

Brain-Gain in Bangladesh: What makes it possible?

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Abstract—This paper examines the factors that are responsible for the migration of academics from developing countries to developed countries. After exploring the causes, the paper also examines the factors related with the return migration of academics in Bangladesh. What has made it possible for the return of academics to their home country is the key concern of this research.

Index Terms— brain drain, brain gain, return migration.

I. INTRODUCTION

Attaining and retaining academic staff poses a serious challenge to many higher education institutions all over the world. Due to global competition for staff, it is often difficult for universities in developing countries like Bangladesh to retain indigenous academics with special skills and academic experience. One of the reasons for this tendency is the policy of developing countries in higher education. In the developing world, narrow and sometimes misleading economic analysis has contributed to the view that public investment in universities brings meager returns compared to investment in primary and secondary schools [1]. As a result the quality of higher education in developing countries is under severe threat leading to the culture of brain drain. About 27,000 highly qualified Africans migrated to overseas between 1960 and 1975 and the similar pattern was observable in other developing countries [2].

In recent times, the culture of 'brain drain' has been reversed in some developing countries including Bangladesh because of the return of highly skilled migrants to their home country. Although questions can be raised whether the number of returned migrants is significant or not. However, this is a change - dominant in the education sector in Bangladesh - that is appreciable and at the same time, is beneficial not only for the economy of developing countries but also for the improvement of higher education. What has made it possible for the return of academics to their home country has become a concern among the researchers as well as the policymakers. This research will examine the dual faces of the nature of the migration of academics in Bangladesh – why academics left the country in the past and why they are returning home now. Did the academics leave Bangladesh due to the weak resources available in the universities or were not satisfied with the incentives they received during that time? Can we say that as the resources have been improved in recent times, the university staffs are returning to their home country? Or is the migration of academics related with other socio-political and economic issues? After examining the above mentioned concerns, this research will argue that the nature of return

migration of academics does not depend entirely on availability of resources in the universities but also linked with other socio-economic factors of the home country.

II. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The study focuses its research around four questions:

- 1) What are the reasons for the migration of university teachers?
- 2) Who have returned to Bangladesh and intended to live in their home country?
- 3) Why have they come back to their home country and for how long they will live in Bangladesh?
- 4) What types of policies can encourage the return of academics?

III. METHODOLOGY

Qualitative research method is used in this study. This research covers twenty five university teachers who have returned to Bangladesh and are working in different universities. Two types of respondents are included for the survey: (a) after completion of PhD returned to Bangladesh (b) after attained doctorate degree worked abroad for a while and later came back to Bangladesh. In both cases there was no job obligation in home country and the return was voluntary. Considering these criteria, the respondents are selected from private universities located in Dhaka. The reason for this selection is most of the returned academics are employed in private universities and the top-ranked private universities are located in Dhaka. These universities are BRAC University, North South University, Independent University of Bangladesh, East West University and American International University of Bangladesh. I have chosen two methods for data collection: open-ended interview and documentary research. I have conducted interviews of the returned academics included in my sample as well as researchers of RMMRU (Refugee, Migratory Movement Research Unit) who are considered expert in this field.

Documentary research is another component of research method used in this study. Documents, however, come in many forms, and serve many purposes. The documents I have examined fall into several groups. First, hard copy and online documents prepared by universities within its records or in research collections. Second, government policies concerning the higher education such as the reports from the University Grant Commission (UGC). Third, publications of national and international institutions (RMMRU, IOM, DCR) and other institutions working in education sector.

IV. LITERATURE REVIEW

In the literature of return migration, we locate some scholars who were not interested in classifying different types of return rather examining the motivation for return. Different factors such as economic opportunity, retirement, or children's education motivate the possibility of return migration of the immigrants [3]. King and Newbold [4] identifies years of immigration, age and education as key determinants of return migration. Females and non-professionals are less likely, whereas immigrants with at least a bachelor's degree and those with lower incomes are more likely to undertake return migration. Some immigrants do not plan to return to their country of origin while others do, stimulates heterogeneity in their behaviors related to labour market, skill accumulation, consumption, etc [5]. Older migrants and migrants with their parent living in home country are more likely to take return decision, whereas migrants with PhD and preference of lifestyle abroad are less likely to take return decision [6].

By applying a binary model on a comprehensive set of survey data Soon [7] has identified a number of return-intention determinants of students in New Zealand. One out of six perception-related variables - the perception of race equality - does not seem to contribute to one's return intention. Another five are effective in return decision and they are perception of wage competitiveness, preferred lifestyle, network of family and friends, working environment and opportunities for application of one's specialized knowledge. Thomas-Hope [8] has revealed that return migration to Jamaica is associated closely with the existence and nature of the transnational linkages established between migrants and their home country, especially at the level of the household and family.

Lehree [9] conducted a research on the returned IT professionals to India, found some other reasons for return. The first type is one kind of forced migration initiated by push factor and it occurs as a result of the presence of a hostile economic environment in the host country. Both push and pull factors are responsible for another type of return migration. The third type is initiated due to the pull factors in home country - better economic opportunities, formation of policies attractive to return, political changes and other incentives. The fourth type of return is the inability of the migrant to stay abroad for different reasons such as unavailability of permanent status.

Zweig studied Chinese people's view about returning to their home country in 1993 by conducting interviews of 273 students, scholars and former residents of China in the US [10]. The research found that until 1980s both political instability and economic opportunities were equally important for not returning. The political conditions in China generated lack of political freedom and a lack of trust in the country which were not supportive for the migrants to come back. At the same time, better houses and income in the US and lack of job in China motivated them to stay in

the host country. If economic and social conditions improve Chinese students and scholars will return in large numbers, but the government needs to be proactive [10].

The changing role of government to attract the migrants is evident in a research conducted by Iredale [11]. The researcher found the average return rate of Chinese studying overseas is about 33.3% which is accomplished because of the recent government policies. These policies include assistance in setting up a business venture, waive of business tax in high tech industry, tax-free import of materials and other incentives. A number of special zones have been established where the returnees will receive these facilities. Among the returnees from Australia, 78.4% was permanent returnee, 15.9% temporary returnee and 4% intermittent returnees [11]. The most common reason behind return was the attractive policies offered by the Chinese government. Lack of future career advancement was another factor that motivated them to come back from Australia. Among the returnees, 82% claimed that one of the significant impacts of return migration in China was the application of the knowledge and skills they gained abroad. Apart from the use of skills, another concern was the respect they received in their home county as well as the responsibility of doing challenging works.

V. REASONS OF MIGRATION OF ACADEMICS IN DEVELOPING COUNTRIES

By 2000 there were 20 million highly skilled immigrants living in the OECD member countries, a 63.7% increase in ten years against only 14.4% increase for unskilled immigrants [12]. One of the reasons for this growth is the introduction of skill-intensive immigration system by the developed countries [6]. Attracting highly skilled people is one of the goals of immigration policies of industrialized countries. University faculty member or academic, a highly skilled professional, is included in this group of international transfer of human capital resources. This section highlights the conditions of academics in developing countries including Bangladesh that are related with the migration of academics from developing to developed countries

Table 1: Conditions in universities in developing countries

Support services	<p>Elite universities (EU): mainly individual offices, quite adequate library, personal computing, electronic and administrative facilities.</p> <p>Urban-based Universities (UU): shared offices, poor library, rudimentary computing, poor administrative support.</p> <p>Rural-based Universities (RU): shared open space, extremely poor library facilities, non-existing computing and electronic facilities, non-existing administrative support.</p>
Staff remuneration	<p>EU: inadequate, supplemented by moonlighting for other universities, government, industry and international development agencies.</p> <p>UU: grossly inadequate, supplementation as above but less so from work with international development agencies.</p> <p>RU: very grossly inadequate, with poor supplementation opportunities.</p>
Staff promotion	Far fewer on academic merit.
Political and academic freedom	Very low degree.

Source: Lim (2001)

One of the main reasons of migration of academics is limited research incentives. The advancement of knowledge through research is an essential function for higher education. It is declared in the World Conference of Higher Education, 1998 that all members of the academic community engaged in research should be provided with proper training, resources and support as research is conducted for the benefit of humanity [1]. Research universities in developing countries face an array of serious problems as found by the World Bank. The report states that recent pressures to expand higher education have diverted research universities from pursuing research and their financial condition is further diminishing their research capabilities. Public universities in Africa and Asia devote up to 80 percent of their budgets to personnel and student maintenance costs, leaving few resources for a research establishment [1]. On the contrary, the U.S. universities are funding a major portion to the research. In U.S. research universities, faculty research is evaluated in terms of publication in peer-reviewed academic journals [13]. For the academics especially the scientists in developing countries, the paucity of research collaboration is often an impediment to their creativity and productivity [1]. Although some steps have taken to strengthen global network but they are not sufficient.

Another factor that motivates migration is lack of transparency in the education system. Lim argues that in developed countries, promotion is based on academic merit and conducted in a timely and transparent way, while in developing countries the procedure is clumsy, and political factors matter more than academic merit more often than not. "Favoritism and patronage contribute to academic inbreeding that denies universities the benefit of intellectual cross-fertilization" [1: 24]. The practice of rewarding length of service, rather than academic performance is discouraged in the prescriptions given by the Task Force on

Higher Education and Society. Faculties working in the education sector in Bangladesh choose migration when they witness that powers rather than performance of academics weights most in the appointment and promotion decision.

Academic salaries have always been a contentious issue, especially when persuading talented graduates and postgraduates to opt for a higher education career rather than the private sector. Low starting salaries are deterring people from entering academic careers. Remuneration packages in universities in developed countries are sufficient to ensure that staff members devote their energy in the service of one institution [13]. This provides a comfortable standard of living even after retirement. For instance, in the US universities, the nine-month salary package absolves academics of any responsibility to their universities over three months in the summer [13]. On the contrary, in the public universities in Bangladesh, faculty pay is generally low and pay increases are governed by bureaucratic personnel systems that reward long service. As a result of poor remuneration package, academics in developing countries devote a significant amount of energy and time working in other institutions. Academic staffs become less available to students of their home institutions.

The imposition of the British model in the Subcontinent has created higher education systems which were characterized by the features of the state supervising model which limits the power of national government and respects the autonomy of higher education system [14]. At university level in Bangladesh, the top of the governance body is the Chancellor who is generally the President of the state. The Vice Chancellor and Pro-Vice Chancellor who are employees of the institution, are appointed by the government and this positions always change as the government changes. The state controls the university by the University Grant Commission whose primary responsibility is to allocate and disburse grants to the

universities placed at its disposal by the government. According to the report of The Task Force on Higher Education and Society, prepared by the World Bank (2000: 63), "The tendency of politicians to intervene in higher education left many institutions hostage to factional policies, with decisions on student selection, faculty appointments and promotions, curriculum design, and similar matters being made on political grounds rather than on merit". The teachers work under the pressure and stress not only of the political parties but also of the students involved in politics. It is revealed in a report that students play a political role in higher education and government support students' involvement in politics and at the same time fear students on the ground that students could overthrow a regime. The report further states that many governments expect universities to contain the culture of student politics, further corrupting the governance systems within institutions. Only loyalty of political party is highly encouraged to recruit teachers of same ideology. The prevalence of teachers association and its strong political affiliation has made the condition aggravated. Sometimes there are strong ties with teacher and students political leaders who control most of all the policy decision of a university. This is the cause of general institutional weakness to practice objectivity and rationalization in the universities. Student politics and the influence of government and other political parties become an obstacle to the freedom of the academics which also lead to brain drain.

The research finds four major reasons for not returning to Bangladesh – secured life abroad (48%), better career and economic opportunities (28%), children's future (12%) and health care system (12%). It is the belief of the returnees that traditionally high skilled professionals living in a developed country as migrants do not come back home considering the existing conditions of the country. Although the private university has created a space to think about return, secured life is still a major concern. One returnee said,

"Just a week after my arrival in Bangladesh I experienced security problem. One day I was working in my office, a young boy acting as a dump came to my room and asked for help. I told him it's not the right place to serve his purpose. I concentrated on the computer; later found my mobile handset is gone. It was on the table. In my own country, from my office table, someone took my mobile phone – after that incident I have felt insecure. I think, to the migrants, the security problem is a key factor for not coming back to Bangladesh."

Some returnees have adjusted with the security issue in a different way. They anticipate security as a common problem; it's a problem for people living in New York as well as in Dhaka. The extent of insecure life has been reduced by the power of money – always use car and live in a protected residential area. The migrants, in response of these efforts by the returnees, argue that some incidents happened in Bangladesh which discouraged them to return. For instance, one returnee said, "I attended a conference in Manila in 1998 where I came to know a Bangladeshi couple. They came back to Bangladesh and worked as doctors in

ICDDR. Later migrated again because their young son was abducted. They had to give 200,000 Tk. to get back their son alive. They were so traumatized that left Bangladesh immediately." When the migrants read or heard this type of news in newspapers or other channels they are less motivated to return Bangladesh.

The second major concern for the migrants is career and better economic opportunities available in the host country. Living there is a practical decision for a group of migrants who are working in technical areas such as computer, software, electrical engineering and other science related fields. They are specialized in fields that have no jobs and sometimes very limited jobs available in Bangladesh. To them, whether like it or not, it is a necessity to stay in the developed country. Coming back to Bangladesh, is counterproductive for this category of workforce as no meaningful contribution is possible to make. In fact, the faculties encourage the students of Bangladesh studying in technical fields to move to overseas where they can implement their skills. Accepting this reality, there are other migrants who are doing well in their jobs - social sciences or business studies – but their staying is not a necessity like other group of migrants. The migrant academics also do not want to come back to Bangladesh for the sake of a better future for their children and access to advance health care system. There is no way to deny that their children receive quality education abroad, lot of facilities to strengthen their skills, access to extra curricular activities, reputed companies where they can build up their career and most importantly uplift their level of confidence. Some migrants wanted to come back but could not because their children grew up and reached an age when it is difficult for them to adjust with Bangladeshi life style.

VI. REASONS OF RETURN

Every migrant, consciously or unconsciously wants to live in their birth of place and such desire is very natural. It is a common topic among the immigrant community - will I go back? If it's not possible, they always try to figure out the justifications to stay although they are not happy with that decision. On the contrary, a group of migrants come back for a number of reasons including both tangible and non-tangible issues. In this research, there are five factors that motivated the migrants to return their home country i.e. Bangladesh. These are greater contribution to the home country, look after parents, better career, better social life and children's orientation to Bangladeshi culture. Among these factors, 40% returnees identify greater and meaningful contribution as the most significant reason for return. The second priority is for the parents (24%) followed by children's cultural orientation (20%), better career (12%) and better social life (4%). It appears from these findings that tangible factor such as better economic opportunity or greater earning is not important for the return of the migrants. Rather intangible factors which include a visible contribution for the home country, emotional attachment to family members, children's adoption with the cultural values and norms of the mother country are much

significant in taking the decision to return. In this context, one returnee argued, “If you quantify material issues you can’t take a decision. You can come back thinking non-tangible issues such as patriotism, family members and cultural values. If you compare situation with tangible gains, the difference is too much. But if you add non-tangible issue, the scale of balance will change.”

Table 2: Reason of return

Reason of return	Number of Faculties
Meaningful contribution	10 (40%)
Parents	6 (24%)
Better career	3 (12%)
Better life style	1 (4%)
Cultural orientation of Children	5 (20%)

Source: Author’s research work (2010)

In this research the key non-tangible factor - contribution to the home country - refers to meaningful works, intellectual challenge, desire to do something for the students and sense of belonging or identity. Some returnees who were well established in their own fields in abroad actually came back to Bangladesh to make a change. They realized that there are some opportunities in Bangladesh which are distinct and they have a desire to make greater impact on society. The returned academics want to create their own environment and work on with some challenges - build up a world-class university, innovate a dynamic institutional structure, offer a research environment, improve the quality of higher education. As migrants they were not satisfied with the contributions they were making because their works did not lead to a greater change in the society as a whole. One returnee after working in one of the top universities of the world stated, “Just taking classes and writing papers is not contribution to me, may be contribution but not a challenging work. Can’t do any change in the society. What I realized that working to build up an international standard university in Bangladesh is much meaningful contribution.”

Another returnee who worked for Intel Corporation in the US first came back to Bangladesh on leave to take care of parents for a time being. At one stage, he started working in a private university as a part time teacher. While working in the university the returnee has enjoyed the profession and become so much involved with the students that lost the interest to join Intel again. Another way of contribution comes from the sense of belonging or identity. After living in overseas for more than two decades some migrants suffered identity crisis. Although they gained citizenship of the host country, they did not find themselves connected with the society they were living in. They were not interested to what was happening in their host country. Instead, they were eager to know the news of their home country, excited to participate in discussion regarding Bangladeshi politics, culture, economy and sports. One

returnee said, “If I did not come back to Bangladesh I always would feel I have done something terribly wrong which is not forgivable.” Another returnee added, “The decision to return became easier when I realized myself not as an American after living 28 years but as a Bangladeshi.” This group of returnee who returned for the purpose of contribution and sense of belonging came back permanently and are working hard in their own areas.

The second factor that motivated migrants (24%) to come back is to look after parents. In this category, the returnees would not come back if there were other family members available to accompany parents. In most cases, they are the only child of their parents. They wanted to live and work in the host country but there was no other option. The risk of having this type of returnees in the home country is they might not stay permanently although they considered themselves as permanent. In addition to stay with parents, this group of returnees also want to spend quality time with their relatives, cousins and other family members. One sort of emotional attachment pushes them to come back to Bangladesh. The third reason is children’s cultural orientation. There is a dilemma of the immigrants that they want their children accustomed with the culture of Bangladesh. Some returnees find it unfair and injustice to the children because it is the parents who brought up in Bangladesh not the children. But the immigrant parents expect their children to behave like a Bangladeshi although they are less connected with this culture. It is irrational as you are growing up in one culture but supposed to behave in such a way that is alien to you. In order to avoid this situation 20% returnees came back for the children’s cultural orientation. One of them said, “I was scared and worried about my children...if you live there (abroad) you might lose next generation.” Another returnee added, “I want my children speak in Bangla, dress up like Bangladeshi, go to Shahid Minar and more importantly be like us.” Only 12% returnees came back for a better career in Bangladesh who also wanted to stay there but did not get academic job and returned to Bangladesh. The majority of this group consider their return as temporary – they are searching for a job in the developed countries and will move whenever they grab that opportunity.

The difference between the returnees of high skilled professions of Bangladesh and other countries such as India, China, and Taiwan is the pull factors offered by respective government. The Science Park in Taiwan is built up by the government where returnees get different incentives - cheap airfares, subsidized housing and subsidized education for their children [11]. The Chinese government established special zones where the returnees receive facilities including assistance in setting up a business venture, waive of business tax in high tech industry, tax-free import of materials and other incentives. In certain fields, such as biotech, the Chinese government is taking care of the lab space and infrastructure needs and it has become a strong enticement for people to start their own firms [15]. The Indian government also attracted returnees particularly in the software industry by introducing favourable policies for the development of this industry [9]. On the contrary, the

government of Bangladesh apart from the dual-citizenship has not launched any special programme to encourage and motivate the high skilled migrants to return home. The returned academics are motivated by the initiatives taken by the private organizations not by the government.

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VII. CONCLUSION

Private university created an opportunity for the migrant academics to come back to Bangladesh and contribute to the development of the higher education sector of the country. Unlike the faculties of public university, these are the returnees who did not depend on the native government fund to gain their doctorate degree as well as skills. In most cases, the University Grants Commission or the government did not sponsor the migration costs of the returnees; the cost was supplied from the returnees in terms of gaining scholarship or self-finance. Understanding this scenario, value addition is greater when they returned to their home country and is contributing significantly in different ways. They are eager to do something productive, want to become an actor in the process of uplifting the quality of higher education. Apart from acting as running the wheel of private university, the returned academics are doing researches in collaboration with scholars of reputed universities and other donor agencies. But such contribution towards development will sustain if their stay is permanent and get adequate support from the government.

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