



Research Paper

An Assessment of the Problems and Challenges Faced by Indian Migrants Living in Gulf Countries

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India is a major contributor to the world's skilled, semi-skilled, and unskilled labour migrants. Since the oil boom of the 1970s, the Gulf region has been a major destination for Indian migrants. Therefore, the main objective of this study is to examine the various problems and challenges faced by Indian migrants in the Gulf countries. This study is based on secondary sources of data such as various journals, articles, newspapers, and governmental and nongovernmental agencies reports. This paper employed an analytical approach, and the conclusion was drawn after a thorough review of these sources. After reviewing these literatures and reports, it reveals that there are six major issues concerning Indian migrants in Gulf countries. There are various financial and political reasons for Indian governments to take a more proactive stance regarding these issues. By utilizing already-existing legislation in Gulf States, it should concentrate on bilaterally promoting employees' rights and circumstances.

Keywords: migrants, migration, challenges, India, Gulf countries

I. Introduction

The 21st century is the century of Globalisation. Globalisation is an omnipresent phenomenon of our times. It affects people in all parts of the globe. It also has an impact on human rights. The phenomenon of Globalisation also affects international mobility, the migration of workers and increasing international travels (Pandhe, 2008). Globalisation has forced the labour or workforce to move from one place to other place or one region to other region from country to other country just for better jobs (Azeez and Begum, 2009). Migration is a process and outcome of globalisation. Globalisation poses for the promotion and protection of the rights of migrants' workers. According to Rousseau "Man is born free and everywhere in chains". But man is not everywhere in chains now. By his unity and struggle he has broken the chains at many places to become really free. They are really free to migrate from one country to another just for the sake of jobs. Human rights also guaranteed freedom to every man to go abroad just for the sake of employment. The overall plight of migrants in Gulf States presents a gloomy picture. The twentieth century has witnessed huge population movement (Ahmad, 1995; 98). From the very beginning of civilization people started to migrate from one place to another for better education, work, place and opportunities. Migration or population movement from one country to another country has become a common phenomenon (Rajan and Zachariah, 2015). Migrant is a person who changes his or her usual country of residence. Migrants are people who move from one place to the other place with the permission of their government for the sake of jobs. Migrants never lost their citizenship. They are the members of their own states. They have the right to come back to their own countries with or without the permission of their government.

The migrants relive unemployment and underemployment in their home countries. The migrants are not the permanent problems of the country. It is an asset of receiving and sending countries. They have sent huge remittances for their country and for their family. The remittances sent by them to their families in India continue to play an important role in the economies of India (Ahmad and Khan, 2011).

India migrants are important agents of socio-economic and cultural change. Indian migrants are respected by their family, relatives, friends and society. Indian migrants move across borders in search of livelihood and better economic stability for themselves and their family. Migrants' workers are often touted as modern day heroes given the importance of their remittances to the economies of their home countries. They have also acted as catalysts in the process of strengthening India's bilateral relations with the countries where they are residing. The Gulf States remain the primary target of Indian migrant's workforce. The future of Indian

migrants looks very bright in the Gulf States. Indian migrants are a different group in Gulf States. They are located in large numbers in Gulf States. The vast majority of migrants are making meaningful contributions to their host country. Migrations from India to Gulf States are usually temporary. Often they are semi-skilled or unskilled and return to India after expiry of their contractual employment. The main reason behind migration from India to Gulf States is unemployment, poverty and economic empowerment. One of the major reasons Indians still like to work in Gulf States are because of the tax free income it provides to India. Many countries in the Gulf States gainfully employ Indians immigrant ethnic groups or migrant communities for their economic development. The interest is primarily economic than anything else (Castles and Miller, 1998).

Methods and Objectives

This study is based on a secondary source of data that was gathered from different sources, including journals, articles, newspapers, and various governmental and nongovernmental agencies reports. This paper employed an analytical approach, and the conclusion was drawn after a thorough review of these sources. The main objective of the study is to examine the various problems and challenges faced by Indian migrants in the Gulf countries.

An Overview of Indian migrants in Gulf countries

The Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries surrounding the Persian Gulf region are endowed with oil and natural gas which has made these states an emerging power. Oil boom in the 1970s made a mismatch between availability of local labour force and requirement for rapid modernization in the gulf countries. The Gulf region has become a new destination that rapidly gained popularity. These Gulf countries attracted semi-skilled and unskilled labour from various Indian states especially from the south Indian states to fulfil the requirements (Rahman, 2001). The number of Indian expatriates in 1975 was 258,000 and in share 39.1 percent of total migrants, the number went up to 3.3 million in 2001 and now in 2017 there are 8.9 million Indian migrants in the Gulf.

According to a report published by the United Nations in 2018, India has the highest number of international migrants, with 16.59 million, and more than half of these migrants reside in the Gulf region. The number of Indian migrants doubled from 7.98million in 2000. According to a report by the United Nations, the overall number of Indians living in Gulf countries is 8.9 million (World Migration Report, 2018). The United Arab Emirates has the largest number of Indian migrants, whose number 3,425,144, up from 978,992 in 2000, followed by the Saudi Arabia 2,594,947, Kuwait 1,029,861, Oman 781,141, and Qatar 746,550 and 326,658 in Bahrain.

Table 1: Stock of Indian migrants in Gulf countries in the year 1990 and 2018

Country	1990	2018
Bahrain	60,493	326,658
Kuwait	553,581	1,029,861
Oman	212,556	781,141
Qatar	129,147	746,550
Saudi Arabia	981,622	2,594,947
UAE	458,294	3,425,144
Total	2,395,693	8,904,301

(Source: Annual report, MEA, GOI).

According to the Indian Centre for Migration, Overseas Indian Affairs Report, nearly 85lakh Indians work or reside in GCC countries. In the first seven months of 2017, more than 2.77 million Indians moved to the Gulf to find work. Most of these job seekers, about 1.10 million Indians, went to the UAE. Followed by Saudi Arabia (59,911), Oman (42,095), Kuwait (40,010), and Bahrain (7,591). The largest number of Gulf migrants from Uttar Pradesh is 62,438, followed by Bihar (50,247), West Bengal (25,819), and Tamil Nadu (24,003). Over the past few years, the number of migrants from Kerala to the Gulf has drastically decreased. The majority of migrants from India that travel to the GCC are skilled or semi-skilled workers. The white-collar workforce of Indians working abroad makes up about 30% of the workforce in the services and IT industries (Annual Report, MEA, 2016-17).

According to figures compiled by the Indian government, the socioeconomic profile of Indian migrants to the Gulf region has been changing since the late 1980s. The majority of Indian migrants have come to Gulf States from poor backgrounds and come from rulers' areas. They are hardworking people and away from their family, relatives, friends and their country. They are the most respected people among their families, relatives, friends and society. Majority of skilled and unskilled Indian migrants are not in good economic conditions. Most Indian migrant workers do not have any business, property and adequate agricultural land in India. Most of them are young and unmarried. They are not highly qualified people but they are technical and skilled people. Some Indian migrants who are working in Gulf States sell their property and agricultural land and pay a huge amount for a visa for a recruiting agency for employment. Only small numbers of the migrants come from well off families and are well educated and work as in Gulf countries as doctors, engineers, bankers and chartered accountant and college teachers.

Problems and challenges faced by Indian migrants in the Gulf countries

There are six major problems and challenges faced by Indian migrants in the Gulf countries. These problems and challenges are as follows

1. Problems related to residency and permanent citizenship
2. Problems related to family status
3. Problems related to association and union
4. Problems related to Labour laws
5. problems related to women employment
6. problems related to children's education

Problems related to Residency and permanent citizenship

Indians in the Gulf do not normally become citizens. In the Gulf States no Indians have been given citizenship or permanent citizenship and residency status. The citizenship is almost universally not granted by the Gulf Countries to a foreign national. Most Indians who migrated to the Gulf States had no plans to settle down there. They left their families back home and sent their earnings back to them with full hope of returning later to their home country. The Indian migrant working in the Gulf States is temporary contract workers/ employees and has to return home on termination or completion of their contract. They are mostly temporary migrants who could not qualify for residency. The children of Indian migrants are not given citizenship even if they are born in Gulf States. That implies that when they leave their jobs they have to go back to India. They don't have special privileges and immigration status. Indian migrants' workforce in Gulf States is part of its economy. They do not have given political and social rights (Jain, 2007 & Abhayankar, 2009). In the UAE, no migrant workforce is given citizenship rights. They have their own rented building and cannot attain citizenship. The living conditions in labour accommodations are not good, the majority of the semiskilled and unskilled migrants lived in rented rooms and most of them are accommodated in collective rooms and in some cases employers provide to the workers where in a single room eight to ten people reside. Qatar has not given citizenship to the Indian migrant which makes all the Indian migrants remain Indian citizens. In Kuwait all of the NRIs is considered as foreigners and do not normally qualify for local citizenship. Only foreign national women married to Kuwaiti nationals are exceptions to this rule. According to Kuwaiti laws those born in Kuwait do not have a right to apply for Kuwaiti nationality, unlike the USA (Shah, 2007 p.4). In Bahrain Indian migrants are not allowed to acquire citizenship. In Bahrain women who marry foreigners cannot obtain citizenship for their husbands or children. However, after five years of marriage, men can submit an application for citizenship for their foreign spouses, and their children are automatically citizens upon birth. With the exception of Saudi Arabia, where minor amendments to the legislation were made in 2007, citizenship regulations are actually comparable in all of the Gulf States. At the age of 18, sons who have a citizen mother and a foreign father are eligible to apply for citizenship. However, in order for the daughters to become citizens, they must marry a Saudi citizen (Hamada, 2009). It is only in Oman that aliens or any foreign nationals are eligible for local citizenship after residing in the country more than 20 years. Many Indians have acquired citizenship on this basis. (High Level Committee on the Indian Diaspora, 2001).

Problems related to Family status

In Gulf States, Indian migrants are allowed to take their family with them provided that their monthly income should be more than Rs.48,000 per month. The highly paid professionals are permitted to take their family with them to the Gulf States. They are offered a very attractive allowance. These highly qualified Indian people grew valued and helped the socio - economic conditions of the region. The professional Indians and some of their white collar workers are the only one who qualifies to have their family with them due to the high basic income norms set by the Gulf Governments (Srivastava & Sasikumar, 2003 and Khatri, 2010). In other Gulf States also the qualifying minimum is higher per month. The civil liberties are not available to other less

privileged workers in the Gulf countries. These workers sometime mentally depressed due to difficult condition of work, bad weather and incapability to participate in any social and cultural activities and long periods of separation from families and relatives leading to emotional deprivation are known to have broken down the lives of low skilled Indian workers in Gulf states the adult children are not allowed to continue residing with their parents, the children of migrant should be allowed to live with separate identification document (McGeehan and Keane, 2008).

Problems related to Association and Union

The Gulf countries cannot allow any Indian migrants to form political parties or associations or Union in the Gulf States. The majority of the Gulf States are against democracy. They are allowed to make cultural associations. They cannot obtain private property or joint trade unions. They have thus restricted social benefits and are excluded from participation in the political system (Weiner, 19820). The Gulf States do not permit Indian migrants to form the workers unions. In these countries migrant workers are suppressed to prevent workers from uniting to reclaim their rights (Pandhe and Jain, 2008). Of all Gulf States only Kuwait, Bahrain and recently Bahrain allow trade unions. In all the Gulf States law and regulations either prohibits or restricts migrants' participation in independent trade union activities. In Oman, there are no unions among Omani workers and troublemakers are quickly deported (Abhayankar, 2007 and Jain, 2008).

Problems Related to Labour Laws

The Gulf States have not ratified core international Labour Organisation conventions protecting freedom of association and right to organise, which includes the right to strike and right to collective bargaining. Labour law in the Gulf States clearly prohibits these actions. In Gulf States, labour laws are weak, for example in UAE the labour laws are very much in favour of employers and the law enforcements are poor (McGeehan and Keane, 2008). In Gulf States, if any migrant changes jobs from one employer to another, while a migrant working in the same country of Gulf States, once required a NOC (no objection certificate) from the current employer (Rajan and Prakash, 2012). In practice, the migrants' worker may not depart the country or change employers without the express permission of his/ her sponsor (Gardner, 2011). Migrant workers are often subjected to neglect, harassment and violation of rights both by agents of the sending and receiving countries. The problems of migrant labourers' start at home by agents and recruitment agencies in the sending and these continue in the receiving countries. Sometimes the workers are not given the employment agreement signed by them in India and changed the contract of the workers by the Gulf employers and skilled workers are forced to work as unskilled labourers. Frequently, recruiters will have workers sign one contract in their home country, but once they get in the Gulf States, they would make them sign a new contract at a significantly lower wage than the one they originally agreed to. The workers paid a high amount to private agents and private agents always exploited the workers and made false promises to workers. The uneducated and unskilled Indian migrants' workers are facing problems in the Gulf at the hands of the recruiting agents or employers. Some of the common problems faced by them include: deposit travel documents and passports, delay in payment of salary, deteriorating wage rates and work conditions that may lead to workers facing non- payment or lack of payment for overtime, work without holidays, lack of health care and poor accommodations (Masod, 2007).

Problems related to women Employment

Employment is a big issue in Gulf States and poses problems for the authorities, authorities would like to promote but are against the women employment States (Kapiszewski, 2000). In the Gulf States professional migrant women have limited opportunities because of strict Islamic law. The professional women migrant is not to work in Gulf States. Majority of migrant professionals in Gulf States who have worked accompanied with spouse or parents. The women Indian migrants' workers are forced to very restrictive cultural norms such as purdah system, preventing them from leaving the house. While men Indian migrants are recruited in a variety of economic sectors, female Indian migrants are concentrated in services sectors such as household or domestic works including home cleaning and child care and nursing and health care services. In some cases, the Indian women being recruited to work in the Gulf States as cooks, housemaids and governess for children. Many women workers have complained of harsh and unfair treatment (Doumato, 1999).

Problems related to children's Education

Right to Education is a basic right of any person. Education is free at all levels for Saudi children. But it is not free for Indian migrant's children. The Indians who are working in Gulf States are allowed to take education of their children. But the Indians cannot afford to educate their children in Arabian schools. The professionals and white collar Indians have taken the initiative of setting up a large number of schools throughout the region which follows the Indian curriculum and thus meets the educational needs for their children. These schools are affordable to Indian migrants. More than 37 such institutions, administered and

managed by Indian experts, are located in the UAE, 15 in Oman, 17 in Kuwait, and 7 in Saudi Arabia. They almost all belong to the Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) board. (Report of High Level Committee of Indian Diaspora, 2001). There are six Indian schools in Qatar, all of which are either directly linked or indirectly affiliated with the CBSE. The Indian community in Bahrain is responsible for founding five schools. The Indian migrants who are living in Saudi Arabia have set up a number of International Schools in various cities. About more than 400,000 students attend these schools in regular mode. The school is an independent institution and affiliated to the CBSE, New Delhi, India and is licensed under the Ministry of Education, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Most of the Schools follow the CBSE pattern and have features for teaching up to class XII (Dietl, 2007). There are 15 Indian schools in Oman. All schools follow CBSE pattern, except one which is affiliated to the KSB (Kerala State Board). All Schools combined together enrolled over 16000 students in January 2003. They are mostly Indians. The Indian Embassy is the patron of all the Indian schools in the country. The control of the Indian schools is under the Board of Directors who are appointed by the Ambassador from among permanent members of the Indian community. The Board coordinates the functioning of management committees of all Indian schools. The existence of 15 Indian schools across Oman's various regions shows how important education is to the Indian community's next generation. There are some middle-class and wealthy Indian migrants who have the financial means to send their children to colleges and universities in Europe and North America for further study. However, the majority of Indian migrants send their children there for technical and further education. The second most significant area of cooperation between the two nations might be education and training, where both parties can work together to enhance their human resource bases. In order to benefit everyone, this industry needs to be taken more seriously (Report of High Level Committee of Indian Diaspora, 2001).

Some changes in the Gulf

It is difficult to determine how much of the recent improvements in migrant workers' conditions in some Gulf nations may be attributed to intervention from the Indian government. For instance, in October 2015, The Saudi Ministry of Labor and Social Development (MLSD) made 38 amendments' in Saudi labour laws and the ministry has also imposed new fines on employers who are in violation of those standards and has increased the amount of those fines. A campaign to raise awareness of worker rights was launched after the labour law revisions. As a result of the amendments, it is now illegal to seize people's passports, and businesses that fail to pay employees' wages will face harsher penalties. They require employers to provide workers with copies of their contracts, penalising any violations to those contracts. In addition, the amendments include provisions that will improve paid leave and compensation for injuries sustained in the workplace (Pethiyagoda, 2017). They grant additional inspection and enforcement capabilities to the MLSD. According to reports, more than 1,440 businesses were forced to close their doors because they failed to protect the earnings of their employees (Tago, 2015). On the other hand Human Rights Watch (HRW) found a number of holes in the changes. The law and its enforcement measures did not apply to workers who entered the nation for a period of less than two months, such as domestic workers and short-term laborer's. HRW went so far as to suggest that several of the new rules institutionalize discrimination against women. As a result, a significant number of the difficulties that the Diaspora must deal with have not been resolved, and the pace of transformation has not accelerated.

II. Conclusion

The Islamic nations of the Gulf States uphold severe laws. The government vigorously defends employee rights against infringement by employers. Without the knowledge of the relevant governments, the employers and guarantors engaged in harsh and inhumane behavior in religiously revered regions. These behaviours violate not only the Sharia law but also basic standards of decency and humanity. Employers in Arab countries are not permitted to engage in such practices under any circumstances. Despite the fact that some workers in the Gulf States have to deal with hardships, the Gulf States continue to be a paradise on earth for Indian labourers. The Gulf States continue to be an attractive employment market for workers from India. There are challenges and issues present in every region of the world. It does not imply that one should quit their jobs. Both India and the Gulf nations benefit from the workers from India. Indians are employed in Gulf States, but they also contribute to the Indian economy through remittances. The Gulf States are among the major sources of remittances. The economic prosperity and social standing of the Gulf States are rising along with the number of Indian professionals and managers working there. Indian immigrants can contribute to the development of India and the bilateral ties between India and the Gulf States in the areas of trade, investment, and energy cooperation.

For a very long time, Indian workers in the Gulf have been subjected to significant difficulties that are caused by systematic abuse and discrimination. Because of the low socioeconomic origins of the employees, their inadequate political strength, and the significance of their remittances to the Indian economy, until relatively recently, successive Indian governments only gave Band-Aid measures to alleviate the workers' plight.

Even if there are indications that this is beginning to change, progress has been slow both in India and in the Gulf region. There are various financial and political reasons for Delhi to take a more proactive stance regarding the issue. By utilising already-existing legislation in Gulf States, it should concentrate on bilaterally promoting employees' rights and circumstances. Where they are effective, it should deploy multilateral tools. The Indian government ought to charge businesses and employment firms for the costs associated with how they treat their employees. It should also encourage all relevant parties to invest in enhancing the credentials of migrants and raise awareness of the issues migrants face. Now is the time for Delhi's rhetoric to translate into successes for its Gulf Diaspora.

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