down in their own hometown.

Well, in nut shell, the humane face of the reverse brain drain has within it saga of emotional turmoil and struggle of those who went out in search of their dream and came back once they felt they have already achieved what they wanted and now they need different set up to enjoy what that they have achieved.

“Going to the US

was an act of beginning a journey to realise dreams while returning home - is an act to perpetuate the happiness that is derived once the dream transforms into reality,” said Nilesh Shah, founder of Return to Amdavad (RTA) club — an informal forum of about 30 NRGs who are in process of settling down back in the city, which they left a few decades ago.

For some going to the US was a necessity — as they wanted to pursue higher education and there were less options back home. While for some the move was fuelled with the desire for exposure to live in one of the most advanced countries of the globe. Some left hometown in search of better work prospects, while for some going to US was social compulsion that arose out of parental or peer pressures.

The factors that compelled, moved or lured these individuals to the country of opportunities may differ; but one thing that is common for all of them - is that they went to the US with clear intention to be back. “There was no opportunity back home when I left for the US in late 80s,” said Pranav Shah,

a chip-designer turned a real estate developer. “US gave me ample of opportunities and I worked with multinational giants including Intel for 17 years. Though kept pushing the deadline to return to India back, it was clear that may be extended but my stay in the US is temporary,” said Shah, a permanent resident of the US.

And Shah is not alone to feel this. “I went in search of opportunities hence had no regrets of leaving home town,” said Vipul Jani, IT consultant, “However, I keenly awaited infrastructural betterment back home and grabbed the first opportunity I got to be back to permanently settle down in Ahmedabad.”

And what lured them back home? Their common answer is - Family. Giving kids exposure to indigenous culture and school education back home as well as to reunite with ageing parents - were the common attractions which prompted their final move of ‘home-coming’.

## The story of how they went only to return...

### Factors that lured them to US

“The lack of opportunities in the late 80s back home pushed many like us towards the US - the land of hope and opportunities,” said Manish Sheladia, engineer. The prime factors that attracted them to the US were better education and work opportunities, comforts of materialism and the edge that foreign exposure would give them.

### What made them stay in the US for long?

“The X+1 syndrome kept them going. “I went to the US for higher education. And after the first agenda (X) was over, the plus one agenda of work opportunities lured me to stay longer,” said Nirav Shah, a chip designer who stayed in the US for more than 15 years. “I kept extending my stay in the US to get permanent residency. After getting PR, the lure of getting citizenship for my kids kept me in the US. And all these years, the work exposure, sheer professionalism, material comforts and healthcare infrastructure - the vital strengths of the US - kept me grounded there.

### Factors that lured them back home

“Family bonds pulled me back,” said Bankim Kumar, a software engineer and business analyst. “After getting permanent residency and citizenship for kids, the desire to give kids exposure to our culture and the competitive environment that prevails in local schools which can train them to survive anywhere in the globe, drove me back to my hometown,” he said.

Giving kids an ‘Indian bringing up’ and spending time with ageing parents were major factors that compelled him to return. Moreover, the developing infrastructure and opportunities back home facilitated their decision

### Compromises they have made

“Those who are back feel the compromises they have had to make are worth it. “Corruption, lack of civic sense and laidback culture - are the issues that hamper easy assimilation within society and work environment back home,” said Ramesh Kumar, IT professional. “Social taboos, family pressures as well as adjusting to the way women are expected to behave here are other concerns. Often, the wife has to compromise on this front,” pointed out Bankim Kumar. However, improving sense of professionalism, infrastructural development and better work prospects are what help them get adjusted in their motherland.

## HICCUPS IN THE DESI DREAM

While they are gung-ho about their motherland, they also have some critical points to make. They admit that Gujarat has changed for the better but here they list some of the several elements that needs to be improved...

### Corruption

Corruption is a major problem that hampers the growth of business here, said Rakesh Ray, a software engineer. “In the US, the tremendous sense of professionalism and almost zero corruption - both positives have merged into creating a kind of atmosphere that boosts rapid growth of both individual's career and that of a business house. However, the Anna Hazare phenomenon gives us hope that in the near future our motherland would be able to curb corruption.”

### Healthcare

Gujarat still lacks in alert healthcare facilities, in spite of the promising 108 service. Manish Sheladia, a computer engineer, said, “We cannot compete with the quality of healthcare facilities that the US offers. In case of an emergency, even if the patient is in one of the remotest regions in the US, medical help reaches within a few minutes and the patient is air-lifted. However, here, if I suffered a heart attack while driving on CG Road, it would take 30 minutes even to cross the road.”

### Me Culture v/s We Culture

There is complete lack of basic civic sense in the state, said Pranav Shah. “I would say a ‘Me Culture’ rules the state as everyone seems to think that they have the right to spit and pee in any corner and drive their vehicle the way they want. While in the US, they follow We Culture - people are sensitive to the needs and likes and dislikes of other members of society.”

### Chalta Hai, Hota Hai attitude

If Gujarat could adopt the professional commitment and dedication that prevails in the US, said Nirav Shah, then the state could be transformed into Global Gujarat - a state which would have all the right elements, latest healthcare, material comforts, advanced infrastructure, civic sense and respect for the dignity of others. “If we change a little, we can become a state that has the same standards as the US,” he said.



Some of the NRGs who chose to return. Pics: Piyush Patel



**Nilesh Shah**  
founder of Return to Amdavad club

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# A very Amdavadi take on Kat-Will hoopla



Prince William and his bride Catherine, Duchess of Cambridge, pose for an official photograph, with their bridesmaids and page boys, in the throne room at Buckingham Palace, in central London. —REUTERS

Paras K Jha LONDON

When I landed at Heathrow for my connecting flight to Newcastle upon Tyne on April 11, the first news I read in the newspaper was the announcement of the official list of invitees to the royal wedding of Prince William & Catherine Middleton. Almost everyday there was something new to learn about the wedding that took place almost three decades after the marriage of William's parents, Prince Charles and Lady Diana in July 1981.

The nation had celebrated two royal weddings - in 1986 and 1999, of Prince Andrew and Prince Edward - but the appeal and the magnetism of the marriage for the second line of succession to the British monarchy on April 29 simply outshone the previous ceremonies.

It was by good fortune that this correspondent was able to visit Westminster Abbey, venue of the historic wedding, before the thousand-year old church, which has a close relationship with the British monarchy, was shut to the public till April 30. The volunteers and staff of the abbey were busy managing visitors while readying the place for the wedding. The church is a world heritage site. It is the place where kings and queens of England have been crowned since 1066. It is also the burial place of around 3000 great men and women of British history including the nation's kings, queens, writers, poets, scientists, clerics, warriors, musicians, philosophers, politicians, artists, scientist Isaac Newton, Charles Darwin, novelist Charles Dickens, poet and writer Rudyard Kipling among others -- and the grave of the unknown warrior. The place is also embellished with statues of world famous personalities like William Shakespeare and martyr

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Martin Luther King Jr:

Thanks to media reports, most of the people in England and in other parts of the world who evinced interest in the wedding, already knew most of the popular aspects of the ceremony -- like the couple's dress design, the wedding ring makers, the cake makers, their hair stylists and so on...

However, interest in the royal affair soon turned euphoric. To fulfil their desire to be a spectator at one of the most celebrated marriages of the English royal family, people took up positions on the procession route from late night of April 28 itself. Many bus routes were affected and the underground railway was jam-packed with people eager to be as close as possible to the royal carriage. Many brought their children, hoisted on their shoulders, to experience the royal gala.