



## Homeward Bound

**Many Indian journalists in US are taking the ticket back home to be a part of the new emerging India**

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**Aseem Chhabra**



On Monday, Chhavi Sachdev is leaving for India — for good. Having lived in the US for 12 years — except for one year when she taught English in rural Poland — this 30-year-old print journalist is making a bold decision. She is taking up a position as a radio broadcaster in India, something she was not able to do in the US.



Chhavi Sachdev, who has packed her bags for India, will miss things like biking to office

“To be honest, all my friends have been hearing this refrain since I got here, which is that I will move back,” Sachdev says from her home in Boston. “I think I am a very adaptable person, and try and set up home wherever I am, but this has never been home.”

Indians in the US returning home is no longer big news. But Sachdev belongs to a small group of journalists who have been slowly heading back to India as the country opens up its media, especially the airwaves.

Recently a group of journalists from the US joined the newly-launched Mint newspaper. Those who returned to India included the paper’s editor Raju Narisetti (former managing editor of the European edition of The Wall Street Journal) and S Mitra Kalita (until recently with The Washington Post), the national editor. Each made the difficult choice and opted for the opportunity to be a part of the new emerging India.

“I always maintained that I will stay in America for love or for money,” Sachdev says. “But when I had neither, I would say what am I doing here? I should go back.”

“You get stuck in what my friends call comfortable mediocrity,” Sachdev adds. “You get used to the amenities.” And so for a while she made excuses about the things we take for granted in the US — WiFi and cable-Internet connection. And she knew she could not live without soy milk and tofu.

“Now you get elaichi and mango flavoured soy milk in India,” she says.

For years Sachdev felt that she had become a hostage to the idea of getting a green card. As a journalist in Boston, she worked for small publications and websites. And she knew she had to find a job at a bigger operation where her H1B visa could eventually be transferred to a green card.

There was also a career issue. For a while now, Sachdev has tried to break into radio in the US. But each time she applied for a radio job, she was told that she did not have any work experience. And she realised that even to volunteer for a station, she needed the backing of unions.

During a recent trip to India, Sachdev interviewed with a newly-launched radio operation. And for the first time she realised that her lack of experience was not a hindrance in India. Her skills are transferable in India, while here in the US she found the system to be much more rigid and with stiff competition.

She came back to Boston without having made up her mind. She needed to weigh her options.

“And then it is snowing in Boston,” she says. “It is absolutely disgusting here. They had 70 degrees (Fahrenheit) the week before I came back, and now it is miserable and cold.”

“I made friends, got good jobs and was mostly content to call the States ‘home’ — but isolated incidents would shatter the self-deceit, like when I couldn’t vote despite having paid taxes for over 10 years and when random rude people on the train commanded me to ‘go home,’” she says.

The last incident happened recently. The day before she had resigned from her job and so she was able to maintain her cool and sense of humour. There will be challenges along the way in India, especially given that she is a single woman. “Life in America in terms of being a single woman is fantastic,” she says.

There are things she is going to miss including biking to work and the way people treat the outdoors in the US. And then there is one more concern. “I am petrified about the work ethic there, because I think the work ethic here just works for my personality,” she says. “I hope to transfer it, but I am mortally afraid that I will be fighting an uphill battle.”

For now, the boxes are packed and Sachdev is visiting all her favourite places one last time. The Charles River is frozen and she still stopped over to take one last picture. She hopes to visit Boston again, perhaps in the summer when it is a lot warmer.

- **Aseem Chhabra is a freelance writer based in New York who has previously written for The New York Times, The Boston Globe, Philadelphia Enquirer and Time Out, New York**