

Issues and Challenges of the Indian Migrants in Gulf Countries

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Background

Migration is a universal phenomenon, and its origin can be traced to the origin of humankind. According to UNESCO, migration is the act of leaving one's own country or administrative unit for a certain minimum period of time. Also, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) defined as migration is the movement of people from one area to another. It is a process of moving, either across an international border, which results in a temporary or permanent change of residence. It includes the movement of refugees, displaced persons, uprooted people as well as economic migrants. Migration is two types such as internal migration (between the states or regions within the state) and external migration (crossing the international borders). Internal migration means movement within a particular country or migration between the regions within the country. External migration refers to movement from one country to another. According to Census of India, the internal migration taking place mainly rural to urban due to the rapid urbanization. A significant source of this growth is urban migration as an increasing number of people do not find employment opportunities in rural areas, therefore, move instead to towns and cities.

However, on the other hand, globalization is the primary factor influencing the external movement of people and for the growth of transitional communities. The international migrants are playing a significant role in the economic growth and development of the both origin and destination countries. In addition, they also benefit individuals as well as communities' development. In the Indian context, its border has been experiencing the political, religious and commercial movement of people (Khadria, et al., 2009). India is one of the leading workforce exporting countries in the world, with more than twenty-five million Indian population residing abroad and became one of the largest diasporas next to Chinese. It is a unique country where we can find both in-migration and out-migration. In-migration is from the all the South Asian countries to India such as Bangladesh, Nepal, Myanmar, Sri Lanka and Maldives and so on. The out-migration is from India to other countries like Gulf, South East Asian countries, or the US

and other European countries. However, there was a paradigm shift of migration towards the Gulf region in the early 1970s and since last decade or so, the demand for skilled workers from the Europe and South-East Asia region is increasing. Particularly, unskilled and semi-skilled labours are migrating from the southern states including Telangana state (MOIA Report, 2016).

According to one study 80 percent laborers are blue-collar migrant workers or unskilled migrants and rest of them are skilled and student migration (Gupta, 2014; Kohli, 2014). It is mainly result of two waves of migration from India. The first wave consisted of unskilled laborers migration to Gulf countries in the early 1970s following the oil boom. In fact, the oil-boom led to economic and infrastructure development in the Gulf which required labour migrants from other countries (Boyle and Rob, 2014). The Gulf countries and the Southeast Asian countries (mainly to Singapore and Malaysia) become an important destination for Indian semi-skilled and unskilled migrants such as housemaids, cooks, drivers, gardeners and construction workers. Most of them are temporary migrants who return home country after the expiry of their contractual employment (Niimi and Caglar, 2006).

The second wave of migration from India comprised of skilled labour, professionals, and entrepreneurs in post economic liberalization era. There has also been arising in high-grade professionals, doctors and students' migration to both developing and developed countries due to pull factors, i.e., high wages and a better standard of livings and higher studies (Sahoo and Trilok, 2013). Adams and John (2003) argued, nowadays, many of young semi-educated persons have been leaving India as whole in search of employment opportunities. These countries have been facing the depopulation or ageing population problems which resulted in a shortage of manpower in the labour market. Therefore, the industries and companies have more interest in recruiting talented foreign persons to meet their industry requirements and alleviate skills gaps (Sil and Samapti, 2010).

Main Reasons for Migration from India

Why do people migrate? People migrate to other countries for employment opportunities and better living standards. However, in the case of India there is social as well as economic migration is taking place. Economic migration, particularly in unskilled and semi-skilled

migrants towards Gulf and East Asian countries whose motive is to earn more money, then come back to home whereas the social migration is in the skilled migrants towards the US and European countries and motive is to earn money settle there in destination country (Khadria, et al., 2009). The majority of the many parts of India have been migrating to Gulf countries. Primarily due to poverty, unemployment, economic disparities, distress in the agriculture sector, and lack of job opportunities in combined Andhra Pradesh.

Further, people in India do not have sufficient agricultural land, and some of them are landless. Even if some of them have agriculture land, it is unable to cultivate and seek profits due to lack of irrigation facilities and use of modern technology. These factors forced agriculture laborers to migrate to Gulf region for seeking employment. In India, agriculture is a dominant sector in accommodating unskilled labor where many studies find the disguised employment and use of traditional technology (Khadria, et al., 2009). For the last two decades, agriculture is not a beneficial and profitable sector which is also one of the reasons. Apart from the traditional industries as cottage, sugar, etc. industry and lack of employment opportunities forced them to look for an alternative job elsewhere in Gulf countries. Another factor is that there are limited opportunities in India for unskilled persons. Therefore, they have to look for an alternative place where they have better opportunities which motivate people to migrate (Niimi and Caglar, 2006).

India is one of the states in receiving remittances from the Gulf region. However, the RBI does not give a State level break-up of private transfers to India. The available data gives us the picture of only those remittances that are through a formal channel. There are informal channels as well for flows of remittances. The vigilance and restrictions on the informal channel and favorable macro situation since 1991 in India resulted in a greater flow of remittances through a formal channel (MOIA, 2015).

Remittances and Socio-Economic Development of Migrants from India

International migration and remittances have its impact on macro and micro level of development has been a major point of study among the scholars and policymakers particularly major migrants sending states like India. Remittances have assumed great importance over the last decade in development studies. The migrants continue to have links with their home states,

even when they stay abroad. With increasing international migration, they are considered to be an important and stable source of external development finance for households in source regions (Chishti, 2007).

The skilled and professional immigration route is distinct from the route of unskilled and semi-skilled. In a case of skilled emigration from India are two types, first one is students for higher education and the second one is professionals or skilled migrants for employment. After the studies, they remain back in the host country to work for a certain period of time. Many skilled emigrants particularly IT persons plan to return to home, more likely to become a source of labor for the country. Some scholars and their research indicate that skilled Indians in the developed countries cultivate strong transnational links with India (Mallick, 2010; Hindustan Times, 2011). On the other hand, low-skilled migration, there is only one route that is employment on the temporary or contractual basis. Therefore, they have to return when their visa gets expired, and they cannot settle permanently in these Gulf regions due to their domestic resident laws. Therefore, migrants send remittances to home to support their family members left behind (Kohli, 2014; MOIA, 2015).

In India, major percent of remittances receiving by rural and urban households spend on some form of consumer expenditure. It includes food items, health care, education of family members, construction of the house, investing in agriculture land, buying durable goods, marriage and ceremonial expenses, debt repayment, savings or investment and so on (Azeez and Begum, 2009). In India, migrants are indirectly contributing to the local economy. However, studies have also revealed that states like Telangana and Andhra Pradesh migrants take loans from the local money lenders at a higher interest rate and used remittances for debt repayment (Tumbe, 2011).

Migration to Gulf has changed the socio-economic conditions of their families, India is the best example. The contribution of migration to development can be seen in various areas like consumption, housing, transportation, lifestyle, investment patterns, education and other infrastructural facilities (Boyle and Rob, 2014). The higher proportion of remittances is getting diverted towards the consumption which indirectly increases livelihood and reduced poverty. Apart from remittances improving the living standard and generating the human capital in the

state, they indirectly impact on the local economies. They used remittances for spending on health and education and means of survival of dependents, investment in agriculture. It seems remittances receiving family are better-off comparative to the other local household. These emigrants have been immense contributing to the India economy by repatriating income in the form of remittances. A portion of the remittances they send back home, in turn, is injected into the local economy (Mallick, 2010).

The size of rural unskilled and semi-skilled migration from India to Gulf countries has been increasing in the recent years because, once these migrants reach the Gulf, they would send information to their relatives and neighbors about the opportunities available there. Such migrant network could facilitate further migration. The chain migration through personal contacts, often arranged by other family members or acquaintances already in the Gulf, remains a significant force in the Gulf (Azeez and Begum, 2009; Kohli, 2014).

However, sociological point of view, the Gulf migration from India engendered migration, in other words, it is male-dominated migration. In simple terms, male migration is leaving family members behind at the origin place which is a predominant form of migration in Telangana state (Gardner, 2011). This type of male migration has wide implications on the families left behind. Since such migration is adopted mainly as a survival strategy, the major impact is experienced and assessed regarding receipt of remittances. Apart from the socio-economic impact on the area of origin, migration also has a profound influence on the status of left behind wives in the family (Boyle and Rob, 2014). Some studies show that in the absence of husband overall status of women improves as they have greater access to money which they can spend as they wish. They have the freedom of movement; they can take independent decisions regarding the education of their children and type of treatment to be given to them if they fall sick (Sahoo and Trilok, 2013).

On the other hand, the absence of husband makes the life of a wife difficult. Her workload increases as she has to take care of several other things, which culturally are done by men. Apart from doing the regular household chores and taking care of children, she has to work in agricultural fields, look after the livestock, and manage all the outdoor work. In the absence of a husband, a woman feels isolated (Sahoo and Trilok, 2013). Indian “Gulf wives” experience a

certain amount of emotional stress when they have to bear the responsibility of making decisions in the absence of their husband. Apart from increased responsibilities, frequent thoughts about the safety of migrant husband add to the mental stress of wives left behind. Thus, the added responsibilities of managing family, children and financial matters, anxiety about the safety of husband and self, and the problems associated with isolation, altogether create a condition of stress among left behind wives (Khadria, et al., 2009).

The Gulf male migration provides an opportunity for individuals to earn significantly higher incomes to the benefit of all family members at the cost of long-term family separations. As a major family decision, migration by a family member may have complicated direct and indirect effects on wives and the family in general. There is an adverse effect on children due to the lack of parental contact with the kids. Children with strong parental support do better in school and develop mature psychological traits.

Problems of India Migrants before Departure

The foreign companies recruit workers through the Recruitment Agencies (RA) recognized by the Protector General of Emigrants (PGEs). In 2016, there are 1243 active RAs in India. However, most of these RAs are operating in villages through sub-agents, intermediaries, and traveling agents. It is noticed that these sub-agents often charge an exorbitant price for work-visa and exploit and cheat emigrants through the fraudulent method such as sending them aboard with fake visas or promising them work-visa on arrival etc. Poor and illiterate immigrants, who often take loans to purchase the visa, remain as an illegal immigrant or imprisoned in the host country (Kohli, 2014).

As a measure of protection Government of India made Emigration Check Required (ECR) mandatory for workers with the education level below 10th standard and seeking employment 17 ECR countries. Blue-collar laborers have to get the emigration clearance from the Protector of Emigrants (POE) of the Ministry of External Affairs. Though ECR was intended to protect the illiterate workers who often get cheated by the RAs and employer, it placed a huge burden on the poor potential worker by increasing regulatory compliance, and as a result, the poor worker ends up paying more for the visa (MOIA, 2015).

Indian Migrants in Gulf: Issues and Challenges

Various concerns and problems relating to the welfare of Indian labour migrants have come to fore in the wake of increasing migration to Gulf countries in recent times. The unskilled and semi-skilled labor migrants often risk life and family savings to migrate to Gulf countries. In desperation to find gainful employment in Gulf countries, the Indian migrants approach private recruitment and placement agencies. However, taking this as an opportunity to earn easy money, these agencies are indulging in exploitative practices by colluding with a prospective employer. It is revealed in many studies that labour migrants are exploited by the agents as well as the employers in many ways, such as passport withholding, denial of promised job or remuneration and victimization (Pralok, 2013).

Women migrants who are employed as domestic worker faces ill-treatment in Gulf countries, sometimes even being subjected to sexual abuse. It was also found that denial of legal rights for redressal of complaints, use of migrants for smuggled goods are in common. Many unskilled labour migrants from India are working in Gulf countries live in extremely pathetic conditions without getting any benefit from legal protection. They lack both the opportunity to have a legal job and to depend on their labor rights. Most of them are work in the construction, agriculture and unorganized sectors as labour. Many of the low-skilled migrants in Gulf countries live in dangerous health conditions and engaged in hazardous occupations (Sasikumar and Zakir Hussain, 2008). Indian migrant workers suffer from lack of decent housing, exhausting work conditions on building sites, more often industrial accidents, an absence of any work contracts, and denial of regular wage payment, and so on. Especially whenever they are arrested for not having a valid work visa, they have to pay a huge bribe to police. In Gulf, they are paid less than the promised wage and provide employment other than what is agreed on in the visa. Also, salaries are not paid in time and some of the workers being repatriated without full payments.

Does India Have a Strong Migrant Labour Policy?

The prevailing recruitment system of India has a lot of shortcomings. Such as, the recruitment agents cheat the unskilled emigrant labor in recruiting process and they are corrupting the system as well. There is a lack of coordination among the government authority, embassy office and the

emigrant regarding opening job opportunities and the government welfare initiatives. There is no proper authority to provide pre-departure capacity building and skills training to our unskilled labour. In fact, most of the Indian unskilled labour migrants are fairly vulnerable to exploitation not only before their departure but also in receiving countries after arrival as they are ignorant of relevant laws and procedures. The professional workers are an exception as their emigration is mostly routed through corporate bodies (Punjab Kesari, 2012; Rajan et al., 2009).

Since these immigrants have been playing a significant role in the development of the India, there is a need for taking care of their rights in different countries. For instance, employment exploitation, agent cheating, protection migrants' rights and welfare, also need to regulate, assist and guide the workers proceeding abroad for employment on contractual basis (Sasikumar and Zakir Hussain, 2008). There is no systematic mechanism in India which put in place for collecting, compiling and disseminating information about overseas job opportunities and educational avenues, also no control over agents in recruitment practice. Contract violation is often happening, and there is increasing a large number of illegal agents who are primarily accountable for encouraging clandestine migration (Khadria, et al., 2009; Rajan et al., 2009).

The state and central governments are neglecting the welfare of these migrant workers. Thousands of migrant workers from India are in jail in the Gulf countries. According to one survey, more Indian migrants die in the Gulf countries every year which is the primary concern. Most of the Indian blue-collar workers in Gulf countries live in poor and pathetic condition. They were not aware of the health programs in host countries to which they are entitled to get (Giordano, 2012).

As noted by various Committees and Studies appointed by the Ministry of External Affairs, State Governments need to work in tandem with the Central Government in areas such as in controlling unscrupulous Recruitment Agencies (RAs), in creating awareness on safe migration, impart skills and to promote economic partnership with Indian Diaspora. Some of the States like Kerala, Punjab, and Gujarat have taken initiatives in this direction. The Government of India is committed to the welfare of NRIs and is ready to provide all possible help.

Rationale and Scope of the Study

The literal meaning of “Migration” is “an act of moving from one area to another in search of work.” In Indian context, this approach poses certain problems. The study expressed that “Migration is normally viewed as an economic phenomenon though non-economic factors obviously have some bearing. Most studies concur that migrants leave their area of origin primarily because of lack of employment opportunities and with the hope of finding better opportunities elsewhere”.

In the Indian context, the present study attempt to understand the reasons of the migration and their problems after the departure in the hosting country. The survey of the existing literature has highlight different aspects of the social-economic ramifications of the international migration confronting present day India. Issues emanating from the positive and negative consequences of the migration particularly in the context of unskilled migrant labour have also been dwelt with. However, the existing literature does not touch upon issues such as shortcomings in the prevailing recruitment system in India. The study will explore the role of Gulf migrants in the socio-economic development of the state as well as on family in a detailed manner. The study looks into the impact of male migration upon the family members who are left behind. The state initiatives in solving problems of migrants both before departure and after receiving in the host country remain untouched in the existing body of literature. The present study will bridge this critical gap in this existing literature on the subject.

Research Questions

- ❖ What are the major factors those causing people to migrate from India? Does the out-migration is due to push factors such as non-profitability of agriculture and drought etc. or because of push factors such as better salaries?
- ❖ How do Gulf labour immigration and remittances impact on the socio-economic development of the family and Indian state as whole?
- ❖ What are the problems faced by labour migrants pre-departure and post-departure?
- ❖ What are the major issues and challenges of Gulf migration in front of the Indian government?

Objectives of Study

- ❖ To examine international migration and remittances impact on economic development of India in micro and macro level.
- ❖ To study different dimensions of immigration such destination for migrants, communities vulnerable to push migration, type of labour and their skill sets, the trends in migration.
- ❖ To explore impact of engendered or male-dominated migration on the family members back home.
- ❖ To analyse NRI Policies adopted by various other State Governments and to suggest measures needed to protect immigrants from India, especially blue-collar labour migrants.

Research Methodology

The research work proposes to analyze dynamics of Indian migration and examine the causes and socio-economic implications and the government policies in approaching the migrants' problems. This study will consist of two components: Quantitative method and Qualitative method. It is also analytical and descriptive in nature. The quantitative method which analyses of the existing corpus of literature and empirical data gleaned from surveys to compile the results into charts, graphs, and tables. For the purpose of this study, it will be undertaking a field in India for conducting surveys and interviews.

In this research qualitative method is conducted by interviewing people, using a combination of closed and open-ended questions and analyzing the responses to draw conclusions. The approach has been analytical and descriptive. Data sources are Protector of Emigrants (Ministry of External Affairs), RBI (for remittances), Sudhir Commission Report (for Muslim migration), etc. to Gulf and the US. Both primary and secondary sources will be consulted. The primary sources include government documents and records, census reports, policy statements and speeches and statements of prominent personalities. Secondary sources include books, journals, articles, newspapers, scholarly papers and other published and unpublished resource material relevant to the study.