

Youth migration

Sociology, Immigration



Our world is a big global village. With the opening up of the world economy resulting in free movement of youth, both within their countries & across the nations for better education, better jobs, better quality of life, migration, both internal and international, has emerged as a burning issue. Migration is a multi-dimensional, transnational, multicultural issue. It is a complex problem. It is not a simple demographic or economic problem; there are socio-psychological, cultural, ethnic, legal issues involved. The issue of migration needs to be examined in a holistic manner.

In today's world, knowledge is power and Information is the key to success. In most third world & developing nations, the youth in rural and semi-urban areas are confronted with poor educational infrastructure. In Indian context, there are broadly three types of schools- (i) schools having teachers and children but no buildings or insufficient classrooms, (ii) schools having buildings and students, but no teachers, (iii) schools having buildings and teachers, but no students because of non-availability of quality teachers, educational tools & equipments.

The colleges in these areas are no better. Next is lack of quality technical & vocational education, lack of qualified science teachers, scientific tools, equipments and other educational infrastructure. Lack of quality educational infrastructure in rural & semi-urban areas in most Third world & Developing nations focus the mere ambitious modern rural youth to migrate to schools & colleges in cities & metropolis. More than 75% of rural population is dependent on agriculture, but ironically agriculture is neither remunerative nor sustainable.

For example, 75% of land in rural India is owned by 5% of landlords, big farmers & absentee landlords. Shoddy land reforms fragmentation of land leading to uneconomic size of land holdings, lack of modernization & commercialization of agriculture, further marginalization of marginal farmers have forced modern youth to move to urban areas for better education, better employment opportunities & better quality of life. The factors that drive migration of youth from rural to urban areas at the micro-level are more or less the same that determine migrant motives at the International level. Better education, better employment opportunities, better vertical and horizontal mobility in job situations, more lucrative pay packets, better quality of life and increasing aspirations of the youth in a liberal free economic world are the migrant motives. The number of young students from Third World countries & Developing economies like India & China in American & Western Universities has quadrupled over the last two decades.

For some a foreign degree is a status symbol; but for the majority of students from poor Third world countries & developing economies it is the quest for knowledge & better job prospects that drive them to migrate to American and Western Universities & Colleges. Developing economies like China, Japan, India, Brazil motivate their students, even at times with state sponsorships & scholarships, to study in Western Universities for acquiring better knowledge & with access to modern technologies. Income maximization, social mobility & social status, yearning for better qualities of life propels this youth to join schools of Higher Learning.

With economic & civilizational gaps between countries narrowing down day by day, the culture shock appears minimal & non-existent. Peer group

influences also act as a motivating factor. Youth migration, both within the country and at international level, is a modern day reality & not to be looked down with suspicion or anxiety. World economies have opened up; nations & nationalities have become more liberal & tolerant; people to people contact, industry to industry contact besides Government to Government contact has become more democratic & participative.

A sort of give and take operates between the rich and powerful nations & the developing & Third world countries. International trade & commerce, technology development particularly after the recent economic meltdown has made world economies more interdependent. No one nation can solve the problems facing the world. A new world has emerged where the Rich and poor nations need each other. In such scenario, International migration, both in the sending country as well as in the receiving country, has affected one & all.

It has thrown open new challenges & opportunities for the Governments & for communities & nationalities. The migrant youth, while migrating to an alien land, no more suffers for cultural shock; he slowly gets integrated in the alien land, becomes part of its society, its culture & its economy. He contributes to the development process in the receiving country; he, in return, receives a better pay packet & leads a better quality of life. Next are, of course, occasional racial discriminations & race related crimes; but they are of negligible proportions.

There are however attendant problems like social and family dislocations in the sending country, greater pressure on the urban infrastructure in the receiving country. Next are occasional hue & cry in Developed economies

regarding their jobs being cornered by youth from developing nations, thus contributing to increasing unemployment & resultant social tensions. At the domestic level, migration from rural to urban areas has put enormous pressure on urban civic amenities like housing, health, education, drinking water, sanitation etc.

The brain drain from rural to urban areas has left the villages bereft of the best hands. There is a growing hiatus between Urban India and Rural India & the same is the case with all developing and third world countries. At the International level, free movement of youth for education & employment has meant that young immigrants make up an important and increasing share of the labor force in the receiving countries, particularly in the Developed economies. Instead of stealing they have significantly contributed to this growth in employment in these economies.

With the relative & absolute size of the working population in the west getting smaller, the youth from countries like India have filled up the void. Net change in the working age population in the countries has a direct bearing on the net youth migration levels. In the western economies, there is a net shortage of labor in particular jobs like ICT, Health, Sciences, Construction & transport, hotels, cleaning & domestic sector. This has helped inflow of labor force from Developing & Third world countries.

It also has meant that cultural and social integration of immigrants & their families into the Western labor market & society has become smoother & faster. Adaptability levels in the host nations has increased manifold. So far as sending countries are concerned, brain drain is the biggest challenge. But migrant remittances have grown manifold which has helped the emigrant

youth to improve the quality of life of their family members & communities back home. International migration is a complex & complicated issue- a multidimensional one.

The economic meltdown in the Developed economies, the war in Afghanistan, Iraq, a terrorism-ridden Pakistan, the turmoil in the Arab world have made international migration, both legal and illegal, a burning issue. For more than 214 million international immigrants life has been uncertain, often treacherous. It has thrown open the debate of shared prosperity & shared responsibilities- it is both a challenge as well as an opportunity for various stakeholders to carve out a balanced mutually agreeable paradigm that will maximize the developmental benefits of migration for both the sending & receiving countries.

Migration benefits all the stakeholders when it is legal, open, just and orderly. Young migrants, both skilled & unskilled labor, have helped in reducing imbalances in International labor market. Young migrants from the Third world & Developing countries like China, India, Brazil bring with them hard work, creativity, cheap labor, entrepreneurial ability, dependence & loyalty. Modern day youth are constantly on the move- they help promote exchange of ideas, values, expertise & knowledge.

There are about 214 million international migrants out of which 128 million live in Developed countries of which 58% have their origin in developing countries. With the economic meltdown, there has been a net decline of young migrants from developing countries. The worst hit sectors like finance, construction, manufacturing & infrastructure in the Developed countries

have negatively impacted the flow of young migrants to the Developed countries.

In spite of this, there is demand for highly skilled young workers, entrepreneurs, unskilled & semi-skilled labor in sectors like health, ICT & construction. These sectors remain to be fulfilled by migrants from Developing countries. But because of the economic crisis & slow industrial recovery in the west, unemployment among youth is rising, particularly among the children of immigrants. This leads to farther marginalization amongst 2nd & 3rd generation immigrants leading to social tension, racial conflicts & alienation.

There has been some panic knee-jerk reactions of Governments in the Developed countries who have tried to reduce migration by reducing quotas, adopting more stringent labor market tests, not renewing work permits, forcing private & state sector players to adopt a more pro-native recruitment policy & reducing the size of the labor market. So far as their countries of origin is concerned, international migrants, particularly the young skilled, semi-skilled & unskilled labor, have helped improve the living standards of their family members left behind by way of remittances.

The nearly 316 billion dollars the immigrants sent home in 2009 not only helped improve the standard of living of the families, but contributed to the increase in foreign exchange reserves in these countries thus adding to their economic resilience in a bad economic year. The countries of origin have included international migration as a key focus area in this scheme of development, often by joining up with major stakeholders in drawing up

plans and programs that benefit the migrants, their families, & the community at a large.

Some countries of origin have developed innovative ways of involving the expatriate communities by facilitating transfer of collective remittances or by issuing ‘ diaspora bonds’ to revise capital from these sources. As an initiate, the countries of origin have undertaken proactive policies & strategies of helping these expatriate communities by facilitating support for labor migration, improve protection in foreign soil, facilitating transfer of remittances & safe return of migrants.

Multilateral agencies like Inter-American Development Bank & International Fund for Agricultural Development have been seized of the issues of reduction of remittance transfer costs. Some donor countries & agencies have taken initiative in engaging & supporting expartites in their home countries by way of providing free expertise, services & advice for development of countries of origin. International migration of youth bring in its wake myriad opportunities & challenges at the migrant’s level, at the family and community level.

Better pay packets for the youth ensures better standard of life for migrants, their families & their home country. In states like Kerala & Andhra Pradesh in India, most of the families have a young qualified and skilled hand serving abroad, as engineers, doctors, nurses, science teachers, construction workers, skilled, semiskilled & unskilled. In the last two decades, most of the families & the community in general have prospered economically & socially of the foreign remittances their son or daughter sends home.

The Gujarati youth carry with them entrepreneurial abilities & expertise world order & carved out a niche of their own in the field of business & industry. There is upward mobility, both economic & social, not only for these young migrants, but their families, kith & kin & the communities left behind in their home countries. The economic possibility of the people of Kerala, A. P. , Gujarat & Punjab can, to a large extent, be attributed to the youth migration in these states to greener & better pastures in the West & Third World countries & the fat remittances they send home.

While international migration, mostly economic, has had boosted the economy of the migrant, their families, their communities & the nation as a whole, the socio-psychological & cultural effects of such migration deserve attention. It is particularly relevant in Indian context, when joint family system still remains dominant. The departure of a young family member staying & serving at thousands of miles away passes serious psychological problems for aged, family members, young brothers & sisters and the peer groups at large.

It creates a psychological vacuum and raises serious problems of adaptability. There is a major problem in the lack of social support system or programmes both for the young migrants as well as their family members left behind. There is an urgency in addressing the issue of understanding how youth migration impacts parental needs & family needs. The old feel neglected & the young feel uncared for. The community feels betrayed. The society, over a period of time, forgets the young migrant who in their eyes has ceased to belong to them, at least socially & psychologically.

Due to lack of constant support, old parents & other members of the family left behind by the young children became a socially & psychologically vulnerable group with high risk of psychological & behavioral disorders, including alienation & feeling of isolation & depression. While the benefits of International migration to individual migrants, their families, communities & the nationalities are visible & apparent, the visible & invisible cost is an urgent area of concern.

While international remittances have helped improve the quality of life of millions back home, sustained poor economics, improved the balance of payment situation & contributed to foreign exchange reserves, the hidden cost & visible cost can no longer be swept under the carpet. The socio-psychological impact on family members left behind, the flight of intellectual capital from developing to developed countries, issues of migrant integration, exploitation of cheap labor, lack of a policy of Inclusive development of migration pose serious challenges for our political & business leaders & policy planners.

Protection of migrants, cases of racial abuses & human rights violations call for a multidimensional approach to various aspects of International migration, particularly its linkages with development, Inclusive growth, human rights & natural justice. With knowledge holding the key in a globalized economy, international migration of youth for better education & better pay packet is going to be on the rise. In the Third world & developing economies it has developed into a permanent & integral structural part of the body politic & economy.

Lack of opportunities, disparity amongst economies & within economies, divergent demographic dynamics, internal upheavals in home countries like Afghanistan, Pakistan & Arab world have acted as a 'push factor' for international migration. Labor market imbalances, availability of cheap labor, both skilled & unskilled from Asia-pacific countries, economic dependence & inter-linkages amongst nations, rich & poor and growing aspirations of the people in these countries have propelled migration of youth across boundaries.

There has also been flow of expert labor from the Developed to developing countries, at times necessitated by transfer of technology, collaboration & joint ventures projects or as strings attached to an economic or technological aid package. Both in the receiving & sending countries, there is a growing realization amongst policy makers and think tanks that international migration & development are interdependent & interlinked. Since international migration is multidimensional, multicultural, multidisciplinary in character, we need to address the challenges in a more humane, understanding & co-operative atmosphere.

It requires integration & cooperation at the local, regional & transnational levels amongst governments, societies & communities. There is a growing feeling that we can address the negative impacts of international migration & maximize benefits to both the sending & receiving countries by involving a collaboration & well coordinated framework within the V. N. system. Such a framework should be well supported by Governments in both countries of origin & countries of destination, backed by civil society.

That way it can transcend cultural boundaries & take into account factors like cultural accommodation segregation, human rights, natural justice & fair play. Countries in Asia Pacific region account for nearly 30% of world's 200 million international migrants, majority of them youths, both as sending and receiving countries. Young talented, skilled youth from India, China, Phillipines etc. make their destination to US, Canada, Australia & Europe for higher quality education as well as meeting the growing technological, semi-technological needs in these countries.

Beside the labor market needs, family reunification account for major chunk of international migration. Besides transnational migration, inter-regional & intra-regional migration is on the rise. You will find a large number of young engineers, doctors, construction workers, health workers from India, China, Pakistan, Indonesia & Phillipines making their way to Gulf nations & Australia. This fills up the labor gaps & corrects labor imbalances in the region. The Gulf countries & countries in South East Asia have emerged as temporary hub of labor migration from South Asia.

Feminization of International migration is a discernible feature in the last decade or so. Large no. of young female workers, particularly in the health, ICT, infrastructure & services & domestic sector from countries of India, China, Sri Lanka, Pakistan & Bangladesh make their way to the Developed countries for attractive economic packages & then fill the gap in the labor market. There is a big outflow of temporary contract labor from Asia, particularly South Asia & South- East Asia for labor intensive 3D jobs (dirty, dangerous & difficult) , particularly in sectors like construction, agriculture, manufacturing & cleaning services.

Women construct laborers who got engaged in domestic sectors or in cleaning services & construction activities often are lowly paid & also explicated at the hands of middlemen & service providers. There is a large number of illegal migrants who make their way to the Gulf countries. It is difficult to know the exact no. of such laborers since a sizable chunk do not register with national authorities. Besides, large no. of illegal migrants make their way because of porous geographic boundaries.

For example, every year lakhs of Bangladeshis illegally enter India for better economic opportunities through the porous boundary. Similarly, there is free outflow of migrants within & amongst the countries of erstwhile USSR. Because of the limited role played by Governments, these temporary migrants & conduct labor get exploited at the hands of private recruitment agencies, particularly in the countries of South Asia. Labor trafficking, particularly construct laborers & women laborers by private recruiting agencies using the means of deception is rampant in the Asia-Pacific region.

The lack of a clear policy by the Governments in the region, rampant corruption by authorities and a pathetic attitude of authorities have altered the private players a field day in exploiting the young migrants, particularly women. The poor economic status of young men & women makes them a vulnerable group. They get financially, physically & sexually exploited at the hands of private players. In the name of migration, young women migrants, particularly from South Asia & South East Asia get lured by the private players to the Gulf countries & exploited, used & abused in the process.

These helpless young women are victims of sexual exploitation, forced marriages & domestic slavery in the rich Gulf nations. In the name of

Contract labor, there are a large number of repulsed cases of women being forced into prostitution or used as keeps in the Gulf countries. Since Islamic society does not provide them much protection, young women, particularly from South Asia & S. E. Asia, are often lured into forced marriages or land up in brothels in Gulf countries. Brain drain & brain gain are a major area of concern in international migration.

In the past, brain drain from poor but talented countries like India, China, Pakistan & South East Asia was a major area of concern because flight of talented & skilled human capital from these countries affected national productivity & technological innovation & hit key sections like health, education, research & development & technology. But with the emerging economies of India, China, Brazil, South Africa & oil rich Arab countries embanking on a path of 9% to 10% growth rate with emphasis on individual production, infrastructure, better education & health care, a reverse brain drain is taking place.

In some sectors, brain gain has really happened. Some of these governments have adopted a dual strategy of retention & return. By offering dual citizenship & sops for setting up industries & liberalizing terms & conditions of investment & providing tax breaks, these countries have succeeded in mobilizing the rich migrants to either return or invest in profitable ventures or in the share market in their home countries.

Countries like India have created a new department in Government for overseas Indians which addresses their concerns & problems, both abroad & at home. The Annual NRI meet organized by Government of India & meeting specific communities like Gujaratis by Gujarat state Government is aimed at

attracting & involving the rich NRIs in profitable ventures at home. Some Governments have adopted a policy & strategy of mobilizing the diaspora which helps in transfer of knowledge, skills, technology & capital that makes up for flight of human capital from the home country.

The key areas of action requires simplification of procedures for remittances so that illegal transfers are avoided. The understanding of the implications of gender dimensions of international migration, the concerns & needs of the families of migrants left behind at home, preparing the second & third generation migrants to take up the new challenges so that they don't find isolated or disillusioned, taking care of the health & educational needs of the migrants & their family members & ensuring smooth integration of the emigrants in the country of destination are issues of urgent concern. The basic civil rights of the migrants needs to be looked into by the Governments & civil society. The key areas of action & co-operation for broadening the opportunities of young migrants requires their psychological, social & economic integration in the process of development both in the receiving & sending country.

In order to fully understand & utilize the potentials & benefits of international migration, both the countries of origin & destination need to evolve suitable migration management policies taking care of welfare of migrants & their integration into the socio-economic agenda, poverty amelioration strategy in the sending countries, racial & social integration in the receiving countries. National & regional developmental goals should be reflected in the migration policies. There must also be policy coherence at the national, regional &

international levels. The civil & legal rights of the migrants must be ensured at all costs.

The Governments, in both sending & receiving countries, must put in place mechanisms to eradicate human trafficking, regulate modus operandi of private recruitment agency, eliminate flesh trade in cases of young women migrants. Last but not the least, the national governments & civil society, cutting across geographical boundaries, must work in an atmosphere of trust & understanding so that international migration caters to the development needs & maintain labor imbalances, thus contributing to the development of young migrants, their countries of origin & countries of destination.