

## **INDIAN IMMIGRANT'S MODERN SLAVERY: A STUDY OF INDIAN LABOR EMIGRATION TO THE GULF COUNTRIES**

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Human beings migrate from one place to other in search of better living conditions. India is not an exceptional in the process of migration of her people from the place of improper conditions to the proper circumstances of employment, sanitation, health, and good atmosphere of life. In ancient period, movements of people of India happened for trade, and propagation of religion. In medieval times, people moved either because of the social and economic conditions of the home country, or attracted by the good socio-economic opportunities of the destination countries. But in the present global era due to developments of transportation and technology, migration has become easy and simple issue. So lot of migration has been taking place for education and job/ business purposes.

Emigration of Indians to various countries of the world divided into four types in order to understand the pattern of Indian emigration to various developing and developed countries of the world. In ancient or Pre-colonial period, migration took place to Southeast Asian countries for the purpose of trade and propagation of religion. During the colonial period, Indians emigrated to work in the plantations of British, French and Dutch colonies in the 1830s through indentured system, which was lasted up to 1920s.

Post-Colonial migration was to the industrially developed countries, and finally recent migration to West Asia. A lot of Indian migrant workers and a small number of the high profiled job workers moved to the Gulf countries after the oil boom in 1970s. Since 1970s, millions of Indian migrant workers had been moving to the gulf countries.

Migration of India migrants to various countries of is not a new phenomenon but pattern of migration and conditions of the migrants is essential. Before independence, a lot of Indian migrants migrated to the British, French and Dutch colonies through indentured system, after independence a large scale of Indian labour migration took place to the gulf countries (Naidu 19991). India has been a major source of human resource for many countries of the world for long.

Millions of Indian migrant workers are living as migrant labor in the Gulf countries. The Gulf countries are also known as the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) namely Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and United Arab Emirates (Wikipedia.org). Emigration of Indian migrant workers to the gulf countries started in the 1970s after the oil boom in these countries. According to Overseas Indian Affairs Minister Vayala Ravi, a total of two million Indians work in

Saudi Arabia followed by 1.8 million in the United Arab Emirates. For him, Saudi Arabia and United Arab Emirates (UAE) only account for the maximum of Indian migrant workers.

Kuwait was home to the Indian migrant population of 641,062 around 581,832 immigrated to Oman, 500,000 to Qatar, 400,000 to Bahrain (www.ummid.com). He sent a written reply in the Lok Sabha on July 29<sup>th</sup> 2013 stating that the number of Indians in the Gulf is estimated to be about four million. In Kuwait, 48 percent of the Indians were working in the unorganised sector. This was 43 percent in Saudi Arabia. The Minister also said that according to information received from Indian missions in the Gulf, there were 1,116 Indian prisoners in Saudi Arabia, 825 in the United Arab Emirates, 111 in Kuwait, 86 in Bahrain and 32 in Qatar. Data pertaining to some of the Indian migrant workers in these gulf countries is not available because of a large number of Indian workers were in the unorganised sector and thus were not covered by labour laws in the Gulf (www.overseasindian.in).

Indian migrant workers in the gulf countries consist of Indian States like Andhra Pradesh, Kerala, Tamil Nadu and the North states like Punjab and Rajasthan which are newly emerging states in terms of migration of Indian labour to the Gulf countries. But the state of Kerala in India has the highest number of emigrants in the Gulf countries.

The number of Kerala migrants living in the Gulf countries was 2.19 million in 2008, which was 1.39 million in 1998. The number of emigrants from Kerala had increased by 830,000 during the 10 year period 1998-2008 (Rajan & Zachariach 2004).

Indians in the gulf region can be classified into two groups. If one is the highly qualified professionals such as doctors, engineers, architects, bankers, chartered accountants; other group of Indians are of manual and domestic workers (Ministry of Overseas and Indian Affairs).

Indian migrant workers in the gulf countries are of two types such as the manual worker and the domestic workers. One the one hand the manual workers are mostly the men of Asian countries such as India, Pakistan and Bangladesh and Sri Lanka. On the other hand domestic workers are women of South Asian and South East Asian countries. While most of the manual workers are in construction companies, and other lower profiled job holders women were as housemaids and housekeepers.

<b>Estimates of Indian Migrants in the Gulf Region, from 1975-1999</b>						
<b>Country</b>	<b>1975</b>	<b>1979</b>	<b>1983</b>	<b>1987</b>	<b>1991</b>	<b>1999</b>
Oman	38,000	60,000	100,000	184,000	220,000	450,000
Saudi Arabia	34,500	100,000	270,000	380,000	600,000	1,200,000
Kuwait	32,105	65,000	115,000	100,000	88,000	200,000
Qatar	27,800	30,000	40,000	50,000	75,000	100,000
U.A.E	10,750	152,000	225,000	252,000	400,000	750,000
Iraq	7,500	20,000	50,000	350,000	NA	NA
Bahrain	1,725	26,000	30,000	77,000	100,000	150,000
Libya	1,100	10,000	40,000	25,000	12,000	20,000
Others	NA	68,000	21,000	21,000	10,000	130,000
<b>Total</b>	<b>266,000</b>	<b>501,000</b>	<b>916,000</b>	<b>1,096,000</b>	<b>1,505,000</b>	<b>3,000,000</b>

The above mentioned table shows that Indian emigration to the gulf countries since 1975 to 1999. Between 1975 and 1999, a total of seventy two laths and eighty-four thousands of Indians immigrated to the Gulf countries. Since 1970s, the Indian emigration to these countries did not reduced, but increased than expected anyone in the world.

According to one Telugu people's website and Census of Indian 2011, out of 85 million Telugu speaking Indian in the world, 500,000 Telugu speaking Indians are in the Gulf region. Out of these 500,000 Telugu speaking Indian, United Arab Emirates only has 100,000 Indian populations, remaining are spread over to Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Qatar, Kuwait, and Oman (<http://www.friendsoftelugu.org>). Over 6 million Indians most of whom are blue-collar workers in construction, health care, transport and domestic sectors from the state of Kerala ([economictimes.indiatimes.com](http://economictimes.indiatimes.com)).

### **Indian Women migrant workers in the Gulf Countries**

Gulf is one of the major regions which attract female migrant workers from India (Shree M). Despite reports of large scale exploitation, women from poor families continue to head towards the Gulf nations in search of jobs, hopeful of a better future. Hundreds of unskilled women from India migrate to these nations every year, landing themselves in situations where they are left vulnerable to physical and mental abuse.

According to Lissy Joseph, state coordinator of the National Domestic Workers' Movement-AP (NDWM-AP), nearly 50,000 women from Andhra Pradesh are working in the Gulf nations. Streams of women are seen every day at the office of the Protector of Emigration that gives the final clearance for the emigration, applying for migration. In the last six months alone, 14 women were brought back from various parts of the Gulf to the state.

### **Socio-Economic conditions of Indian Migrants in the Gulf countries**

Most of the Indian lower profiled job holders live in some localities known as "Indian Compounds". Generally due to the high cost of the room rent, many Indian workers used to stay in one room, where one person's space like a bed as we see in any Indian hospitals. Each one of these migrants has to adjust with that very little space to save money and sent to their homes. Some of these migrants are sending money to their homes. But on the other hand most of the Indian migrant workers are living an unhealthy life.

Some of the Indian laborers live in apartments, "Indian Compounds" or barracks which is unhygienic in nature and many of these migrants have to adjust with one or two bathrooms for thirty to forty people. Since most of these migrants have to work for twelve hours a day and six days a week, they cannot maintain at least a good situation for their living places. They have to start to their work in the early morning and come back to room by late evenings. So they could not concentrate on sanitary issues of their residence, which are the primary reasons for their illness of these workers.

### **Work Schedule of the Indian Migrant workers**

One of the inhuman treatments of the gulf employers is the work schedule. A worker has to work for twelve hours a day and six days a week, which is a mandatory for the entire project of a company. During the summer time also, these migrant workers have to work for twelve hours a

day and six days a week. Due to this a lot of these workers receive diseases. Some of these workers also admitted to the hospitals of the Gulf countries. In spite of their physical problems, they have to attend the work. In order to escape from that torture some of these workers decide for suicide option. According to Gulf news website, seventy two per cartage of suicides which are happening in Dubai are from India, and other people are from the Asian countries.

### **Unemployment of Indian migrant workers in the Gulf countries**

The global economic crisis in world around 2008 not only affected the migration of skilled people to the developed countries at a small level but the unskilled and semi-skilled to the Gulf countries from the Asian countries. Broadly it may not show a major result of phenomenon but at a small scale there is a clear evidence of crisis affect on the labor migration to the Gulf Countries and their socio-economic situations in the Gulf countries.

According to International Labor Organization (ILO 2013) the Middle East region slowed down in 2012. Oil exporting economies such as Iraq, Kuwait and Qatar were leading the economic recovery in the region with growth rates above 6 per cent in 2012. However, with the slowdown in global growth and recession conditions in the Euro area, oil demand could decelerate, with significant adverse effects on growth rates in the region.

On the other hand, oil importers and countries that experienced social unrest during the Arab Spring displayed much lower growth rates or outright depressions, such as Yemen where growth fell by more than 10 per cent in 2011 and another 1.9 per cent in 2012 which means the growth rate of the.

Middle East was slowdown from 5.0 per cent in 2011 to 3.2 per cent in 2012. But it picked up slightly to 3.3 per cent in 2013. It not only made changes in the economy of the Middle East countries, but also slowdown the socio-economic progress of the Asian countries labor in the middle east countries of Gulf region through unemployment.

The unemployment and other bad situations of Indian migrants not only forced for return migration to their homeland but weakened the living conditions of Indians through socio-economic exploitation. In order to escape from the social unrest of these labors in the Gulf countries some were returned to their homeland and a small number of the Asian migrant workers committed suicides.

### **Suicides of Indian labor migrants in the Gulf countries**

According to 'Migrant-Rights-Organization' there was a trend of suicides by the migrant workers in the Gulf States. In May 2010 alone, it documented 17 cases of suicides and attempted suicides by the domestic workers in Kuwait. During April, 12 migrant workers attempted or succeeded in ending their lives in Kuwait, during the end of February and March these were 13 reported cases of suicides and suicide attempts by migrants in the emirates.

According to a Dubai Police report (2011), over 70 per cent of the suicides were committed by Indians (<http://gulfnews.com>). In 2008, the number of suicides among Indians in Dubai and the northern emirates peaked at 147, and then fell to 114 in 2009, 110 in 2010, 76 in 2011 and 72 in 2012. All these suicides show nothing but Indian migrant labour despair.

According to Indian Community Welfare Committee (ICWC) the number of suicides peaked in 2008 during the time of the financial crisis. It has now fallen, but is still high. One obvious reason is that Indians form a majority of the expat population. There are other issues like financial problems. However, we have often found that the reasons are more than just financial. So its required to look at not only the financial crisis for the suicide rates of the Indian migrant workers but the other socio-economic and other forms of exploitation, which was one of the main cause of return migration of these migrants in the recent times. Even in Bahrain also these were a considerable number of Asian migrant workers suicides.

According to IB times TV channel, Pasupathi Mariappan, 33, originally from Tamil Nadu in South India, became the twenty-sixth Indian expat to commit suicide in Bahrain this year (www. ibtimes.com). However, because of the social and economic unrest in the Gulf countries, a lot Indian manual workers and domestic workers were planned to move to their homeland. The kind of Indian workers life and their living conditions in the Gulf countries once again remind the life of Indian indentured labour.

A lot of Indians immigrated to the British, French and Dutch colonies to work on the sugar plantations through indentured system. All these migrants lived a hard there, where they had to right to choose their optional living or freedom of job. They lived like slaves of those days. They had no human rights. All these things remind the lives of Indian labour in the Gulf. There was an immediate action on indentured labour to stop the ill-treatment of Indians in the indentured system, but the actions taken were not implemented perfectly. But in the modern days, the Government of India has a less concentration on the lives of Indian workers in the Gulf countries.

It's not good to forget the contributions of these workers and need to provide at least one basic need that is survival security in the Gulf countries. Because, a lot of Indian workers in the Gulf are in prisons without committing mistakes and many of these are under the exploitation of their employers. So, to change these people's lives, there should be some actions and those actions are needed to initiate by the Government of India for good future in the gulf countries.

When India provides good life to the Indian workers in the Gulf countries, then only Indian get good amount of remittances from these workers. So, obviously it's in the hands of Government of India only to get more remittances from the Indian labour who outside of India.

### **Return Migration of Indian Migrant Workers from the Gulf countries**

Return migration of Indian Gulf migrants to home was very happy to all the Indian migrant workers, because of their socio-economic exploitation by their employers. On the one hand return migration was unhappy for some Indian labor migrants those who wanted to earn money for their financial problems, on the other hand is a new life for rest of the migrants who were under the ill-treatment Gulf employers. For this reason, Government of Indian made efforts to bring back the *Gulf Victims* who were suffering economically and physically. With the help of the government of Andhra Pradesh at first time a group of 14 people and second time about 20 people and finally 17 migrant workers returned to home from Dubai.

According to the Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister N. Kiran Kumar Reddy and NRI affairs Minister D Sridhar Babu,

*...third group of migrants from Andhra Pradesh granted amnesty for overstaying in the United Arab Emirates, and they returned home on Sunday.*

(Times of India.com 2013)

According to the statements of Government of Andhra Pradesh, the government is making efforts to bring back about 300 "Gulf victims". Majority of these migrants are mostly unskilled labourers from various districts, who were stuck after their visas expired or agents cheated them. Sridhar Babu NRI affairs Minister in Andhra Pradesh, told that around 1,000 migrants stuck up in the UAE approached the state government for help.

According to other reports, that is "Indian Migrants Rights and Welfare Forum" informed that some voluntary organisations like NGOs have also come forward to help the migrants (timesofindia.com). K. Narasimham Naidu president of *Indian Migrants Rights and Welfare Forum* who visited Dubai a few days ago said that he found about 200 Indians, including 71 from Andhra Pradesh, needed help to return to their native places. Naidu said he was trying to rope in voluntary agencies and cultural groups to bring back more migrants. He said the Indian government should request the UAE authorities to extend the amnesty that many illegal migrants could not apply for it.

According to Migrants Rights Council, a voluntary organisation, 18,000 workers from the state were languishing in the UAE. This shows that in spite of many efforts to look after the problems of the Indian labour migrants in the Gulf countries the either from the Government of Indian side or other private organisations side, there is a need for a comprehensive initiative to bring back the Indian labour migrants to their home lands or for betterment of these workers from the Government of Indian mainly. Government of India need to remind the contributions of Indian labour migrants that is a lot remittances came from the Gulf to India and its rank is first among the Asian countries.

### **Contribution of Government of Indian and other Private Organisations**

There is no doubt in saying that Government of Indian is with the Indian labour migrants in the Gulf countries. But saying that statement is not just enough in the case of the Gulf migrants. Because, there is a need to find out all the people of Indian who are in difficulty situations and have to examine that through what ways in which all these Indian labour are involving starting from the lost of their passports and cheating by the Indian agents and Gulf agents and employers.

Unless the Government of Indian takes proper required actions against the inhuman practices that are happening on Indian labour in the Gulf countries, these labour cannot see good life in future. Unless Government of Indian concentrate on these people's problems this will reduce the number of remittances that are coming to India.

India needs to remind the remittances came to Indian when the situations were good for Indians workers in the Gulf countries. So, if Indian takes necessary actions on inhuman practices happening on Indian migrants, if the life of Indian labour in the Gulf countries changes, a lot

remittance will come. If not, Indian will see burden on Indian economy through less number of remittances from the Gulf States and more suicides of Indian labour migrants in the Gulf countries. The suicide not only effects the workers but also the families whose who are living in India. So, India needs to look at these problems of Indian labour that who live outside of India for a good future of India and its workers, On the whole for a betterment of India.

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