

## Migration of Indian girl students to the Gulf: A Study

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● **Abstract:** Migration of Indian girls students to the gulf countries shows a growing trend. Such migration is seen in mostly for pursuing academic career and job opportunities. This paper studies the dynamics of migration among Indian girl students to the gulf and tries to understand the different factors influencing their decisions of migration. The investigation employed a mixed-methods approach and snow ball sampling technique. It tried to explore the experiences of migrated students and has examined the opportunities and challenges they face. It also explores the impacts of India's global image in terms of cultural exchange, gender empowerment and academic diplomacy. The findings has been presented in the form of thematic analysis and offers an understanding upon enhancing India's standing in the global academic arena.

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- Key words: Migration, Diaspora, Indian girls, Gulf, Opportunities and challenges Abroad,
- **Introduction:** The patterns and dynamics of migration across various regions exhibit significant diversity. This diversity is evident in the ways that migrating individuals influence both their host and home communities. A comprehensive understanding of migration is closely associated with factors such as remittances, social security, and job opportunities, which provide benefits to both migrants and society in numerous ways. Consequently, this understanding is also linked to population mobility driven by job security and workforce demands. The advancements in Information and Communication Technology (ICT) have transformed the global workforce, broadening employment

opportunities for skilled individuals. While the globalized workforce has facilitated capital flow, it has also enriched the cultural integration of different communities. As a result, highly industrialized nations frequently attract skilled professionals. Moreover, the socio-economic and cultural implications of migration are significant. The remittances sent by migrants to their home countries not only bolster the national economy but also enable individuals to improve their living standards, benefiting both themselves and their families. This, in turn, contributes to poverty alleviation and enhances productivity levels. From a cultural perspective, migrants are often exposed to a broader spectrum of global cultures, allowing them to engage in a process of comparison, assimilation, rejection, and acceptance of various cultural elements, which fosters inclusivity. Additionally, if the migrants are female, the cultural impact is likely to be more pronounced compared to their male counterparts. With these considerations in mind, this paper explores the migration of Indian female students to the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) Countries utilizing primary data for analysis.

- **The migration trends of Indian diaspora:**
- Migration from India to West Asian countries has deep historical roots. The primary drivers of this out-migration have been economic and political factors. Notably, the influx to West Asian nations, particularly the six Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries, namely Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) was significantly influenced by the oil boom that occurred between 1932 and 1967. This period of substantial capital accumulation, coupled with a severe labor shortage had prompted these oil-rich GCC nations to seek industrial labor from Iran, Western countries, and the Indian subcontinent. According to Francoise De Bel-Air (2015), recruitment trends began to favor Arab workers following the Indian independence

movement in 1947 and the Arab-Israeli conflict of 1948. Consequently, Yemenis and Egyptians emerged as the predominant groups securing better employment opportunities in the GCC countries. Additionally, after 1968, Palestinians and Iraqis began to establish their presence in the GCC countries, largely due to the political upheaval following the coup (Kapiszewski, 2004).

- However, a different trend of migration to GCC countries emerged between 1973 and 1990. This shift can be attributed to the fact that all Gulf countries attained political independence by 1971. The aftermath of the Arab-Israeli war in 1973 marked the beginning of a new phase of migration across the Arab region. Prior to the 1970s, foreign migrant workers constituted 90% of the workforce in Saudi Arabia. However, the economic boom driven by rising oil prices created an increased demand for migrant labor to fulfill production needs. Consequently, the population of foreign migrant workers surged tenfold by the 1990s, primarily comprising individuals from Yemen, Egypt, Sudan, Jordan, India, and Pakistan. Notably, migrants from India and Pakistan were employed under the kafeel (sponsor) system, which could involve an agency, company, or private individual responsible for issuing employment contracts. The kafeel was obligated to assume all socio-economic and legal responsibilities throughout the employment period and was also tasked with establishing the terms of employment. As a result, migrant workers relied heavily on their kafeel for the duration of their employment (Francoise De Bel-Air, 2015).
- Following the 1990s, the geopolitical landscape experienced significant transformations. The Iraqi invasion of Kuwait in 1990 resulted in approximately three million individuals being compelled to leave their countries, which had previously offered them employment opportunities in the Gulf region. This invasion led to the expulsion of around 3.5 lakh Jordanians and Palestinians from Kuwait, as well as 8 lakh Yemenis from Saudi Arabia. Concurrently, two

million Shia and Kurdish individuals either fled Iraq or became internally displaced. The resultant political and economic shifts prompted a substantial change in the policies of Gulf states. Consequently, the proportion of foreign nationals in GCC countries decreased from 72% in 1975 to 31% in the 1990s (Shah, 2004). Data from the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs indicates that by mid-2020, the majority of migrants in GCC countries originated from South Asia, West Asia, and South-east Asia (UN DESA, 2020). Furthermore, it was noted that approximately 70% of non-national migrants were employed in GCC countries, forming a significant part of the labor force. Kapiszewski (2004) posits that this shift occurred as Asian workers increasingly supplanted Arab workers for various social and political reasons. During the decade from 2010 to 2019, India-Saudi Arabia ranked seventh, while India-Oman placed eighth in terms of migrant workforce (UN DESA, 2019b). By 2014, GCC countries emerged as the third largest region for hosting migrants, primarily from India, Pakistan, and Egypt. Thus, the GCC countries became home to the highest number of foreign migrants globally (Thiollet, 2016).

- **Girls migration to Middle Eastern countries:**
- The 2020 data indicates that women represent 35.3% of the total migrant population in Western Asia, marking the lowest percentage of any region globally. Among the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, and Kuwait emerge as the most preferred destinations for girls, in contrast to Qatar and Oman. This preference may be attributed to higher rates of spouse or family migration to Saudi Arabia (743457:2019), the UAE (792877:2019), and Kuwait (331645:2019) compared to Bahrain (78271:2019), Qatar (97262:2019), and Oman (164781:2019). Furthermore, trends reveal that following the conclusion of the pandemic

lockdown, the total number of migrants from India has risen significantly, increasing from 132,675 in 2021 to 204,316 by July 25, 2024, according to the data. However, the country-specific data provided by the Ministry of External Affairs regarding emigration clearance for Indian migrant workers from 2019 to 2024 does not offer a clear breakdown of female migration to GCC countries.

- Indian population are migrating to other than the GCC countries also. However, these numbers are significantly smaller when compared to those migrating to GCC countries. Among the other GCC countries, Malaysia experienced the highest influx of Indian migrants, surpassing the figures for Jordan and Iraq in the Middle East, as well as Lebanon, Thailand, and Indonesia in Southeast Asia. Furthermore, data from the African continent for the years 2021 and 2022 indicates that there was only one instance of migration to South Sudan and Sudan. Thus, the prevailing trend indicates that the discovery and extraction of oil in West Asian countries, particularly within the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) nations, have led to an increase in job opportunities, thereby attracting millions of low-cost laborers from outside the region. Consequently, the GCC countries experience the highest migrant population globally. Additionally, certain West Asian nations, including Turkey, Syria, and Lebanon, are witnessing significant numbers of refugees due to the turmoil and conflicts that have resulted in internal displacement within their sub-regions. Therefore, West Asian countries predominantly host two categories of migrant populations: a labor force and Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs).
- The current study aimed to examine the phenomenon of migration of Indian girls, particularly students in the educational sector, which is witnessing a notable increase. Data on migration, both from India and globally, indicates that each year, a growing number of girls seek opportunities in especially in GCC countries, either to pursue their academic qualifications or to explore job

prospects. In this context, the study investigates the evolving patterns of migration among Indian female students to GCC countries. It also explored the socio-cultural, academic, and economic factors that led to their decisions of migration. Furthermore, the research captured the experiences of girl students highlighting the opportunities and challenges they encounter in a region. Thus, the primary focus of this research was to understand the implications of female migration on India's global image, particularly regarding cultural exchange, gender empowerment, and academic diplomacy. It also explored how these Indian girls navigate transnational education and contribute to India's soft power and global presence.

- **Methodology** :This empirical study employed a mixed-methods approach to collect data from a diaspora sample. Google response sheets were designed to align with the objectives of the research, facilitating the collection of responses from participants. A snowball sampling technique was implemented to reach the target samples for data gathering. Additionally, telephonic interviews were conducted with participants to explore relevant issues and gain insights into qualitative aspects. The age range of the participants varied from 23 to 70 years. The paper is structured in a descriptive format under various subheadings to address the research questions. Consequently, the analysis of the paper is based on a small sample size, with responses evaluated both quantitatively and qualitatively.
- **Result and findings:**
- **Job deficit and migration of girls:**
- By the year 2020, secondary data indicates that women represent 35.3% of the total migrant population in Western Asia. This figure is notably the lowest among all global regions where females migrate in pursuit of education, employment, or permanent settlement, often with their spouses. Furthermore,

the data reveals that since the 1990s, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and the United Arab Emirates have drawn the highest number of female migrants in the Middle East, in contrast to Oman, Bahrain, and Qatar. The migration trends were further examined through a questionnaire administered to the sample of girls, who were asked to indicate their city of migration from India. The emerging patterns derived from their responses indicate that, despite the superior educational facilities present in Delhi, the highest rate of out-migration among girls (20%) to Middle Eastern countries for educational and employment opportunities originates from Delhi, India. The limitations of this research, specifically the reliance on a small sample size, may result in skewed outcomes that favor Delhi, where out-migration appears to be more pronounced compared to other regions in India. This phenomenon may be associated with the prevailing job and employment deficits in the country, prompting a significant number of young women to seek better-paying opportunities that offer social security and additional benefits.

- According to the annual report from the Directorate General of Employment in India, gender-specific employment statistics indicate a notable increase in employment rates for women in recent years. The data reveals that both the Workers Population Ratio (WPR) and Labour Force Participation Ratio (LFPR) for females have shown upward trends, suggesting a decline in the unemployment rate. Specifically, the unemployment rate for women decreased from 5.6% in 2017-18 to 3.3% during 2021-22. Nevertheless, the number of educated women graduating from universities in India significantly exceeds the available job opportunities in both the public and private sectors. Consequently, the migration of women is often linked to the employment prospects offered by Middle Eastern countries, which provide social security. Notably, 60% of female respondents indicated that their migration was motivated by job

opportunities. Additionally, 13.3% of respondents cited other reasons for migration, including family reunification and relocation with a spouse. The analysis of migration motivations among women reveals that factors such as improved social security (20%), enhanced job opportunities (13.3%), financial support for families (13.3%), and a desire for cultural exposure (13.3%) have influenced their decisions to migrate. Therefore, the prevailing stereotype that women in India are primarily confined to domestic roles can be challenged by the emerging trends in female out-migration data. Approximately 71.5% of the respondents indicated that they relocated in pursuit of teaching positions, while 7.1% each moved for opportunities in the insurance sector, human resources, and other fields. During their migration, the majority of respondents did not have a specific institution or program in mind that motivated their decision to relocate.

- Further investigation of these samples through comprehensive interviews indicates that none of the participants expressed a desire to pursue higher education in the Middle East, primarily due to the higher costs associated with such education compared to India. Consequently, most individuals who migrated had already completed their higher education at their respective levels prior to their relocation. The interviews also highlighted numerous challenges faced by teachers in Indian schools, which often hinder their professional advancement. To qualify for government teaching positions in India, they must pass nearly four semester tests, including both primary and secondary Central/State eligibility tests, in addition to entrance examinations. However, successfully passing these assessments does not guarantee employment as a teacher or financial stability. In contrast, private teaching positions tend to be more exploitative, offering lower compensation relative to the hours worked. Conversely, securing a position in international schools is comparatively easier,

providing job security, financial benefits, and additional perks such as medical coverage and free education for teachers' children. Such opportunities are rarely available in Indian private institutions, whether at the secondary or tertiary level. The following excerpts from the in-depth interviews provide further insight into this matter.

- Researcher: • What prompted you to migrate?
- Sample: • Better paid Job opportunity with social and financial security
- Researcher: • But, that you can have here too...
- Sample: • But that is very scanty. The favouritism here in India often hinder the path of deserving candidates.
- Researcher: • Was there any particular institution or particular course in your mind that you were aware of and led you to migrate?
- Sample: • No... As I said, in teaching sector, in India, we have to pass lots of leveled examinations to get inducted into the work force. And that often frustrate any one who have devoted time, money and energy in getting the degree of no use...
- Researcher: • Can you elaborate further 'leveled examinations' that you mentioned?
- Sample: • I wanted to say that while earning the degree of teaching in India, any individual in India has to pass 4 semesters first. But these teaching degree are of no use unless you clear another eligibility criteria for teaching i.e. Centre or State Eligibility Test popularly called C-TET or S-TET. Once you pass this examination too, even then you can not become teacher in government sector where you can have social and economic security with other benefits such as medical facility, leaves benefits, pension and so on.

- Researcher: • Then?
- Sample: • You need to further appear in another test as and when advertised by the government for jobs. In Delhi, it is usually advertised by Delhi Service Selection Board (DSSB). But that is also advertised rarely as most of the contractual teachers are hired with no social and financial security. Therefore, I thought to migrate and look for similar types of jobs with world class opportunity, social and financial security and other benefits.
- **Familial Support to Migrated girls:**
- The research aimed to explore the perceptions of families regarding the migration of girls. This inquiry was particularly relevant given that many Indian families adhere to traditional values, which often result in restrictions on the mobility of girls compared to boys, primarily out of concern for their safety. Therefore, it was essential to understand how the family support system was perceived by these migrated girls and the challenges they faced within society. The majority of respondents indicated that they did not experience any familial pressure regarding their migration to Middle Eastern countries. In fact, 93% reported receiving support from their families. Only about 6% mentioned facing difficulties at the family level concerning their decision to migrate (refer to figure-4). These findings suggest that the assumption that families do not support the migration of girls is largely a stereotype. Additionally, the research examined whether these girls felt any societal expectations associated with being female and working abroad. Approximately 79% stated that they did not perceive any societal pressure or expectations while employed overseas as women. Almost 100% responses suggest that they are much comfortable in the host country and feel safe.

- **Girls' choice of GCC countries and ramification:**
- A significant number of the girls indicated that they preferred the Middle East over other regions due to the opportunities available and the alignment of faiths and beliefs, which do not interfere with their personal religious practices. Additional factors influencing their choice of the Middle East included family considerations, the employment of their spouses in the region, workplace safety, the appeal of Islamic culture, social security, and the presence of extended family members working there. Most of the girls who migrated maintain strong connections with their families while living abroad, utilizing mobile phones, video calls, WhatsApp, and even traditional letters to stay in touch. This consistent communication allows them to feel at home rather than isolated. They reported that they have adapted to the culture of the Middle East with relative ease and have not encountered significant challenges in adjusting to the region. Many expressed that cultural assimilation has occurred, enriching both their familial and societal cultures since their migration. Furthermore, they noted that their presence has positively impacted India's global image in the host country. When asked about the reasons for this perception, they attributed it to the preference of Middle Eastern countries for hiring Indian workers over those from other nations. They also highlighted that numerous Indians have successfully established small businesses in the region, demonstrating their talent and hard work. Consequently, India's global image has been significantly enhanced due to the migration of Indian girls, contributing positively to the country's reputation. Indian girls in the Middle East have made substantial contributions across various sectors, including education, healthcare, business, and technology, showcasing India's talent and strong work ethic. Several of these girls are also employed as teachers. The female educators have contributed not only their professional knowledge but also a diverse cultural

background, highlighting the importance of genuine effort, respect for learning, and a profound dedication to the growth of their students.

- Additionally, the migration of girls in Middle Eastern countries contributes significantly to soft power, cultural exchange, and academic prestige. The participants indicated that the cultural diversity and values they encountered enriched their knowledge, as they had the opportunity to learn from various cultures, including those of individuals from Egypt, Jordan, Iraq, and Pakistan. They expressed a warm reception towards Indian girls and reported no challenges in cultural integration. A deeper exploration with the respondents highlighted the importance of soft power, cultural exchange, and academic standing. Below is an excerpt from one of the samples.

- Researcher: • How do you see India's global image in terms of your migration as a girl?
- Sample: • It has positively contributed in enhancing India's global image...
- Researcher: • On what basis can you say that? Can you elaborate little more...
- Sample: • See... our my migration to this country has contributed to develop soft power, cultural exchange, and my academic reputation. As a teacher, when I interact with my students and colleagues from diverse backgrounds. They become enthusiastic in knowing Indian perspectives on several issues including educational values. The daily interactions has contributed to develop soft power by building a positive and respectful image of India
- Researcher: • How do they see Indian girls academically as you are hired for teaching here?
- Sample: • My migration has allowed me to bring my experience and

teaching methods to new contexts. It has not only enhanced my own reputation as a teacher in adapting new environment positively and swiftly but also it has given me opportunity to develop myself as skilled educator. This image of Indians in adapting to new environment of work force has further enhanced India's global image of Indian teachers

- Researcher: • Did you find educational system in the Middle East different from that in India?
- Sample: • I am personally not satisfied as this system focuses on good grades rather than proving knowledge. In one sense grading has become synonym of learning. But one thing is very different here is that the campuses are very safe specially for females
- Researcher: • How about classroom environment ?
- Sample: • It is different from India. Here I felt study provides more opportunities. But spoon feeding system is more prevalent. In India at least, spoon feeding system in state schools is non-existence.
- Researcher: • And administratively? S
- Sample: • That also is quite different from India. Administration give a lot of relaxation to students. Students are really very good in communication and presentation, but majority of students lag behind in writing skills. They also are more scared and afraid of assessment and evaluation.
- Researcher: • And curriculum?
- Sample: • Education system in India is vast .Here they are trying to improve it as they vastly use Modern classroom teaching with

the use of technology in teaching and learning and are found to be more structured. Also the educational system places a strong emphasis on Islamic studies and local cultural heritage which is missing in India. You will also see gender wise segregation with separate schools or classes for boys and girls.

- Researcher: • What did you like most in methods of teaching & learning comparatively?.
- Sample: • The learning here is inquiry-based education. Strong focus on extra-curricular activities for the development is followed. But in India, strong emphasis on competitive exams and for getting higher marks. In India, education is deeply influenced by cultural diversity, with different states having distinct approaches and content based on local languages and traditions. Moral values and respect for elders and community, regional languages and traditions, emphasis on moral values. co-education is common across most schools. Further, in India, teacher-student relationships are often found to be formal, with teachers seen as authority figures who command respect. But you will not find these here. Educational curriculum in Middle East provide more of practical learning and exposure. Encouragement for women's empowerment is prevalent in both countries.
- The migration of Indian women, including educators, has significantly improved India's global reputation. Many respondents noted that they have benefited from opportunities such as selecting career paths, networking, and engaging in cultural exchanges, as well as gaining international exposure through their teaching and studies in Middle Eastern countries. This is

attributed to the genuinely pluralistic nature of the educational and work environments in these regions. Furthermore, a majority of respondents indicated that the chance to connect with students and educators from diverse backgrounds has improved their networking abilities, fostered international friendships, and facilitated better cultural adaptation (refer to figure-6). In addition to these advantages, they have gained access to a variety of educational methodologies that prioritize critical thinking and cultural exchange. The active integration of technology in education has also enabled them to utilize modern educational tools, further contributing to their professional growth.

- **Mitigating the challenges:**
- The study also aimed to explore in greater detail the difficulties encountered by these migrated girls and the strategies they employed to overcome them. The findings indicate that approximately 29% of the girls experienced economic difficulties, followed by cultural obstacles at 21%. Additional challenges included academic issues (7%) and gender-specific concerns (7%), among others (refer to figure-7). These challenges primarily emerged during their migration. However, within a few months, they were able to adapt to their new surroundings and address these issues. The economic difficulties were alleviated once their income flow stabilized, which took nearly two months to resolve. Cultural adjustments were achieved more smoothly within about three months, as most of them acclimated to their new environment.
- **Conclusion:** The out-migration of Indian girls to Middle Eastern countries, particularly in the realm of education, is an increasingly prominent trend as they seek academic and employment opportunities abroad. The evolving landscape of migration has underscored the significant influence of socio-cultural, academic, and economic factors on this phenomenon. Consequently, this migration has positively contributed to India's global reputation, especially

regarding cultural exchange, gender empowerment, and academic diplomacy. This is evidenced by the preference for Indian professionals in educational institutions worldwide over those from other regions. Nevertheless, the migration of girls to Middle Eastern countries remains comparatively lower than in other global regions where a higher number of girls migrate. Researchers recognize that the insights gained from this study hold substantial importance, as they will assist policymakers, educators, educational institutions, and diaspora communities in formulating recommendations on female student migration and capitalizing on this trend to bolster India's position in the global academic landscape.

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