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Crossing Borders for Livelihood: Dynamics of Rural Migration from India to the Gulf

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Abstract

India is the second-largest contributor to global migrant labour, with the World Bank estimating that 11.4 million Indian migrants emigrated in 2010 alone. According to Government of India data, nearly 90% of the migrants worked in Middle Eastern (Gulf) countries. Rural-urban migration in India is rapidly emerging as a complex socio-economic phenomenon, with structural factors such as economic disparities, inadequate employment opportunities, and environmental issues playing a crucial role. However, there are specific challenges involved in migration to the Gulf countries, including high recruitment fees, cultural differences, and short-term contracts. This study, which is mainly based on the primary empirical data, has explored the dynamics of rural migration and its varied impacts on livelihoods in Uttar Pradesh, India. For the research, the mixed method approach was used, combining qualitative methods such as in-depth interviews and focus group discussion to determine the main motives for migration. This includes seasonal manpower requirements, aspirations for better living conditions, opportunities for overseas employment and the negative effects of agricultural distress. This study adds to the academic debate on rural migration in India by highlighting the urgent need for targeted policy interventions. A multi-faceted approach is needed to address the structural determinants of migration and reduce the vulnerabilities faced by migrating communities.

Keywords: Rural, Migration, Labour, Livelihoods, Discrimination, Remittances

Introduction

Migration is a major process affecting the contemporary world's society that represents enormous economic, social and political changes. Migration has historically been an economic lifeline for individuals and groups to help them address economic, environmental and socio-political issues (De Haas et al., 2019). In the multidimensional nature of migration, India is said to play an important role as the second largest provider

of the global migrant labour force (Ratha et al., 2016). In fact, the scale and impact of India's migration has increased significantly in the past few decades and is shaped by a range of complex and multifaceted drivers, such as an economic imperative, environmental pressures, demographic dynamics and changing socio-cultural aspirations (Sanjaya, 2024).

Most migrants are from rural areas who are looking for economic security and sustainability of their livelihoods, with the World Bank estimating the number of migrants from India travelling abroad in 2010 at about 11.4 million (Schultz, 2014). Every year, the Government of India has stated that around 90% of these international migrants are looking for employment within the Middle East, mainly in the countries forming the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) including Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates (UAE), Kuwait, Qatar, Oman and Bahrain (Rajan & Saxena, 2019). The countries, where the economies are growing and are mainly dependent upon the oil exports and ambitious infrastructural development, have always shown the demand for various categories of labour, from unskilled labour to semi unskilled artisans, technicians etc. (Gardner, 2010). The Indian rural-urban migration to the Gulf region is complex and contradictory since the oil boom of the 1970s, with a mix of socio-economic opportunities and widespread structural vulnerabilities (Khadria, 2006).

The reasons for migration from rural areas are not always single; instead, it is the result of a complex mix of factors that include structural inequalities, agrarian crises, limited local job prospects, demographic pressures, and aspirations for improved livelihoods (Azhar, 2016). Development gaps in rural areas have long been a challenge in India, including lack of infrastructure, income differences, labour instability, environmental hazards like droughts, floods, and climate-related agricultural distress (Mahendra Dev, 2018). Also, structural changes and economic liberalisation policies that took place in the 1990s further exacerbated regional disparities, which unintentionally increased the flows of internal and external migration (Kohli, 2014).

Migration to rural domestic areas and to international destinations are not only distinct but interconnected paths. Migration to the Gulf countries carries a unique significance in academic and policy debates for its unique economic and socio-cultural features (Sanjaya, 2024). Migration to the Gulf countries brings huge economic benefits through remittance, drastically changes the rural economies in a positive way, boosts household income and facilitates investment in education, health, and housing (Naik, 2024). Throughout rural India, remittances have had a strong impact on human capital development, poverty alleviation and socio-economic empowerment in migrant-origin communities (Rajan, 2021).

At the same time, the migration towards the Gulf represents several challenges and vulnerabilities. Migrants face high recruitment fees, abusive working practices, precarious employment, disorientation of culture, isolation, and legal uncertainty (Gardner, 2010). Gulf migration is more ephemeral and is frequently limited by very rigid contractual arrangements that impose very strict controls on the rights and freedoms of migrants. Structural vulnerabilities in question further contribute to social, psychological, and economic pressures on migrants, their families and their communities (International Labour Organization, 2017). Therefore, migration to the gulf is a complex process not only as a source of economic livelihood, but also as a possible source of exploitation, risk and socio-economic fragmentation.

The study is of a critical nature with a thorough study of out-migration from rural areas and its socio-economic effects at household and community levels in out-migration prone regions of India to the Gulf countries. The research uses a mixed-methods approach, incorporating both qualitative and quantitative methods (in-depth interviews,

focus group discussions), which examines the dynamics between economic, socio-cultural and environmental factors influencing migration. It specifically covers: (1) the key drivers of rural migration to the Gulf countries; (2) the impact on household livelihoods, social networks, labour supply and community integration; (3) vulnerabilities encountered by migrants in the Gulf countries and how they impact migration outcomes (exploitative labour conditions, legal precarity, socio-cultural alienation); and (4) policy action points to mitigate vulnerabilities and enhance socio-economic benefits. This multi-dimensional analysis is more than an economic interpretation, it surfaces complex socio-cultural and institutional dynamics and contributes to the development of empirically informed lessons for policy, development, and research.

Literature Review

There are several theoretical perspectives that could be used to account for migration and the socio-economic effects of it. The basic push-pull model (Lee, 1966) posits that migration is caused by the lack of opportunities and living conditions in origin areas, yet greater opportunities and living conditions in destination areas, although some have criticized it for its lack of capturing the complexity and structural inequalities as well as the cultural-institutional aspects of migration (De Haas et al., 2019). The new economics of labour migration (Stark, 1991) redefines migration as a collective action strategy for risk diversification, especially to help deal with agrarian uncertainties, income variability and agrarian-market failures in rural settings (Taylor & Martin, 2001). The Dual labour market theory (Piore, 1979) highlights the need for structural labour demand in destination countries and tends to account for the fact that Gulf countries continue to depend on low-skilled Indian migrants for sectors which the local population does not wish to fill (Gardner, 2010). These are complemented by social network theory and by cumulative causation (Massey, 1990) which emphasises the importance of kinship networks and diaspora connections in lowering psychological and logistical hurdles and making migration self-perpetuating over time.

Empirical studies on the rural migration process, both internal and external, in India shows a duality. The main motivation of the migrants is identified as an economic distress, agricultural stagnation and environmental pressures through internal study, while they migrate to urban centres to take up informal jobs, poor housing and social marginalisation despite the economic uplift through their remittance (Bhagat, 2017; Kundu & Saraswati, 2012; Priya Deshingkar & Farrington, 2009). Since the 1970s oil-boom, economic migration, especially to the gulf countries, has contributed significantly to the changes in the rural economy, including large remittance flows to rural areas that help alleviate poverty, improve human capital and inspire local development (Rajan, 2018; Zachariah & Rajan, 2010). But there are underlying weaknesses to this flow: high recruitment fees; harsh working conditions for migrants; the legal precarity of the *kafala* sponsorship system; cultural alienation; limited migrant rights (Gardner, 2010; Khadria, 2006). In terms of socio-economic impacts, remittances can be shown to have an impact on improving household incomes, which can help households invest in their education, health care, housing and small businesses, and reduce their vulnerability to agricultural shocks (Taylor & Martin, 2001). In contrast, it causes critical disruptions, such as labour shortages to reduce the productivity of agriculture in the rural areas, create wage disparities, break up traditional social network, change the nature of family, and create vulnerability for women, elderly and children who did not migrate (Bhagat, 2017). The literature highlights migration as a 'double edged sword' not only a powerful livelihood strategy that generates transformative remittances, but also one that underpins structural vulnerabilities and socio-economic costs that require policy attention.

Methodology

The current study takes a qualitative method to understand the phenomenon of rural migration, socio-economic impacts and vulnerability of migrants in the context of migration from rural areas of Mirzapur and Varanasi District of Uttar Pradesh to the Gulf countries. The study adopts purposive sampling and snow balling sampling method to engage 20-25 respondents who are those that return home, family members of migrants, local community leaders, migration facilitators, recruitment agents and government officials. Data collection is conducted through in-depth interviews and focus group discussions (FGDs) to get deeper insights on the process of migration decision making, recruitment process, living and working conditions in the countries of migration, socio-cultural adaptation, use of remittances, impacts of migration at the household and individual levels, and obstacles encountered during migration and return. The in-depth face-to-face interviews are semi-structured to allow flexibility and depth of the interview, and FGDs (6–10 members per group) aim to generate discussion between group members on community-level impacts, shared experiences, and vulnerabilities. Ethical issues (informed consent, confidentiality, sensitivity to participants' vulnerabilities) are rigorously adhered to.

Findings and Discussion

1. Key Drivers of Rural Migration

The migration of people from rural areas to the gulf countries in India is a multifaceted phenomenon with economic, social, environmental and structural causes. This trend of migration is most marked in certain states, such as Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar and Punjab, where much of the population has little opportunity in the country, and wants to pursue better economic opportunities elsewhere. The key drivers and push factors of rural-to-rural migration in these areas, particularly to the Gulf nations, are discussed below.

- **Lack of Local Employment Opportunities:**

The economies in rural India are underdeveloped and there aren't many industries that provide an opportunity to earn a stable and good salary. For instance, in states such as Uttar Pradesh and Bihar, agriculture is the primary livelihood but is no longer sustainable, because of increased input costs, decreased yields and small and scattered farms.

A migrant from Varanasi, Uttar Pradesh, shared: Here, I was earning 300-400 a day as a daily wage labourer. In Dubai, I earn 1,500 a day. How can I stay here when my family is struggling to survive?

The narration exposes the economic contrast between the income in rural India and in the Gulf countries, especially among low and semi-skilled workers. The speaker, who is presumably a migrant worker, compares the standard of living in India, where he earns 300-400 a day, with that in Dubai, where he earns more than 1,500 a day, highlighting economic necessity as the main motivation for migration. This is a representation of the larger problem of Income Disparities, unemployment, and underemployment in the rural economy of India, which do not ensure sustainable livelihoods for local people. The term 'struggling to survive' implies that for families, it is not an option, but a necessity. This is in line with the push and pull theory of migration in which the economic challenges faced in India (push factors) and higher wages offered elsewhere (pull factors) influence migration decisions. Further, the statement has a rhetorical power to it; it speaks as a testament to the challenges migrants face in balancing the loss of home and family to access employment opportunities and survival.

• **Agrarian Distress:**

In India the agriculture industry is facing several issues such as low productivity, debt burden, and climate change. Often the poor and unprivileged farmers and the agricultural labourers move from one place to other to come out of the vicious circle of poverty and debt.

A 45-year-old farmer from Varanasi rural area who migrated to Saudi Arabia stated: I used to grow, but the crops failed three years in a row. I had no choice but to leave.

This narration is an expression of the agrarian distress as an important push factor in rural migration. The speaker, presumably a farmer, speaks about the three years of a series of crop failures, which left them with no livelihood and with migration being a way of survival. The expression “I had no choice but to go” expresses helplessness, making migration a necessity rather than a choice, because of climate change, unpredictable rainfall, increasing costs of inputs and a reduction in soil fertility. It also highlights the lack of support systems in the rural areas, lack of financial safety nets, absence of alternative jobs etc. which makes farming unsustainable. This is in line with the idea of distress migration, in which economic and environmental pressures force people to relocate from their current homes. The conclusion underscores the critical importance of implementing policies, employment initiatives, and financial protection measures that are resilient to climate change to avoid migration caused by inadequate agrarian livelihood.

• **Remittances as a Lifeline:**

Remittance inflows from migrants are important to support rural households. The funds play a critical role in giving many families opportunities to invest in their children’s education, health and housing needs.

A 50-year-old mother of a migrant worker in Kuwait shared: My son sends 30,000 every month. We have built a new house, and my grandchildren are going to a private school.

This narration puts emphasis on the positive economic effects of migration and remigration on rural households. Here, the speaker (presumably a parent of a migrant worker) highlights the impact of their son’s remittance of 30,000 per month on their family’s life. The capacity to construct a new house and send their grandchildren to a private school is testament to the uplifting potential of migration for rural families and the investment they can make in their housing, education and standard of living. It highlights the remittance’s potential to transform the lives of the impoverished people and to provide opportunities for the future generations. It also implies a change in social aspiration, since the ability to obtain a private education suggests that there is a desire to rise socially. Yet remittances offer financial security, but at a price of disconnection and emotional toll on the part of migrants, presenting a complex balance of migration. In this instance, the case fits in with the general phenomenon of migration-related rural development, where overseas remittances act as a vital source of income for many families in areas where there are not numerous jobs.

• **Aspirations for Upward Mobility:**

Migration is perceived as a route to greater opportunities and better living standards. One of the most common wishes of migrants is to offer their children better opportunities in education and health care.

A 28-year-old migrant working in Qatar explained: I want my children to go to a good school and have a better future. That’s why I left.

The above narration captures the aspirational nature of migration, whereby people

migrate not only for economic survival but also for a better future of their families. The speaker is a migrant from her homeland, aged 28, who has come with a personal sacrifice: to seek a better life and better opportunity for her children through migration to Qatar where she can earn more than she could in her home country. That's why I left" emphasizes the emotional aspects of migration, as people face the physical separation, social isolation, and difficult working conditions for the sake of economic stability and mobility for their families. This fits the new economics of labour migration (NELM) theory, which proposes that migration decisions are frequently made strategically by the household to enhance the longer-term socio-economic stability of the household, in addition to the near-term income benefits. The intergenerational aspirations of migrant families are also being reflected in this statement, as parents envision transnational mobility to escape intergenerational poverty and to improve their children's educational and career opportunities. While remittances make a positive difference to household welfare, the social cost of migration, in terms of long-term separation from families, is a major challenge for migrant workers.

• **Social Networks and Peer Influence:**

Social networks are important facilitators of migration. Previous migrants usually give information, financial assistance and referrals to work to relatives, friends and neighbors.

A 35-year-old migrant in Oman said: My cousin went to Muscat five years ago. He helped me find a job there. Without his support, I wouldn't have dared to go.

This statement underscores the importance of social networks in migration and highlights the significance of social links (family members, friends etc.) in migration decision-making. The speaker attributes the assistance of her cousin who had moved to Muscat 5 years earlier to her getting a job, highlighting the need for informal support networks to smooth migration. It is an expression of the difficulties and uncertainties of migration, such as the fear of the unknown, financial risk, and the complexities of relocating to a foreign country, without his support. It implies that having a trusted contact in another country can give you a sense of security, direction, and support, including finding a job, setting up your living quarters, and helping you adapt to the culture. This is consistent with the network theory of migration, which suggests that existing migrants open avenues for potential migrants via their ability to reduce the economic, informational, and emotional costs. Social networks can therefore be an important way to maintain migration patterns, especially in the case of rural migrants who lack formal resources or channels of recruitment. These networks can also, however, create dependence and even exploitation as migrants might feel compelled to accept working in precarious situations because of family or social pressure.

2. Impacts on Rural Livelihoods

The rural-urban migration to the Gulf states has a few consequences on the lives of the rural population in India. The impact of these beneficial and harmful effects are on social organisation, labour relations, family economy and community cohesion. We explore these factors in detail, based on the empirical evidence and knowledge from source areas.

• **Increased Consumption**

Remittances are a key income source for many rural families, helping them to pay for their living expenses including food, clothing and utilities.

A 45-year-old woman from Mirzapur, whose son works in Saudi Arabia, shared: Before my son went abroad, we struggled to afford even necessities like food. Now, with the money he sends, we can comfortably afford three meals a day, including

fruits and vegetables. We also use the funds to buy milk, eggs, and medicines, which has made a huge difference in our health. My grandchildren are much healthier now, and we can visit the doctor whenever needed. My younger son can attend a good school, and I hope he will have a brighter future than his brother did. Our lifestyle has improved significantly—we've been able to buy essential items like a TV and a fridge, making our daily lives much easier and more comfortable.

Prior to my son's departure overseas we had a hard time even meeting our basic needs, such as food. With the money he sends we can buy three meals a day, including fruits and vegetables. The money is also used to purchase milk, eggs and medicine which have improved our health greatly. My grandkids are now healthier, and I can take them to the doctor if they need to. I feel that my younger son can get a good education and he may have a better future than his brother. There have been definite improvements in our lifestyle – we've been able to purchase items that we need such as a TV, a fridge, which has made our life much easier and comfortable.

This narration captures the double benefit of remittance incomes, both in the short term, to pay for food, health and education, and in the long term to achieve upgrading of life and prospects. It also brings to light the sacrifices that migrant workers make and the tremendous impact that their contribution has on their families at home. It does suggest, though, that there are difficulties involved in the life of the migrant son, whose own life may not be as rosy as the one he's helping to create for his younger brother. It's a testament to the difficult nature of migration: sacrifice of one generation leading to opportunity for the next.

• **Increased Investment**

A 40-year-old farmer from Varanasi, Uttar Pradesh, whose son works in Dubai, shared: With the money my son sends, I bought a water pump for irrigation, allowing me to grow crops throughout the year and increase my income. We also used the remittances from my daughter to purchase a piece of land, where we now grow seasonal vegetables and sell them in the market. Additionally, I opened a small shop in the village, which helps me earn extra income to support my family. With the funds from my son, we even built a new house with proper rooms, a kitchen, and a bathroom—something we never dreamed of having before. These changes have transformed our lives and given us hope for a better future.

This narration underscores the changing nature of remittances in enhancing rural livelihoods and quality of life. When migrant children earn money from the work abroad, their families can invest in modern agricultural technology such as irrigation, high-yield seeds and agricultural machines, which increases the productivity and decreases the dependence on traditional farming. Many households also diversify their income by buying land, market-oriented farming or by establishing small businesses, thus providing alternative sources of income. In addition to economic security, remittances help to improve one's lifestyle and allow families to afford modern houses, quality health care and quality education for their children. Parents have the means of paying for private education, nutrition, necessary household supplies and so on, which can improve the overall quality of life and social mobility for families long-term. The narration, however, also highlights the sacrifices of migrant workers, who work with their hard-earned money to make these improvements.

• **Changing Family Dynamics:**

When there is no male family member, especially when they are many of the migrants, there are extra responsibilities for the women and elderly family members.

A 60-year-old grandmother said: My daughter-in-law manages everything now—

the fields, the children, the house. It's too much for her.

Migration has an impact on family relations, particularly in rural areas, because the male members of the family are likely to be the primary migrants, and they are more likely to be moving for work. This shift places greater responsibilities upon women and elders who are expected to manage the agricultural operations and care for children and the household. This can be a positive for women's autonomy and decision-making power but can also increase their workload and stress and strain on their bodies and minds. Senior family members also are expected to take on more responsibilities with limited abilities. These changes can give women power as more responsibilities are put on their shoulders, but can also put them at risk, such as being socially isolated and having limited access to resources. Men are less involved in supporting the women and children, which leaves them to deal with these challenges primarily individually. The process underscores the importance of policies and support mechanisms that address the needs of the marginalised and balance the benefits of migration with the issues it presents in relation to family structures.

• **Intergenerational Shifts**

Migration can also result in changes to intergenerational relationships, as the younger migrants take on new values and lifestyles that can clash with traditional ones.

A 25-year-old migrant working in the UAE shared: When I go back home, I feel like an outsider. My family doesn't understand my life in the Gulf.

The narration focuses on the divergence of cultures and societies that migrants face when they return to their home communities from whence, they came and live and work. This experience of the migrant in the UAE has resulted in change of values, behaviour and thinking, which may be different from what they had previously experienced. This out-of-placeness and alienation can result in misunderstandings, emotional distance, and isolation. The story also emphasizes the intergenerational and cultural change resulting from migration as migrants have new opportunities, but they lose out their belongingness in the home community. This clash of progress and tradition, individual and community, is universal among migrants all over the world. The story highlights the emotional and social challenges of migration and the importance of increasing understanding and dialogue between migrants and their families to deepen the bond and closes the gap.

• **Weakening of Community Ties**

One of the major effects of migrants is the erosion of community relationships, as without migrants, the social networks in rural communities are highly affected. The migration of individuals for work can also increase the focus on their needs and problems, decreasing the involvement in collective activities and in community events by their families.

A 50-year-old community (Panchayat) leader in Varanasi noted, Festivals and community events are not the same anymore. Many families are too busy managing their own lives.

This observation is a testament to the changing focus from communal engagement to individual survival and well-being in the context of migration. Families with migrant members may invest time and energy in dealing with remittances, with the loss of a loved one, and with the enhanced responsibilities for those remaining. Consequently, the traditional activities of the community, such as festivals, religious ceremonies and collective farming, become less vibrant and participate. This move away from the community also damages social cohesion and the feeling of being united as a community

that was prevalent among rural communities. This can result in a more fractured social structure, whereby families become increasingly isolated from their neighbours. The development of rural areas also has wider implications in the sense that community cohesion is being lost. Participation and leadership may be lacking in collective efforts, including community-led efforts or cooperative efforts. This can limit progress in areas such as infrastructure development, education and healthcare where community collaboration is often essential.

3. Rural Indian Migrants' Challenges in Gulf

The migration experiences of rural migrants to the Gulf countries are fraught with a multitude of problems affecting their personal migration experiences and the migration experience of their households.

• Exploitation and Poor Working Conditions

Migration, on the one hand, offers opportunities for livelihoods, but on the other hand, it can leave workers in low-skilled work in precarious labour conditions. Gulf countries, as well as other foreign labour markets, demand migrants to work long hours, pay low wages and provide no legal protections, leaving them extremely vulnerable to abuse. The problems stem from the imbalance of power between employers and migrant workers, from rigid and hard to implement labour regulations, and from weak enforcement of the law.

A 34-year-old construction worker in Saudi Arabia shared his struggles:

We work under the scorching sun for 14 hours a day, lifting heavy materials with barely any rest. By the time I return to my cramped shared room, I am too exhausted to even eat. But if I complain, I risk losing my job and my visa. When I was recruited, they promised me \$400 a month, but after I arrived, they reduced it to \$250. For months, they withheld my salary, claiming deductions for food and travel expenses. I had no choice but to endure it because they took my passport. When my employer stopped paying us for three months, we had no one to turn to. If we protested, they threatened to cancel our visas. With no money and no legal support, we were trapped—we had to keep working, no matter the conditions.

This narration is a compelling snapshot of the presence of migrant workers and the very real conditions and exploitation to which they are subjected, especially in the construction industry where physically demanding work is often coupled with long hours, unsafe conditions and financial insecurity. The worker's account exposes several levels of exploitation and vulnerability stemming from unfair employment practices, untraceable recruitment, wage theft, and immigration restrictions. The narration highlights the critical need for enhanced labour rights, enforcement of minimum wage, and legal framework reforms to safeguard migrant workers from exploitation. The sending and receiving states need to enact policies for holding employers responsible, ensuring fair wages, and ensuring legal assistance for migrants. Further, the repeal of the passport confiscation policy, better working conditions and easier transitions between jobs are crucial to preserve the dignity and rights of migrant labourers. If this does not change, then many migrant workers will be caught in a vicious cycle of abuse, poverty and forced labour, even though they are essential to the economies of the countries to which they have migrated.

• High recruitment fees and debt-

The difficulties of the rural migrants from India looking for jobs in the Gulf countries are also high recruitment fees and debt. Such problems are an economic burden and can compromise the entire purpose of migration: to alleviate economic hardship for people and families. Here's a detailed explanation of the problem:

Santosh, 32, a labor hailing from Uttar Pradesh, was always having trouble feeding his family. He had been offered a life-changing opportunity by a recruitment agent in his village who had promised him a job with one of the construction companies in Dubai with a high salary. The agent, however, insisted that he should take 2 lakh for the job and process the visa and arrange travel. There was no money to save, and Santosh had to go and borrow money from a local lender at a high-interest rate.

The agent assured me that I would earn 50,000 a month and could easily repay the loan in a few months. It seemed worth the risk, he recalled.

But upon reaching Dubai, he was in for a rude shock. Rather than the lucrative job he was promised, he was assigned the job to work with load of heavy materials for 25000 per month with long working hours in harsh weather conditions. He also had some deductions made by his employer for his food and housing, and he didn't have much left to send home.

He confronted the agent, and he found that the contract was in Arabic, which he cannot read, and he found that the terms of the contract, which he had not agreed with the agent, were written. He then found that there were a lot of people who migrated with the same problem—misled about wages, job roles, and working conditions. Others were told that they would get an office job but were hired for jobs at the construction site or in domestic work under bad conditions.

I felt trapped. I had taken a loan, my passport was taken away, and I couldn't even leave. Back home, my family was struggling to repay the debt, Santosh said.

He had not received his pay for months and when he complained about it, his employer threatened to cancel his visa. After 2 years of hardships, Santosh at long last got back home, however, with little in his bank account and a debt that had just accelerated with interest. Migration had pushed him further into financial problems, rather than bettering his family's potential future.

I thought I was securing a better life for my family, but all I got was debt, broken promises, and endless struggle, he lamented.

Santosh's story is the story of thousands of rural migrants who are often tricked into taking up work abroad with false promises, paid exorbitant amounts of money, and are exposed to exploitation in host countries.

• **Social Isolation and Cultural Alienation**

Social isolation and cultural alienation are major problems of rural migrants to the Gulf Countries. The problems are related to language barriers, differences in culture and the lack of integration policies in host countries. This isolation can negatively affect migrants' mental health and well-being, which may affect their capability to work and/or reach their migration objectives.

Ramesh, 30, from Jharkhand, came to Riyadh with the dream of a better life for his family. However, once he touched down, he felt lost. He could not converse in Arabic or English, which made it hard for him to follow instructions from his employer, or even purchase basic food from the shops. The simple things became difficult, such as asking for directions, or medical aid.

At work, my supervisor gave orders in Arabic, and I couldn't understand. If I made a mistake, he shouted at me. I wanted to explain, but I didn't know how, Ramesh recalled.

He had difficulty obtaining information regarding law, did not know his rights or who to contact if he had legal issues. In addition to the language, there were cultural differences which compounded his problem. Gulf countries are strict on social norms, which involved dress code, gender segregation and religious rules, he had no knowledge

about. He was afraid of giving offense to the residents by mistake. He had no room to socialize as he did at home, here he felt constantly being watched and judged. No programs were available to assist migrants such as him with their settlement and he felt isolated. Bad discrimination made things worse. He was a low-paid employee who was discriminated against daily. They had a disdain for him and even at his job he saw how much better treatment western migrants were given. This feeling of being outside left him feeling even more alone. He developed mental ailments as the stress continued. He missed his wife and kids but did not have enough money to visit home. Despite his own difficulties, the urge to send home the money was too great. He was stuck he felt not welcome in the country and had no voice in his job.

I couldn't sleep at night. The loneliness, the stress, the constant fear of making a mistake—it all became too much. But what choice did I have? he said.

He had no mental health care or help available and was forced to endure in silence.

Ramesh's narrative is a true story of thousands of Indians, who face individual and collective problems of separation, alienation, and mental illness, in a foreign country because of the language barrier and cultural differences. They depart from home for a better life but many experience a different kind of difficulty—one that no one anticipated.

• **Poor Living Conditions:**

The most immediate issue that the rural Indian migrants have in the gulf nations is the extremely poor condition of their stay. Such situations have an impact on their physical health, as well as their mental health and general capacity to reach their migration objectives. The following is a detailed description of the problem:

Nesar, a 37-year-old labourer from Varanasi, shared it-

We live alone in the desert, where there's no water or shelter, just tents under the scorching sun. We drink the same water as camels, struggling to survive the heat. My friends in the city aren't any better—over 30 people crammed into a single room, sharing one filthy toilet. Whether in the desert or the city, our lives are filled with hardship. We came here for a better future, but all we found was suffering. Every day is a battle—against the heat, the dirt, the loneliness. This isn't the life we dreamed of, but it's the one we're forced to endure.

Migrant workers in the Gulf countries are exposed to the harshest working conditions, both in isolated areas in the desert and in the city. In the desert, they live in makeshift tents with no proper shelter or clean water; they drink from the same sources as camels and suffer from the heat. More than 30 workers live in a single room in city areas, sharing an unclean toilet and no privacy or hygiene. This appalling situation causes a myriad of health problems, such as respiratory issues, skin diseases and infections, and clean water and sanitation add to the risks. Their physical condition is paralleled by emotional pain, loneliness, stress, and hopelessness is all around their lives. Many of the migrants were attracted to the promise of a better life but ended up in a life of exploitation and neglect. They feel disillusioned and helpless because of the hardships of their life, and because they must work to pay off the debts and provide for their families back home. The obstacles demonstrate that there is a systemic inadequacy in enforcing and securing migrant workers' rights and welfare. There is an urgent need to act on these issues, such as ensuring clean water, clean housing, and health care, in addition to holding employers responsible. The hopes of many migrants will remain shattered by the intolerable conditions and unmet promises without significant action.

4. Policy Interventions Reduce Vulnerabilities and Improve Socioeconomic Benefits for Rural Migrants.

- **Pre-Departure Interventions:** For preparing and protecting the migrants from

rural areas, pre-departure interventions are critical. Effective monitoring of recruiting companies, which include licensing, caps on fees, and well-defined contracts, can prevent abuse and fraud. Skill development efforts, such as vocational training, language instruction, and cultural competency seminars, complement migrants' employability and adaptation. Financial literacy initiatives equip migrants and their households with the skills to manage income remittances and save and invest, thus ensuring long-term economic gains. Awareness programs raise awareness of prospective migrants about their rights, safe migration, and the risks of irregular migration, enabling them to make informed decisions. Governance and accountability is strengthened by institutional developments such as the creation of a specialized migration agency and the strengthening of data collection. Cooperation with partners, such as NGOs and international bodies ensures wide support for migrants. These efforts reduce vulnerabilities, prevent exploitation and maximize the socio-economic benefits of migration, thus promoting sustainable development and poverty reduction in rural communities. Governments by addressing challenges at the pre-departure stage can create a safer and more equitable migration process that can enhance the wellbeing of migrants.

- **Interventions During Migration:**

Migration interventions are needed to adequately protect and ensure the well-being of rural migrants in the Gulf. Labor agreements between the two countries and labor reform to the Kafala system can ensure migrants are not exploited, and that they are paid fairly, have decent working conditions, and can change employers. The employment contracts should be standardised, with job responsibilities, salary and working hours clearly defined, ensuring transparency and accountability. Helplines, legal aid, and labour courts can help migrants with the following types of problems: unpaid wages, breaches of contracts or working conditions, and harassment at the workplace. The need to improve living conditions is also critical; businesses must also ensure the provision of safe and sanitary housing facilities with clean water, sanitation facilities, and electricity. To ensure migrants are not overworked or subject to unsafe conditions, fair working hours, the provision of rest time and occupational safety measures should be put in place. Support is another vital area, and health care is one of them. Access to affordable health insurance and mental health support are essential for migrants' people to cope with physical and mental health issues. There are health camps and clinics in the areas where there are more migrants, which provide timely access to healthcare services. Also, associations and support groups can help build migrant networks to provide support to each other, to disseminate information, and to collectively advance advocacy, while community participation is vital to ensure migrants' voices are heard in policy dialogues. Workplaces and accommodations are regularly audited and reported as openly as possible, making it more difficult to produce results that are not compliant with labor law. Workplaces and accommodations are regularly audited and reported openly making it harder to produce results that are not compliant with the law. These initiatives do not only prevent migrants from being victims of exploitation but also contribute to the socioeconomic gains of migration to their families and communities.

- **Post-Return Interventions:**

The interventions that follow rural migrants' return are very important in facilitating a successful reintegration and maximizing the socio-economic benefits of migration. Counselling and psychological support helps returning migrants cope with reverse culture shock, unemployment and mental health problems and skill development and vocational training programmes allow for skills development and better employment opportunities. Financial assistance like micro finance and small business loans are

given to the returning migrants, to enable them to start their own businesses or join in agriculture activities, thereby promoting self-employment and economic stability. Job placement services have the job of helping people find jobs they can get in their community, and they ensure that their skills are being put to good use. Family care for women and elderly migrants, family pensions and family health insurance, which are provided to migrant families, help to lessen vulnerabilities and alleviate the burden on families left behind. Education and skills development programmes end poverty and contribute to upward mobility for migrant children. Financial education sessions help the families understand how to manage their remittances, how to save and invest, ensuring their long-term benefit. These reforms will require a concerted response from governments, international bodies, civil society and communities. Institutional and governance reforms can overcome the structural obstacles to migration and make migration a means to a better life for rural migrants and their families, through sustainable development, dignity and prosperity. They help protect migrants and build their resilience, enabling their communities to thrive and grow in the long-term.

Conclusion:

The economic hardship, agrarian insecurity and aspiration pull factors are responsible for rural out migration from India to countries in the gulf region. Remittances increase the incomes of migrants and their families, improve education and local investment, but migrants are subjected to unjustified contracts, high recruitment costs, lack of culture and legal insecurity. These weaknesses compound the labour shortages in source areas and the traditional social structure, leaving women and the elderly most vulnerable. A multifaceted policy approach should include pre-departure policy measures such as skills training and regulation of recruitment, awareness creation, access to information, and enhanced living conditions on the vessels, as well as post-return policy measures including reintegration support and community development and enhancement. Financial inclusion and migrant collective organising should be complemented by institutional reforms, such as specialised migration agencies, strong data systems and multi-stakeholder governance to mitigate vulnerabilities and strengthen development benefits. For the rural India, migration is not just as a means of livelihood but as an opportunity for transformation. Structural drivers must be tackled, but migrant rights must also be protected, if inclusive and sustainable development is realised in ways that benefit the well-being of rural communities.

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