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Indian Diaspora in Kuwait

John Mathew Chandy John

Entrepreneur, Author and Philanthropist

Indian diaspora is huge running in to tens of millions, spread across the length and breadth of the entire planet earth. A small but unique and significant segment of Indian diaspora, consisting of a million people in Kuwait is the topic selected. Kuwait, though tiny in size is one of the richest nations in the world. The only national income of the country is oil which was formed deepbeneath the surface of earth millions of years ago during the physical and chemical evolution of the planet. Mother earth kept the secret of this immense wealth buried under the desert till early decades of 20th century, then the Imperialist powers continued to keep the secret as the whole world was at war and they did not want the enemies to put their hand on the valuable energy reserve. The secret was not revealed to the world till after the completion of the mega genocide, which we all call as the second Great War. The outflow of the black gold and inflow of yellow gold in to Kuwait commenced immediately after. The price of the liquid black gold peaked from 5 cents in 1950s to almost a dollar a liter in 2014. Oil exporting Gulf Arab states were inundated with petro dollars beyond the wildest imagination of any economist.

Put all the luxuries and extravaganzas of Hollywood, Bollywood, London, Paris, New York and Tokyo in a bowl, mix it thoroughly, add copious quantities of fantasies from 1000 and one nights, flavour it with expensive Bakhour chips from the Himalayas and let the voluptuous girls around the world serve it on a solid gold plate, a

research scholar can enjoy the rich taste of the life style of Arabs living in the metropolises of GCC countries. The streets and highways are buzzing with the latest models of Ferraris, Lamborghinis, Maserati's, BMWs, Mercedes's and Rolls Royce's. The rich and elite of these cities do not live in houses but palaces; they maintain a retinue of servants to look after their needs, whims and fancies; their kitchens are run by five star Chefs and their shopping trips are to the most expensive designer boutiques in Paris or Milano or New York. They travel only in first class or private jets and stay only in the most luxurious hotels in mega cities. If this is the story of rich and elite in the Gulf Arab States, the ordinary citizens are really extraordinary, when compared to the working class around the world; almost everything including food, electricity, water and fuel are heavily subsidized, free education at the universities of their choice, free medical aid including treatment abroad in countries like USA, UK or Europe. They even get financial support to marry and settle down. Employment and lifelong pension as well as a fat unemployment allowance are the birthright of all Kuwaitis. Black Gold and a multinational diaspora created an Utopia for Kuwaitis.

Who are the builders of this Utopia? Dr. A.K. Pasha of JNU stated in his book that "To a large extent Kuwait is a British creation. In fact it is a byproduct of Imperialism in the Gulf". The imperialist companies British Petroleum and Gulf Oil Corporation of U.S.A together with the Gov-

ernment of Kuwait established a company by the name Kuwait Oil Company which started the exploration, production and export of crude oil from the desert of Kuwait after the Second World War. Kuwait was a protectorate of British Empire at that time and Kuwait's population in 1946 was 100,000 and in 1950 it crept up to 150,000 as per the available statistics. Able-bodied men available to work, leaving women and children out, were only a handful and most of them were traders travelling between India, Kuwait and Syria and others were sea farers. They were hardly literate; in short there were no local citizens to carry out the harsh and most demanding work of installing oil drilling rigs, constructing oil storage tanks and laying pipelines to transport oil from the well head to storage tanks and from the storage tanks to the ships. BP took the responsibility of manning the operation by importing His Majesty's subjects from his colony- India. The Indian expatriates along with a large number of expatriates from other countries had to face very harsh living conditions in the desert; drinking water was brought from Basra in Iraq using donkeys and camels and hence even taking bath was a luxury they afforded rarely. They were living in tents which were constantly at the mercy of sand storms and desert winds; after a long day's work when they returned to their tents their measly belongings were buried in sand. In summer months, ambient temperature reached 52 degrees in shade and in direct sunlight it exceeded 80 degrees. Winter nights were biting cold at 4 or 5 degrees. One may wonder why a large number of Indians opted to work in the harsh ambience of Kuwait. Post second world war conditions in India was deplorable; the colonial masters depleted Indian resources; food, materials and money was in absolute scarcity, unemployment was rampant and majority of Indians were in abject poverty. India was still under the cruel boots of Feudalism. Foreign countries proved to be the promised Canaan for the famine infested Indians.

Indian Migration to Kuwait

Migration to Kuwait from India to work as guest workers continued in heaps and bounds and it has reached almost a million within seven decades and still counting. In earlier period of migration except for a small percentage of professionals others were nicknamed as ABCs-

Ayah-Butler-Clerk. The hue and composition of Indian diaspora slowly changed over the last few decades. At present most of the guest workers coming from India are hard core professionals- engineers, medical doctors, graduate nurses, chemists, accountants, managers, lawyers and specialists of every walk of modern professions. Though Kuwaiti citizens nurture a general dislike towards guest workers, Indians are respected and loved by the Kuwaitis for their hard work and loyalty.

Indian diaspora in Kuwait played a very significant role in converting the barren desert in to a modern luxurious welfare state; let it be exploration, production, marketing and transportation of crude oil; or filling the city's skyline with skyscrapers; or designing, building and operating huge world class hospitals; or constructing and operating huge power stations to produce a total output of 12,000 MW and millions of cubic meters of potable water distilled from sea water or constructing and operating some of the largest oil refineries and petrochemical complexes or any similar activities. In service sector the presence of Indian diaspora is outstanding; smiling polite faces of Indians can be seen in Malayalee restaurants as well as in the Board room of a multimillion dollars turnover companies; the only difference is the restaurant waiter's attire will be a Chinese made pants and tee shirt while the company director will be in a French made Armani 5 piece suite. Lo and behold; the Indian diaspora in Kuwait remitted in the financial year of 2014/15 a whopping sum of \$2950 million which is a handsome 4.5 % of the total foreign remittance India received during the year!

Entrepreneurial Success

There are many success stories of Indian entrepreneurs in Kuwait who used the investor friendly conditions such as easy bank finance, minimal bureaucracy, lack of taxation, lack of labour strikes and favorable climatic conditions. They became billionaires and multimillionaires during a span of couple of decades. House of Jashanmal is one of those success stories. The present owner Mr. Tony Jashanmal's grandfather started a small business in Iraq during the First World War and in 1940s his son Mr. Narayan Jashanmal transplanted the business in the soil of Kuwait and now it is a large chain of stores operating in all the Gulf countries and the own-

er is a billionaire according to relevant press reports. During Second World War a Punjabi gentleman –Om Prakash–started a restaurant for Italian prisoners of war and after the war he came to Kuwait from Iraq. He realised that the newborn state needs a reliable supply of uniforms for her soldiers, policemen, medical staff and school students and ventured in to starting a tailoring business. Today it is a prestigious large business and is managed by his sons. If these are the war time startup there are hundreds of new startups. A Malayalee gentleman started a rent-a-car company in mid-eighties and now the company operates a fleet of 5,000 cars supported with service workshops. The huge profits generated by such entrepreneurs are channeled in to India for investment in their own ventures such as hotels, car dealerships, manufacturing units and trading companies.

The Crisis

When Saddam Husain of Iraq who posthumously joined the array of Hitler, Mussolini and Idi Amin, invaded Kuwait in 1990, rendered 2 million people homeless, 170,000 of them were Indian guest workers who were contributing in a big way in foreign direct remittance to India. Government of India's attitude towards those hapless citizens was of apathy and indifference. Selling even their underclothes they had to earn some money to buy their way back to India; while Government of India extended only meager namesake assistance for the thousands who supported Indian economy with their sweat in the desert of Kuwait. The wound inflicted by the Government at that crucial period is still hurting the survivors like me. Government of India's attitude towards Indian diaspora in Gulf countries is still in deplorable stage.

Challenges to Indian Diaspora

Universal suffrage is the birthright of all citizens including Indian Diaspora but it was denied to them till very recently and now it is granted to them which is a cruel joke. A humble guest worker earning meager wages in foreign country must travel all the way to his village and go through the cumbersome bureaucratic procedures to get him registered as a bonafide voter and further on the polling day he must come again from wherever he is, to exercise his fran-

chise. 99.95% of the Indian diaspora worldwide who are eligible to exercise their franchise cannot afford this luxury. Government of India is treating the Indian Diaspora with contempt and apathy who is filling the foreign exchange coffers of India with dollars, who saved the honour of India in 1991. Foreign exchange reserves of the Government got reduced to such an extent in 1990 that India could barely finance three weeks' worth of imports which lead the Government to airlift national gold reserves as a pledge to IMF in exchange of a loan. Indian diaspora opened their valets and funded the Government to retrieve the pledge. In spite of such many contributions, voting rights for them is not facilitated in this era of super cheap IT facilities. This is the height of ingratitude by a Government to its citizens.

Conclusion

From a handful of thousands of Indian guest workers in the 40s of the last century today the number has swelled to 900,000 and counting. Some 30,000 illegal Indians are also living in Kuwait constantly fearing of getting arrested at any time; in spite of the efforts of Indian Embassy and the Government of Kuwait the problem persists. Even breaking the laws they want to stay back in Kuwait. The case is repeated in all the wealthy countries as the so called third world nationals are escaping their countries and attempting to migrate to greener pastures. Migrants are breaking the borders created by imperialist and feudal powers of yester centuries. Border less one world may not be a pipe dream anymore.

Indian diaspora in Kuwait created a mini India in Kuwait; over 100 Indian associations, 20 Indian schools, several Indian hospitals, hundreds of small and medium business houses, several large companies partially owned and fully managed by Indians and an array of other activities managed by Indians make a visitor to Kuwait wonder whether they are in India. Population ratio wise there is almost one Indian to one Kuwaiti and soon it will tilt in favour of Indians. Once domestic servants were the majority of Indians but now they are a minority. The decline in oil prices and the resultant austerity measures being adopted by the Government is restricting the migration of foreigners to Kuwait, but it is going to several years if not decades such policies can bear fruit.

Kuwait for decades to come will have to depend on foreign manpower to keep the country going and Indians will be an important constituent of expatriates. The government is in the process of diversifying the economy to be not entirely dependent on oil. New business opportunities will emerge giving opportunities for Indian business houses to invest in Kuwait. With 100% reliable power and water supply, excellent roads and highways network, very efficient port facilities, good public health care systems, strict adherence to law and order and an investor friendly government Kuwait is emerging as an investment

destination and Kuwait will maintain its position as a migration destination. All the rich countries will remain as migration destinations and the diaspora population will swell and swell till all the borders are broken down and the whole earth will become a free space where human beings can travel and live at will. Human race will pay a heavy price to achieve that goal. This year alone more than 4000 human beings were drowned in the Mediterranean while they were trying to migrate from North African borders to European borders and the story is continuing.

John Mathew Chandy John is an Author, Activist, Social Worker, Entrepreneur, Engineer, Philanthropist, Currently active in Organisations in Kuwait; one engaged in raising funds for the needy in India and the other engaged in teaching Malayalam to school children. Besides, he Published three Malayalam books; two on Evolution and the third a novel. Published one novel in English. Currently working on an English novel and a Malayalam novel. Published a large website with audio to teach Malayalam language. Qualified as a Chemical Engineer in 1960 with eligibility to earn CSIR scholarship. Worked in FACT in Kerala till July 1962 and migrated to Kuwait to work in state owned Petrochemical Industries. Resigned in 1981 and start-

ed an Engineering and Contracting Company in partnership with Kuwaiti citizens. Presently serving the same company as the Deputy Chairman. The company grew in to a major company employing 4000 people. Started Malayalam Industries Ltd in Kochi, Kerala in 1984, and the company is engaged in Hospitality, Engineering and Trading. Started The Medical Engineering company in Kuwait in 2014 and the company is engaged in Equipping hospitals. Started MIL Enertech Engineers in 2016 at Kochi in association with two major Engineering companies in Kuwait who are investing in India. The company is engaged in Engineering Design and Technologies.



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K-1/114, First Floor, C R Park, New Delhi – 110019

Email: internationalconference@grfdt.com, Website: www.grfdt.org/ www.grfdt.com