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India–Gulf Migration from a Generational Perspective: Patterns, Transformations, and Socio-Economic Implications

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Abstract-- Migration from India to the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries represents one of the largest contemporary South–South migration corridors in the world. Since the oil boom of the 1970s, millions of Indian workers have migrated to Gulf states in search of employment, shaping not only economic relations but also social, cultural, and generational transformations. This paper examines India–Gulf migration through a generational lens, focusing on the experiences of first, second, and emerging third generations of migrants. Using secondary data, existing literature, and regional case studies, the study analyses changing motivations, labour market positions, remittance behaviour, identity formation, gender relations, and long-term developmental outcomes. The paper argues that while first-generation migration was largely survival-oriented and temporary, later generations exhibit diversified aspirations, hybrid identities, and global mobility. Understanding these generational shifts is crucial for migration governance, diaspora engagement, and development planning in both India and the Gulf region.

Keywords-- India–Gulf migration, generations, labour migration, remittances, diaspora, transnationalism

I. INTRODUCTION

The India-Gulf migration corridor is one of the most important migration systems, and international labor migration has emerged as a defining characteristic of globalization. Over 9 million Indians, or nearly one-third of India's total overseas population, live in Gulf countries, making India the largest source of migrants to the GCC as of the early 2020s. In order to maintain their rapid economic growth, nations like Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Kuwait, Qatar, Oman, and Bahrain have mainly relied on migrant labor. The long-term social effects of migration across generations are the focus of recent research, whereas a large portion of the early scholarship concentrated on remittances and labor market outcomes. Nowadays, migration is a social process that is reproduced and passed down through families and communities rather than being a one-time occurrence. A generational approach enables a more thorough comprehension of how migration alters identities, class positions, aspirations, and developmental paths over time. The long-term social effects of migration across generations are the focus of recent research, whereas a large portion of the early scholarship concentrated on remittances and labor market outcomes.

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This paper seeks to answer the following questions:

How do migration motivations and experiences differ across generations?

What economic and social transformations emerge through inter-generational mobility?

How does India–Gulf migration affect origin communities over time?

II. HISTORICAL EVOLUTION OF INDIA–GULF MIGRATION

2.1 The Oil Boom and the First Migration Wave (1970s–1980s)

In the Gulf states, extensive infrastructure development was spurred by the discovery of oil and the 1973 and 1979 increases in oil prices. Due to severe labor shortages, these economies heavily relied on South Asian recruitment. Because of its low wages, colonial-era migration networks, and excess labor, India became a major source of labor.

At this stage:

Most of the migrants were low-skilled men. Jobs primarily in construction, transportation, housekeeping, and sanitation. The move was short-term and contingent on a contract. Families did not leave India.

2.2 Expansion and Diversification (1990s–2000s)

The Gulf economies were growing at the same time that the Indian economy was liberalized in 1991. The skills and sectors of migration varied:

Increase in skilled and semi-skilled migration

Getting started in technical services, retail, healthcare, and education. The expansion of migration networks and recruitment. Notwithstanding obstacles like COVID-19 disruptions, the Gulf remains a key component of India's migration network.



III. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: MIGRATION AND GENERATIONS

A generational viewpoint is derived from:

The New Economics of Migration
Internationalization
Theory of Social Reproduction

Decisions about migration are not just personal; they are also a part of family plans. Different structural conditions elicit different responses from each generation, leading to a range of results.

IV. FIRST-GENERATION MIGRANTS: SURVIVAL AND SACRIFICE

4.1 A Socioeconomic Overview

First-generation immigrants usually:
Came from semi-urban or rural areas.
Had little formal education.
Started working in labor-intensive, low-paying jobs
Many saw migration as a means of economic survival rather than social mobility.

4.2 Remittances and Growth

The World Bank estimates that:
In 2022, India received remittances totaling USD 111 billion. The Gulf provided between 45 and 50 percent of this total. First-generation immigrants were given priority.
Domestic usage
Construction of housing
Payback of debt
The education of children
In Kerala, at its height, remittances made up almost 35% of the state's GDP.

V. SECOND-GENERATION MIGRANTS: MOBILITY AND HYBRIDIZATION

5.1 Instruction and Goals

Second-generation migrants, frequently the offspring of Gulf laborers, encountered:
Improved educational accessibility
Being exposed to different cultures
Greater ambitions than manual labor

Many went after:

Professional degrees
Education abroad (in Europe, North America, and Australia)
Jobs in the corporate and service sectors

5.2 The Development of Identity

The identities of second-generation migrants are hybrid:
Indian cultural ties
Socialization in Gulf settings
Transnational affiliation

However, the Gulf's stringent citizenship laws discourage long-term residency and strengthen transient identities.

5.3 Gender Transformation

Unlike the first generation:

Female participation increased
Women entered healthcare, education, and domestic services

Migration altered traditional gender roles within families

VI. EMERGING THIRD GENERATION: TRANSNATIONAL FUTURES

The third generation is an example of a changing cohort:
Gulf-born people are frequently
Educated in foreign educational institutions
Internet-connected

The Gulf is not a destination for this generation, but rather a stepping stone. Aspirations are becoming more global, and migration is not limited to the India-Gulf corridor.

VII. IMPACT ON ORIGIN COMMUNITIES

7.1 Economic Transformation

Remittances resulted in:

Higher quality of life
Growth of private healthcare and education
Growth in businesses financed by migrants

7.2 Stratification in Society

New class hierarchies were brought about by migration:

The social status of migrant households increased.
Families that were not migrants experienced relative deprivation.
Migration turned into a status symbol.



VIII. KERALA CASE STUDY

The most complete illustration of generational migration can be found in Kerala:

In the Gulf, more than 2.5 million Keralites are employed.

Upward generational mobility was made possible by high literacy.

The number of second-generation migrants to Western nations is rising.

IX. GOVERNANCE AND POLICY ISSUES

9.1 Protection of Workers

Important difficulties include:

Substitution of contracts

Theft of wages

Social Security benefits are limited.

India has launched programs like:

The e-Migrate system

Yojana Pravasi Bharatiya Bima

9.2 Participation of the Diaspora

India's diplomatic efforts abroad aim to:

Bring in investments

Maintain cultural connections.

Encourage the exchange of skills However, because of Gulf citizenship laws, long-term integration is still restricted.

X. IN CONCLUSION

India-Gulf migration has evolved into a multigenerational social process rather than a temporary labor phenomenon. The first generation moved in order to survive, but subsequent generations use migration to further their education, move around, and integrate with the world. Global inequality, family dynamics, and labor market changes are all reflected in this generational shift. A generational perspective enriches migration studies by highlighting continuity and change over time. Policymakers must recognize these dynamics to design inclusive migration governance frameworks that balance economic needs with human development.

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