

Sahay, Anjali (2009), *Indian Diaspora in the United States: Brain Drain or Gain?* Lanham: Lexington Books. Pp. 248, ISBN 978-0-7391-3549-5

For the last few decades, most analyses of migration of skilled labourers have predominantly discussed a sense of despair and alarm at what they see as a brain drain for the sending countries. Recently, due to the high volume of international migration coupled with the global economy, attempts are made by many scholars and policy makers in the sending countries to explore the implications of migration. They began to shape relatively more competing migration policy options aimed at the gain strategies associated with brain drain. It is observed that there is a fundamental shift in discourse among the fields of the transnational mobility of human capital in analysing the economic benefits of brain drain and its potential force to the development strategies for the sending countries. In the backdrop of this discourse, the book under review by Anjali Sahay, entitled *Indian Diaspora in the United States: Brain Drain or Gain?* evolved from the premise of the transnational flow of human capital along with globalised economy. It examines the brain gain strategies for the sending countries with reference to Indian migration to the United States as a case study.

The book is composed of eight chapters divided into two parts. The preface to the book deals with all the subject matters that are analysed in the study. The concept of brain drain is redefined here in the larger context as 'brain gain', 'brain circulation' and 'brain exchange' associated with emigration through new framework of enquiry. Part One of the book is divided into four chapters which look at the brain drain issues in theoretical and historical perspectives. Chapter one, an introduction, provides the discourse on brain drain and identifies the central concepts, research questions, hypothesis statements, units of analysis, and methodology. This chapter discusses mainly the impact of international migration of skilled labour. In addition, this chapter argues that the diaspora option is more advantageous both to the sending countries and its emigrants in terms of acquiring skill proficiency and economic remittances.

Chapter two looks at the theoretical framework for understanding the brain drain and brain gain perspectives in the wider context. The diverse approaches to the brain drain issue on solutions to brain drain is presented in the light of the available literature as way for alternative analysis. Here return and diaspora option can be utilized as a development strategy for sending countries. This chapter argued that the migration of the highly skilled can be effectively utilized as soft power for their countries of origin. The concept of soft power leads to redefine the notions of asymmetrical interdependence between sending and receiving countries.

Chapter three highlights as a background study regarding the relationship between the two countries selected for examining the issue of brain drain. The historical background of the relationship between the two countries both during and after the Cold War is explained in political and economic perspectives. The empirical evidence about “brain gain” to India as a result of “brain drain” of skilled workers to the United States is examined here. It is discussed that the diasporic communities can operate as agents of development for their home countries. In addition to the economic aspects, migration linkages between them have impacted their bilateral relationship in new and innovative ways. This chapter adds further to our understanding of the complexities involved in the mobility of highly skilled people. The major thread of the chapter four is the restriction to immigration laws adopted by the United States to attract and pull in the highly skilled manpower. This chapter looks at the important implications for the relationship between migration and economic development by analysing to evolve a more purposeful migration policy framework aimed at the maximum benefits.

Part II of the book is composed of four chapters including conclusion. The empirical evidence for the role played by the Indian diaspora is provided from the chapter five to seven. The direct benefits of human capital are measured in chapter five as remittances, return, and transmitting technological know-how by creating knowledge networks between India and the USA. Different approaches to brain gain are discussed in this chapter. Primarily, this chapter addresses some serious questions with respect to the migration of highly skilled labor. The emergence of the Indian diaspora in the United States as having the power of ideas to set the political agenda beneficial to the home country is explained in chapter six. It evaluates, through evidence and arguments, whether skilled migrants with high levels of education and income are more likely to influence investments for their country of origin. Moreover, whether they can be utilized as soft power to redefine asymmetrical relationships between the countries of origin and destination is analysed.

The role of the sending country in promoting return, investment and the initiatives toward their diaspora and future policy options are explored in chapter seven. The chapter argues that Indian diaspora has the potential to play important roles in India’s development and can be a valuable network for its members. Lastly, it concludes with a discussion on the various hurdles that diaspora members face while investing in India. Finally, chapter eight, the conclusion, offers an assessment of the main findings of this book. The theoretical and policy implications of the study and other avenues for future research is also the part of this chapter.

The major thesis put forward in this book is the following: The book argues that brain drain can be

effectively viewed as a positive phenomenon. A large portion of Indian Diaspora, who are strong in terms of wealth and education, was settled in the United States (p ix and 84). These diaspora use their power and position to lobby issues of both political and economic concern for their countries of origin. Consequently, migration leads to multidimensional aspects, changing from actor to actor in specific issue areas. The Indian Diaspora, therefore, can be effectively utilized as soft power for their country of origin. In such a situation, diaspora take a role to redefine the notions of asymmetrical interdependence between the United States and India. Despite all these factors being determined by more active role played by the state in the sending country, it can be observed that such a form of relationship between them in favor of India remains at best in the long term (p 157).

The book consists essentially of empirical evidence substantiating the aforesaid thesis, mainly compiled from both quantitative and qualitative research. It has involved collecting data from different sources. The statistical data on immigration is primarily taken from the United States, for instance, US Census Bureau, National Statistical Agencies of US, Central Bank of US, US Department of Homeland Security and; US Citizen and Immigration Services. Apart from these sources of data, case studies of returnees, diaspora members, IMF and World Bank provided various levels of data for the book. The table and figures can be seen throughout the study. It reaches remarkable heights from chapter three to six where the historical relationship between US and India, US immigration laws, the economic and political potential of Indian diaspora in the US and so on are described and analysed most convincingly. The book has used a number of terms in different chapters of the book. For instance, “diaspora networks”, “soft power”, “brain circulation” and “carriers of gains of migration” are defined meaningfully in accordance with the context of the study.

In terms of the organization and style of the book, it deserves appreciation for the presentation of the idea, research questions, hypotheses, the concept, and theoretical and empirical evidence in the concerned chapters. All hypotheses are proved with clear evidence without ambiguity and it offers insights into the causes and consequences of migration. In addition the rich review of literature provides a wide-range idea of the studies and research done in the concerned field.

The book is considered as a paradigmatic shift from the earlier literature on loss of human capital as contributing to brain drain. In addition, since there is a concern on the political implication of migration, the book tries to bridge the serious gap in the literature that links international migration and international relations. Here, it becomes imperative to look at international migration as one factor that may be responsible for adding on to the current theories on Assymetrical Interdependence (p 47). Therefore, this research is a departure from previous works in the sense that

an attempts to look at the areas where each country has its particular strength. Besides these aspects, it answers the question of how the more dependent country can use its diaspora as soft power in the contemporary world.

Like other research work, some of the themes are left by the book also for the further study, such as the impact of immigrant work force on native labor force, comparison of the Indian diaspora with other Asian and non-Asian diaspora groups in the United States, the impact on other legal and illegal immigration in the United States, the assimilation of Indo-Americans in native societies and the cultural and social assimilation of second generation Indians (p 225). These are considered as the limitations of the study too.

Finally, considering the core issue of economic development of sending country, the book under review opens the diversity of the subject of enquiry to the rapidly emerging body of studies on the transnational movement of the people. Hence, the discussion in the book goes beyond the traditional perspective by analysing the wide range of aspects, in terms of the flow of human capital, core-periphery discussion, the role of diasporic community and the element of soft power in international relations with reference to international migration. In such a context, the accessibility of this interdisciplinary contribution would equally address a wider audience interested in any of these topics. To sum up, since the subject of the mobility of human capital itself, though different in time and space, has been a dynamic force and potential concern of research; it will always be studied in the globalized world.

**Rajeevan Kunnath**, Research Scholar, Centre for West Asian Studies, School of International Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, Email: [rajeevkunnath@gmail.com](mailto:rajeevkunnath@gmail.com)