

Why Large Numbers of Indians are Leaving the Country

If immigration did not exist, it would have to have been invented for the sake of progress of humanity. The movement of people from one place to another has been one of the oldest phenomena since the mankind came into existence. In modern time, first large-scale immigration was witnessed in nineteenth century was a century when people in millions travelled from one continent to other and this phenomenon further became expedited in 20th century what Novelist Salman Rushdie called a century of migrants. Second half of 20th century after Second World War saw another wave of people's movement across the continents in search of job and security.

But 21st century saw a different upsurge of immigration where it became difficult to distinguish between refugees and immigrants and even today millions continue to risk their lives in continent of Africa and Asia by crossing seas, oceans, and rivers for a better future. In today's volatile and anarchic world, there could be dozens of reasons for people to desert the place of their origin and immigrate to both acquainted and unacquainted territories.

India has a long history of migration. More than a century ago, large number of Indian migrants, many of them involuntary, moved to Africa, the Caribbean and within the Indian subcontinent. Today one in every twenty international migrants happens to be an Indian. Only amid the carnage, both preceded and followed, by the independence of the country, millions of people were forced to leave their ancestral homes, progenies, friends, neighbors, and nears and dears to settle in a newly-created sovereign territorial space (Indian and Pakistan).

Later in early 1970s, the rise of petrodollar in the wake of oil boom in Gulf countries again induced millions in India to land up there in search of jobs and today the GCC countries are host to around 9-10 million Indians. There has been steady rise in the numbers of Indians reaching in the oil rich countries from 300,000 in 1973 to 2.15 million in 1993 to 3.5 million in 2000 to 5 million in 2011 to the present 9 million. These immigrant workers are source of biggest source of remittance for the country and India is the biggest receiver of remittance which is today worth hundred billion and constitute 3 % of the GDP. But meanwhile their status is merely of expatriate workers and sooner or later they have to come back to India.

But in recent years, a new pattern of immigration is being witnessed among the Indians who are not only abandoning their homeland in search of a new destination but also renouncing their citizenship. This is happening at a time when India has opened its arms through its controversial Citizenship Amendment Act, 2019 to migrants belonging to Hindu, Sikh, Buddhist, Jain, Parsi.

According to a report of External Affairs Ministry, around 16,63,440 Indians have renounced their citizenship since 2011 and 2,25,620 Indians renounced their citizenship only in 2022 which is almost twice to the figure recorded in 2015. The figure of 2022 tells that every day 618 Indians are surrendering their passports which are quite alarming. In 2020 (COVID-19 year), 85,256 Indians decided to jettison their citizenship and in 2021, this figure reached to 1,63,370 while in 2019, 1,44,017 left returned their passport. We can see a steady rise in the figure except the COVID year of 2020. Out of those who have renounced their citizenship, 40% are reported to have received the US citizenship and rest is heading towards UK, Australia and Canada. In comparison to this speedy outflow, only 10,645 people from 87 countries have applied for Indian citizenship between 2016-2020 and majority of these are from Pak and Afghanistan and, particularly they applied after passing of CAA legislation.

Though it is a fact those who are immigrating are affluent but many of them belong to a wealthy class. In 2023, around 6500 millionaires are expected to leave the country and in year 2020, the figure was 7,000 and in terms of outflow of millionaires, India is just behind China. In last 14 years, around 61,000 millionaires have left the country.

Most of these millionaires are leaving for US, UK, Australia Dubai and Singapore while former is known to be fifth city of India because the individual tax rates are much lower there than India and Singapore is also a tax haven. These millionaires are leaving because of adverse business environment such as prohibitive tax legislation coupled with convoluted, complex business rules and cumbersome NRI investment procedures and other several small and big reasons. This is happening when India is eyeing to be Five-Trillion Economy in next few years. It seems that rich men have turned into a secessionist and nationalism or patriotism has become a poor man's burden.

Along with these affluent and very affluent people, there is another category of students who are also eyeing for abroad for better economic future. There are reports of bright students leaving the

country. Half of the first rankers in Class 10 and Class 12 examinations from top public schools in metros during the two decades between 1996-2015 immigrated to foreign countries and after studying there, today they are employed and mostly in the US. Only in 2019, 70 % of class ten students from two high profile private school in capital left for abroad. It has also been noticed that 80 % of those who go abroad for study do not return because of the better job prospects in those countries.

What is more striking about this exodus is growing urge among Indian minorities (Muslims and Christians) to leave the country. Over the years, there has been a disproportionate rise of emigration among Indian Muslims and this trend could be attributed to growing economic stagnation, growing incident religious and communal violence, day-to-day discrimination and their marginalization in public space and a prevailing sense of insecurity and uncertainty are acting as a catalyst for this exodus. Mr. Abdullah (name changed) who has recently sought residency in Turkiye with the intention of seeking citizenship later tells that he has moved his family because he wants good education for his children and to keep them away from day-to-day divisive socio-political and religious discourse. Similarly, Aamir tells that it is no longer an easy task to levee here because of growing political and religious divide in the public sphere and now it has become terrible to live in India. Aamir has already applied for a permanent residency in Canada as a skilled worker. Another woman who has already immigrated to Australia tells that she does not want to see her children grow listening who belongs to which religion and backlash at different stages of life because of their religion.

Turkiye happens to be most desired destination among the Indian Muslims who are leaving the country or have such plan for future. They begin this exercise first by making huge investment in real estate there, then buying flats in periphery of Istanbul , Izmir or Ankara with the intention of seeking citizenship or long term residency. The new law in Turkiye allows foreign citizens to purchase real estate for worth 310 million INR and be eligible for Turkish citizenship.

Given the present pace of outflow of rich and educated Indians to other developed countries, one could see different set of reason for different set of emigrants who are departing the land of their forefathers. But there are some common factors among all the emigrants which are working as a push factors which include lack of peaceful environment, horizontal and vertical spread of hostile

and vicious environment, explicit rise of both economic inequality and instability along with the declining economic opportunity, health hazard because of growing pollution and unhygienic conditions. According to Central Pollution Control Board, about 60 percent of India's water-sources have poor "bio-chemical oxygen demand", an indicator of organic pollution. Indians in large number are desperate to seek citizenship abroad due to better economic and educational prospects and they are also in search of peaceful life away from any social-political constraints or any vigilant gaze. Most of the working couple who have already left the country are of the view that higher management and does not consider the family compulsion and offer no leeway. Unfriendly working culture has also forced many to look for option abroad. One of the experts on the subject, Hilal Ahmad said that reasons for relinquishing Indian citizenship include the lack of good politics, adverse social and economic environment and the rapid increase in crime.

Most of Indians who are choosing to settle abroad, US happens to be their first choice because the citizenship laws are very stringent in West Asian and South East Asian countries despite the fact that largest numbers of Indians are living there as expatriate workers. If given the chance, everyone will love to move to US because, according to an expert, it is the land of the brave and the free people where one can breathe fresh air. It is the country where one can eat, drink, wear and believe whatever he or she assumes to be correct.