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ISSN (Online) : 2455 - 3662
SJIF Impact Factor :3.395 (Morocco)

EPRA International Journal of
**Multidisciplinary
Research**

Volume: 2 Issue: 10 October 2016



**Published By :
EPRA Journals**

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MIGRATION, CHANGING FAMILY RELATIONS AND CHALLENGES FOR ELDERLY

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ABSTRACT

Ageing is gradually emerging as an important social issue in contemporary Indian society having wide ranging implications. The status of elderly acquired a new dimension and has become an issue of concern due to ongoing changes in demographic, social and economic spheres because elderly people have to adapt themselves not only with these changes but also with changing family structure and relationships. Among other factors migration, particularly overseas migration has affected family structure and family relationships which pose serious challenge to the status and authority of elderly in the family. The present paper deals with this issue that calls for necessary measures and policy intervention on a priority basis.

KEY WORDS: Ageing, Migration, Family structure, status of elderly

INTRODUCTION

One of the most significant by-product of demographic transition all over the world is ageing population. Population ageing is a universal phenomenon occurring in both developed and developing countries with its wide ranging implications. The older population has been increasing steadily in number and proportion. Thus, ageing is gradually emerging as an important social issue in contemporary society.

UN Report projected the number of people aged 65 or older to grow from an estimated 524 million in 2010 to nearly 1.5 billion in 2050 with most of the increase in developing countries.

In less developed countries the number of older people is projected to increase more than 250 percent between 2010 and 2050 compared with a 71 percent increase in developed countries. In India Census data shows an increase in the percentage of population over the age of 60 years from 6.8 in 1991 to 8.6 in 2011. Even though the Dependency Ratio of India shows an overall decline the Old Dependency Ratio (calculated as the number of persons in the age group 60 years or more divided by the number of persons in the age group 15-59 years) has risen from 122 in 1991 to 142 in 2011 (Srivastava et al., 2013).

Table 1. Growth of 60+ Population in India* 1951-2016 (in million)

Census	Total	Male	Female
1951	19.6	9.7	9.9
1961	24.7	12.4	12.4
1971	32.7	16.9	15.8
1981	43.2	22.0	21.1
1991	56.7	29.4	27.3
2001	70.9	36.4	34.5
2006	82.3	42.0	40.2
2011	96.4	49.1	47.3
2016	113.5	57.6	55.9

Source : *Excludes figures for Assam in 1981 and J & K in 1991 where census was not conducted

due to disturbed conditions. The figures from 2001 onwards are projected population taken from the

Report of Technical Group on Population Projections constituted by the Planning Commission in August 1996 and published by the Registrar General, India under the title, Population

Projections for India and States, 1996-2016, New Delhi, 1996 (Quoted from Bose and Shankardass, 2004).

Table 2. Percentage of 60+ Population to total Population, India

Year	Total	Male	Female
1951	5.4	5.2	5.7
1961	5.6	5.5	5.8
1971	6.9	5.9	6.0
1981	6.3	6.2	6.4
1991	6.7	6.7	6.7
2001	7.0	6.9	7.0
2006	7.5	7.4	7.6
2011	8.1	8.1	8.2
2016	8.9	7.7	9.1

Source : *Excludes figures for Assam in 1981 and J & K in 1991 where census was not conducted due to disturbed conditions. The figures from 2001 onwards are projected population taken from the Report of Technical Group on Population Projections constituted by the Planning Commission in August 1996 and published by the Registrar General, India under the title, Population Projections for India and States, 1996-2016, New Delhi, 1996 (Quoted from Bose and Shankardass, 2004).

The size of the Indian elderly (60 years and above) is expected to be triple in next four decades from 92 million to 316 million, constituting around 20 percent of the population by the middle of the century. There is no significant empirical evidence to suggest that larger proportion of older population would impede the economic progress of a country. At the same time, there are many social changes expected as a result of ageing population in any nation. Demographic and economic changes are accompanied by enhanced migration of people in search of better and quality employment. The status of elderly undergoes rapid change during this period who are left behind (James and Sathyanarayana, 2011). Indian society is undergoing transformation under the combined influence of Industrialisation, urbanization, technological advancement, improvement in public health, modern education and migration that can be felt on different population group differently. Migration has become a worldwide phenomenon in modern society and the nature and quantum of overseas migration have assumed new dimensions. Development of modern means of transport and communication facilitated large scale migration of people not only within but outside India both to Industrialised nations of West or to the Gulf countries.

The status of elderly acquired a new dimension and has become an issue of concern due to the ongoing changes in demographic, social and economic spheres because elderly people have to adapt themselves not only with these widespread

changes but also with changing family structure and relationships. Traditionally elderly people in India always enjoyed a prestigious, powerful and authoritative position and formed an integral part of family and society. Getting old has been linked to wisdom, honour, experience and spirituality that contributed significantly in transmitting the socio-cultural values and the rich experience of the older generation to the younger generation. Therefore, family customs and practices protected and reinforced respectable and authoritative position of elderly in family, community and society.

In the recent past, however, traditional values are in the process of erosion and undergoing through adaptation and transformation resulting in weakening of inter-generational ties (Bhat and Dhruvarajan, 2009). Family which is widely recognized as the most important institution to look after elderly is undergoing change. The status of elderly is declining day by day because of technological advancement that has led to significant changes in the life styles and values of younger generation. It has resulted in replacement of the ascribed or age based status by the advancement criterion or function based status. Industrialisation and urbanization have given rise to migration. Rising cost of living and materialistic attitudes have resulted in neglect of the aged persons (Tondon, 2001). Available literature reveals the changes that have occurred in the status of elderly in their families as a result of socio-economic transformation in Indian society which has transformed close knit structure of Indian families.

d'Souza (1971) while discussing changes in the status of elderly in Indian families argued that position of elderly in their families is not determined by their age as being old but by their wealth and educational qualifications. Desai and Naik (1971) observed that elderly enjoyed respectable position in their family due to socialization of younger generation in terms of values favourable for elderly people. Ranjan (1986); Lena (2009); Nasreen (2010) and Srivastava et al. (2013) have highlighted that

elderly people are neglected and ill treated by their family members and suffer different economic, psychological and health problems. Most of these studies are concerned with the problems and social security of elderly. There is hardly any study which studied the impact of overseas migration on the status of elderly.

Emigration from India has been causing an adverse impact on family. Earlier families particularly in rural areas would live on a single source of income i.e. agricultural land and allied activities. But migration provides some members of family separate source of income and disrupts family unity by separating migrant members from rest of family and affect family relationships which has serious social, economic and psychological implications for the family left behind particularly elderly. Every act of migration involves an origin as well as destination. Social structure and cultural system both of the place of origin and of destination are affected by migrations. Studies of the patterns of migration, characteristics of migrants and causes of migration, constitute only one aspect of the phenomenon. Another aspect is the effect of migration on the place of origin and destination. This second aspect, and more particularly, the effects of migration on the place of origin has so far been overlooked in the studies on migration.

In view of these observations the present paper addresses itself with the impact of overseas migration within local context i.e. villages in Azamgarh district of Eastern U.P. and seeks to examine the impact of migration on the family, in particular the elderly members of family.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY AND SAMPLE DESIGN

The major objective of the present paper is to examine the impact of overseas migration on family relationship and status of elderly. For this purpose, Azamgarh district has been selected for the study on the basis of our prior information that a sizeable number of its population has emigrated and continues to emigrate to Arab and Middle Eastern countries. It was envisaged that it would provide ample opportunities for examining the issue under study. Considering the cost, time, labour and representativeness, three villages namely; Anjan Shahid, Alipur and Dhorahara have been purposely chosen as sampling units. Good number of individuals from these villages have migrated to the Gulf countries for employment.

For the purposes of this study, household has been taken as the unit of enquiry and data was collected from heads of the households. It is striking to note for this district that it is predominantly Muslim households which are sending their members to the Gulf. These emigrants were predominantly Muslim married

males, young (below 30 years) with low levels of education and were mainly unskilled and semi-skilled workers. Majority of them went to Saudi Arabia and Dubai through contacts with relatives, friends and known persons and stayed there for long periods of time. The average tenure of stay of emigrants in the Gulf, it was surprising to find, was more than twelve years. Finally, with the help of informants, 250 migrant households were identified and chosen as samples.

TOOLS AND TECHNIQUES OF DATA COLLECTION

For the collection of primary data, major techniques used are: observation, informal talks and interview schedules. A rapport was made with the government officials such as District Development Officer, Block Development Officer, Bank Officials and influential person of the area, such as Pradhan of the selected villages, in order to gather relevant information. Interviews and discussions with recently returned emigrants from overseas were also held for the purpose of securing in-depth and latest information which was otherwise inaccessible. Finally, the investigator's own observations about emigrants' households, life styles and behaviour were utilized for filling the gaps.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

During the course of interaction with informants it became evident that a significant number of emigrants' families desired to live separately from their extended families. They gave their own reasons for this phenomenon. One of the reasons was that a nuclear family enables an emigrant's wife to control remittances, enjoy more freedom and independence, and to lead their lives as they pleased. An interaction with emigrants who were here on leave too showed that a good number of them favoured a nuclear family. They were of the view that in a nuclear family tensions and disputes are minimized because of minimal interactions with other family members. On account of small size of a nuclear family, everything can be easily and better managed. A few of them even went to the extent by saying that joint family system is not actually approved or promoted in Islam.

Head of the household is assumed to be the nodal one in income earning and enjoying authority in management of the household affairs. Therefore, in view of the importance of the role played by the head in the household affairs, present study collected information about the person holding such a position. Keeping in view the importance of the head of the household, it was thought prudent also to collect information as to who occupies this position in the households.

Table 3. Head of the Household

Head	No. of persons	Percentage
Father	101	40.4
Uncle	8	3.2
Brother	24	9.6
Any other	117	46.8
Total	250	100.0

Data in the Table 3 clearly shows that the majority of the households, (46.8 percent) are headed by 'any other' (this category comprises grandfather, father-in-law, brother-in-law, son, mother or wife of the emigrant). In actual practice, all these houses were headed by the wife of the emigrant in his absence. 40.4 percent of the households were headed by the father of emigrants while 3.2 percent and 9.6 percent households were found to be headed by uncles and brothers of the emigrants.

In a patriarchal society, as typical of most part of India, a male is usually the head of the household. Female headed households emerge in areas of matriarchy or in situations of out-migration or emigration of the male head or in the case of widowed, separated or single females. Nearly 20 million out of 193 million households in India, or 10.35 percent of the total, are female headed. While in the state of U.P., the percentage of female headed households is 7.91 (7.49 percent rural households and 9.49 urban households). Azamgarh district, the area of the present study, has 14.62

percent female headed households. But the sampled population reveals that 46.8 percent of the households are headed largely by females. This large proportion of female headed households is accounted for by emigration of male heads. This is interesting point to note, for it shows a shift in the traditional division of roles in the households because Azamgarh is patriarchal, patrilineal and patrilocal in nature.

RESIDENTIAL ARRANGEMENTS

One major problem that arises as a result of male emigration is with regard to the living arrangements of the family left behind. In the case of unmarried migrants who lived with parents and siblings, the emigration does not bring about any change in residential settings of their families. The problem assumes serious proportions in the case of married emigrants. In fact, the most important dimension of the change experienced by the wives left behind relates to their places of residence, which in turn, has significant sociological bearings on their overall roles within the family.

Table 4. Distribution of emigrants' wives according to their place of residence

Place of residence	No. of cases	Percentage
Independently	100	40.0
With emigrants' parents or siblings	133	53.2
With wives' parents/siblings	13	5.2
Not applicable	4	1.6
Total	250	100.0

Note :Four emigrants were unmarried.

Table 4 reveals that a sizeable number of wives stayed independently after the emigration of their husbands. The reason why women did not prefer to shift or live in alternative household arrangements was their reluctance to forego the independence which had come about for them to enjoy as part of the nuclear families and also because they had developed confidence to look after the household affairs independently while their husband were abroad. While some of these women had the support of their grown up children, in some cases, a close relative also moved in to assist the family. Further, the ease of contact with relatives living nearby also gave the necessary confidence and support to the women who decided to stay separately.

During the course of interaction with informants, it became clear that the age of wives plays a central role in determining their place of residence during the absence of their husbands. Young wives, it was pointed out, stayed in their in-laws' houses, while a few move to their parents' homes. Most of the women who stayed independently were comparatively older and were having grown-up children. These women, thus, became heads of their households in the absence of their husbands. This is relatively a new occurrence having considerable social implications, particularly in a predominantly patriarchal Muslim community. However, these female heads of households do not exercise the kind of authority that was generally exercised by male heads of

households and are largely dependent on their sons and other male family members for taking important decisions.

Thus, a related issue here is the informal guardianship of emigrant’s left behind families during their absence. Even though the place of residence of such families will give us some idea about guardianship, it may not be a sufficient indicator to identify the main responsibility holder of the family. Although a significant number of

women were living independently following their husband’s emigration, it did not necessarily mean that they were primary care takers of the family. On many occasions, the overall guardianship was assigned to a close relative who either came and stayed with the family or lived in the vicinity of their homes.

Table 5 shows the individuals who assumed guardianship of the family when the emigrants were abroad.

Table 5. Guardian of the family during emigrants’ absence

Individuals assuming guardianship	No. of cases	Percentage
Emigrants’ parents/siblings	133	53.2
Wives’ parents/siblings	29	11.6
Emigrants’ wife	58	23.2
Emigrants’ son	17	6.8
Others	9	3.6
Not applicable	4	1.6

Note :Four emigrants were unmarried.

Table 5 shows that in more than half of the cases, parent/sibling of the emigrants looked after their families in their absence. In few cases (11.6 percent), it is the parents/siblings of wives that assumed the charge of overseeing the care of the left behind families. Thus, it appears that in most of the cases where the wives resided with parents (either their husbands or their own), the guardianship of the family was taken over by the father or brother in formal way.

Further, in more than one fifth of the cases, it is the wives of emigrants who were the main guardians of the families during their husbands absence. They, more or less, independently managed the household affairs. These were such families where the wives lived independently following their husbands’ emigration. But it should be noted that in about 100 cases, wherein wives lived separately, only in 58 families the guardianship was with them. It is, thus, obvious that a few emigrants preferred a close

relative as a guardian to take care of the family while they are away, even though their wives and children continued to live separately.

RECIPIENTS OF REMITTANCES

In order to get some clues about the recipients of remittances and family structures of emigrants information was collected about family members to whom emigrants send remittances. Responses showed that in 43.2 percent of cases, remittances were made in the names of parents, particularly fathers; 40 percent in the name of emigrant’s wives, 8 percent in the name of emigrants’ other relatives, mostly fathers-in-law and brothers-in-law, and a little below 9 percent in the name of brothers of the emigrants, as is clear from the table 6. If we combine the first three categories together, then it turns out that in 52 percent of cases, remittances were sent to emigrants’ parents and brothers.

Table 6. Distribution of emigrants’ remittances received by relatives

Recipient of remittances	No. of respondents	Percentage
Father	104	41.60
Mother	4	1.60
Brother	22	8.80
Wife	100	40.00
Other relatives	20	8.00
Total	250	100.00

The trend that the largest number of remittances are made in the name of fathers suggests the prevalence of patriarchal authority in the family, the proportion relating to ‘in the name of wives’ can not be overlooked either since it is fairly significant for giving migrant’s wife an identity, status and authority commensurate with her newly acquired economic power. In many of the cases,

after deeper probing, it was disclosed that this new shift from male to female authority has brought in its wake, tensions, stresses and strains, among the members of emigrant’s families/households leading to squabbles, skirmishes, conflicts, which led sometimes to family disruptions. It was also disclosed that though these remittance are sent in the name of emigrant’s father, in most of the cases

it is wife of the emigrant who exercises authority in making use of these remittances and played prominent role in financial matter. In our study new female headed households also points to a change in the composition of the family structure, while 'three generation' family network is still intact, there seems to be a tendency for the decline of traditional patriarchal ethos which today lingers only at the formal level.

It is observed that the family relationships are also affected by managing the resources generated due to emigration. This is problematic, particularly in the context of a large family which has very little cash income to supplement finances received through remittances. Almost everything in the households is arranged with remittance money which either comes in the hands of parents of emigrants or their wives. In many migrant families, we found that there existed at least two groups. One group consisting of mainly parents of emigrants thought that the remittances should be used in the interest and to fulfill the needs of the family as whole. This group forms a majority. On the other hand, the other group, consisting of wives and children of the emigrants thinks that remittances should be used mainly in their interests and for their welfare alone. They feel that the hard earned money of the emigrants are mostly misused by other family members, which is why they do not want to live with their extended families. The adverse changes in the attitudes and behaviour of emigrant's children and wives were detrimental to the interests of the family. Moreover, wives and children of some emigrants looked down upon those family members who were dependent on remittances. As elderly people in these families are dependent, they feel financially insecure and isolated in their families.

It was noticed that child care is given special attention among emigrant families. This was evident from the quality of food in emigrant homes, medical care, hygiene and education of children. Emigrants constantly keep in touch with their families to enquire about their children's health, well being, education, etc. In a significant departure from past practices, number of babies being delivered in expensive nursing homes has registered a considerable growth. Emigrants encouraged their wives to go to private nursing homes not only for delivery but for general medical check-ups for themselves as well as for their children. As far as schooling of children is concerned, a strong desire was observed on the part of emigrant households to provide their children quality education. They were keen to ensure that the children were admitted to good schools, preferably convents and other English medium institutions. Many of the respondents confessed that they did not want their children to miss those opportunities in their life which they missed in their childhood due to lack of education and

opportunities. So great was their desire to see their children well educated that some women stayed alone with their children in rented houses in Azamgarh city to facilitate good education. Therefore, they were also found to engage private tutors and sent their children to coaching centres to equip their children educationally well.

With regards to the care of elders, though majority of respondents (80 percent) told that elders in the family are provided with better medical care and diet. However, while talking informally with respondents, it came to light that most of the elders of emigrant families feel neglected. They confided in investigator that the respect they deserve was missing. Their feeling of being neglected, probably arise out of the fact that there has been a significant change in authority structure of the families. Traditionally, power rested in the hands of the heads of the households. But, with emigration of some members, their position in the family has weakened, while the position of emigrants and their wives has improved. Permission of heads of the households in the management of household affairs is no longer sought in the same manner as it used to be. In many families they have a very little say in important family matters. Therefore, they feel neglected as their importance and status in the family is somewhat dented.

CONCLUSION

The present study observed that overseas migration has resulted in preference for and an increase in the number of nuclear families in the area under study. It was observed that family relationships are also getting affected, particularly in the context of large families which have very little cash income and are dependent on remittances. It has emerged from the study that women have acquired a better and independent status in the family as a result of male migration and the upbringing of children is given special attention in emigrants' families as is evident from the quality of food, education, hygiene, and medical care that is provided to them. Elderly are given proper medical care and diet but most of them do not enjoy traditional respectable and authoritative position in their families. In many families they feel neglected and isolated due to change in authority structure of family but they do not openly reveal it for maintaining family honour and dignity. These issues concerning elderly need necessary measures and timely policy intervention to ensure them dignified status in family and society.

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