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## Qatar's "White-collar" Indians

Radhika Kanchana

**T**he paper is a descriptive narrative of the Indian expatriates in Qatar, covering two aspects. One dimension highlights the profile of the Qatari Indian community primarily in the white-collar occupations and the second dimension explores some of the differences of the group, in comparison with its counterpart in the United Arab Emirates (UAE).

The basis for the work is a two-month fieldwork done as part of doctoral research in late 2009 (15 days in Qatar and the rest in the UAE). The region of Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) collectively has a significant population of Indians in its total size of foreign migrants. All the countries share the practice of importing labour, extensively from the 1970s since the discovery of oil and the rapid development in the region. However, it is relevant to understand that the individual member countries (namely Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Oman, Bahrain, Kuwait, and United Arab Emirates) do not have the same typology with regard to the Indian-migrant group.

Differences in character, composition and size of the expatriate group might reflect the structural and current conditions in the respective host countries. Oman, Bahrain and the UAE today show a more entrepreneurial and mature Indian expatriate presence than in the other three Gulf nations of Qatar, Kuwait and Saudi Arabia, partly because the former were historically involved in sea trade with the coast of India. For this text, Qatar as host country to the Indian community is explored. It has one of the highest per capita incomes in the world and an economy primarily dependent on its impressive reserves in oil & natural gas reserves<sup>1</sup> (Per capita- \$81,963, GDP- \$111 billion; In contrast, the UAE's share is per capita- \$49,995, GDP- \$253 billion)<sup>2</sup>. It was a perception that the Indian community in Qatar is insignificant - that was proven wrong after the fieldwork. The holding of the 2nd Non-Resident Indian Global Summit in Doha in March 2010 could be cited as a testimony to the group's expanding visibility here (the Summit also launched *NRI Institute, Qatar Chapter*).

The paper is an effort to throw some light on the dominant group of Indian expatriates in Qatar, given that limited literature exists, and to share a part of the ongoing research project. In the context of existing dearth of formal migrants' rights and charges of labour exploitation in the region, much media and research attention on the expatriates in the West Asia-Gulf states is almost exclusively devoted to the blue-collar segment. As a result, there is a missing discourse on the other sections of the expatriate population and a general prevalence of the mistaken image of a Gulf

<sup>1</sup>It is claimed to hold the world's third largest reserves of natural gas. *CLA World Fact Book*.

<sup>2</sup>International Monetary Fund, *World Economic Outlook Database, April 2010*.

migrant, to be a blue-collar worker. The paper expands the story to beyond the image. The “white-collar” classification is chosen for focus, within the larger Indian expatriate cluster mainly because during the fieldwork, this sector was personally perceived to be more prominent in Qatar compared to the “business” category that was found to be important in the case of UAE in an earlier fieldwork. Some comparison is used with the Indian community in the UAE, so that it could be useful to observe the nuances in the characteristics of the expatriates in the two host countries, and to recognize some of the underlying factors responsible. For example: as to why in Qatar, it demonstrates a wider professional-representational class and in the UAE, it shows a more mature community strength and a larger entrepreneurial class. Finally, it is a curious fact that whereas the Asian expatriates and particularly, the Indians are widely visible participants in the local economy and society of the host countries in the Gulf, yet they are “invisible” in the official and public discourses. There is a significant size of the expatriate population that has lived in Qatar for many years, but the halo of temporariness existing around the “foreign migrant”, shrouds them from being acknowledged in the public domain, as also being participating “residents”.

### Background note

The Indians living in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries differ somewhat from the generic grouping of Non-resident Indian (NRI)<sup>3</sup> that is usually applied to the population of overseas Indians. In common usage, the NRI label is loosely applied to also include individuals of Indian origin who have naturalized or become citizens in the countries where they have migrated either for work or other

<sup>3</sup>By official definition, it refers to Indians living outside India for more than 183 days (6 months) in the year.

reasons<sup>4</sup>. The GCC Islamic countries do not permit naturalization options and follow a *Jus sanguinis* principle for citizenship. The Indian expatriates in the Gulf, apt to be termed “contract workers”, experience certain disadvantages compared to their counterpart NRIs from the other regions: they seem to lose certain rights both in their host and their home countries because of their supposed transient stay abroad. The population of Indian expatriates in the GCC countries is neither insignificant nor always “temporary”. The Indians are estimated at close to 5 million in the entire Gulf region. Despite their residence sometimes stretching over multiple generations, they necessarily hold Indian passports. The remittances to India are also significant (nearly \$15 billion)<sup>5</sup> and it is one of the factors to finally win them attention from both the host-GCC nations and home nation-India, albeit on the opposite interests (it is capital flight to the former, versus capital gain to the latter).

The majority of the Indian expatriates are engaged in the blue-collar sector, owing to the local market demand needing mass labour for the scale of construction and development projects initiated after the oil boom in the region. The profile is currently expanding, partly in response to the changing economies in the region and partly reflecting the maturation of the expatriate community. The economic criterion of job opportunity and the currency differential is a primary reason for the migration of Indians to the oil-rich Gulf nations. Geographical proximity is another affirmative factor favouring migration in this direction, with current migration having foundations in the

<sup>4</sup>Individuals who have become citizens of another country could apply for official status that grants them certain rights- either Person of Indian Origin (PIO) or Overseas Citizenship of India (OCI) (introduced since a few years).

<sup>5</sup>Quoted from an article on a recent Reserve Bank of India (RBI) Survey that indicates that in 2009, remittances from the Gulf region, form nearly 30% of the total remittances to India nearly matching the same from the North American region.

historical trade and socio-cultural links between India and the Gulf region.

Qatar perhaps witnessed several trends with regard to the composition, number and settlement pattern of its expatriates, in parallel to the trends in its national development. After the independence in 1971 from being a former British protectorate, Qatar's leadership change in 1995 to the current Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa al Thani, saw its capital shifted from Al Bida to Doha and the introduction of liberal and "pro-development" policies. The economy and new industrial development expanded to clusters in Doha, Al Khor, Mesaieed and Dukhan, where today the expatriate residential locales also tend to concentrate. Past trends in the increase or decrease of the expatriate population/composition in Qatar, reflect also specific periods of successful policy action. Expatriates recall the deliberate hike in rents (cited as steep as 600% during 2005), when there was a resultant flight of a bulk of the expatriates who could not afford to keep up. A noticeable change in the nationality-composition of the expatriate workforce, within the fairly recent period of 3-4 years, is also cited. The GCC has a common policy to achieve "demographic balance" in their population, including in the nationality of their expatriate groups. The shift to Srilankan, Nepali (see Brusle in the same issue) and Southeast Asian labour force such as Filipino and Vietnamese seems to have happened at a quicker pace in Qatar compared to the UAE. These examples show that there have been periodic trends over the previous decades and that policy action in Qatar with reference to the expatriates has been particularly effective.

### Profile of the Indians in Qatar

The Indian community in Qatar is currently estimated at close to 500,000<sup>6</sup>

unofficially. The 2010 Census puts the total population of Qatar at 1,696,563<sup>7</sup>. Hence, at nearly 25% of Qatar population, the Indians are a significant group and arguably the largest among the expatriate population in the country, followed next, by Pakistanis and Bangladeshis. Although Qatar's expatriate population comprises nationalities from diverse regions, the South Asians dominate it at the moment (see Bruslé in the same issue). The expatriate-native proportion is approximately 60:40, indicative of the prevailing imbalance. It is especially skewed in the labour force: "Qataris encompass only 7.6% as opposed to the 92.3% foreign labor force", as per a Labor Force Survey conducted by the Statics Authority in October 2007<sup>8</sup>.

Indians in the construction and the low/unskilled/unorganized sector form between 60 to 70% of the group and the rest are divided between the professional and the business categories that we here, term as the "white-collar" occupations. However, the profile has expanded or shown change from the earlier decades, where the "blue-collar" segment was significantly more dominant. For reasons discussed in the subsequent sections, the Qatar-Indians enjoy relatively less security and freedom than for example their counterparts in the UAE, but can nevertheless be broadly counted as a community doing well.

There are numerous socio-cultural and professional associations, schools, restaurants, clubs and other organizations in Qatar representing the Indian community. Owing to the stricter restrictions in place, their active social and cultural life is however, much subdued. The country is said to follow "zero tolerance" policy when it comes to deviance from the rule for instance, regarding religious expression. The community boasts a number of public personalities. However, it is less visible and numerous compared to the other Gulf

<sup>6</sup>A media quote in 2008 mentions the population to be 420,000.

<sup>7</sup>2010 Census (Government of Qatar).

<sup>8</sup><http://www.qsa.gov.qa/eng/index.htm>.

countries: a local respondent opines that “the Indian community is the weakest in Qatar”. To list from the professional domains they most represent in Qatar, the Indians are: engineers, medical professionals, media professionals, information technology (software/hardware), teachers, chartered accountants, managers, architects and other. The service industry in particular hence, is supplied and manned principally by the pool of Indian manpower – “talented, multi-skilled and cheaper”.

The larger sub-group among the Indian population in Qatar is South Indian in origin (as in most GCC nations). Kerala-state<sup>9</sup> alone allegedly represents more than 50% of the migrants<sup>10</sup> and the others are generally from the states of Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu and Goa. From the rest of India, it is predominantly from Maharashtra, Punjab and Gujarat with newer flow of workers from Bihar and Uttar Pradesh. While it is essentially a male-dominated-migration, one could hazard a proportionally larger number of females in the Indian population in Qatar unlike in most other GCC countries, because the white-collar expatriates are in a better position to bring families<sup>11</sup>. On the occupational side, they are mainly found in the medical sector as nurses and related professions and also as housemaids and secretarial staff. However, relatively more women working in the professional/working category might be found in Dubai.

An overlooked segment commonly, is the second or the third- generation youth in the wider expatriate population in Qatar. Not all the working expatriates are “fresh” migrants. An increasing number among

them, was either born or raised in the country and have begun their careers as well as families in their host country. It is to be noted that this group exists. It is beginning to be visible as pursuing jobs and as students enrolling in the few but fast-mushrooming higher education institutions in Qatar.

Having observed the expatriate community in the UAE on a previous fieldwork, the Indian expatriate community in Qatar was found to be relatively different. In a broader sense, the divergence could be explained as a factor of the host environments in Qatar and the UAE. The nature of the economy, the historical context, the policy atmosphere and the resolve of the ruling authority are some of the variables defining the respective character of the expatriate population. For a better perspective, it might be constructive to use some comparison with the UAE to describe the Qatar-Indian expatriate community.

Qatar is primarily an oil-based economy, whereas the UAE (especially Dubai) additionally boasts a larger commercial and a diversified economy. In this sense, the requirements of the oil and gas industry in Qatar seem to have dictated the relative consolidation of a larger white-collar expatriate class comprising the skilled and professional workers (and a smaller entrepreneurial class) compared to the UAE that shows a far wider diversity in its expatriate composition. The expectation at the start of the fieldwork in Qatar was to find a less significant Indian expatriate community but it was proved false on the ground. Qatar showed a group with its own strong characteristics although smaller in most ways (in size itself, the Indian population in the UAE is nearly 1.75 million<sup>12</sup>). To demonstrate certain segments or key aspects of the community, the following section uses selected cases:

<sup>9</sup>All Indians are generically clubbed as “Malabar”. Malabar refers to the northern and Muslim-dominated region of Kerala, from where the earliest and largest migration from the state is claimed to occur.

<sup>10</sup>Estimated by Indian embassies in the GCC.

<sup>11</sup>The official salary to be eligible to sponsor family members to live in Qatar is 7000 riyals (roughly 1360 euros).

<sup>12</sup>Projects, UAE Department of Naturalisation and Residency, the Ministry of Interior and the Ministry of Labour.

## The entrepreneurial segment is emergent

The big Indian business names and public personalities do not exist in the same scale or spread in Qatar like it is found in the UAE. The expatriate entrepreneurship in Qatar is “emerging and growing” in contrast to the “long/and securely-established” category that could be applied to the UAE case, indicative of the community’s visibly high participation in the private sector here. Because of the restrictive *Kafala* system (sponsorship)<sup>13</sup>, most «expatriate-run» businesses are found under the partnership category (the company name has an extension of “WLL” meaning *With Limited Liability*; the term used in UAE is, “LLC” meaning *Limited Liability Company*)<sup>14</sup>. In the local business scene in the UAE, expatriate enterprise is significant, after the top section of companies that are inevitably state/ruling-families-owned, representing very large capital investment and those followed by the big multinational companies. In Dubai, the Indian participation could be said to represent over 50% in the private sector-ranging from the unorganized sector, the free zone enterprises, to the bigger enterprises. However, in the business sector

of Qatar, the representation of Indians is visibly limited in size, diversity and number. Some factors explain the relatively emergent nature of the expatriate entrepreneurship in Qatar at the moment. 1) In Qatar, there is less business activity outside *its oil & natural gas resource-related industry*. In the UAE on the other hand, the national economy is far more varied and bigger and only Abu Dhabi has more secure oil reserves (Dubai’s choice of an aggressive diversification policy is an important factor). 2) A *transparent and pro-business legal environment is weaker or lacking in Qatar*, whereas they were cited as among the main attractions for the bulk of Dubai’s expatriate entrepreneurs in the interviews. In Qatar, the With Limited Liability (WLL) provision implying reasonable protection to the expatriate entrepreneurs in the background of the *Kafala* system, is only a fairly recent introduction (around six years old). The almost complete dependence of the expatriate enterprise in Qatar, on the goodwill of the local sponsor/partner, thus it makes it a highly risky and discouraging business environment. As a businessman expresses, although there was usually some form of written agreement, “unless a contract is actually registered in the court, it is quite useless having the document”. He mentions his good fortune of having a trusted sponsor and that it might not be the case for many others. In the UAE, the legal contract was a common practice and the expatriates expressed confidence in the access as well as the fairness and transparency in the legal recourse. 3) The *absence of a prior expatriate merchant community* like in the case of UAE- current evidence in Qatar does not show significant earlier or continued presence of traditional Indian mercantile families, similar to that found in some of the other GCC countries. Selected examples of a few prominent “Indian” businesses:

<sup>13</sup>In the GCC region, it regulates the entry and stay of the migrants and restrict the ownership of property or kind. By extension, no expatriate could own a business license. Any business activity must have at least 51% investment by the local sponsor or *kafil* (the figure could differ among the other GCC states). On paper, the local “owner” has the share but in reality the *kafil*’s participation is limited to the “fee” paid to him by the expatriate “partner”. In most cases, it is an annual agreed amount (this practice is particularly true in the UAE). In contrast to UAE, it was noted that in Qatar, the *kafil*s generally took more participation in the business with an actual investment and share in profits and there was more interaction between the expatriate businessman and his sponsor.

<sup>14</sup>The official figures do not indicate expatriate entrepreneurship as the businesses are necessarily listed in the name of the local partner-sponsor (whether it was the name/goodwill or if there was an actual monetary investment). In most cases, the expatriate-entrepreneur is found designated as the “Managing Director”.

### Seashore Group of Companies

[Mohamedali E.S]

Based in Al Khor and started in 1989, *Seashore Group of Companies* is one of the older and popular Indian “managed” businesses, and among the largest multi-faceted engineering and contracting conglomerates in Qatar (majorly into construction, industrial manufacturing, mining and minerals, oil and gas, power and utilities, retail, services and transport). Mohamedali E.S is the Managing Director with the Qatari sponsor/Group Chairman Saeed Salem Al Mohannadi. Mohamedali is a Kerala-origin businessman with stakes in more than a dozen businesses and more than 3,000 employees in his companies and is also recognized for his community outreach and support to the needy expatriates. At the foundation-stone laying occasion of the company’s new venture, the then Indian Ambassador George Joseph commended on the Indian-managed group setting up a steel plant in Qatar as a “symbol of growing Indo-Qatar friendship”.

As per local rumour, the company was appropriated by the sponsor in the past for a brief period but was later restored. Although not very common, such cases showcase the insecure atmosphere for expatriate-entrepreneurship in the country, where there is an unusual reliance on the goodwill of the sponsor. Perhaps it is for this reason on the positive side that, unlike the UAE (*kafala*-fee relationship), there would necessarily seem to be a greater trust relationship between the sponsor-expatriate partners in Qatar.

### Behzad Group

[CK Menon]

Established in 1983, the Doha-based Group is mainly focused in fuel transportation by land and sea. Also of Kerala-origin, CK Menon is the Managing Director of the company and has commercial interests stretching across the GCC and the Middle East, Europe, USA,

South America, Sudan and India. He is a well-known philanthropist and was conferred several recognitions such as “Pravasi Bharatiya Samman” in 2006 and the “Padma Shri” national award in 2009 by the Government of India for “out-standing contribution in the field of Social Service” including housing projects for the slum-dwellers in his Kerala hometown. An active figure in the Indian community socio-welfare activities in Qatar, he also acts as the director of the expatriate welfare association, NORKA ROOTS and the Infrastructure Kerala Ltd (INKEL) set up by the government of Kerala apart from a range of business interests in India. The Group is also into petroleum services, fuel bunkering, transports, heavy equipment, bakery, Car Care, plastics and trading enterprises in alliance with Al Misnad Transports and Trading and the Group Chairman is Saeed Salem al-Mohannadi.

The brief accounts show that the Indian enterprise in Qatar is also represented in the large conglomerate category, often with extension into diverse areas. Similar examples of successful Indian entrepreneurship are the Al Baraha Group, Transmedia International (TMI), Teyseer Motors, Gulf Lights. In addition, a few of the business leaders are also community leaders although also not at the scale as represented in the UAE. A majority of the big players in the expatriate-business field appear to be of Keralite origin (like the above two cases) although it is a mixed picture<sup>15</sup>. To name examples of the others: Teyseer Motors (Punjabi), Al Sulaiman Jewellers and Watches (Maharashtra-Azim Abbas); a small but emerging number, from Andhra Pradesh including the Diplomat Group, the Prominent Group are also indicative. Unlike the UAE or Oman, where Sindhi and Gujarati traditional merchant families continue from their historical trading presence in the local societies and are

<sup>15</sup>During the fieldwork, the larger research focus at the time was on the expatriates from Kerala and Andhra Pradesh.

currently found well-entrenched (like the Jashanmal National Company, Uncle's Shop, Bhatia Brothers, Gulfar Group), it is not clear if Qatar has had similar such presence in the earlier decades. At present, it would seem marginal. Late Mulchand Assandas Kanjani was perhaps an example of such older merchant class (businessman and founder of ICBF mentioned in subsequent section), in whose name the local *Kanjani awards* for services to the Indian community in Qatar are instituted. Unsurprisingly but not as a necessary condition, Muslim names appear more numerous among the successful businessmen that perhaps attest the critical importance of *wasta*<sup>16</sup> and having local contacts for the start and the growth of an entrepreneurial venture, at least in the past, and religious affinity might comprise a contributory factor.

The sectors of concentration of the expatriate businesses are mainly in the service industries linked to oil and gas petrochemical field. There is also a wide representation in the fields of Retail, Transport, Jewelry, Textile, Trading, and Education among the others. Finally, as the entrepreneurs themselves assert: "in the examples of the expatriate businessmen in Qatar... we have all worked our way up the hard way" (meaning, often starting with salaried jobs in Qatar and not, with prior business backgrounds) - hence, the expat-entrepreneurs of Qatar are more the "locally-grown" kind.

### **The professionals-category among the Indian expatriates is highly visible**

The primary demand comes from the oil and gas industry that has attracted and absorbed the dominant mass of the professionals and skilled manpower from India. The occupational pool ranges from

engineers, scientific researchers, technical experts and the managerial and administrative personnel. The supporting professional sectors have also developed to have a strong presence of Indians like the medical and health sector - doctors, nurses and other staff; the teaching and education sector - with teachers at the school level to higher institutions; the Chartered Accountants and auditors; the software and hard ware IT support professionals; and the journalism and media-related sector. Finally, the rising construction and development sector is emerging as important, employing a growing number of Indian professionals. In response to the demands of this sector, there is also a dominant presence of construction engineers, architects, project managers and other real estate related supply-skill groups.

The professionals-white-collar Indian expatriates are a publicly visible class in the Qatari society. They are dominant as consumers and clients in the market place in addition to being the service-provider group across different sectors. They are principal customers in the shops and Malls, the public places like the museums, parks, etc. A rise in their presence is also noted in the up-scale residential colonies/villas supposedly meant for the "white" expatriates (*e.g.* American, European) and the native Qataris. In addition, large residential colonies of some biggest employers like Qatar Petroleum, Qatar Gas, RasGas, QAPCO, QASCO, QAFAC, Q-Chem and others, show significant expatriate composition.

*The Ras Gas residential colony in Al Khor* is one such example, where there was an opportunity to spend two days and observe the expatriates and their social life. It might not be an exaggeration to quote that the Indian expatriate group represented nearly 70% among the residents and the expatriates in general might comprise almost 90% as a proportion. The residents were mainly managerial executives, technical and other administrative staff and their families. Other dominant expatriate groups appeared to be

<sup>16</sup>It means using influence through connections or contacts, and the practice is predominant in the Gulf region.

of Pakistani, other Middle East and European/American origin. Wide range of facilities from schools, commercial complex, clubs and sports facilities were housed within the colony providing for the comfort and needs of the resident employees. Among the schools were an International School following the British curriculum and another following the Indian stream (with CBSE-national syllabus). The social clubs evidently had majority expatriate membership. The expatriates of different nationalities do not seem to mix much socially but rather kept to their national groups and to their own social associations with specific exceptions in certain sports teams.

The Indians generally organized around region - and language-based affiliations (like it is found outside the colony, and also mirrored in the UAE). It was noted that the Malayalees (from Kerala) and the Telugus (from Andhra Pradesh) were the dominant groups followed by Punjabi and Tamil communities in the colony. *Arang* was one of the Kerala associations that showed a broader range of activity and mass in membership compared to the Telugu one that was found to be more an inner-group with activity largely limited to social get-togethers and entertainment. One "All-India" grouping, *Bharathi*, celebrated programmes with a larger scope and national events/festivals (e.g. Independence day or for a specific cause). A larger section of the respondents both male and female, expressed contentment about living in Qatar, in terms of their social life, the security, comforts and facilities of residing in a well-equipped colony and free from the bother of "unnecessary troubles and issues" (of the outside world). In the past decade, there was widening activity outside the Ras Gas colony in Al Khor town, majorly represented by the Indians - the growth of a commercial market that includes ethnic shops, and new residential areas with choice of cheaper accommodation, etc. There is currently a proposal to set up a new international Al Khor school by Indian

businessmen. Local commerce is vibrant with mainly the Indians participating. The local fish market is an example. Regular leisure activities of the Indian residents included Cricket and other hobby groups, weekend getaways or get-togethers at the clubs/resorts coming up along the beach-side.

Among the main concerns for the Indian resident-expatriates in Al Khor involved the children's education after school level. It involves preparation to send the kids back to India for secondary and tertiary educations, coupled with the wife/spouse's regular visits/or prolonged periods of stay in India to accompany the children. Therefore, concern regarding the aside, otherwise many express that "life is good" and that for the family life, it is the most comfortable quality later education and the future careers of the children whether in India, the Gulf or abroad dominated the discourses. A less articulated challenge was about the career promotion of the expats to higher posts. It was widely shared that no expatriate generally reaches the highest positions irrespective of experience or merit and seem reconciled that this was the writ of the land. "In any case, we know who the real boss in our office is": often, the native Qatari in the top executive position only nominally heads the actual work front. However, it was shared that more Qataris are seen in the offices in the recent years including secretarial staff as a result of the Qatarisation (nationalization) policy. The challenges of living' - in fact, this respondent who later went to work in the US/Canada chose to return to Qatar for the stated reason. One of the deterrents identified with the option of returning to India was concern regarding re-absorption into the more competitive Indian job market. Gulf experience is generally not perceived at home as value-adding to the professional profile. Another reason given was that the "wives don't prefer it" (appreciation of the freedom of being independent from family; the comfort of

facilities). In a sense, the RasGas Al Khor colony was an “insulated” world for the resident-expatriates.

The blue-collar employees of the company lived outside the colony in labour camp quarters usually in difficult conditions, many of whom additionally do odd jobs/housework for the families inside the colony on their off-days and are mainly Nepali or Indian. Fewer number of Indian residents expressed awareness of the conditions in the camps outside the colony/involvement in support/voluntary activity to help the workers. Assumedly, other big companies have similar residential colonies.

### **Community leaders or public personalities tend to be from the professional segment**

Unlike the UAE, where the community leaders in the limelight almost necessarily represent the entrepreneurial segment, it is a different scenario in Qatar. For example, current personalities most referred in the local media and across the community in the UAE are Yousuf Ali of EMKE Group, BR Shetty of NMC Medicals, Mohan Jashanmal of Jashanmal Group, and more – they are all business leaders and with money/fame/influential clout. Compared to the UAE, a lesser entrepreneurial participation is observed among the community and the entrepreneurs have a lower public profile in Qatar’s economy and society, at least at the moment. In Qatar, popular personalities are those known in their professional occupations and for their participation in community activity. The late KC Varghese had working experience with QTel and Gulf Times (in Telecommunications sector and later as freelance journalist) over three decades of living in Qatar and was considered an “unofficial ambassador” because of his popularity. Examples:

#### **R. Seetharaman**

He represents a rare example of an Asian/Indian expatriate achieving a top executive position till date in any sector in Qatar and is referred to as a phenomenon. He is the current CEO of Doha Bank (since 2007), the largest private commercial bank in Qatar. As a banker, he won several distinctions awarded, “Best CEO in Middle East Banking Industry 2008” during the 5th Leading CEO Summit. First starting his career about 25 years earlier in Oman as a Chartered Accountant, he has become a symbol of the Indian expatriate success in Qatar not only as an international expert in his professional field but also as an extremely articulate and worldly-sophisticated individual in the broader public and social life of Qatar- in a certain contrast to the more stereotypical image existing of a self-effacing Indian expat.

#### **Dr. Mohan Thomas**

A doctor by profession, Dr. Mohan Thomas Pakalomattom finds frequent mention as among the prominent Indians at the current moment. A former gold-medalist from the prestigious All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS), New Delhi, he is claimed as the first ENT (Ear, Nose and Throat)-specialist in Qatar. He is currently a leading practitioner with prior experience of working with the Ministry of Interior for a decade in the 1980s. He is a popular community leader holding positions as the current President of the Indian Community Benevolent Fund and the Indian Medical Association and also as patron of several socio-cultural associations. Chairing the church construction committee, he is also seen to be instrumental in securing the land grant and the permission to build the Indian Church in Qatar. In July 2010, he has been conferred the Knighthood of Saint Gregory-Chevalier by Papal Order in recognition for his efforts toward the Syro-Malabar Christian community especially in the Gulf region and the church. Significantly, Dr.

Mohan Thomas also has several business ventures in Qatar to his name- the current Chairman of the popular Birla Public School (BPS), the Director of Global Auto Spare parts and more. Among his philanthropic and business activities extending to Kerala/India, he heads a non-profit charitable organization and Care Foundation in Kerala and is Founder-Director of Kochi International Business School.

These notables are considered the public spokespersons and the civilian ambassadors representing the Indian expatriates in Qatar. Their professional background in most cases remarks on the prominence of this segment, in terms of their influence in the Qatari Indian community.

### **The associational life is relatively restricted yet strong**

The number, scope and diversity of the collective associational activity of the Indian expatriates is smaller compared to the vibrant parallel case found in the UAE. It is a common feature among the GCC countries to restrict the associational representation of the expatriate communities to only one official organization for each nationality for their socio-cultural needs. In practice however, the expatriate communities generally have multiple organizations. This is also the case with the Indian group. The umbrella association registered with the Indian Embassy in Qatar (ICC) or with the Indian Consulate in Dubai (ICWC), acts as the host to numerous expatriate organizations affiliated to it. The arrangement could symbolize either an ingenious alternative to the local legal restrictions or a natural evolution by an increasingly consolidating expatriate community. In the UAE, the story is of a strongly established associational life; in Qatar, it is a smaller and emerging picture. This might be reflective of the stricter policy environment in Qatar. Like the introduction of *WLL* status to enterprises is fairly recent

in Qatar, concessions to a more visible socio-cultural representation might also emerge.

On the one hand, the associational life reflects the more nascent status of the Indian community in Qatar-Indian community in the background of local curbs on it. On the other hand, it also projects a community with certain strengths. The following examples demonstrate the strength of the community and also the strength of its professional composition.

### **ICC and ICBF**

Under the patronage of the Indian Embassy in Qatar, the Indian Cultural Centre (ICC, established in 1993) and the Indian Community Benevolent Fund (ICBF, established in 1984) act as the official bodies representing the Indian expatriates. The ICC has around 108 community associations registered with it and its activities are mainly concerning the socio-cultural needs of the community, whereas addressing the welfare needs of the underprivileged and the distressed Indians is the domain of ICBF. Both have a Chief Coordinating Officer nominated by the Embassy and function independently under a Managing Committee. In the UAE, in Dubai alone, close to 1 000 Indian community associations are estimated to exist<sup>17</sup> and with a far greater diversity in activity than that found in Qatar.

### **Art of Living (AoL)**

The outfit was disbanded in the recent period (2007-08) and the key members were allegedly expelled within a short span of about two days. The case is selected as an example of the firm official crackdown in Qatar, on any overt religious expression (other than the state religion of Islam). The government supposedly acted on the news

<sup>17</sup>The number is much higher than the official figure registered with the Indian Community Welfare Committee (ICWC).

that there was congregation and religious ceremony (*bhajan* or group singing of religious songs). As per an unconfirmed account, notice was given and the visas withdrawn of many as 200 members (many from the Al Khor community where the information was received). The local law prohibits public congregations, wherein any gathering of more than 12 persons requires police permission. Similarly, it is also deterred to engage in public fund-raising except through the Qatar Red Crescent organization. However, public events could be organized with the mandated permission from the police and from the concerned Embassy and requires a certain security presence. Examples exist however, when prominent community individuals with permission have hosted ceremonies/cultural events (like the *Dimali puja* or *Dandiya dances*) or raised funds (like toward the “Indian Church”). At the time of the fieldwork, the warning was fresh in the memory of the expatriates about the limitations on their activity, due to the recentness of the AoL event, the speed of the crackdown and the expulsions. Yet, it is also remarked that it was the advent of a particularly conservative Minister of Culture that is witnessing stricter rules (change noted especially since 2000).

In contrast to Dubai, where a temple for the expatriates following the Hindu faith has been functioning since decades (and a Gurudwara for the Sikh-followers inside the complex), in Qatar there is none. A temple-like *Dharmalayam* allegedly existed earlier, which is currently either shut down or functioning less publicly. However, the government has lately given permission for the establishment of a Church that now seems to house around 25 smaller churches representing different denominations within the same premise termed the “Church Complex”. A respondent shared his belief that the “Christian faith was better tolerated” in the kingdom (than Hinduism); another expatriate shares that, “even the Sunnis cannot make functions openly” citing the example of how a popular Sunni

religious leader from Kerala was curtailed during his visit to Qatar<sup>18</sup>. A few Indian Muslim entities operate with lesser restriction and are directly approved by Qatar government like the Indian Islamic Association and the Qatar Indian Islahi Centre.

### IEI and the IMF-Qatar

The Institution of Engineers of India, Qatar (IEI-Qatar Chapter) and the Indian Media Forum-Qatar (IMF-Qatar) are two good examples of active and representative professional associations. They attest to a considerable presence of the Indian expatriates in the professional-segment. The former was established as an Overseas Chapter in 1991 and as per its claim: “with more than five hundred engineers associated, the (IEI) Qatar Chapter is the largest professional body functioning in Qatar at present”. The IMF is also popularly known as the forum for the Indian professionals in the print and electronic media domains that actively conducts regular meetings among the fraternity and around 4-5 seminars annually. Numerous similar professional organizations exist such as the Institute of Accountants and Financial professionals in Business (IMA) and the Indian Medical Association and Indian Doctors Club-Qatar Chapter. Other entities mainly catering to the professional class such as Toast Masters’ Club are popular.

A point again to note is that a significant majority of the membership in the community associations seems to be drawn from the white-collar professionals, and a smaller minority from the entrepreneurial background. In Dubai, the entrepreneurs had a greater presence than seen among Qatar’s associations.

<sup>18</sup>Qatar follows the Wahabi school of Islam. Among the GCC countries, it is closer to Saudi Arabia in its practices.

## The young-second-generations express rooting/local affiliation

A few interviews with the younger generation expatriates born and/or brought up in Qatar revealed some interesting trends. In both the sites for fieldwork in Doha and Al Khor, interactions with the second-generation individuals who were currently working in Qatar or pursuing higher education, revealed the youth expressing a preference to stay in Qatar. They felt a greater affinity for having grown here. Some of them had most of their higher education in India (secondary school, graduate and post-graduate)<sup>19</sup> and chose to return to work in Qatar and start a family. A few others were currently pursuing education in India/elsewhere abroad, but had plans to look for a job in Qatar. It is a surprising trend because until recent years, the popular destination for careers and for immigration for the “Gulf-kids” was understood to be the “West” symbolising attractive locales especially for their liberal societies (mainly the USA, Canada, the UK, Europe and Australia/New Zealand). It was because citizenship or naturalisation was almost impossible under the current laws in the host-Gulf countries hence, immigration to the greener West was the eventual project commonly encouraged by the expatriates for their children. Choice to return to India for career/life advancement has generally been a lesser occurrence, in the pursuit to achieve upward social mobility. And in general, as reflected in the personal interactions with both groups, the second-generation did not have the same identification with their « home-country » like that expressed by their parents.

<sup>19</sup>The expatriates are generally obliged to send the children abroad for higher education (either India or elsewhere). Two reasons: first, the absence of quality higher education institutions within the Gulf till recent years. Second, the local laws allow the parent to sponsor residence in Qatar to a child only up to a certain age, roughly until the secondary education level (up to marriage in the case of girls). There is an exception if the child is independently admitted in a local college/university.

The most recent trend shows the younger generation preferring to return to Qatar in spite of the future-uncertainty element. In addition, their express choice of Qatar rather than any GCC country demonstrates that economic opportunity was not the sole factor. It also reflects their affinity to or/and confidence in their future within the host country where they grew up. The presence of family members in Qatar and pre-existing contacts might also be a criterion.

Two other trends are the mushrooming of Indian higher educational institutions/businesses in Qatar – new ones or the extensions of Indian branches (*e.g.* Madras Management Training Institute Doha) and the enrolment of a miniscule but increasing number of expatriate children of Indian origin in Qatar’s educational institutions (like the Qatar Foundation<sup>20</sup>). The latter tended to be highly expensive and intended to cater to the offspring of Qatari or the Western expatriate. However, presence of a number of Indian students<sup>21</sup> points to not only that the expatriates are increasingly able to afford the expensive education, but also that are willing to invest in their children’s education and their futures, locally rather than with a deliberate eye toward India or elsewhere.

<sup>20</sup>Qatar Foundation’s campus called the Education City, currently hosts the largest enclave of American universities’ branches outside the USA: Virginia Commonwealth University, Weill Cornell Medical College, Texas A&M University, Carnegie Mellon University, Georgetown School of Foreign Service and Northwestern University. Recent addition of other international institutions include HEC Paris and University College London.

<sup>21</sup>The student profiles living in the campus hostels attached with some of the institutions give some evidence. The number also includes students from India (from the more affluent sections), choosing to enroll in the prestigious international and also Indian educational branch institutions in the Gulf region. Reasons include physical proximity compared to studying in the USA or other popular destinations and also the tougher competition faced in India, for example, to acquire admission in select disciplines.

## Conclusion

Like its title suggests, the paper describes the Indian community in Qatar, focusing particularly on the segment mainly engaged in professional occupations. The expatriate population also comprises a prominent white-collar-professional class, in extension to the stereotypical categorization of the Gulf expatriate as “blue-collar labour”. The “white-collar” manpower was found to be relatively more influential and visible in the Indian community in Qatar as a whole. In the Emirates, there was more vibrant participation of the Indians in the private sector. The reason why it is so that the “white-collars” stand out among the Indian community in Qatar is a mix of several factors: Qatar’s principal oil and gas industry demands skilled and professional workforce. As a richer and a less diversified economy, Qatar does not have the incentive to be responsive to nurture the entrepreneurial ventures of the expatriates nor does it embody a range of opportunities like the UAE does (especially Dubai); The Indian community is relative newer or younger in Qatar and experiences a less secure position in the host society (in Dubai, the Gujarati/Sindhi-origin Indian merchants had a prior or settled presence). Further, Qatar has a stricter and resolute policy atmosphere and hence, it restricts the socio-economic-cultural vigour of the expatriate community. Thus, the Qatar-Indian community has a somewhat different and a miniature profile compared to that of the UAE. Yet, the Indian community in Qatar nevertheless projects strength on its own terms and it currently shows to be resilient. There appears a consolidating trend, given the sustained demand for expatriate

manpower and the preference to stay increasingly demonstrated by the second/next generation-expatriates.

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