

Brain Drain: A View from the Other Side

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The gigantic VC 10 touched down at Heathrow airport. Now the celestial abode that he always dreamed of had become reality. But did it really happen? From the early days of his childhood he was nurtured in an atmosphere where this foreign land was elevated unto a celestial plane, where all that happened here was for the good of human kind.

He had desired to stay over there for sometime but certain existing circumstance did not permit him to do so. Firstly, he had, only a temporary entry permit. Evenmore, he had planned to come out here much earlier, but then the funds he possessed were far from adequate.

He knew at the outset that there were many Ceylonese all over the place. These Ceylonese had now become 'home birds'. They had built their respective nests here and there. These nests resembled some of the Ceylonese villages, he thought to himself. Their style of living and mannerisms were still the same, for they were just another batch of Ceylonese. But they wished very much to think of themselves as a privileged class.

What were they really doing here? Most of them had learnt to do one thing—to do a job that they detested in their homeland. Some of them were lurking behind counters either selling commodities or counting money. A few high ranking ladies were seen selling goods in supermarkets, some of them were wives of doctors or wives of administrators. Even great respectable gentlemen, of his country, had now taken up positions of lorry drivers or store keepers. Anyway this is something they must do, for existence is impossible without money. It is not easy. There are innumerable young ladies who have obtained positions as nurses, reluctantly tending their jobs and cursing themselves. Young men who have left their homes in search of higher education, have turned to be bottle washers or dish washers or railway men. They got to do it. One must not hate this situation, for it is a very real situation. But what is strange is that the very people engaged in these positions detest and look down upon the others who do similar jobs. This is something that must be made known, for it is something they have inherited from an inbred class consciousness, from their false value patterns, pseudo livelihood etc.

I am one who was genuinely surprised to see some of our fellowmen thinking they were similar to white men. Let me recall just one incident. A young man who had lived in England for nearly fifteen years entered my room one day, when I was engaged in conversation with a white friend. This young man told us that though he had lived in this foreign land for so long a time he had not qualified himself in any important field of work. Instead he whiled away his time doing various odd jobs and acquiring the permissive culture of the country. He had a good English accent, presumably a thing that he had cultivated with difficulty. When my English friend asked him about his future, he just shrugged his shoulders and said: 'Well I have no plans'. When the young man took leave from us, my white

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friend remarked: 'Is it not a pity to encounter young men of that sort, for they have acquired just one thing, which is that accent. This is all they seem to have got from this country!'

This thought brings back to my mind a remarkable letter written many years ago by Lenin's wife, Krupskaya. In that letter she says that when they arrived in London they found that they could not understand a single word of English. They had to study the language with great difficulty. They studied so very hard. In exchange for what they learnt they taught Russian. A most significant observation she makes is on the attitude of Lenin to the surroundings in London. They saw the mean little streets tenanted by London's working class, with clothes lines stretched across the road, and pale children playing on the doorsteps. They saw clearly the two positions of wealth and poverty. Then Lenin would mutter in English through clenched teeth: 'Two nations'.

There is no difference between the Ceylonese who go to London and the Ceylonese who go to live in any other big city. What they do and acquire are the same. It is also a problem of culture and attitudes interspersed with economics. On one occasion a certain doctor hurried into my room complaining: 'Oh to live with these idiots' I asked him: 'Why doctor what is wrong?' Then he said:

'Oh these Ceylonese, they drove me out of the country. They don't want any decent man to do anything worthwhile. But.....'

'Yes.....' I asked.

'Yes, but what are we doing in this blessed country? We look as if we are having first class opportunities, but in reality living in third class situations. In Ceylon we were first class citizens, but had third class opportunities.....'

This great big complaint never ends. It is a saga of various nuances. Anyway the doctor who was critical about his standpoint was yearning to see his kith and kin in his homeland. Like my doctor friend I have come across innumerable home sick Ceylonese yearning to go back, but find that they have either not collected sufficient funds to foot an air bill or are reluctant to face their kith and kin once they are in their homeland.

So the happiness and the bliss of this celestial plane is at cross roads. Amidst these a few of our friends have acquired quite a useful thing for their existence, for some of them have become international racketeers or betrayers of their own country! The story of this great renunciation cannot end in this fashion. For those who have entered an escapist sojourn all ends in frustration.

They have escaped temporarily from social injustice and class problems in order to better their lives. But what a journey!

It is time for the VC 10 to reach Katunayaka airport. Oh, the well-wishers and family members are all crowded at this place to see a son of Lanka return home.