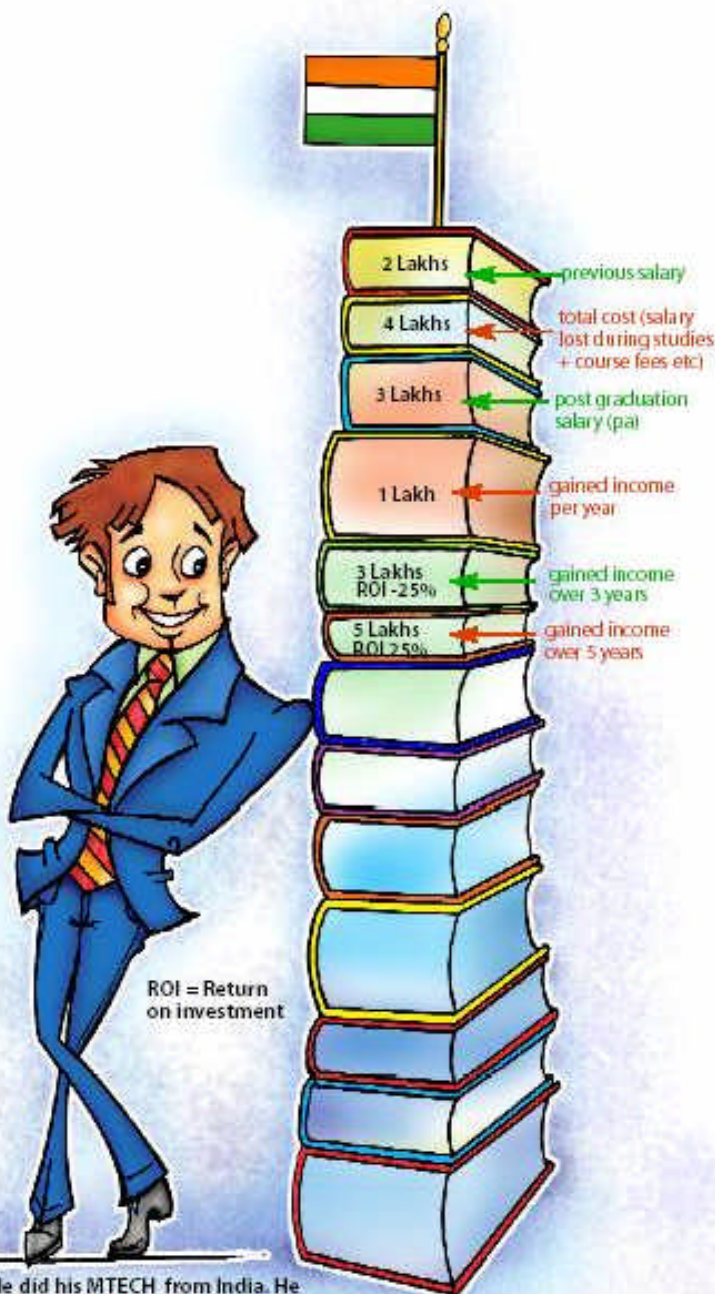


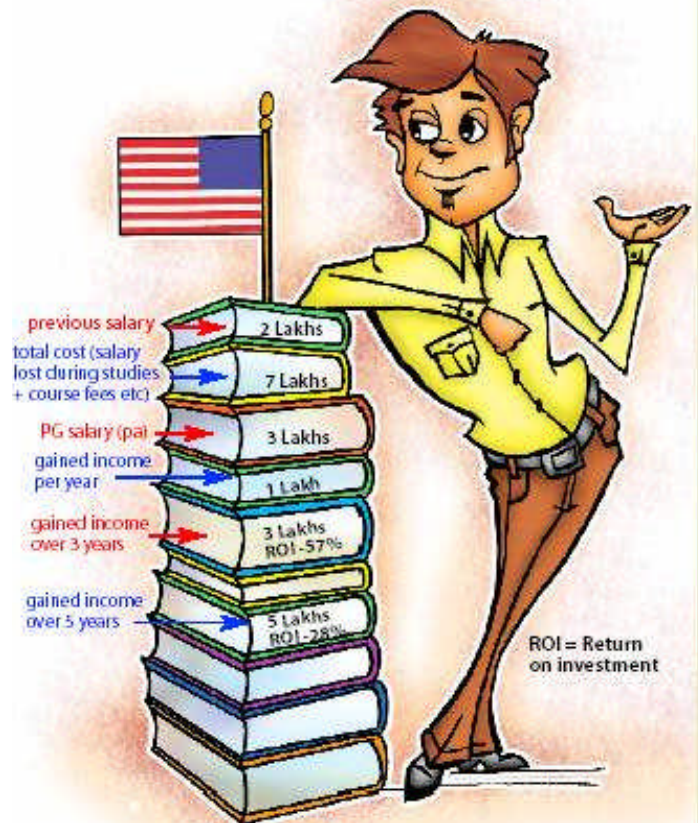
DESI MTECH VS AMERICAN MS

OF A DIFFERENT DEGREE

HOW WISE IS IT TO FORSAKE AN MTECH FROM INDIA FOR AN MS DEGREE FROM THE US? **JAY REGE** EXPLORES THE RETURNS ON INVESTMENT OF THE TWO QUALIFICATIONS



Raju Gorle did his MTECH from India. He found employment in India and recovered the cost of his degree within 5 years



Gautam Pandit did his MS from the US. He returned to India for a job. He did not recover the cost of his degree even after 5 years

Sheetal Doshi is a final-year engineering student from Mumbai. She spends her day catching up with term-work and college assignments and the evenings browsing through websites of US universities. She gave her GRE and TOEFL in the last week of September and like many of her classmates, plans to pursue her MS — a master's level degree in engineering — from the US. She has no intention of applying for the ME degree offered by Mumbai University or MTech programme offered by the IITs or for that matter, any equivalent Master's programme offered by any university in India.

Like Doshi, Rajesh Nair completed his electronics engineering degree from a private engineering college in Mumbai in 2003. In his final year, he gave his GRE and TOEFL and applied to a number of universities in the US. Nair had an average academic record in his bachelors (aggregate of about 60%) and his GRE score was 1250. He managed to secure admission into an MS programme at a university in Chicago, USA. Nair finished his MS in May 2005 and currently works at a leading telecommunication company in Chicago earning \$70,000 per year.

Sheetal and Nair are no exceptions. Scores of Indian students prefer pursuing MS programmes in the USA and other countries rather than doing an equivalent programme from India. But is this really feasible? How much sense does it make to apply abroad, especially considering the heavy costs involved? Is a foreign degree really better? And what about the returns on investment and job placements?

MS DEGREE FROM THE US

"I considered the option of doing an MTech from the IIT but found the GATE exam difficult to crack. Also, admissions in India are very competitive. The GRE was much simpler and I didn't need to be an outstanding performer to secure admission to a US university. "With so many options, securing admission abroad was a much more 'doable' task," informs Nair.

OF A DIFFERENT DEGREE

Pros of studying in the US

When asked about the money he spent on education abroad, he says, "I spent nearly one lakh rupees only on my applications, visa fees and air tickets; another Rs five lakh on my MS programme fees and living. I had to pay my first semester fees out of my pocket, after which I got funding from the university. But it was worth it. I made the right choice."

After completing her MSc from Mumbai University, Sharmila Joshi decided to continue research in the life sciences. She managed to gain admission to a doctorate degree programme in the USA. "After my MSc, I tried looking at research options in India and also thought of appearing for the NET (National Eligibility Test conducted by the University Grants Commission). Many universities in India do research in life sciences but I could not get enough information on their websites. I found the syllabus of the NET a little exhaustive and difficult too. Since I was interested in research and a PhD, most of my faculty and friends advised me to look at universities in the USA."

Joshi managed admission into a PhD programme at a US university with full financial assistance. Post her PhD, Joshi would like to continue as a researcher either at a university or research organisation in the US.

PROS OF STUDYING IN INDIA

Raju Gorle, a BTech from Andhra University and MTech from IIT Kanpur, didn't opt for the MS (in the US) as he wanted to stay in India after completing his BTech. As he was interested in higher education, Gorle wrote the GATE and decided pursue his MTech. After securing an All India Rank - 30 - getting into IIT Kanpur's MTech programme was a cake walk. Says Gorle, "An MTech degree in India is very affordable. Plus, with Rs 5,000 as monthly stipend, my net expenditure

(including fees and living) during the MTech was negligible. Today, Raju works at a MNC IT company in Delhi and says that his annual salary is about Rs 50,000 (approx Rs 4000 /month) - higher than his BTech/BE counterparts who have similar experience.

DO US DEGREE HOLDERS REALLY GET BETTER PLACEMENTS?

Not all students who go to the US for higher education plan on settling there. Gautam Pandit, after completing his MS in computer science from the US, made a conscious decision to return to India. Today, he works as a software engineer with a leading IT company in Bangalore. Pandit draws a monthly salary of about Rs 25,000 -about Rs 4,000 higher than his colleagues who were recruited around the same time from various engineering (BE/BTech) programmes in India. He says "I don't think the fact that my MS was from a US university helped me in any special way. I would have got an equally good job had I done my MTech in computer engineering from a reputed university in India."

Recruiters and HR managers in India agree. Most hiring managers in India do not give added preference to candidates having a foreign MS as compared to those holding an MTech from India. "We consider the candidate's overall profile. A Master's degree is always a plus. We treat a foreign MS on par with the Indian ME/ MTech," says the HR manager of a leading IT firm in India. "Salaries that we offer fresh MTech/ MS graduates are not very different from what we offer fresh BTech/BE graduates. Experience counts more than just educational qualifications", he adds.

RETURN ON INVESTMENT

A continued discussion with many students and industry personnel made one thing quite clear: When looked at it from a pure Return on Investment (ROI) perspective, the ROI of a foreign degree is much higher for students who preferred to pursue a career abroad. The table below examines the ROI of MS/MTech programmes for various students.

BOTTOMLINE

It would be unfair to gauge the returns from higher education using simple financial calculators (as it table below). There are many intangible and long terms benefits of education - change in the individual's outlook being vital. In conclusion, this discussion leads to an interesting debate: Students like Sheetal, Nair and Joshi, after a US education, ended up with great careers abroad. Can they be cited as success stories or as classic examples of the brain drain?!

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