

LABOUR EMIGRATION FROM INDIA: TRENDS AND ISSUES

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Abstract: *The oil boom in the gulf region in 1970s has resulted in the beginning of large scale infrastructural development in various Gulf countries. It had generated huge demand for the labour in this region. This process is continued in the last four decades with ups and down. It is assumed that this will persist in the near future. India has emerged as a big supplier of semi-skilled and unskilled workers to the gulf region. Though, there are few regions, especially southern states, in India from where professionals, technocrats and knowledge workers also joining this stream of emigration. Even today a large number of semi-skilled and unskilled labours and considerable proportion of skilled professionals immigrate to this region from India every year (Rajan, 2011). This is not as economically competitive as it was in last quarter of twentieth century for the migrant labours due to noticeable competition from the labours of Philippines, Bangladesh, Pakistan and Sri Lanka. Here, in this paper trends of labour emigration from India to the Gulf countries have been discussed along with the various issues and problems related to this migration process such as use of remittances, labour exploitation and welfare, problem of illegal migration, vulnerability of domestic workers, education of their children, new adverse policies of gulf countries, failure in timely renewal of their passports and implementation of social security schemes. At the end of this paper suggestions are given for the betterment of labour migrants for this region from India.*

Key words: Labour Migration, Gulf Countries, Emigration Clearance, Remittances

Introduction

In case of the country level scenario of labour migration to West Asian region, especially to the Gulf countries, India plays an important role in terms of a noticeable labour supplying country. As per Annual Report 2014-15 (MOIA), the Gulf countries attracted the maximum Indian emigrants in the last few decades. Including Emigration Clearance required and not required categories about seven million Indian workers are estimated in Gulf countries who are employed in this region primarily on contractual basis for a fixed tenure of two to five years. A vast majority of migrants to the Middle East, including Gulf countries, are semi-skilled and unskilled workers. There has been a consistent and steady increase in the number of persons emigrating for employment abroad from the last few years. On the basis of number of emigration clearances granted by offices of the Protector of Emigrants there were 6.41 lakhs labours emigrated from India in 2010. For the years 2011, 2012, 2013 and 2014 these figures were 6.27 lakhs, 7.47 lakhs, 8.17 lakhs and 8.04 lakhs respectively. Though, the total labour emigration from India is much more if we include those labours also who do not require emigration clearance. There are more than seven million overseas Indian labours throughout the globe. More than 90 percent of them are in the Gulf countries and South East Asian destinations. In 2014, about 8.04 lakh workers emigrated from India after obtaining emigration clearance. About 3.29 lakh out of these 8.04 lakh workers went to Saudi Arabia alone. Among the other important destinations, nearly 2.24 lakh workers migrated to

UAE, 0.75 Lakhs to Qatar, 0.51 lakhs to Oman, and 0.22 lakhs to Malaysia. In India, Uttar Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh, Bihar, Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Punjab, West Bengal and Rajasthan states are the leading sourcing states and given in the declining order as per 2014 data on emigration Clearance granted (Annual Report-MOIA, 2014-15). Considerable numbers of emigrants, falling under emigration clearance not required category, are also joining this stream of emigration. Majority of them are from southern parts of India.

According to Rajan (2011), these numbers of labour emigrants who require emigration clearance are very small in comparison to earlier reported figures. This is because category of emigrants who do not require emigration check by Government of India is growing. There are 13 categories of persons mentioned in the Emigration Act 1983 who have been exempted from emigration check before leaving India. Here, a detailed account of recent trends and issues of labour emigration from India to the West Asian destinations has been discussed on the basis of various secondary sources of information.

Research Questions

The broad objective of this paper is to understand the nature of labour emigration towards west Asia from India along with the trends and issues associated with it.

Methodology

This research is based on the secondary data sources. The univariate analysis is carried out in this study. In univariate analysis descriptive statistics i.e. mean and percentage analysis are used here. The information, which has been collected through the various sources, is processed and then suitably represented with the help of graphs and other statistical diagrams.

Trends of labour migration between India and Gulf countries:

The trends of labour emigration from India are quite fluctuating both in temporal and spatial contexts. The labour supplying parts in India are showing a shift in this process. In the table no. 1 about 11 years data on number of workers granted Emigration Clearances are presented by major states. The figures in this table do not include those labour emigrants who do not require emigration check before emigrating from India. This is also one of the reason for declining numbers from the southern states because in this period the educational qualification of labour from this region have increased significantly and now after achieving secondary level education these labour do not require Emigration Clearance.

In this table it is clear that till the year 2008 maximum number of workers granted Emigration Clearance were from Kerala, Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh states but after that these states were replaced by Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, West Bengal , Punjab and Rajasthan. Here, one of the reasons of the low labour migration from Kerala is that the persons holding secondary level of education are exempted from emigration check required category (Rajan, 2011). The similar reason can be given in case of Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh.

Table 1: Number of workers granted Emigration Clearances by major States (2004-14)

#	STATE	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
1	Uttar Pradesh	27428	22558	66131	91613	139254	125783	140826	155301	191341	218292	229444
2	Bihar	21812	9366	36493	51805	60642	52207	60531	71438	84078	96894	98721
3	Tamil Nadu	108964	117050	155631	150842	128791	78841	84510	68732	78185	83087	83202
4	Kerala	63512	125075	120083	150475	180703	119384	104101	86783	98178	85909	66058
5	Andhra Pr.	72580	48958	97680	105044	97530	69233	72220	71589	92803	103049	53104
6	West Bengal	8986	5102	14929	24817	26094	21187	28900	29795	36988	41916	51561
7	Punjab	25302	24088	39311	53942	54469	27291	30974	31866	37472	48836	48431
8	Rajasthan	35108	21899	50236	70896	64601	44744	47803	42239	50295	41676	48123
9	Telangana	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	38531
10	Maharashtra	28670	29289	15356	21496	24786	19128	18123	16698	19259	19579	19110
11	Karnataka	19237	75384	24362	27014	22413	18565	17295	15394	17960	17798	15054
12	Orissa	6999	1258	4114	6696	8919	6515	7344	7255	7478	10608	13046
13	Others	56362	68826	52586	54813	40399	27394	28729	29475	33004	49011	40493
	TOTAL	474960	548853	676912	809453	848601	610272	641356	626565	747041	816655	804878

Source: Compiled from various Annual Reports, Ministry of Overseas Indian Affairs, GoI (2008-09 to 2014-15).

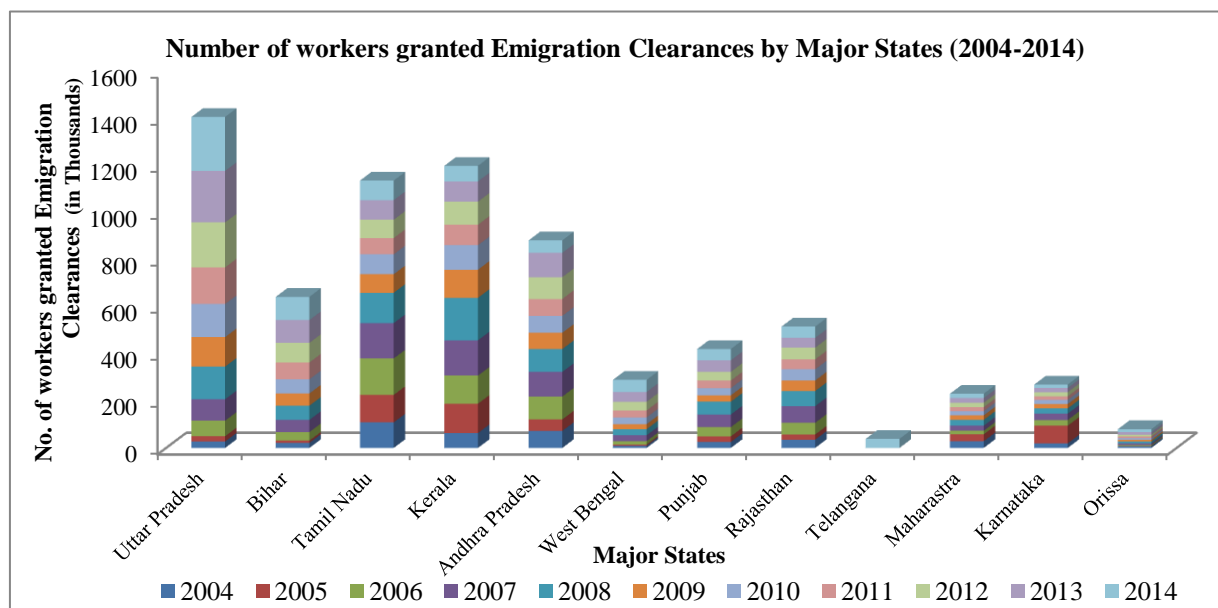
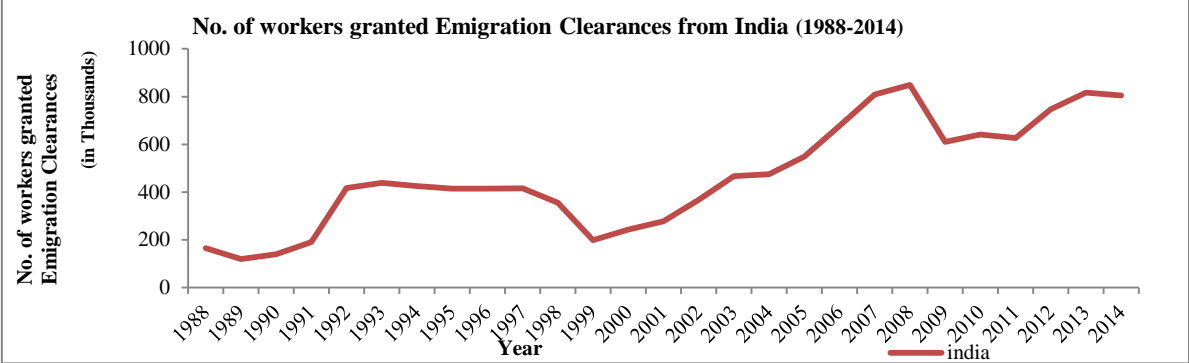


Figure 1: Emigration Clearance by major states

A chart has been prepared to show the fluctuations in the total labour emigration for these destination countries especially in Gulf countries and the dominant states in terms of volume of workers granted Emigration Clearances. Here, in this figure no. 1, the heights of the columns are showing the total number of workers granted Emigration Clearances in the period of 2004 to 2014 from particular states. Because, this labour emigration is primarily on contractual basis and these labours are granted visa for a limited period of two–five years, so the heights of these columns do not depict the quantum of Indian labour population settled in these countries from these states in the concerned time period. The heights of these columns are clearly showing the state wise variations in labour emigration to the Emigration Clearance required countries excluding those workers who fall in the category of Emigration check not required. In this period of eleven years maximum worker granted Emigration Clearances from Uttar Pradesh and followed by Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh and Bihar. Rajasthan is at sixth position in this criterion.

The year wise total number of workers granted Emigration Clearances from various states is shown by the different colours in these columns. The different heights of the year wise column spaces in a single composite column for a particular state and across the columns of different states is clearly demonstrating that there is variation in the demand for these workers at destination countries as well as state wise supply for particular period of time. There may some other factors also responsible for these fluctuations and most important among these are political instability, changes in immigration policies at destination countries, emergence of new labour supplying countries etc. The overall labour migration from India to the Emigration Clearance required countries under emigration check required category is showing fluctuating trends. In the last two decades there is almost two fold increase in the labour emigration from India to these 17 countries. The figure no. 2 is showing these trends.

Figure 2: Comparison of Emigration Clearance data for India and Rajasthan



Source: Compiled from Annual Reports of the Ministry of Labour and Ministry of Overseas Indian Affairs, Gol.

Among the Emigration Clearance required countries, the countries of Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) are the most preferred destinations for Indian emigrants. In these countries also Saudi Arabia and United Arab Emirates are attracting about half of the total Indian labour emigrants. From the following table no. 2, this is revealed that in the duration of last 11 years (from 2004 to 2014) maximum Indian labours granted Emigration Clearances for these two countries. The countries like Kuwait, Qatar, Oman and Bahrain are other important destinations in this context. Besides this general trend there are variations in the year wise outflow of labour from India to these destinations. This is clearly displayed in the line graph (figure 3).

Table 2: Emigration Clearance granted for Gulf Countries in last few years (2004-14)

#	COUNTRY	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
1	Saudi Arabia	123522	99879	134059	195437	228406	281110	275172	289297	357503	354169	329937
2	U.A.E.	175262	194412	254774	312695	349827	130302	130910	138861	141138	202016	224033
3	Kuwait	52064	39124	47449	48467	35562	42091	37667	45149	55868	70072	80419
4	Qatar	16325	50222	76324	88483	82937	46292	45752	41710	63096	78367	75935
5	Oman	33275	40931	67992	95462	89659	74963	105807	73819	84384	63398	51318
6	Bahrain	22980	30060	37688	29966	31924	17541	15101	14323	20150	17269	14220
7	Iraq	0	0	0	0	0	390	390	1177	917	6577	3054
8	Others	51532	94225	58626	38943	30286	17581	30556	22229	23985	24787	25962
	Total of 17 Countries	474960	548853	676912	809453	848601	610270	641355	626565	747041	816655	804878

Source: Compiled from various Annual Reports, Ministry of Overseas Indian Affairs, GoI (2008-09 to 2014-15).

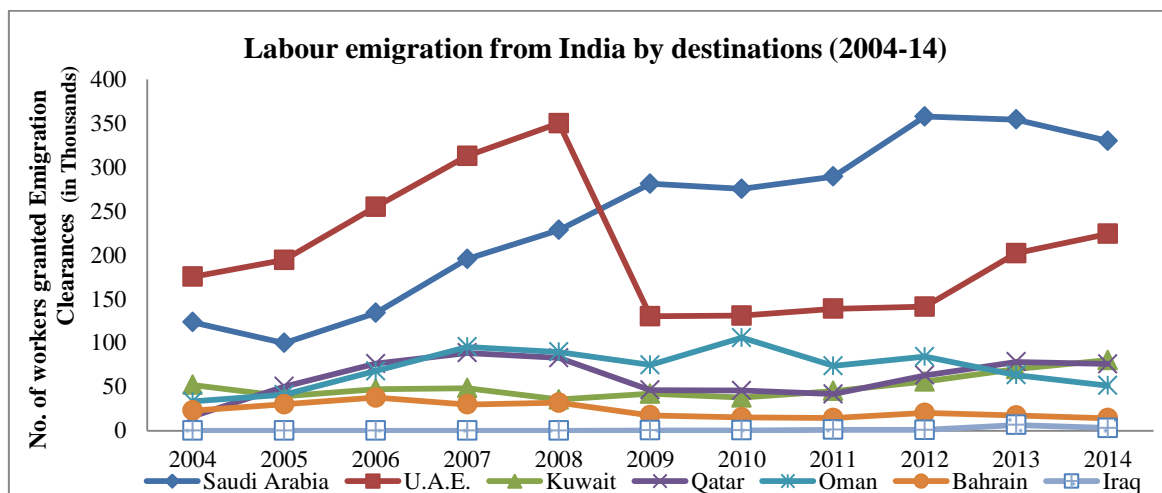


Figure No. 3 Labour emigration from India by Destination

As per the United Nations Report (2009), maximum Gulf countries realized that the immigration level has reached too high and they were in favour of designing a policy for lowering the migration flows in future. Out of total six important Gulf countries (GCC) five were with the opinion to reduce migration stock in future, except Bahrain. The migration level was felt satisfactory in Bahrain and they wanted to maintain the existing immigration level. Such initiatives might change the scenario of labour emigration from the south Asian countries including the Indian labour emigration for the Gulf countries in the near future.

Remittances

Kapur and McHale (2003) observed that in the recent past, there has been a noticeable emphasis on the study of various dimensions related to remittances. Obviously, this interest has been accelerated due to a remarkable increase in the remittance flows. The impact of this increase has been rediscovered as a potential source of development finance. The flow of remittances from developed to developing countries rose from \$31.1 billion to \$76.8 billion in the period of 1990 to 2000. Even the remittance flow is increasing with greater pace after year 2000. Now, registered remittances amount is twice the amount of official development assistance and 10 times higher than the net private capital transfers to developing countries.

Remittances play an increasingly important role at national level. These are relatively stable source of external finance. During economic and political crises, remittances play a critical role as social insurance and protect the economy of affected countries (Kapur 2003). Remittances are more reliable foreign currencies source to prudent the economy of any country because these are less volatile and less pro-cyclical than other capital flows such as foreign direct investment and foreign institutional investment. India has experienced the positive role of remittances in crisis periods. Role of remittance in the overall sustenance of family back home is very important in case of semi-skilled and unskilled labour emigrants. In Indian case remittances are playing crucial role in the maintenance and upliftment of the families back home. In some case social and community remittances are important for the development of an area and a larger group.

In the table no. 3 given below the migrant remittance inflow is given for India and the world for last four decades. In this period migrant remittance flow in India has increased more than 160 times, while the total remittance inflow at world level has increased more than 60 times only. But in 1975 Indian share in the total migrant remittance inflow was only 4.5 percent which has increased to nearly 12.1 percent in 2014. In case of India the rapid growth in remittance inflow was observed after 1994. The figure no. 4 given below is clearly depicting this trend. In this period of two decades there has been good amount of addition in remittance inflow and in last decade India became the largest remittance receiving country in the world. Afterwards India is constantly leading the world in migrant remittance inflow. In 2013, the migrant remittance inflow was about 70 thousand million US\$ which was 3.7 percent share of the total GDP of the Indian state.

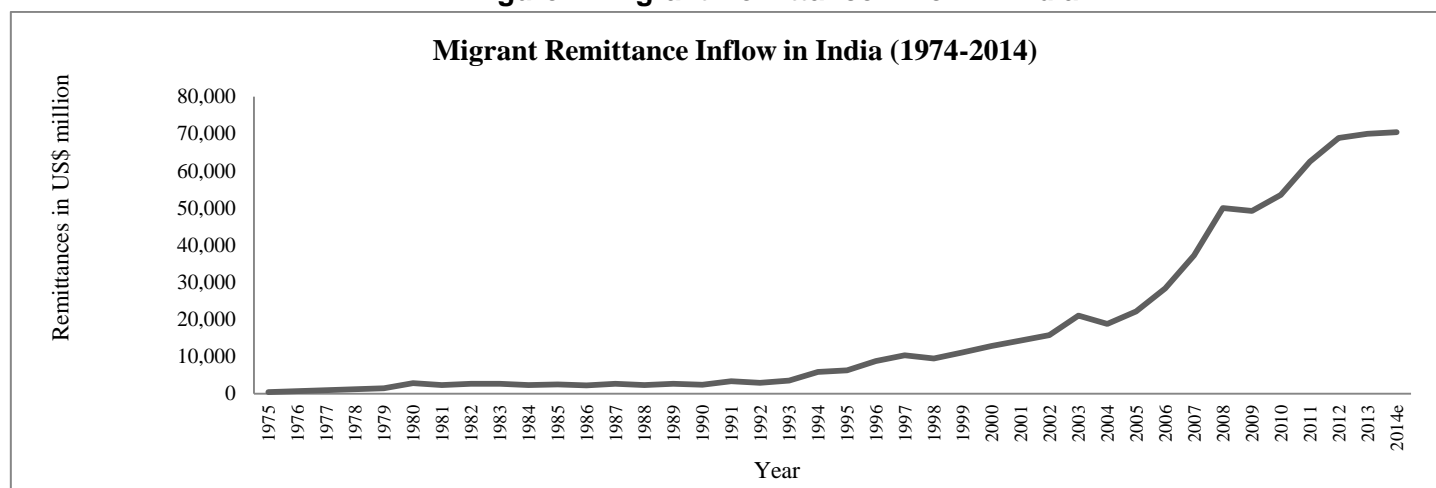
Table 3: Migrant remittance inflow in India and World in US\$ million (1975-2014e)

Migrant remittance inflows	1975	1976	1977	1978	1979	1980	1981	1982	1983	1984
India	430	643	935	1,161	1,441	2,761	2,302	2,622	2,662	2,293
World	9,529	11,069	16,830	22,356	28,222	35,814	34,887	36,041	36,578	35,361
Migrant remittance inflows	1985	1986	1987	1988	1989	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994
India	2,472	2,243	2,663	2,317	2,610	2,382	3,294	2,896	3,527	5,855
World	34,556	40,459	48,817	52,361	54,749	64,034	67,754	75,215	75,211	85,677
Migrant remittance inflows	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004
India	6,224	8,763	10,334	9,477	11,122	12,845	14,229	15,707	21,015	18,753
World	97,889	102,763	117,242	114,005	121,671	126,750	140,339	163,489	197,183	226,426
Migrant remittance inflows	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014e
India	22,125	28,334	37,217	49,977	49,204	53,480	62,499	68,821	69,970	70,389
World	279,851	324,603	392,477	452,735	422,820	457,897	512,310	533,140	557,083	583,430

Source: Annual Remittances Data, The World Bank (April 2015)

e= estimate

Figure 4: Migrant Remittance inflow in India



Out of the total remittances received by India, about 50 per cent of this was sent by the workers in the Gulf region. In case of investment also they are responding well. The Gulf based Indian emigrants are putting huge investments in the hospitality sector and some other areas in India. The remittance receivers are generally having a bank account. These remittances often promote financial strength of sender and recipient and usually contribute in the economic development in many ways. The remittances are considered less volatile than other capital flows despite financial crises and economic slumps remittances are reliable financial resource for the developing countries. Such sustainability further increases if the emigrants of any countries are spread in many countries over the globe.

Issues and Problems related to Indian Nationals in the Gulf Region

The concerns and the problems in most of the countries of West Asia especially the Gulf region are similar. Most of the Indians in the Gulf were concerned about labour exploitation and welfare issues, the education of their children, the exploitation of women and so on at their place of origin and in the Gulf region.

Issues related to labour exploitation and welfare

The large proportions of Indian workers emigrate without attestation of Employment documents. This is a major cause for their exploitation and no relief in existing system. There are some common problems faced by the Indian emigrant labours here like non-payment of salary, delay in the payment of salary, absence of proper basic amenities at work places, poor residential arrangements, non-renewal of labour card and visa, non-payment of gratuity on termination of job, employer refusing to give permission to travel to India, discouraging return if job conditions are found unsuitable, misled by recruiting agents in India, pre-mature termination of labour contracts, non-observance of terms of contracts by employers rather denial of existing contract job conditions and signing of new contracts after arrival of labour to the destination in disfavour of labour, many of the Indian workers are vulnerable to neglect, disease, accidents, unemployment and many more. There are also cases where companies/employers do not provide return airfares to workers on completion of their contracts.

The problem of illegal Migration

This is a big challenge to control this illegal emigration from India to the Gulf countries. There are large number of unskilled workers, domestic servants and housemaids who are coming through the informal channels. The recruitment agencies are playing adverse role in this game. There are many cases of fraud and extortion by the Recruitment agencies and there is a dire need to have checks and strong monitoring on these. After their immigration in these countries, due to various reasons, workers are not ready to leave. As a result of this, in many ways they are exposed to exploitation such as imposing penalty on them, declaration of illegal immigrant status, nonpayment of salaries, denial of security and safety measures, problems of non-payment by Insurance companies and so on. These recurring problems are also related to those who abandon their sponsors and work illegally.

Vulnerability of Domestic Workers

Domestic workers are the most vulnerable section of the Indian community in many Gulf countries. This section is not provided due security under the existing labour laws in many cases. They are facing problems like adverse working conditions, non-payment of salaries, confiscation of their passports, sexual exploitation etc. Many of the housemaids are exploited through the present system of recruitment of domestic workers. The recruitment of young

housemaids leads to their sexual exploitation. Though the minimum age for housemaids is fixed at 30 years, but still the problem persists through fake age certificates and other rackets.

Education of their Children

Indian schools in many countries like Kuwait facing problems related to the procurement of books published by the NCERT. These workers are also demanding for some special and easy provisions for their children to get admission in educational institutions in India. This concern they have raised in many Pravasi Bhartiya Diwas programmes also.

New adverse Policies

Another important concern is the aggressive policies of localization in gulf countries such as Kuwaitization, Emiritization and categorization of companies to discourage single nationality emigration. Though the Kuwaitization and Emiritization processes may not have impact on the blue collar workers, where Indians are mostly engaged, but it does affect the white collar workers and future migrations.

Failure in timely renewal of their Passports

Many of the emigrant's passports are remaining pending for renewal from the State Governments in India. This is creating a problem of their legal status at destination. Though the Government of India is simplifying this process and also trying to facilitate them at their destination.

Implementation of social security schemes:

There is a need for full implement of these schemes of social security like Pravasi Bhartiya Bima Yojna. The problem is that large numbers of Indian workers are still not benefitted with such schemes. There are also complains of lack of accessible investment/pension schemes. Other than these issues there are many concerns which must be addressed adequately like debt burden due to managing finances for emigration process, socio-psychological insecurity among the families back home, remittances are largely used for consumption purposes so no economic security for future, weak skill development and accommodation at new destinations in comparison to competitive emigrants from Philippines, Sri Lanka, Bangladeshis etc.

Conclusion and suggestions

Human Development Report (2014) states that the undocumented / illegal Indian workers are suffering a lot and are exposed to inhuman conditions of life in the Gulf countries. On the other side, here things are not as fetching as it was two to three decades before. Still, it is perceived lucrative for the workers to get employment in Gulf countries despite common stories of grief and exploitation. The Saudi Arab and UAE countries are the important destination for the Indian emigrant workers. Other most important countries in this reference are Kuwait, Qatar and Oman. That is why the policies of these countries towards immigrants are very important for us. This is the reason that in recent past Indian government have shown special interest in these countries. In 1970's mainly semiskilled and unskilled labour emigrated from India to the gulf region to take up jobs in construction and other infrastructure development sector. But, in last two decades, demand increased for skilled and professional manpower for operation and maintenance services, transport and communication, I. T. and other such sectors. The south-Indian region like Kerala, Tamil Nadu etc. have responded accordingly. There, the proportion of semi-skilled and skilled workers is increasing among the Gulf migrants. But, in case of Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Rajasthan etc. the conditions are almost

similar as it was in 1970s. There is a need for skill upgradation of prospective emigrants through pre departure training and orientation programmes in considerable manner for changing their efficiency and income and awareness drives for minimizing their exploitation. The wage differences in sending and receiving places and continuous job assignments are the main catalyst behind this emigration. There are very poor job prospects in India for them and the young workforce is pushed to join this emigration stream.

In the North Indian region these emigrants are getting information about the employment opportunity in Gulf region by the agents or their sub agents or field catchers. These agents and their other helping partners are not fair with these innocent, unaware and less educated prospective emigrants. They are exploiting them in all possible manners especially in terms of heavy charges for their services. It has been found in various surveys that about every emigrant sending remittances to their family back home, the emigration has resulted in the increase of household income. Primarily, this increase in income have translated in improving food and nutrition quality, purchase of household amenities, improvement in the residence quality etc. Most of them first try to repay their debts if any. Then, they use remittances for arranging basic facilities including food and also for improving the standard of living. This use of remittance is purely for consumption purpose. Only a small proportion of these workers use remittances for productive investment and saving.

The emigration of semi-skilled and unskilled Indian labour is not very lucrative now as it was before 2-3 decades. At present they are facing competition with Philippines, Bangladeshi, Sri-Lankan and Pakistani labour migrants. There is negligible increase in the salaries of workers in the last few years in the Gulf region, where inflation has increased remarkably. It is perceived now that only the skillful workers should emigrate for the gulf countries. The contribution of this emigration in various sectors of development cannot be denied but in the last few years it is difficult to establish a unidirectional relationship between migration and development equation here. This is so because a large section of emigrants are not grading this business very profitable now.

Suggestions for improving the emigration of labour to the Gulf region

- There is need to simplify the process to get passport, visa and emigration clearance. This is very much necessary to erode the role of mediators in this entire process.
- The Indian embassies abroad must be approachable and helpful to deal with the problems of emigrants rather than avoiding their concerns and exploiting them.
- There must be provisions and institutional facilities for skill upgradation, pre-departure training and orientation of prospective emigrants. This can increase the competencies and income prospects of these emigrants by the capacity building exercise. This is also necessary for getting edge on their competitors from other Asian countries.
- The Indian Government must control the mediators to avoid exploitation of emigrant workers. There must be awareness programmes for these prospective workers. It is easy to catch them during passport making for orientation and awareness programmes.
- The Government of India as well as state governments are now making policies for the welfare of these workers. But, these initiatives are of no use until and unless the policy related information are not reached up to the beneficiaries.

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