

## **Brain Drain: Why People Leave their Motherland? (Implications for the Developed and Developing Economies)**

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*‘Ask not what your country can do for you – ask what you can do for your country?’ – John F. Kennedy, Former US President.*

Tendency to migrate from one place to another is probably as old as history of human kind. In primitive societies, such migration took place due to several factors, like adverse climatic conditions, displacement due to war, insurgency or local feuds, religious / ethnic persecution, or merely for economic reasons. In modern times, people migrate due to numerous reasons, including the above-stated ones. Though migration of people have always affected the countries or places from where people leave; the countries receiving the large influx of immigrants also get favourable or unfavourable bearing on their societies. The issue of large-scale movement of people between countries or regions become more sensitive, when it involves highly educated and skilled manpower. In economic terms, it is referred as ‘brain drain.’

*‘The term brain drain was coined by the spokesmen of the Royal Society of London to describe the outflow of scientists and technologists to the United States and Canada in the early 1950s.’ (Sarfraz, 2008)*

It is now widely referred as the phenomenon of migration of highly skilled or educated people of one country to settle down and work in another country in order to improve their economic conditions. It is to be noted that the term brain drain is used only in case of the following conditions:-

- When migration of highly skilled and educated occurs due to economic reasons.
- When this migration is seen to be almost permanent and harmful for the country from where people are leaving.
- When skilled and educated people of a country, from where people are leaving, is already in deficit of such kind of manpower.

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Brain drain has always been part of the recorded human history; however, it received world-wide attention in 1960s, when instigated by Soviet Union's advances in the space technology, the United States of America launched its space programme to catch up with the Soviet Union and relaxed its immigration laws to permit transfer of scientists from USSR, Germany, and others to USA. Almost at the same time, the newly liberated countries of Asia, Africa and Latin America started their economic development process, which needed skilled manpower to work as engineers, professionals in myriad fields, educationists and technicians. Migration of such categories of people to the developed nations of America and Western Europe badly affected the developmental efforts of poor countries.

In case of Pakistan, although people from different walks of life have been leaving to settle in foreign lands since long; however, this tendency has picked up in the recent years, when we notice that young as well as experienced professionals from almost all sectors of the economy are preferring to settle down in the developed countries like USA, UK, Canada, Australia and other countries of Europe and East Asia. This phenomenon was further certified by a study conducted by the Gallup Survey of Pakistan in 2008, when it was found that 62% of the adults who were surveyed expressed their desire to migrate abroad and 38% said that they would prefer to settle outside permanently. A similar survey conducted 15 years ago found these figures at 49% for preferring to work abroad and 17 per cent for settling outside permanently. Current survey also indicates that about five percent of households in Pakistan have at least one immediate family member settled abroad. (Khaleej Times, November, 2000)

According to the survey, when asked about why their dear ones chose to leave Pakistan, about 70% cited better economic prospects while 12% pointed towards 'future economic prospects of the country'. Poor law and order situation was cited as the reason for their kin to leave the country by six percent of the respondents. Analysts at the Gallup Survey have linked the rising migration levels to two principal causes: one, a declining hope in the country's economic future and the other being rapid and reliable telecom link. The analysts point out that in 1986, 72% of Pakistanis agreed with the statement that 'Pakistan will make tremendous progress in the next 10 years'. The report went on to state that this figure has dropped to 54% in 2008. But despite this growing trend to seek jobs outside the country, or to try to settle abroad, nearly 90 per cent of the people interviewed for the survey said they still took pride in being citizens of Pakistan. According to the report, two per cent said it was not a matter of pride, and one per cent went to the extent of saying

that they felt ashamed of calling themselves Pakistanis. Asif J. Mir writes in Pakistani Think Tank:

*'We cannot achieve long-term economic growth by exporting our human resource. In the new world order, people with knowledge drive economic growth. We talk a lot of poverty alleviation in Pakistan. But who is going to alleviate the poverty—the uncreative bureaucracy that created poverty? Hypothetically, the most talented should lead the people, create wealth and eradicate poverty and corruption.'* (Sarfaraz, 2008)

Phillip Bonosky, contributing editor of Political Affairs, writes in his book 'Afghanistan-Washington's Secret War',

*'Pakistan seems to have nothing but problems. Endemic poverty which was Great Britain's imperial gift to the colonial world—a poverty on which the sun never sets—skilled (badly needed in Pakistan itself) going abroad in search for jobs. Hardly any country has suffered more from the 'brain drain' than has Pakistan. Nearly 3,000 (annually) graduates of Pakistan's medical colleges are jobless; most go abroad. The educated see their future not in their home country but in any country but their own.'* (Bonosky, 2001)

The greatest effect of brain drain on any country is what is seen in Pakistan today; rampant corruption, poor administrations, lack of motivation and a fast diminishing nationalism. Unless there is nationalism there can be no collective progress and poverty and crime will continue to increase under the umbrella of plethoric apathy. Whatever the solution it needs to come fast and it needs to be come now otherwise 'when the educated are away, the uneducated will play' as they are playing at the moment. (Sarfaraz, 2008)

### **Why People Leave their Motherland?**

'Young, well-educated, healthy individuals are most likely to migrate, especially in pursuit of higher education and economic improvement.' (Awases et.al. 2003) and (Mejía 1979) We can count numerous reasons for migration of the educated youth of the developing nations to the developed economies, like:-

- 'In most of the developing countries, employment opportunities for the educated people are generally few and grossly outnumber the prospective applicants,' says Abid Ali Abid, while delivering

a lecture on 'The Impact of Brain Drain on Pakistan's Economy' to the members of Lahore Economic Journalists Association (LEJA) said, 'Though the salaries of highly skilled workforce in developed world is 30-40 times higher than in Pakistan but money is not the only reason for many who opt to go abroad. He said lack of respect of the professionals is another reason'. Abid, who is an eminent research economist and the Chairman Denmark Pakistan Chamber of Commerce (DPCC) lamented that highly skilled software engineers are usually answerable to the bosses that have no knowledge about IT and they ridicule the computerised solutions that the engineer presents before them. Being faced with the high level of unemployment, the educated young people are left with no choice but to seek employment some place else. (Abid, 2009)

- There appears to be 'push' and 'pull' factors in operation to induce people to migrate. (Bach, 2003) Disparities in working conditions between richer and poorer countries serve to 'pull' people towards the rich countries. Governments of many developing countries and recruitment agencies also facilitate migration. Several migrating health professionals are said to be influenced by a number of economic, social and psychological factors, and family choices (Connell, 2004) before deciding to leave their motherland. 'De-motivating working conditions, coupled with low salaries, are set against the likelihood of prosperity for themselves and their families, work in well-equipped hospitals, and the opportunity for professional development.' (Narasimhan V, Brown H, Pablos-Mendez A, *et al.*, 2004)
- A phenomenon crueller than unemployment is underemployment, which breaks not only the will of an educated person, but also his or her self-respect. The term, 'underemployment' refers to a condition in the job market, where an employee is paid either less than his / her capabilities or works part-time due to less availability of decently paid full-time work. It is generally noted that underemployed employees are more inclined either to switch their jobs for better offers within or without the national boundaries.
- In several instances, educated youth leave for developed and rich countries in the garb of higher studies, but many never return to their motherland due to better living and employment opportunities abroad. Horrendous disparities in working conditions between richer and poorer countries attract the

professionals in almost all fields to move towards the more developed countries. Governments and recruitment agencies also encourage this trend. Low salaries, non-existent job security and unfair working conditions, all contribute to widespread brain drain throughout the developing world.

- Apart from job opportunities and working conditions, there are other factors that allure the young minds to settle in the rich countries on permanent basis, for instance, individual freedom, general peace and tranquillity in urban as well as rural areas, high standard of living, rule of law and justice, etc.
- It needs no reiteration that higher studies in most of the poor countries are substantially subsidised through low tuition fees and generous grants from the public exchequer. On the other hand, the educated people, who go abroad for higher studies or for greener pastures, are not neither reminded nor indoctrinated that they would have to come back to their motherland to serve it and to pay back for what their countrymen have done for them. Thus, a vast majority of the educated lot does not feel any qualm in settling permanently in a rich country and abandoning their motherland for ever.
- People leave abroad due to their own selfish behaviour, asserted by some people. It is commonly believed that majority of the people, who leave their countries to seek permanent residence in the developed countries, are usually those, who prefer wellness at individual or at the most at immediate family level than at collective level. Therefore, it is commonly believed that such people are usually more selfish in their human dealings. In response to such utterances, several people question: 'Why should we lament the behaviour of these young people for ignoring their motherland and their own people? We as a nation or at our individual level, never attempted to tell our young generation that their higher studies and to a large extent, their livelihood is sponsored by the meager incomes of tillers, workers and common people of this land; therefore, they must feel and accept their obligation to pay back their poor country in the form of serving it and contributing their share in its economic and social development.'
- It has been noted that skilled workers from lower strata of the society generally migrate to any place, where they can find job; however, the professionals like engineers, doctors and paramedical staff, scientists, etc prefer the Western countries

known for their favourable record in democratic norms, free expression and low crime environment.

Generally, it is believed that the parents, whose offspring have settled permanently in the developed countries, are very fortunate at least in economic terms. However, when one probes into the lives of such parents, startlingly harsh realities of the contemporary life start surfacing. In the first instance, one cannot say with certainty whether such parents get any financial assistance from their children or not. Secondly, in most of the cases, such parents are usually well-off; therefore, they usually do not need much financial help. What they need most is human care, company of their children and their grand children. They need personalised attention, when they fall ill or are hospitalised. Even when they are in good health, they need their dear ones near them and above all, they need human touch. Unfortunately, the people settled abroad cannot fulfil such needs, even if they want to. In a nutshell, lives of most of people are transformed into loneliness, misery and despair, whose dear ones chose to settle permanently in foreign countries.

### **Implications for Developed and Developing Countries**

‘Hardly any country has suffered more from the ‘brain drain’ than has Pakistan. Nearly 3,500 (annual) graduates of Pakistan’s medical colleges are jobless; most go abroad,’ (Abid, 2009) Abid further highlighted that about 36,000 professionals, including doctors, engineers and teachers, have migrated to other countries in the last 30 years as mentioned in official estimates of Pakistan’s Overseas Employment Corporation. But, in his view, this number is indicative of only a small proportion of actual migration, since the majority of emigrants do not register. He said his research indicates that the number in recent years has increased around 45,000. Abid lamented on the prevailing euphoria about increasing foreign remittances by expatriate Pakistanis saying that perhaps we are not fully aware how the flight of professionals like doctors, engineers and scientists is damaging the long term objective of attaining economic success.

According to the World Health Organization (WHO) study conducted in 40 countries on the magnitude and patterns of the migration of medical personnel, about 90% of all migrating physicians shifted to only five developed countries – Australia, Canada, Germany, UK and USA. (Back, 2004) In 1972, nearly 6% of the world’s physicians (140 000) had settled outside their countries of origin. Over 75% of them had preferred USA, UK and Canada. (Ioannidis, 2004) All of these countries, i.e., India, Pakistan and Sri Lanka, were known to have

colonial background. The countries, which were noted to be producing more doctors than their economies could absorb, were identified as Egypt, India, Pakistan, Philippines and South Korea. (Levy, 2003) From economic point of view, brain drain is an inescapable reality of international trade of human resources and would continue as far as it benefits rich and powerful nations. In the following paragraphs, an attempt shall be made to highlight the salient implications of brain drain for developing and developed countries.

### **Implications for Developing Countries**

Following are the salient implications of brain drain on developing countries:-

- When highly skilled and educated people leave their country for greener pastures in the developed countries, it usually results in decreased output in those areas of work from where these people left. According to Dr. Fitzhugh Mullan of George Washington University every doctor who leaves a poor nation leaves a hole that cannot be filled. He says, 'That creates enormous problems for the source country and the educational and health leaders in the country who are attempting to provide healers'. (Sarfaraz, 2008)
- Brain drain does not remain confined to decline in output in quantitative terms; it also results into production of poor quality of goods and services.
- In most of the developing countries, citizens are taxed to finance the skill building courses and produce hi-tech and highly educated human resources. It is envisaged that when these people would work in factories, laboratories, offices and fields, they would produce much more than their predecessors. However, when such human resources leave their homeland to find a cosy, comfortable life in a developed country, the dreams of a common man about securing better future are shattered. This phenomenon results into a great loss for the developing country. This loss of dream for economic development and loss of national and collective faith in their youth becomes even more heartrending, when it is realised that the highly skilled and educated lot who migrated to a developed country for better future for them were those, whose education and skill-building efforts were financed by taxing the meagre earnings of common people. The overall financial effects of such brain drain are calculated by measuring the value of the income earned by the migrants in their new country. This amount is considered to be

the inequitable transfer of the third world resources to the first world rich countries.

- Paradoxically, there is an alternate viewpoint of some economists of the Western world, who present an 'internationalist approach' to understand the phenomenon of brain drain. According to this approach, there is nothing wrong with the migration of professionals and skilled manpower among countries, and strengthen their viewpoint on the basis of three assumptions. First, the world consists of nation states, where all people are paid on the basis of their contribution towards the nation's output. Second, there are no externalities from work so that a skilled person provides no benefits to society other than for which payment is received. And, finally, all educational expenses are borne privately by the parents only. One does not need to be an economist or educationist to see that all these assumptions do not hold true in any country, developing or developed. For instance, in which country all people are paid according to their contribution towards nation's output? Similarly, the third assumption about considering this world as the one, where all educational expenses are borne privately by the parents only, is so ridiculous and far from the real world that it needs not to be further commented on.
- In conventional societies, education of children is considered by parents and the society at large as a reliable investment, which would bring dividends, when the grown-up children would take care of their parents in addition to contributing meaningfully towards economic development of their countries. However, when the sons and daughters of such parents do not return back to their motherland, the parents are left alone to suffer their old age, without the economic, social and psychological protection of their own blood. Miseries of such so-called 'successful families' are numerous and heartrending.

### **Implications for Developed Countries**

Most of the effects and implications of brain drain for the developed countries have been positive, especially in the area of economic development. Salient implications in this regard are enumerated below:-

- Developed countries get hold of highly skilled and educated emigrants free of any sizeable expenditure on their education. Mostly, it has been observed that the educated emigrants from the developing countries prove to be more law-abiding, disciplined and productive. All these attributes benefit the



developed countries in the field of economic development as well.

- If a rich country encourages brain drain of highly skilled and educated people from the developing countries, these emigrants also pay back to the economy of the rich country in form of increased receipts of taxes, higher output in factories, organisations and farms, and smoother adjustment of these people in their adopted country.
- It has been observed that mostly the educated, young and energetic people migrate to other countries, which itself is nothing less than a blessing.

The reasons are as follows:-

- Young people are expected to be more energetic and productive.
- They are also expected to live longer, thus would be able to contribute substantially towards economic development of their host countries.
- Educated people are usually able to adjust and assimilate in a new culture without many cultural shocks.

### **Recommendations to Contain Brain Drain**

In order to arrive at viable remedial actions, it is utmost essential to give serious consideration to all those factors and conditions that induce people to leave their motherland and settle permanently in alien lands. In this regard, following measures are recommended to reverse the tide of brain drain from the developing countries:-

- The very immediate and all-pervasive cause of brain drain is the moment the incumbent worker or professional feels that he or she is not needed in his/her homeland. Usual reasons for such feelings are wide-spread unemployment/underemployment, low remunerations, low respect, less chances of professional or career development. Governments of the developing countries would have to give top priority to resolve these issues and adopt long-term policy and action measures in these areas of concern.
- General environment and living conditions (including education for children, health facilities, law and order, reliable supply of electricity, gas, etc) in most of the developing countries are far from satisfactory. If the developing countries are serious enough to keep their human capital within their boundaries, they would have to bring visible improvements in these sectors.
- It has been noted that professionals also leave their native lands due to autocratic traditions in national politics and in

organisational setup, which curb freedom of thought and participation in the decision making processes. Democratic values and structures are therefore call of the day to contain the valuable human capital from leaving their motherland.

- Support of the host countries in particular and of the world community in general is also necessary to discourage unchecked outflow of the human capital from the developing countries. International forums like UNESCO, ILO, International Court of Justice, etc could also be brought in picture to play their roles in the containment of illegal transfer of resources from poor nations to the rich.
- Skilled manpower and professionals, who have emigrated, can be recovered and be motivated to give their share in economic and social development of their homelands. However, success of such an undertaking depends on the availability of the positive atmosphere, favourable working conditions, improvement in living environment and development of democratic values and participative culture at home.
- And, finally the ethical and educative aspect of brain drain also needs open discussion in homes, offices, educational institutions, seminars, the parliament, the higher courts and every in conceivable forum. Younger generation as well as the experienced professionals ought to be reminded over and over again what they owe to their people and the country at large.

### **Conclusion**

The term, 'brain drain' refers to the phenomenon of migration of highly skilled or educated people of one country to settle down and work in another country in order to improve their economic conditions. Migration of skilled manpower from the developing countries to the West has badly affected the industrialisation efforts of poor countries. Some people say that people generally leave for abroad due to their selfish behaviour. However, it is documented that people leave their motherland and their dear ones due to assorted reasons, including the cataclysmic, economic and political ones. Unchecked brain drain bears implications both for the developed and developing countries. The salient implications of brain drain for developing countries include declined output, poor quality of goods and services, inequitable transfer of the third world resources to the first world rich countries, distressful family relations and privation in social order. On the other hand, developed countries get highly skilled and educated emigrants free of cost. Other advantages of brain drain for rich countries include improvement in

productivity (both quantitative and qualitative), increased receipts of taxes, and smoother adjustment of these people in their adopted country. There is a dire need to check this menace by taking assorted, yet concerted efforts. Salient measures to constrain the tendency of brain drain include provision of adequate employment opportunities, career and professional development, improved environment and living conditions, revival of democratic disposition at national as well as organisational levels, and involvement of world agencies to check this trend. Finally, the young and the experienced professionals ought to be reminded of their ethical and emotional obligations to their own people, who have sponsored their education and livelihood in one way or other.

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