

Moving stories: Francis Wacziarg

BBC World Service's The World Today programme is asking migrants who have been successful in their adopted countries how they got to the top of their field.

Francis Wacziarg is an author and historian. Originally from France, he has lived in India for 33 years.

Even though I'm originally from France, I made India my home. I acquired Indian citizenship after 20 years of living in India, and I find that India has been my country from the word go.

" I think the West is old now, while I feel that India is a virgin land "

Before I came, I spent most of my childhood not in France but in other countries, so I had already travelled around quite a bit.

But when I came to India, that was it - this was where I wanted to live.

My decision was only in favour of India - not giving up France.

As it is, I go back to France a few times every year, on work or to see my family. But I really feel that home is here.

I wrote two books on India, on Rajasthan.

In the course of my research on the two books, I came across some very old forts that were in ruins.

My business partner and I had the idea of picking up one of them, restoring it to its original splendour, and converting it into a hotel.

So it went from one first experience to a passion.

I don't consider it as a business simply, but more as something that we have to do for society - and for the country.

As far as France is concerned, I consider it a great wealth to be able to have the culture of France. Like India, I think France is backed by centuries of culture.

So I think it's a great opportunity to sit on the fence in a way, and enjoy both cultures.

I would call myself a Franco-Indian or an Indian-Frenchman. You can never change your culture - you can change your citizenship but you cannot change your culture.

I feel richer for that - I have my roots in French culture and I have been able to open up to Indian culture.

I don't think I would like to live in France, because there is in India a sense of achievement which is lost in the West.

I think the West is old now. I feel that India is a virgin land. There's so much that one wants to do in this country.

There are so many things that I wouldn't have been able to do had I lived in any other country.

India has its particularities in the sense that there are still things that exist from the Middle Ages and are still contemporary, and can still be achieved here.

That doesn't exist in many countries in the world.

My Indian friends - and I practically have only Indian friends, as I live here permanently - I think they like me for not aping India, but being at home in India.

I don't wear Indian clothes, and people say "we like you for that," because traditional dress is not fancy dress - and a foreigner wearing Indian clothes would tend to consider it fancy dress.

It's a lack of respect for a culture when you're not intrinsically part of it, when you ape it to that extent.

So one of the things that people have been consistently telling me is that "we like you for what you are - and yet being so close to us".

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