

THE BRAIN DRAIN –A SYMPTOM*
by Masood Hasan

ONE PERSON says the glass is half full another says it is half empty. Both are correct but the emphasis is very very different. In a way, there is a very close relationship between the optimist and the pessimist! To talk of the brain drain is taking an optimistic view of life, it obscures the more important aspect ie the other side of the picture. If there is a brain drain, by definition there must exist its counterpart – the “mutt glut.” The concept of opposites being very closely related is much older than we think yin and yang, light and darkness, truth and sin . .

If we are interested in drying up the brain drain it will be more to the point to address ourselves to the mutt glut. I would like to consider the mutt glut as the cause and the brain drain the effect for purposes of this article, after all the gluts have it, resulting in the outward displacement of brains.

It follows, therefore, that we must find ways and means of reducing “muttism” and if we can do that I am sure the brains will be well looked after. Muttism thrives on ignorance which is an excellent fertilizer and is at its best when the left hand is completely ignorant of what the right does. Is it possible to throw the light on such a state of affairs?

It is, if we are prepared to adopt the use of the scientific method to ensure an integrated analytical effort to find out what is going on. We will, in that case, have made the beginnings of an objective enquiry. We are all agreed that an objective inquiry is a good thing, but how can we get about it, particularly if muttism has got institutionalized? It calls for an act of courage, for as Bronowski says what is science if it is not “. . . the acceptance of what works and the rejection of what does not (and) that needs more courage than we think.”

We can only hope that ways and means to reduce the mutt glut will be found quickly enough as time is not in our favour. There is plenty of slack before we can draw the rope of opportunity tight enough for those of our talented, who are far away from us for them to hazard the walk back. Merely promulgating laws prohibiting emigration of technologists or scientists of one kind or another is akin to treating the symptoms rather than the disease itself. In any case individuals always find ways and means of getting round very many things and “muttism” itself provides the means! After all can anyone stop a determined person?

Crying Need

We say the brain drain is a bad thing (fact), we have not stopped it (fact); we should, therefore, question in our more conscious moments our sanity because we are agreed that a mutt glut is a bad thing (fact?) To strike at the roots of muttism is the crying need of the country today. Being able to throw light (in an organized and formal fashion, mind

* Pakistan Times, August 18, 1968.

you) on a “muttery” accretion is half-way towards dissolving the thrombus out of our system.

It is a fact that our country, though a developing one, is not the only one faced with a mutt glut. Developed countries of the West are losing the brains that are moving further West. This westward shift has been explained away in the past as being on account of the “technology gap.” Better informed individuals in Europe say nothing of the sort. They say it is on account of the “management gap”. This gap is one of the easiest to define (in three words) – “resistance to change.”

Our problem is basically the same in “form” but at a very different level! This does not, however, preclude us from drawing meaningful conclusions from the situation described above. After all the Westward drift is felt by us in Pakistan. Many talented individuals are filling in the gaps made available by those who have migrated to the USA.

Our efforts, if they are to yield fruit, towards a progressive reduction in “muttony” requires an honest self-appraisal by all of us and this can be very uncomfortable thing, but it is condition precedent before we can experience a change in attitude—the same difference, which is termed the management gap between Europe and the USA. A change of attitude in the right direction can bring about a revolutionary increase in productivity (and are we not looking for it?) Though it appears that Pakistan will progressively phase its way of achievement as patterned by the developed countries, *this means we will go through the same error-committing schedule*. This is by no means necessary. Failure to understand this results in waste of resources, all sorts.

Dr. Hawkins in the “Medical World News” has something very relevant to say “. . . If a man who consumes more than he produces knows of a land where the under producer is subsidized he will wish to go (or stay) there. If a man who produces more than he consumes knows of a land where the producing classes are less exploited by the consuming classes, he will wish to go there If a man can improve his productivity, produce and enjoy the fruits of his labour, he will usually stay where he lives.”

We have heard and read a lot about Parkinson’s Laws. There are two other laws which are very much more relevant to “muttercrats”. The first is Peter’s Law, which states that a person rises to his level of incompetence, ie the last (final) job held by an individual is by and large somewhat beyond his capacity hence no further promotions come his way. Being kicked upstairs is a part of this phenomena. If this happens early in the life of such a mutt one can at once see the fillip given to the brain drain!

The other law, I believe first enunciated by Pacifico, is adapted from Einstein. It is the Law of Human Relativity and goes something like this: to the extent I diminish you, then relatively I advance. In organisations operating in a market where there is little or no competition a pretty high level of internal incompetence can be tolerated without serious effects.

Dilemma

Many a time an intelligent and ambitious young hopeful is placed between the horns of Peter's Law and the Law of Human Relativity and in the bargain Pakistan is the poorer—some other country the gainer. After all, no one in his right senses is prepared to accept rubbish.

What is it that is missing? After all, by definition the mutt glut is increasing. It is the inability, conscious or unconscious, to follow the scientific method, both in the overall appreciation of the problem as also in our lack of determination to subscribe to an analytical effort to get down to the nitty gritty at each level of our daily activities. It is only then that we can lay the basis of a practical integrated analytical effort. And it is only at that time there will be a very clear definition of our problems thus separating the symptoms from the disease, and this will be no mean achievement.

History is our ally, if only we can read its lessons properly. How many times have how many peoples raised themselves to something higher by their own bootstraps, that too in time so short that the imagination boggles. And all this based on an intangible—an ideal or ideology. Let us first look inwards and understand ourselves, the rest will look after itself.