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# OVERSEAS MIGRATION: IMPACT ON AGRICULTURE AND LIVESTOCK

Dr. Ziaur Rahman Khan<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Assistant Professor, Department of Sociology, Shibli National College, Azamgarh, U.P, India

## ABSTRACT

*Over 20 million people of Indian origin live overseas at present. Of these, more than 5 million people emigrated to Gulf countries as contract labourer during a span of last three decades. These emigrants not only retain social, cultural and emotional bonds with their place of origin but send money in the forms of remittances to their families left behind. In 2005, India received US \$ 21.7 billion and became the highest remittance receiving country in the world. Migration of people on large scale has significant effects on both the place origin and place of destination. In this context, it becomes imperative that adequate attention is paid to various dimensions of overseas migration. This will prove to be helpful in devising meaningful policies. The present paper seeks to understand the effects of overseas migration of labour and resulting remittances on agriculture and livestock at micro level. Based on primary data collected from Azamgarh district, the study found that remittances from the gulf have enabled migrants' household to purchase cultivable land and acquire modern agricultural inputs. Dependence on outside labour has increased. Besides it, substantial decline in raising of livestock was noted.*

**KEY TERMS:** Migration, Remittances, Agriculture, Livestock

## DISCUSSION

Migration, although an old phenomenon, in recent past has acquired new dimensions. Its quantum and nature has changed enormously. Never before have such a large number of people left their countries of origin, either permanently or for short durations. It is estimated that over 130 million people now live outside the countries of their birth. In India, migration of workers on large scale began in colonial era and continues in the independent India too. It is observed that more than 20 million strong stock of Indian migrants (Non-resident Indian citizens - the NRIs, and the foreign persons of Indian Origin - the PIOs), referred as Indian Diaspora, were recorded at the close of the twentieth century.

It is common knowledge that migration flow during British rule was closely tied to the interest of colonial rulers. For instance, a great part of 19<sup>th</sup> century and early 20<sup>th</sup> century witnessed a regular migration of Indian workers as indentured labour for plantations or mines in the British colonies. Independence of the country witnessed

two distinct types of migration flows. The first type, referred to as 'brain drain', saw exodus of talent and skill i.e. Doctors, Engineers, Nurses, I.T. professionals, Scientists and Teachers to the industrialised countries of the West. Majority of these migrants have permanently settled as citizens of the country they adopted. Side by side with this skilled migration to the developed countries, the 20<sup>th</sup> century has also witnessed flow of unskilled and semi-skilled labour to the Gulf countries in West Asia, which acquired substantial dimensions after the dramatic oil price increases of 1973-74 and 1979 - a trend still ongoing and now encompassing professionals as well.

According to one estimate over 2.78 lacs persons emigrated to Gulf countries for employment in the year 2001. This figure rose to 5.49 lacs in the year 2005. About 21.37 lacs persons migrated to Gulf countries for employment during the period from 2001 to 2005. Majority of these emigrants come from the state of Kerala, Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh. The magnitude of labour outflows from the state of Uttar Pradesh

(U.P.) that rose from 13,912 in 2001 to 22558 in 2005 is relatively low in comparison to these states. But what is noteworthy is the fact that there are few districts in U.P. that send significant number of workers abroad. Mentioned may be made of Azamgarh, Ambedkar Nagar, Balrampur, Basti, Deoria, Gonda, Jaunpur, Mau and Sidharth Nagar regions having old history of migration. According to Provincial Census Report of 1901, the inhabitants of Azamgarh, both high and low castes, especially the latter, emigrated very freely not only to the colonies, but also to Assam, Calcutta and Bombay. Outflows of workers to other countries, in particular, to the countries of Persian Gulf is still continuing in large number. An overwhelming number of households in almost all the villages of the district inhabited by Muslims have some family member or relative working in the Gulf countries.

The nature of migration to the Gulf countries is strikingly different from the one to the industrialised countries. Majority of the migrants are unskilled or semi-skilled workers. In contrast to the more or less permanent emigration to the industrialised countries, emigrants to the Gulf countries are considered as contract workers and have to go back to their countries of origin. These migrants maintain strong social, cultural and emotional bonds with their Place of Origin and are viewed as the main source of remittances that have come to India. In 2005, India received US \$ 21.7 billion and became the highest remittance receiving country in the world. 27% of the total remittances came from the gulf countries. Remittances from the Gulf region, therefore, play important role in the external account of the country and is critical for the families of emigrants. A news item by Bishwanath Ghose (1999) mentions that a sum of Rs.5 crore is exchanged through trust-based network such as hawala in Azamgarh, Varanasi, Jaunpur, Mau, Basti and Gorakhpur every day. Out of this, Azamgarh's contribution is Rs.1.5 crore per day. Remittances from official and unofficial sources put together, therefore, would be much higher. In effect, the income level of the migrants' families has improved appreciably. However, it would be inadequate and incomplete understanding of phenomenon of overseas migration if it was seen merely in terms of either balance of payments or family budget. It has significant effects on society, economy and polity of both the place of Origin and place of Destination. In this context, it becomes imperative that adequate attention is paid to various dimensions of overseas migration.

Micro studies conducted in Punjab, Gujarat and Kerala brings out dissimilar patterns of utilization of remittances. Rao (1986) mentioned that remittances have been partly responsible for the green revolution in Punjab and the white revolution in Gujarat. However, in Kerala, Gulf money is converted into status through conspicuous consumption, large houses and automobiles.

Prakash (1978) and Mathew and Nairs' (1978) studies lend credence to what Rao has said. However, P. Venugopal (1993) in his study noted that there has been perceptible change in the spending patterns after the Gulf War. The accent now is on saving rather than on conspicuous consumption. There is a tendency to invest in safe instruments like bank deposits, equity share and securities. In addition to these, expenditure incurred on education and medicines increased as consequence of the receipts of remittances. According to the study emigrant's households spend a significant amount of income on education of their children.

In view of the above facts, the present paper seeks to understand the impact of overseas migration on agriculture and livestock at micro level. Primary data for the present study was collected from Azamgarh on the basis of our prior information that a sizeable number of its population has emigrated and continues to emigrate to the Gulf countries. For the purposes of this study three villages of Azmatgarh block of the district was purposively selected as the micro unit. With the help of informants 250 emigrants' households were identified and selected as sample for study. Requisite information was obtained with help of interview schedule.

The present study seeks to examine and understand the effects of Gulf remittances on agricultural and allied activities in terms of the following heads:

- Investment of remittances on agricultural land.
- Ownership and cultivation of agricultural land
- Use of outside labour
- Ownership of agricultural implements
- Livestock raising.

In an agrarian society land is the principal source of livelihood and also a source of inequality which relates to the ownership, control and use of land and other material resources. In other words, agrarian structure is defined in terms of relationship which exists between those who have command over land and those who operate this land by supplying labour power for productive activities. Thus, land has been and continues to be a fundamental basis of social cleavage in agrarian societies and any shift in the pattern of land ownership is bound to bring a change in the status of the individuals or groups in those societies.

In view of the importance of land in agrarian economy, it is quite natural that a person with some disposable income seeks to expand his size of land. In the present study, therefore, an attempt was made to understand the magnitude of investments of remittance money on acquisition of agricultural land.

**Table 1**  
**DISTRIBUTION OF EMIGRANTS' HOUSEHOLD ACCORDING TO PURCHASE OF LAND**

Investment on agricultural land	No. of persons	Percentage
Yes	53	21.20
No	197	78.80
Total	250	100.00

Table 1 shows that a significant proportion of sampled population invested remittance money on agricultural land. In fact, over the last two decades demand for land, irrespective of agricultural, residential or commercial, has considerably increased. Consequently, the prices of land have also increased in the area of study.

In order to understand the impact of remittances on household production, an enquiry

was made as to who is the actual tiller of the land because it was presumed that the outflow of labour and the inflow of remittances will affect the productivity of the family and its participation in labour. Table 2 provides information about the farming practices of the emigrants' households.

**Table 2**  
**DISTRIBUTION OF EMIGRANTS' HOUSEHOLDS ACCORDING TO ACTUAL USERS OF LAND**

Actual	No. of cases	Percentage
Self cultivation	89	35.60
Partially leased out	20	8.00
Leased in	5	2.00
Completely leased out	105	42.40
Not applicable	30	12.00
Total	250	100.00

It is observed that majority (a little below 43 percent) emigrants' families have completely leased out their irrigable land to others for share cropping. 8 percent have partially leased out. Shortage of man-power and involvement of family members in other lucrative engagement was given as the main reason for this. It is also observed that about 36 percent respondents personally controlled and used their irrigable land with the help of outside labour. In addition to it, there are 2 percent respondents who have leased in other's land for cultivation. If we combine the first three categories together, it turns out that majority of the emigrant families are involved in agricultural activities. In fact, for them, remittances from Gulf have proved to be of immense help. Good modern farming techniques undoubtedly, require inputs such as high yielding variety of seeds, chemicals, fertilizers and modern agricultural implements such as tractors, pump-sets, diesel engines, threshing machines etc. Utilisation of these inputs has pushed up the cost of farming considerably. For instance, in the rural areas of this district, if a farmer has to hire services for ploughing one acre of land he is required to pay Rs. 350-380. Similarly, irrigation through diesel engine (the main source of irrigation), if hired, requires a farmer to pay Rs.80-90 per hour. In the same way, a farmer has to pay Rs.70-80 as threshing charge in cash terms or 3-7 kilograms of wheat in kind for threshing every 40 kg of wheat. Remittances from Gulf, it was revealed, are utilized in meeting these agricultural inputs.

The present study also explored whether remittances from abroad are used in acquiring modern agricultural implements because one of the most important factors of agricultural modernization is in the nature and types of agricultural implements used for the performance of different agricultural operations. Recently, there have been considerable innovations in the field of agricultural implements. These agricultural implements are both time and labour saving. They also help augment the agricultural production. It was precisely for these reasons that the present study made an attempt to see if there has been an expenditure, if any, from Gulf remittances on purchase of new agricultural implements.

**Table 3**  
**DISTRIBUTION OF EMIGRANTS' HOUSEHOLDS ACCORDING TO OWNERSHIP OF NEW AGRICULTURAL IMPLEMENTS**

Ownership of implements	Number	Percentage
Tractor	35	14.00
Improved plough	75	30.00
Spray machine	3	1.20
Pump-set	39	15.60
Electric motor	18	7.20
Thresher	38	15.20
Harvester	5	2.00
Harrow	10	4.00
Power tiller	2	0.80
Chaff cutter	2	0.80
Cane crusher	2	0.80
Others	150	60.00

Note : Others include traditional implements such as *khurpa*, *ganrasa*, *henga* (Harrow), *hasva* or *hasuli* (hand-sickle), shovel, spade etc.

Table 3 shows that Gulf remittances have enabled some emigrant families to acquire ownership of tractors, improved ploughs, power threshers, pump-sets, electric motors, harvestors, harrows, power tillers, chafe cutters, cane crushers, spray machines

etc. Among the modern implements, improved ploughs, power threshers and tractors are the other three important implements. The respondents in the present study either own these implements or utilize them on rent basis.

**Table 4**  
**DISTRIBUTION OF EMIGRANTS' HOUSEHOLDS ACCORDING TO REQUIREMENTS OF OUTSIDE LABOUR**

Outside labour hired	No. of cases	Percentage
Yes	114	45.6
No	136	54.4
Total	250	100.00

The above description, therefore, suggests that the remittances which the emigrant households receive have a greater role to play in managing the above inputs. Thus, agriculture, the mainstay of inhabitants of this district, has to a large extent, depends upon the inflow of migrant's money. It was also observed that there was a visible economic impact of emigration on the demand for labour by the left behind families. It was found that 45.6 percent of the informants had hired outside labour to substitute the members of migrants' families

especially for farming activities. In other words, we can say that all those families that are involved in agricultural operations require outside labour. It was also noticed, in most of the cases, that change in fathers' occupation or of the family is not very significant. The only noticeable change is that in rural areas most of them have left the actual cultivation of land and now have reserved themselves only for supervising the farming or agricultural operations.

**Table 5**  
**DISTRIBUTION OF EMIGRANTS' HOUSEHOLDS ACCORDING TO POSSESSION OF LIVESTOCK**

Possession of livestock	No. of cases	Percentage
Increased	21	8.40
Reduced/stopped	133	53.2
No change	96	38.4
Total	250	100.00

So far as live-stock raising is concerned, 53 percent of the respondents revealed that it has reduced or stopped completely due to the shortage of manpower. 8 percent, on the other hand, reported that it has increased. The remaining 40 percent felt that it remains more or less the same as earlier.

Thus, it can be concluded that remittances from Gulf have enabled migrants' households to purchase cultivable and commercial land. As a result, the prices of land have increased. Due to shortage of manpower and involvement of family members in other lucrative engagements, majority of people leased out their land for share cropping. However, a significant proportion of migrants' families controlled and used their land with the help of outside labour. So, their dependence on outside labour has increased. Remittances from Gulf also helped some of these households to acquire ownership of modern agricultural equipments. The study noted substantial decrease in the livestock raising in most of the households due to shortage of manpower required to get involved in such activities.

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