

Detoxification from Brian Drain Debate: A Close Review to Bitter Reality in Reference to Nepal

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Abstract: Contrary to claims made by some scholars who have not thoroughly assessed the situation, this article argues that Nepal does not suffer from brain drain. The paper adopts an academic and archival approach, utilising qualitative desktop research methods to comprehensively examine the issue. The arguments presented are supported by the Delphi method and firsthand experiences. The study relies on secondary sources supplemented by personal observations and informal discussions to provide a well-rounded perspective. Recent publications accessed through widely used archiving platforms are given priority to ensure the credibility and relevance of the sources cited. Through this rigorous methodology, the paper concludes that the real issue plaguing Nepal is excessive labour drain, not brain drain. The analysis reveals that the notion of brain drain in Nepal is largely a misconception, with only a negligible number of individuals falling into this category. The departure of this small group has not significantly hampered the nation's dignity or development. On the contrary, the labour drain has created a severe shortage of workers in critical sectors, impeding the nation's progress and

exacerbating economic vulnerabilities. Therefore, it is imperative to reorient strategies to address the labour drain by focusing on creating employment opportunities, improving working conditions, and offering incentives for workers to stay. By concentrating on these areas, Nepal can curb the outflow of its labour force and channel the energy and skills of its people towards national development. Consequently, the paper asserts that it is unnecessary to no longer concern oneself with brain drain.

Keywords: Brian drain, labour drain, Nepal, remittance, contribution.

1. Introduction

The continuous advancement and positive progress of a nation is a widely anticipated outcome for its citizens. This notion holds true for Nepal as well, although the growth trajectory appears to be moving in a reverse and deeply concerning direction. In the context of this observation, Katuwal (2020) suggests that "development is both a cause and consequence of change" (p. 1655). Regrettably, it seems that development has been at a standstill for a prolonged period. Additionally, Bhul (2024) argues that the concept of federalism, which was initially presented as a solution to existing obstacles, has failed to deliver substantial outcomes beyond isolated attempts at incremental change. The provision of shared governance has been overshadowed by a prevailing sentiment of self-rule. The mounting sense of disappointment is further compounded by the fact that the country has not experienced the anticipated pace of significant and favourable development despite numerous successful political reforms and transformations.

To reflect upon the past, it appears that Nepal's situation was relatively better than that of neighbouring countries India and China at certain points in history. Nepal experienced both hardships and prosperity during a period of controlled independence and tyranny. Pandey (1982) and Khanal (2018.) provide detailed accounts of the financially stable state of Nepal during that era. The concept of money supply and economic growth, proposed by Mahara (2020), had a positive impact during this time. India and China achieved freedom from British colonisation and the Manchu dynasty, respectively, several decades before Nepal's shift towards democracy in 2007 BS, marked by the downfall of the authoritative Rana's Oligarchy. Many other South Asian countries

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also faced similar challenges during this period. Khanal (2023) notes that the development aspirations of Nepal have been greatly affected, referring to it as "the most victimised sector of political transition in Nepal, which still seems everlasting" (p. 30). He also considers "some geopolitical issues" as key determinants of this fate. As a result, Timilsina (2023) argues that Nepal's economic growth has declined. Tan et al. (2023) suggest that Nepal's politics revolve solely around the constitution, while Berst et al. (2018) observe this unique apocalyptic practice only in Nepal, unlike other South Asian nations. Due to the consequences of such unfocused politics, the Nepali people remain deeply hopeless and significantly far from achieving the expected development despite the notable progress and prosperity achieved by many neighbouring countries in the past three to four decades. Dahal (2021) argues that trade, which is considered the "engine of economic development," negatively impacts Nepal and undermines the nation's strength. The country suffers from chronic deficits and imbalances in trade, resulting in massive and devastating consequences.

The importance of the welfare state and ongoing progress is a topic that receives global attention and is consistently discussed by political leaders both domestically and internationally. Bryson (2022) views the welfare state as a major concern in contemporary global politics, while Garritzmann et al. (2022) consider it a social investment and Barrientos (2018) sees it as necessary support for billions of people. When examining the lack of progress in Nepal, the slow pace of development, underdevelopment, and increasing decay over the past few decades are attributed to the issue of brain drain in recent years. The significant increase in the flight of human capital is believed to have a highly negative impact on the country's development trajectory, as Pousyal (2023) suggests. It is widely accepted that brain drain is the primary cause of ongoing underdevelopment and damage in the country, leading to calls for emigrants to return in order to accelerate progress. Silwal (2019) and Com et al (2023) acknowledge the serious disadvantages and deepening losses caused by brain drain, with Mainali (2019) concluding that it has significant detrimental effects. Mishara (2023) and Adhikary (2023) describe brain drain as a painful reality. According to recent data, approximately 5 million Nepali citizens are living abroad.

Currently, around 2,000 people per day are leaving the country for various reasons and desires. Adhikary (2019) notes that this emigrant community represents almost 14% of the current population, a figure that has exponentially increased in recent years. Shrestha (2022) explores the primary reasons for this trend, which are largely based on various compulsion factors. According to a World Bank (2011) report titled "Large Scale Migration and Remittances in Nepal," Nepal ranks as the third highest country in terms of remittance-dependent nations, following Tajikistan and the Republic of Kyrgyz. Clewett (2015) highlights the gravity of the situation by claiming that approximately 29% of the country's GDP is generated annually from remittances. This dependency has become more entrenched in the post-conflict era. An International Labour Organization report (2017) identifies the global employment trend and preference for cross-border migration as common characteristics among youth, although it is not always a serious or detrimental phenomenon. It is indisputably a verifiable truth that a significant number of individuals from Nepal have emigrated from their homeland and settled abroad. However, it is both ill-advised and fallacious to infer that this phenomenon indicates a pernicious and detrimental brain drain occurring within the nation. Such an assertion, founded solely on the observation of a burgeoning desire among Nepali individuals to seek opportunities abroad and an overall fascination with foreign countries, is a lamentable hindsight and a fantastical misconception. Surely, it stands in dire need of a prompt and thorough re-evaluation.

2. Methodology

As an integral component of an academic and archival study, this paper employs the qualitative desktop research method to provide a comprehensive understanding of the subject matter. The Delphi method, renowned for its systematic and interactive forecasting approach, is utilised for

inference, ensuring a robust and credible analytical framework. The integration of both lived and observed experiences further enriches this method, offering valuable insights and practical perspectives that enhance the depth and authenticity of the arguments presented. The study primarily relies on secondary sources and data, which serve as the foundational structures for analysis and discussion. These sources are carefully selected to ensure relevance and reliability, drawing from a diverse range of academic and professional literature. In addition to secondary data, personal observations and informant discussions are thoughtfully incorporated, offering first-hand accounts and nuanced understanding that complement the existing literature.

To maintain the integrity and credibility of the research, priority is given to citing recent publications obtained through widely recognised and globally utilised archival gateways. This approach ensures that the study is grounded in current and authoritative sources, reflecting the latest advancements and trends in the field. By balancing rigorous methodological approaches with rich, qualitative insights, this paper aims to provide a comprehensive and scholarly contribution to the academic discourse.

3.1 Discussion and Analysis

3.1 Fantastic delusion

Candidly stated, not every individual who chooses to go abroad is currently attempting to go abroad or has already gone abroad, which can be considered part of a brain-drain culture. Oosterbeek (2011) notes that studying abroad increases the inclination to live overseas. However, most of the migrants who have gone abroad do not contribute in terms of intellectual capacity. They are primarily utilised as mere workers, serving as labourers in a literal sense. Referring to this reality, Bakri (2024) classifies them as skilled or semi-skilled labourers, while Bhardwaj and Sharma (2023) suggest the term skilled labour migration instead of brain-drain. In contrast to the general perception, the number of immigrants who truly engage in intellectual work and contribute their brainpower is extremely small and negligible. Recent studies have revealed that less than one per cent of the total migrant population falls into this category. Seddon et al. (2022) refer to these immigrants as "new Lahures," and Adhikari et al. (2023) observe a slight change in the trend as labourers are now moving to developed countries in the guise of pursuing studies.

Furthermore, even if a small group of highly intelligent individuals chooses not to return to their home country, Nepal will never face a shortage of equally competent, skilled, and intelligent individuals within its borders. Undoubtedly, there is a substantial number of highly qualified professionals, experts, and skilled individuals in various fields who are readily available in the country.

The small minority of individuals who possess the intellectual capacity to contribute abroad rarely feel despondent about leaving the country. Yurt (2014) suggests that this group of people does not experience the same level of sorrow as others may perceive. The perceived pain is much more intense than the actual assimilation experience for expatriates. Rather, they often view it as an emblem of achievement and a source of pride. Hu (2023) argues that students see studying abroad as a measure of success and social status. Once visas are granted, individuals often partake in lavish celebrations, exchange congratulatory messages, expect notes of congratulations, and post boastful statuses as if they have achieved a great victory. Amid these celebrations, they inadvertently belittle and criticise those who choose to stay in their home country rather than seek opportunities abroad. They label them as incompetent and incapable of accomplishing anything noteworthy. This psychological and verbal disdain towards their own fellow citizens extends to the point where their spouses, children, and other relatives also decide to accompany them in pursuit of permanent settlement. According to Çalışkan (2023), this trend is visibly and alarmingly increasing. Many of these individuals hurriedly sell their possessions and properties in their home country to finance their migration. Adhikari (2024)

notes that, with a few exceptions due to extenuating circumstances, these migrants contribute very little or no remittances at all. The bulk of remittances, approximately 89 per cent, is sent by labour workers employed in foreign countries, with a significant concentration in the Middle East, Gulf countries, and surrounding regions. Furthermore, the migration of these individuals, who are often labelled as brain-drain, is not due to a lack of opportunities or financial difficulties. On the contrary, they invest significant amounts of money before flying abroad. In examining the reality of the situation, Tamang and Shrestha (2021), Gautam et al. (2021), and Kharel (2022) posit in their respective studies that despite the increasing trend of students pursuing education abroad, their subsequent professional engagements do not necessarily align with the assumption that they are highly educated. Instead, they seem to prioritise overseas study at any cost and misuse the opportunity for foreign education. Mathiesen (2019), in "Brain Drain: Beyond the Green New Deal," concludes that the purported brain-drain phenomenon is not a matter of utmost concern that nations should be excessively worried about and falsely magnify. It should not be immediately and appropriately addressed through control measures. Rather, the labour drain, which is often overlooked but increasingly prominent, presents a more significant challenge than the brain drain in many countries. Nepal, unfortunately, finds itself immersed in this disheartening reality and painful fact.

3.2 Real complication

Due to a significant increase in the migration of workers to foreign countries, there is currently a severe shortage of general labour in the country. Karki et al. (2022) attribute this to the phenomenon of outmigration, while Kapur and Ghimire (2020) highlight its detrimental impact on agriculture. India currently has the largest number of migrant workers in the world, as noted by Dhakal and Poudel (2023), who state, "India is the highest recipient of remittances in 2021" (p. 53). Nepal ranks seventh among the countries that send significant annual remittances to India. Reports indicate that labourers of Indian origin send approximately three to four billion dollars annually. This significant capital outflow is primarily caused by hiring workers in ordinary labour markets such as construction, plumbing, hair salons, and other similar industries that contribute to a substantial economic deficit. These workers are typically engaged in road construction, hydroelectric projects, and other construction activities (Karki, 2018). A similar amount is spent on importing food and groceries, a consequence of the substantial outmigration of the productive labour force from Nepal.

A quarter of these individuals experience discontent and sadness as they are separated from their country and families. Homesickness presents various challenges and difficulties. A detailed descriptive cross-sectional study conducted among 502 migrant workers in different countries by Sharma et al. (2023) reveals an alarming increase in psychological distress. They report that 14.4% experienced mild to severe depression, and 4.4% had moderate levels of anxiety (p. 1). Therefore, Regmi et al. (2020) emphasise the importance of pre-departure counselling and mental health orientation as mitigating efforts, although the real solution lies in minimising the necessity for overseas employment. This can be achieved by promoting domestic employability and generating employment opportunities within the nation. Nevertheless, Devkota et al. (2021) find the situation even more distressing, as various issues such as family disintegration, instances of sexual misconduct, and crises in parental intimacy are prevalent. Recent reports from the judiciary also confirm a high number of divorce cases, mainly attributed to foreign employment.

The group of individuals who have migrated as labourers overseas are facing numerous challenges and hardships. It is observed that a significant percentage of this group includes individuals who have either lost their lives in work-related accidents or are currently in custody in various countries. A study conducted by Paneru et al. (2020) found that over 10 per cent of migrant workers suffer from at least one health issue, highlighting the need for healthcare management for this population. Additionally, the data clearly demonstrates that the nature of work undertaken by the majority of

these individuals is not only risky and unappealing but also falls into the category of dirty, dangerous, and degrading ('3 D') work, as indicated by Joshi et al. (2023). Paudel et al. (2023) state that their research reveals that Nepalese migrant workers experience extreme weather conditions and face various physical and mental health challenges, including workplace abuse and exploitation.

Despite their arduous tasks and their significant contributions through remittances, there is a severe shortage of labour in the country. However, the absence of these labourers does not visibly affect the country or cause it to stagnate, contrary to the exaggerated debates and concerns surrounding brain drain.

While it is important to show compassion, sympathy, and support to those individuals who have made mistakes but are now striving for improvement, it is not appropriate to exploit and disregard others who have never engaged in wrongful acts. Some leaders and experts hold the opinion that those who have migrated abroad are the true assets for the prosperity and development of the country and believe that they possess the ability to single-handedly drive progress upon their return. Such a narrow-minded perspective puts unnecessary pressure on the dutiful group of experts who remain committed to contributing to the country's growth and development within its borders. These individuals choose not to leave their nation and actively reject the idea of abandoning or betraying their country, instead dedicating themselves to working tirelessly towards its expected prosperity and development. Migrant groups and diaspora societies in various countries often organise trips and arrange travel for their leaders, accompanied by warm hospitality and friendly receptions. These visits may involve the exchange of occasional gifts, rewards, and favours. As a result, there is a natural inclination for political leaders at all levels to establish ties with these overseas communities. However, little research has been conducted on the extent to which these interactions meet the country's pressing needs.

Recently, the term Gross Domestic Requirement (GDR) has emerged in development theory, challenging the traditional reliance on Gross Domestic Product (GDP). Wyżnikiewicz (2017) criticises GDP as being limited in its ability to capture the complexity of economic growth, while Kovalenko (2020) suggests that GDR offers a more comprehensive framework for mapping socio-economic progress. Therefore, a thorough analysis of the specific requirements of the nation should precede any uncritical praise for expatriate communities.

Regarding the brain drain phenomenon, its existence itself is questionable. Even if it does exist, the visible contributions and the loss suffered by the country due to their absence are negligible. On the contrary, Nepal needs to attract more skilled and well-trained individuals to meet the demands of the labour market. The apparent lack of such individuals imposes significant losses on Nepal, both socially and economically. Furthermore, they make substantial financial contributions to the country's survival. Thus, the notion of brain drain, which focuses solely on intellectual migration, neglects the more pressing issue of labour drain and reflects a simplistic and self-righteous perspective. While the voluntary return of individuals should be encouraged, the priority should be placed on addressing the larger issue of labour drain through comprehensive and proactive efforts by the state.

4. Conclusion and Recommendations

In conclusion, the concept of brain drain in Nepal is largely a misconception, with only a negligible number of individuals falling into this category. The departure of this small group has not significantly hindered the nation's prestige or progress. On the contrary, those who leave often do so willingly, perceiving their departure as an opportunity rather than a necessity. The true and pressing issue confronting Nepal is not the so-called brain drain but rather the substantial outflow of labour, which poses a significant threat to the country's socio-economic stability. The labor drain has resulted

in a severe shortage of workers in critical sectors, impeding the nation's advancement and exacerbating economic vulnerabilities.

Therefore, it is crucial for Nepal's governing bodies to recognise the true nature of the problem and adjust their strategies accordingly. The government must implement strict plans and take proactive measures to mitigate the adverse effects of labour drain. This includes generating more employment opportunities within the country, enhancing working conditions, and providing incentives for workers to remain. Moreover, efforts should be made to address the underlying issues that drive labour migration, such as inadequate wages and limited career advancement. By focusing on these areas, Nepal can reduce the outflow of its labour force and channel the energy and skills of its people towards national development. It is essential to shift the discourse away from the illusion of brain drain and instead concentrate on addressing the actual challenge of labour drain in order to ensure a sustainable and prosperous future for Nepal.

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