

## The importance of NRIs

Murugesapillai's correspondence<sup>1</sup>, which refers to an editorial in *Current Science*<sup>2</sup>, and which comments on the role of NRIs in the development of India, is interesting. It is true that some, if not all, NRIs usually have a sentimental relationship with this country because the majority of their kith and kin lives here. But this does not mean that they would have a special desire to do something for the welfare of the Indian society. That is simple to understand. Persons having no hesitation in deserting the land of their birth in search of better jobs, better opportunities and better living conditions, and persons having even long-term plans of accepting the citizenship of a foreign land, cannot be expected to be more concerned about and more enthusiastic to serve the country of their origin compared with the natives. That some of them part with good donations cannot be taken as testimony of their concern. Since they are financially in a good position – and it is said that a US resident Indian has higher average income than a person from any other ethnic group – they can donate well. Because of the currency exchange rate, even a small donation can turn out to be a big sum in this country.

It is not always true that Indians go to the US (and for that matter any other developed country) because they cannot find a job here. In recent past, three of my colleagues left for the US, resigning their permanent positions in my university department. In fact, leaving for the US and getting a permanent residence in that country is for many Indians, a dream

come true. This simply means that the feeling of nationalism is not as strong as some of us would like to believe. Yet, most of us would not leave the country, not because of a strong bond with the country itself, but because of certain constraints like that of family relations and of difficulty in adjusting to an alien society. National allegiance is a weak concept and in this age of globalization, it has grown weaker. Rampant corruption in the society is an irrefutable proof in this respect.

Then why is so much importance being given to NRIs, with the government even celebrating Pravasi Bharatiya Divas? Does this mean that one could serve the country better by becoming an NRI? Perhaps, this is related with the foreign obsession that is so deep-rooted in the Indian psyche. The successful English rule of about two centuries over this country coupled with the undeniably impressive technological advancements in the West during the same period, had a blinding effect on the Indian people. Any intellectual concept or any material object that originates in the West is considered necessarily superior to whatever is indigenous. Even after getting political independence, intellectual slavery continues to rule over our minds. During all these years, westernization of the Indian educated mass has been a consistent process, aided definitely by the electronic and print media. We are living with borrowed concepts. Be it the political system (democracy), the economic system, the judiciary, the education, or the medical system,

almost everything is imported from the West. The concepts of globalization and liberalization that we have accepted in recent times have also originated in the West. After an initial hesitation or confusion, we generally adapt ourselves to every new idea originating in the West, without questioning its relevance or utility in the light of our different social, cultural and economic background.

Our academic system is not free from this influence. We consider a foreign course of study to be superior to ours. We accept without a pause, any research front that opens up in the West. A paper in a foreign journal is more respectable. A piece of work published in a foreign journal, a thesis evaluated by a foreign examiner, and a testimonial from a foreign scientist are all accepted as trustworthy. So also, an NRI is believed to be superior to his/her counterpart in India. And so on. No wonder then that some of us regard NRIs as our saviors–rescuers in periods of academic crisis.

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1. Murugesapillai, K., *Curr. Sci.*, 2003, **84**, 1383.
  2. Balaram, P., *Curr. Sci.*, 2003, **84**, 121–122.
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## NEWS

### Fourteenth mid-year meeting of the Academy\*

The high point of the 14th Mid-Year Meeting of the Indian Academy of Sciences, Bangalore was that for the first time, part of the sessions was held at Bangalore University, i.e. outside the Indian

Institute of Science (IISc) campus. A 500-strong auditorium at the University was filled to the brim with eager questions put by the young and old alike, and subsequently, the IISc venue was filled with more youth and invited teachers. K. Kasturirangan, President of the Indian Academy of Sciences, inaugurating the special half-day session on genetics to

commemorate '50 years of discovery of the double helical structure of DNA', described the celebration as significant for this seminal discovery. Kasturirangan said that holding sessions outside IISc would 'become a pattern for future Mid-Year meetings'.

G. Padmanaban, IISc, Bangalore, delivered a special lecture on 'Molecular

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\*A report on the 14th mid-year meeting of the Indian Academy of Sciences, Bangalore held during 17–19 July 2003 in Bangalore.