

LOW-SKILLED LABOR MIGRANTS:  
STRUGGLES OF A PAKISTANI LABOR MIGRANT IN SAUDI ARABIA

H I B A S H O A I B

**Abstract**

**T**his paper discusses the findings of primary research that aimed to explore the lived experiences of low-skilled Pakistani labor migrants in the Arab States. It is an in-depth case study centered on the journey and struggles of a Pakistani labor migrant who worked as a driver for a rich Saudi family and was subjected to exploitation and forced labor. After two years, he returned home understanding the right to his freedom and with a stronger sense of attachment towards his Pakistani nationhood. Based on a narrative interview, this study serves as a firsthand account of the migrant himself. It highlights major themes like exploitative labor conditions in Saudi Arabia, institutional short-comings, practices of coercion, emotional vulnerability, collective acts of resistance, and a loss of social capital that altogether underpins the complex system of transnational labor migration. This qualitative investigation is geared towards raising awareness and giving visibility to migrant voices that largely remain silent in Pakistan.

**Keywords:** *Low-skilled; Labor Migrants; Pakistan; Saudi Arabia; Transnational Migration; Institutional Short-comings ; Forced Labor; Exploitation; Lived Experience; Local Migrant Voices.*

## Introduction

### Introduction

Low-skilled labor migrants are one of the groups that are most vulnerable to forced labor (Kagan, 2017). Low-skilled work mostly includes entry-level jobs that do not require high education or expert skills. Due to financial constraints and familial responsibilities, low-skilled workers, mostly from Developing Countries migrate to Developed Countries, often to become a victim of exploitation and marginalization. According to the International Labor Organization (ILO), the Middle Eastern Arab States<sup>1</sup> house several manual and domestic<sup>2</sup> laborers, and are therefore regarded as one of the major destinations of migrant workers globally (Kagan, 2017).

As per the International Labor Organization (2016) report, *Where to go for help: Pakistani Migrant Workers' Access to Justice at Home and in Gulf Cooperation Council*, "some 8,598,000 Pakistani workers went abroad for employment between 1971 and 2015. From this number, the vast majority of them (96 per cent) went to a Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) country"<sup>3</sup> (p. xi), out of which the largest flow of workers was to Saudi Arabia at 50.3%. From the approximately 1.4 million migrant workers who went to the GCC countries during this time, 41% of them were employed in manual and low-skilled job categories while only a small portion was employed in an expert or highly-skilled capacity (International Labor Organization, 2016). Despite these overwhelming statistics, there remains limited scholarship on the hardships and struggles of Pakistani labor migrants in the Arab region. Therefore, this research attempts to take a step further in bridging this gap by presenting a qualitative case-study on the journey and experiences of a Pakistani labor migrant in Saudi Arabia.

## Research Methodology

For the purposes of this research, a narrative interview was conducted

with Muhammad Rashid, a domestic worker employed as a driver in Saudi Arabia for two years, after which he returned to Pakistan in 2017. He was selected as a participant based on purposeful sampling. The interview was conducted by two researchers. To maintain a conversational atmosphere and extrapolate an in-depth narrative, an open-ended interview guide was used. The interview was recorded via audio and video with the informed consent of the participant who has agreed to be identified for this research. The contents of the interaction were transcribed verbatim and then translated from Urdu to English. The interview was translated only for the purpose of coding. This was done keeping in mind that the interviewee's chosen language of communication holds more meaning than mere translation and/or transliteration can express (Regmi, Naidoo & Pilkington, 2010).

Based on the findings of this interview, as well as secondary research, an analysis of Rashid's various experiences that, for example, includes poor working conditions, institutional short-comings, loss of social capital, etc., was done.

### **Reason(s) for Migration**

Out of economic necessity and ever-increasing familial responsibilities, Rashid had decided to migrate to a new country in 2015. He stated:

*“The deteriorating conditions of my home forced me to go there. There were tensions and financial issues. So, with the intention of earning well over there, I left. I wanted to do something for my kids. I couldn't study myself, but I wanted my kids to go to a school. God has blessed me with a daughter now, so I have little dreams for her”* (Rashid, 2019; interview) <sup>4</sup>

According to the neo-classical model of migration, a person's decision to migrate is driven by a push-pull framework (King, 2012; Castles &

Miller, 2003). Poor conditions like unemployment, low-wages, political repression, etc., in their hometown, push them to leave their origin, whereas factors like "... job prospects, better education, welfare systems..." in the destination country pull them towards it (King, 2012, p.13). As King (2012) states, this model underpins the "neoclassical economics paradigm" whereby migrants are assumed to be making a "rational choice" to maximize their utility (p.13). In light of this theory and Rashid's statement above, Rashid could be regarded as a rational agent whose decision to migrate was based on the existence of better economic opportunities in Saudi Arabia. However, this simplistic-macro model fails to take into account the complex socio-cultural ground reality of transnational migration that revolves around factors like institutions, emotions, gender, race and ethnicity—all of which constitute the lived experience of a migrant.

### **Institutional Shortcomings and their Practices of Coercion**

Persuaded by false promises of high wages, Rashid's recruitment agent<sup>5</sup> manipulated him "with big dreams of getting rich over-night"<sup>6</sup> (Rashid, 2019; interview). He was informed that his salary would be 2000 Riyals. However, upon reaching, he was paid only 1700 Riyals as his monthly salary.

Furthermore, Rashid added that he was kept unaware of his substandard living conditions by his recruiter. He said: "I mean, these details [living conditions] must have been in my contract that I signed in Pakistan, but I did not have any knowledge of them when I left Pakistan"<sup>7</sup> (Rashid, 2019; interview).

Although Rashid chose not to provide us with elaborate details about his recruiter in Pakistan, but two things could be deduced from his statements. Firstly, it is perhaps common for recruiters to deceive their clients by luring them with promises of an attractive remuneration and

secondly, that the living conditions in the destination country are hardly desirable to workers when starting out.

At the institutional level, this shows how low-skilled migrant workers, in exchange for hefty fees, are often betrayed by the third-party recruiters. Being the only source of information and responsible for all operations and migratory procedures, these recruiting agencies usually lie and give incomplete or false information to migrants (Jureidini, 2016). Most of the time, no proper pre-departure orientations are conducted for the migrants (International Labor Organization, 2016). The vulnerability of these migrants is further exacerbated by their lack of education and knowledge due to which terms and conditions are often unclear to the migrants, and they are thus easily manipulated and cheated by these informal agents.<sup>8</sup> Rashid told us that he is too an “*anghoota-chap*”<sup>9</sup> (Rashid, 2019; interview).

Moreover, the authorities in Saudi Arabia also failed to grant legal protection and labor rights to Rashid. For about three months, his status in Saudi Arabia remained unclear as his formal documentation was delayed. Rashid shared:

*We get our work-permit and license three months after our arrival. So, we cannot run away in the meantime. If the person does not work, they don't give you your license, i.e. your work-permit. They even confiscate your passport so that even if the person runs away, he can't escape outside”* (Rashid, 2019; interview)<sup>10</sup>

This largely reflects slow procedures and short-comings on part of the institutions situated in the host country, Saudi Arabia in this case, that are responsible for granting legal rights to the in-coming migrants (Fargues, Shah & Brouwer, 2019). Since they are denied any form of

legal identification by the host country, these migrants also find it increasingly difficult to avail services that require their identity cards (International Labor Organization, 2016).

This unjust set of conditions are exacerbated by the Kafala System. Under this system, the migrant workers are under the authority of a sponsor, typically their employer, referred to as a *Kafeel*. He is able to exercise an unreasonable amount of control over the legal status of the migrant and “the sponsorship rule may entail elements of servitude and slavery, where sponsors might concede employees to others without their consent and might withhold their passports to prevent any possible escape” (Jarallah, 2009, p. 9).

In Rashid’s case, his employer was his *Kafeel*. Rashid lived at a distance of 2 km from his *Kafeel*’s house, and was responsible to take *Kafeel*’s kids to school by 7:30 am every day. Rashid would get up early at 6 in the morning so that he could be at the *Kafeel*’s house by “7 am at any cost [6:26]” (Rashid, 2019; interview). Under his employment, Rashid was subject to rigid schedules, salary withholding, excessive work with no breaks and holidays, and a low wage which entrapped Rashid into forced labor. When relating his experience, he mentioned that,

*“I would have to wake up at 6 in the morning, but there was no fixed time for when I would get off. It [working hours] could go up to 12:00, 1:00 or even 2:00 am, and you can’t say no to them in the meantime. If you don’t do the work, they threaten you with cutting your salary... Imagine how sad one would feel if they don’t get their salary at the end of the month, even though they had provided their services for the entire month”*<sup>12</sup> (Rashid, 2019; interview).

He also shared:

*This is a very big responsibility. In case something goes wrong, then we are in big trouble. If the kid says something and we reply to them, then the Kafeel or their mother immediately calls the police, and they blackmail us a lot”<sup>13</sup>* (Rashid, 2019; interview).

Upon asking if he ever got a chance to visit his family during his two-year stay in Saudi Arabia, Rashid replied:

*“I asked Kafeel twice. One year had already passed, I told him that I want a leave. But I didn’t get one holiday. Even if you are sick, they need work. The only break you have is the Friday break, that too for an hour or so”<sup>14</sup>* (Rashid, 2019; interview).

This shows how Rashid was mistreated and forced into a vulnerable position whereby he was exploited in a poor working environment. Rashid’s status and freedom were tied to an individual, the Kafeel, who not only denied him leave despite Rashid’s persistent requests, but threatened to blackmail him under various circumstances. In addition to this, Balasubramanian (2019) argues that the Kafala system makes it difficult for migrants to switch their jobs or leave the country, thereby making it increasingly difficult for them to escape the ongoing abusive treatment.

Moreover, Rashid’s complaint and advocacy against his Kafeel was also silenced by a Saudi organization (Rashid did not reveal the name), and he was instead charged with a penalty. Upon inquiring about the Saudi organization and if the Saudi government facilitated him in anyway, Rashid told us:

organization and if the Saudi government facilitated him in anyway, Rashid told us:

*“You can call it a sort of an NGO. In case you are new and you have a problem, you can go to them to seek help. You go there with a hope of getting relief. I went to them twice, but instead of helping me, they lodged a complaint against me to my Kafeel. They told my Kafeel that I was complaining against them. They also took away my work permit and license, and for six days I was not allowed to live in my quarters. I told my Pakistani friend about my problem...so for six days I lived at his place. He was a good Pakistani”*<sup>15</sup> (Rashid, 2019; interview).

He further added:

*“It (passport) was taken away which meant even if I wanted to escape, I couldn’t”*<sup>16</sup> (Rashid, 2019; interview).

The practice of confiscating a migrant’s passport is regarded as a form of coercion that is often adopted by the institutions in certain destination countries (Fargues, Shah & Brouwer, 2019). It is indicative of forced labor as it limits the migrant’s freedom of movement. Instead of paying heed to migrants’ concerns, migrants are often punished (International Labor Organization, 2016). Although Rashid managed to reach a worker’s organization, his opportunity to seek justice was curtailed because of unfair and ineffective complaint handling mechanisms (Jureidini, 2016). His attempt to file a grievance complaint resulted instead in an unfavorable outcome that left Rashid stranded without a passport and a shelter. This not only reflects incompetency but also an absolute lack of accountability on the part of legal authorities that play an integral role in this complex system of transnational labor. The short-comings on the part of governmental

structures and a gap in the legal framework tend to exacerbate migrants' difficulty (Balasubramanian, 2019). Such directives enable the Kafuels to impose exploitative labor conditions, thereby leaving the workers extremely vulnerable to mistreatment (Fargues, Shah & Brouwer, 2019).

## Poor Living Conditions

In addition to the anxieties he faced regarding his working conditions, Rashid revealed that he was provided with inadequate housing facilities that consequently confined him in poor-living conditions. Aside from electricity, his small quarter was deprived of necessities such as cooking gas and water-supply. Therefore, upon arriving, Rashid was forced to make all the important purchases like a "gas cylinder and food supplies" (Rashid, 2019; interview). He further added that "whatever else you want, you have to bring it yourself. I also had to manage my own food within that salary (1700 Riyals)" (Rashid, 2019; interview). The living conditions he was restricted to is consistent with what Jarallah (2009) explains about how migrant workers are usually forced to live in cramped and poor cottages with unsanitary conditions that are often detrimental to their physical and mental health.

## Language Barrier

To aggravate the matter further, the language barrier is one of the foremost challenges that migrants face upon their arrival in any new country. Not only was Rashid unable to fully integrate into the host society, but his lack of language competency created interpersonal issues for him. He revealed that he was unable to converse with his *Kafeel*:

*"My Kafeel used to converse in English or Arabic, and I couldn't understand either. This caused a lot of problems*

*for me, and this is why, more often I was pulled into arguments with my Kafeel. They misbehave and bully a lot if you can't understand their instruction. They even fight. For about six months, I struggled in understanding their language”*<sup>19</sup> (Rashid, 2019; interview)

Rashid further shared that his inability to understand the language also led to his failure at successfully navigating routes and reading traffic signs in Arabic which often pulled him into verbal arguments with his employer. He said, “when you are new you don't even know the names of the routes, they say... (Arabic)... that is left and right in Pakistan. So, language also became a problem in the start”<sup>20</sup> (Rashid, 2019; interview).

This reflects how the inability to speak a similar language may increasingly restrict the potential economic and social gains for low-skilled labor migrants which, in turn, may lead to their social exclusion from the community (Kagan, 2017).

## **Stereotyping and Marginalization**

In addition to these challenges, Rashid's identity as a Pakistani made him a target of stereotypes and marginalization as well. He stated,

*“They think that entire Pakistan is as if their servant. They want to rule you. They want us to agree and accept everything and anything they say, otherwise they degrade you; they give you names, be it an Indian or a Pakistani or an Indonesian. If you ignore them or can't understand them, they maltreat you”*<sup>21</sup> (Rashid, 2019; interview)

Upon asking if a similar treatment was adopted with other labor migrants that he may know of, Rashid replied:

*“It's the same thing. And it wasn't just with me, but with all the drivers working over there in the vicinity, everyone*

*was treated low like this”*<sup>22</sup> (Rashid, 2019; interview)

This gives us a window into the deeply-rooted ethnic stereotypes against South Asians that thrive in Saudi Arabia. South Asian groups often experience ‘othering’ which propagates expressions of inequality and prejudice based on their group-identities (Powell & Menendian, 2018). Othering includes, but is not limited to, sex, ethnicity, religion, class, etc., that consequently establishes the superiority of one group over the other. Iqbal (2018) writes how Pakistani migrants, post 9/11, are often labeled as extremists in host countries. These “deep-seated attitudes of prejudice and xenophobia” against South-Asians adversely impact their self-esteem and mental health (International Labor Organization, 2017, p.15). Rashid, too, was often treated like a second-class citizen and was directed by his *Kafeel* to perform odd jobs which he considered to be outside his actual job description. He shared,

*“He used to say...(Arabic)... go pick up dates for me, clean the garbage in the neighborhood. I used to reply...(Arabic)... I am your driver not a garbage cleaner”* (Rashid, 2019; interview)<sup>23</sup>

These odd jobs such as cleaning garbage in the neighborhood were not a part of his job, and made Rashid feel degraded and abused, thereby igniting a sense of slavehood and servitude.

## **Acts of Resistance**

In order to earn more money, Rashid, involved himself in what he described as “*Hera Pheri*”<sup>24</sup>. Alongside other Pakistanis and Indians, he would secretly drive his *Kafeel*'s car as a taxi at night and would pick up passengers from Jeddah to the airport.

*“I was forced to cheat because my family members at home were tense, and I had to buy a phone as soon as possible. Therefore, I used to pick passengers from Makkah to*

*Jeddah, and I used to drop them to the airport. This way I could afford my living expenses every month. A trip per day was enough for us as we used to earn almost 600 riyals in a round trip. We would try doing this on alternate days to avoid any suspicion from anybody and our Kafeels, otherwise I would have been stuck. So, this how I used to cheat”<sup>25</sup> (Rashid, 2019; interview)*

Rashid shared that he “*was informed about this technique by a fellow Pakistani”* who explained to him “*that this way I could manage both my living expenses and family at home. He helped me”<sup>26</sup> (Rashid; 2019; interview).*

Firstly, this shows that Rashid alone was not experiencing such hardships but his peers within the labor migrant community were also struggling and thus resorting to illegal means to make their ends meet. Secondly, it reflects how labor migrants mobilize into subcultures of resistance and “collective acts of defiance” whereby they tend to indulge in illegal activities so nonchalantly that these practices become normalized among them (Pande, 2012, p.18).

Rashid narrates another incident where his poor economic standing compelled him to perform pilgrimage, illegally. By paving his way out through a tunnel inside a hill, Rashid committed to an illegal journey of seven hours alongside thirty other men to reach Makkah. Although crossing the tunnel “*was difficult*”<sup>27</sup> (Rashid, 2019; interview), but the fear of getting caught was not enough to deter these men from performing pilgrimage.

Social Action Theory by Max Weber is relevant in this context because it highlights how the actions and reactions of individual agents occur in response to the behavior of others and are thereby oriented in their course. That is to say, how “agents are largely considered to negotiate between their personal desires and the limitations imposed by their

social context” (Flamad, 2017, n.p). The use of illicit, also illegal, strategies by Rashid to earn more money and to determine his physical movement - if reviewed in light of Social Action Theory - explains how migrants determine and negotiate between their desires and the social pressures that influence their choices. Pande (2012) suggests that more than often, in the face of structural inequalities and social marginalization, migrants “enact resistive acts and forge alliances” (p.3). They are often forced to resort to illegal means like criminal activities, cheating and manipulation. Such alliances allow the otherwise powerless groups to come together based on their shared and rather desperate circumstances to resist against domination (Pande, 2012, p.18). Thus, in order to challenge unjust societal orders and to improve their conditions, Rashid, alongside his migrant group, adopted reactionary measures to subvert the structures of subordination and power imbalances forced upon him by his circumstances.

## Changes in Social Network

During his journey, Rashid’s connection with people changed depending upon the different circumstances and occurrences he found himself in. Ergo, his system of social network was marked by both positive as well as alienating experiences. It is interesting to note how Rashid began to create a strong affinity with people, with whom he might not have shared any ethno-cultural connection, but who seemingly understood the struggles of the working class. In describing his journey of performing the pilgrimage while circumventing its legal procedure, Rashid mentioned that he was caught by a *shurta* in Makkah. A *shurta* is a police officer in Saudi Arabia.

*“...we begged the shurta and pleaded for his help. He made us three men sit in his car and took us to Mina, Arfaat and upto Muzdalifa. Then in Makkah he made us do Tawaf, and in the end, he made me cross the check posts as well”*  
(Rashid, 2019; interview)<sup>28</sup>

Upon asking that why would a *shurta* help him in doing something illegal, Rashid replied:

*“I don’t know for sure but maybe he felt our pain. He knew that we were poor and if we get caught, we will have to pay a lot of money which we did not have”* <sup>29</sup> (Rashid, 2019; interview)

From this, it could be deduced that although the two men did not share any cultural association, but the *shurta* seemed to understand the pain and struggles of the working class, and might have personally resonated with Rashid and his peers at some level. This brings to light how people from the working class, especially in a foreign land, perhaps tend to connect only on the basis of their socio-economic background regardless of their cultural or geographical variations. To this date, both Rashid and *shurta* continue to maintain their connection through social media as Rashid shared that he still has *shurta’s* “pictures on my Facebook ID” <sup>30</sup> (Rashid, 2019; interview).

Moreover, he would often find solidarity and unity within the transnational community that included migrant workers from a similar ethno-cultural background. From sitting with an Indian or a Bengali friend because they knew Urdu to being facilitated by an Indian driver for navigating routes, Rashid shared proximity and built kinship with people belonging to similar culture and areas of origin. This behavior of Rashid is in line with what Castles & Miller (2003) explain regarding how migrant minority groups “based on ideas of common origins, history, culture, experience and values” form ethnic communities create self-definition of belonging amidst the majority dominant groups (p.33).

However, yet again, Rashid’s *Kafeel* would impose his authority and try to alienate him from this community.

*“If we would sit together, Pakistanis with Pakistanis, or Pakistanis with Indians, then they [Kafeel] would call us*

*later in the evening and scold us a lot and question that why were you there with them? Maybe they feel that we are planning to go to another Kafeel”<sup>31</sup>*

At another place, he also shared:

*“Indeed there were several Pakistanis over there with me, but if I would sit with them or eat with them, then my Kafeel would question me for being in connection with fellow Pakistanis. So, of course, then I would remember my mother, father, sister, brother”<sup>32</sup> (Rashid, 2019; interview)*

Although Rashid’s aforementioned statement is not representative of all Saudi employers, but this goes without saying that besides reflecting the state practices of control, the Kafala System indeed “gives employers the misguided sense of possessing the workers” that subsequently creates the basis for much of the abuse (Pande, 2012, p.6). They not only regulate migrant’s work but, by trying to isolate them from their friends, they seem to interfere in their personal lives as well.

Furthermore, Rashid was also distanced by his family members back at home. The small amount of cash, 300 Riyals, that he had brought to Saudi Arabia were utilized “within the ten days of my arrival”<sup>33</sup> in buying house supplies and food. Rashid told us that “after six months I had the chance to buy a cell phone and only then could I talk to my family”<sup>34</sup> (Rashid, 2019; interview). Whenever he had money, he would buy a cell phone card that was worth 10 Riyals but it would only last for a 12-minute conversation.

This means that he felt distant from his family members as well which added to his sense of alienation. It shows how high cost becomes a major obstacle for them in maintaining a connection with their families back at home (Fargues, Shah & Brouwer, 2019).

*Emotional Structure of Precarious Migrant Labor*, also explores the emotions of the labor migrants that are often understood as a private matter and are therefore separated from migrant's working conditions. However, as Loustaunau (2019) denotes, "emotion and experience are co-constitutive: how the workers feel while they are working is part of what the work experience is" (p.28). Migrants' inability to speak the same language, loss of social status and social network, rigid working conditions, expensive living are only a few factors that push them into a state of helplessness, despair and anger.

In this case-study, Rashid recalled crying and feeling powerless about his situation where he missed family celebrations like Eid-ul-Fitr and more. Rashid describes his Eid in Saudi Arabia in these words:

*"On Eid, I was shivering at high temperature. I was crying. My Kafeel kept on calling me again and again. I couldn't even stand up. In whatever clothing and condition I was, I took him [Kafeel] for the Eid prayers. But my condition was not right. I didn't have the energy to go to work. I was just crying a lot at that time, I was missing my family terribly [21:56]"<sup>33</sup> (Rashid, 2019; interview)*

He further added:

*"I used to sit alone and just cry. That time, my mother was severely ill... I wanted to do something for her, but I couldn't even talk to her... My mom would then start crying, she used to ask me to come back. This made me feel helpless"<sup>34</sup> (Rashid, 2019; interview)*

In addition to that, his *Kafeel's* demanding attitude and ruthless behavior just exacerbated his sense of emotional distress and homesickness.

This gives us a window into how the management authorities tend to evoke and generate feelings of helplessness among migrant labor

## Emotional Vulnerability

For Rashid, his stay in Saudi Arabia was marked by stress and psychological anguish. Loustaunau (2018) in her study, *Exploring the Emotional Structure of Precarious Migrant Labor*, also explores the emotional structure of labor migrants that is often understood as a private matter and is therefore separated from migrant's working conditions. However, as Loustaunau (2019) posits, "emotion and experience are co-constitutive: how the workers feel while they are working is part of what the work experience is" (p.28). The migrants' inability to speak the same language, loss of social status and social network, rigid working conditions and expensive living are only a few among plethora of factors that push them into a state of helplessness, despair and anger.

During his interview, Rashid also recalled crying and feeling powerless about his situation when he missed family celebrations like *Eid-ul-Fitr* and more. Rashid described his *Eid* in Saudi Arabia in the following words:

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In addition to this, his *Kafeel's* demanding attitude and ruthless behavior

exacerbated his sense of emotional distress and homesickness.

This gives us a window into how the management authorities tend to evoke and generate feelings of helplessness among migrant labor groups. They use the migrants' emotional vulnerability in maintaining discipline and command over them, thereby indicating that emotions are not just personal but also a "social and political phenomenon" (Loustaunau, 2019, p.29). At the same time, Loustaunau (2019) further suggests how emotional distress may potentially "mobilize workers to change or resist this dehumanization" – something we noted above when Rashid adopted illicit strategies to improve his living conditions (p.29).

## **Returning Home with a Changed Perspective**

When Rashid returned to Pakistan, he realized that his two years in Saudi Arabia had given him life-long lessons. His perspective towards identity politics and nationalism had now drastically changed.

Rashid shared:

*"I had an Indian friend from Kerala over there, who would help me in navigating the routes. At night when we would drive the car secretly as a taxi, we would do it together and pick passengers from Jeddah"* <sup>37</sup> (Rashid, 2019; interview)

He further added:

*"I would sit with an Indian or a Bengali because they knew Urdu. Then, they used to teach me Arabic bit by bit"* <sup>38</sup> (Rashid, 2019; interview)

Despite the India-Pakistan rivalry that has existed long after the split of the subcontinent in 1947, Rashid's friendship with an Indian made him

challenge the internalized conflict with his neighboring nation. He was able to connect with an Indian and a Bengali on the shared grounds of language and culture. This reflects how migrants in a foreign country tend to find solidarity among their ethno-cultural peers regardless of any political and nation-state rivalries that may exist between their homelands (Castles & Miller, 2003). Not to our surprise, Rashid now possesses a stronger sense of patriotism for his country. He values the importance of living as a citizen in a free nation and is not ready to move to a foreign land under any circumstances. He shared:

*“All I have learnt is the value of Pakistan as a free nation. We should value our country more than we do at present. This is a country which is free. Abroad, you do not have any freedom; I would only suggest them [Pakistanis] to go there with the intention of Hajj [pilgrimage], not for work. These people [Saudis] do not deserve our services”* (Rashid, 2019; interview) <sup>39</sup>

He further added with passion:

*“No matter how much someone offers me to go abroad, I will not leave Pakistan. Even if I have to earn only Rs.10,000 here, for example, I will still manage somehow. But I will not leave Pakistan, never in my life will I want to go to another country. Never ever”* <sup>40</sup> (Rashid, 2019; interview)

The way Rashid’s sense of loyalty and patriotism towards his Pakistani nationhood grew, similarly, the return of migrants is usually marked with a heightened and a renewed sense of nationalism towards their hometown. Whereas, on the other hand, their sense of identity and belonging towards the host nation-state is often marked with alienation, detachment and home-sickness (Gmelch, 1980). Most times, they tend to develop a negative, perhaps even an extremist perception towards the foreign land which is in response to their degrading experiences, “strangeness of the language, people, and customs”, and the

socio-economic oppression faced in the host country (Gmelch, 1980, p.137)

## Conclusion

For over 3.16 million migrant workers in the Arab States, the majority of whom come from South Asia and Africa (Kagan, 2017), Rashid's story is neither shocking nor exceptional. While we do acknowledge that this report is based on a single interview and therefore cannot be generalized, the nature of these experiences and the qualitative information drawn from this interview serves as an important contribution, notably in identifying avenues for future research.

At present, millions of domestic workers continue to face exploitative labor conditions in Saudi Arabia; their stories remain hidden and voiceless due to complex layers of structural and social inequalities. Therefore, this report, through Rashid's voice, allows us to raise awareness on the hardships of labor migrants. It highlights the need for further research on the struggles of low-skilled Pakistani migrant labor groups in the Arab States, and calls for action in safeguarding labor rights by both the Pakistani and Saudi Arabian governments.

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## Notes

1. “The Arab States region comprise of the Occupied Palestinian Territories, Yemen, Iraq, Lebanon, Bahrain, Qatar, Syrian Arab Republic, Jordan, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia and Oman” (Kagan, 2017, p.1)

2. Domestic work is “performed in or for a household or households. This work may include tasks such as cleaning the house, cooking, washing and ironing clothes, taking care of children, or elderly or sick members of a family, gardening, guarding the house, driving for the family, and taking care of household pets. In the Arab States region, domestic workers are often divided into those who are live-in domestic workers undertaking general household duties (generally women) and cooks/gardeners/ butlers/concierge, who are not live-in (and generally men)” (Kagan, 2017, p.1)

3. Signed in 1981, the Gulf Cooperation Council is a political alliance of six Middle Eastern countries that comprise of Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, the United Arab Emirates, Qatar, Bahrain and Oman.

4. *“bs halat ki nazar se wahan jana para, pareshania thein ghar mein, halat sahi nae they, tou kuch kamane ki soch se gae they wahan par; Bs mein yeh chah raha tha k matlub bache houn tou unke lie mein kuch karskun, ya mein tou nahei parh saka, tou apne bachon ko parha sakun. Ab allah pak ne mujhe beti di hai tou mere chote mote khuab hain k mein inke lie kuch karskaun”* (Rashid, 2019; interview)

5. Recruitment agencies facilitate the process of migration. In Asia, privatized recruitments are very common that include brokers who maintain informal contacts in the destination country. Recruitment agencies are usually characterized by fraudulent practices such as demand for high fees (Fargues, Shah & Brouwer, 2019).

6. *“yahan par log khuab dekhate hain dosron ko k aap aoge tou raton rat ameer hojaoge”* (Rashid, 2019; interview)

7. *“agreement jo tha osmein btaya hoa wa tha, liken mujhe nae pata tha jub mein yahan se gya”* (Rashid, 2019; interview)

8. Government recruitment agencies do exist but from what Rashid revealed to us about his working conditions and the lack of social security he faced in Saudi Arabia while working there, reveals to us that he had gone through an informal recruitment agency.

9. ‘Anghoota-chap’ is someone who can’t read or write. So, they use their thumb impression as their signature.

10. *“iqama or license bhe teen mahine baad banta hai, tou banda bhag nahi sakta phir. Agar banda bhag jae ya kam na karey tou osko na he iqama milta hai or na he license milta hai, aur passport bhe apka woh rakhlete hain, woh zabt karlete hain k agar banda bhaag bhi jae tou kahin ja na jaskey”* (Rashid, 2019; interview)
11. *“7 baje se pehle pehle mujhe puhanchna hota tha”* (Rashid, 2019; interview)
12. *“subha 6 baje jana hota tha, phir aane ka time koi nahe hai. 12, 1 2 bhi baj sakte hain, is doran ap naa nahi kar sakte unko. Na karienge tou phir apko salary nahe denge woh....agla mahina ka end arha hai tou apko salary nahe mili tou kitna insan ko dukh hota hai key meine pora mahina kam kia or mujhe salary nahe mil rahi”* (Rashid, 2019; interview).
13. *“ Yeh bhe bari ek zimidari hoti hai k agar kuch bache ko hojae, tou buhat mushkil hoti hai humein, agar koi baat karde bacha or agar osse aage se jawab dedia, tou peeche phir jo kafeel hota hai ya oski waldah hoti hai phir who foran he police bola lete hain, aur buhat zayada blackmaik karte hain”* (Rashid, 2019; interview)
14. *“Meine os sey dou baar kaha. Ek saal mukamal hogya tha, meine osko kaha k mujhe choti dedein, liken nahi di; Ap beemar bhe houn tou unko kam chye, koi chuti nahe hai, bs juma namaz ki time par 1 ghante ki choti hai”* (Rashid, 2019; interview)
15. *“ek matlub sifarat khana kehlein, jo ek ajnabni ata hai osko koi parehsnai ho tou osmein jasakta hai, osko relief milne ki omeed hoti hai, liken dou bar mein wahan gya liken unhone mere kafeel ko ulta bola lia, k yeh apki shikayat lagarha hai, bajae os nein mera iqama bhe lia or license bhe lelia, or 6 din tak mujhe makan par nahe rehne dia; Ek Pakistani k sath, meine osko btaya k yeh masla chalrha hai ... tou 6 din meine wahan oske sath guzare”. (Rashid, 2019; interview)*
16. *“han woh zabt karlia tha ek bar k banda bhaagna bhe chahe tou woh kahin na jaske”* (Rashid, 2019; interview)
17. *“cylinder lia, khaaney ki cheezin lein”* (Rashid, 2019; interview)
18. *“baaqi ap kuch bhe laein gey ya kuch karna chahein tou apni taraf se layen, khana bhe apna hota hai osi salary mein”* (Rashid, 2019; interview)
19. *“jaise wahan gae tou sirf age jo mera kafeel tha, who english mein baat karta tha ya arbi mein baat karta tha, tou mujhe pareishani hoe, jub inki baat sahe se samjhe na banda tub yeh badtmeezi karte hain, larai bhe karte hian. tou taqreeban 6 mah tak pareshani hoi zaban smajhne mein”* (Rashid, 2019; interview)
20. *“tou jub naya banda ata hai tou osko raste ka bhe nae pata hota. Woh kehrae hain...Arabic... yahan par left right kehte hain, tou zaban ka masla bhe hota tha shoro*

21. *“matlub who is tarah samjhte hain k Pakistan unka gulam hai. Unko hukoomat karni hai. jo bhe baat woh kahenge tou unki maanlo, werna gali khao; Kafeel galian deta hai, koi bhe ho chahe woh Pakistani ya Indian ya “Indonesian ho, jub unke baat ignore karo tou ya nahe sahe se samjh sakta, tou galian dete hain”* (Rashid, 2019; interview)
22. *“ek he baat hai, woh sirf mere nahi balke jitni bhe driver wahan waadi mein kam kar rahe hote hain, woh sub ek jaise hote hain”* (Rashid, 2019; interview)
23. *“matlub woh kehta tha k khajoor tor kar leao, kachra para hai galiyon mein yeh saaf karo, mein osse bolta tha...Arabic... mein driver hun, mein tumhara safai suthrai wala nahi hun...”* (Rashid, 2019; interview)
24. Hera-Pheri, is an informal word that is used in Pakistan to define an activity/practice that involves cheating, manipulation, deception.
25. *“beyamni karna buhat zaroori hogya tha, kyonk ghar wale pareshan they or mujhe phone bhe lena tha... tou apna kahrcha wahan se nikal leta tha mein pore mahina ka; bs ek round jane ka aur ek ane ka lagta tha tou humara kam hojata tha, humare dou chakar ban jatey they, 600 riyal kama letey. Ek din chor kar try karte they k aisa na ho kisi ko pata chale, ya kafeel ko pata chale werna phans jaunga mein, tou chori karte they wahan par”* (Rashid, 2019; interview)
26. *“yeh bhe mujhe wahan par ek Pakistani ne btaya k ap is trah karoge tou apka ghar ka manage hojaega or ap bhe yahan par manage karloge. madad ki osne meri”* (Rashid, 2019; interview)
27. *“mushkil hoi thi humein”* (Rashid, 2019; interview)
28. *“phir minat ki shurta se, buhat minat ki. Shurtey ne teen bandon ko gari mein bithaya tha. Mina mein, Arfat mein, Muzdalfay tak, wapis Makkah mein tawaf karwaya, phir osne mujhe wapis huddod bhe cross karwadi”* (Rashid, 2019; interview)
29. *“mujhe sahi tou nahi pata liken woh shayad humara dard samjha hoga. Woh janta tha hum gareeb hain or agar hukoomat ne pakarlia tou humein buhat bara jurmana dena parega jo hum nahi desakte they”* (Rashid, 2019; interview)
30. *“jee oske mere pas pictures bhi mujood hai mere facebook id par”* (Rashid, 2019; interview)
31. *“Agar hum log apas mein bethjaein, Pakistani ek dosre k sath bethjaen, ya Indian or Pakistan betjhaen tou osko sham mein buhat sune ko milti thi k ap wahan kyon bethey they, shayad unko lagta tha k woh banda tanazul utha kar dosre Kafeel k pas na chaley jaen”* (Rashid, 2019; interview)

32. *“matlub Pakistani buhat they wahan par, agar kisi k sath koi khara hota hai tou phir kafeel tang karte hain k ap kyon khare hoe, phir yaad tou aati thi, waldah ki, walid sahib ki, behan bhaiyon ki bhe”* (Rashid, 2019; interview)
33. *“mere pas jo 300 riyal they, woh puhanchte he khatam hogae taqreeban 10 din mein”* (Rashid, 2019; interview)
34. *“taqreeban 6 maah k bad mobile phone lia tou ghar par baat ho sakti thi meri”* (Rashid, 2019; interview)
35. *“Ramzan ki Eid par mujhe bukhtar tha buhat ziyada, mein rorha tha, kafeel mujhe bar bar phone karha tha, or mujhe taez bukhar tha k mein khara nahi hosakta tha, meine jaise bhi kapre pehne we they, oshi mein osko namaz k lie lekar gya, meri halat nahi thi, mein nahi jaskta tha os time, mein buhat rorha tha os time mujhe ghar walon ki buhat yaad arhi thi”* (Rashid, 2019; interview)
36. *“mein roya tha, mein buhat roya tha, akele beth kar roya tha mein. Os time mere waldah buhat beemar thein... unke lie mein kuch karna chah raha tha, baat nahe hosakti thi,.. phir ami rone lagjati thien k tum wapis ajao”* (Rashid, 2019; interview)
37. *“mere sath ek Indian tha, jisne mujhe help kia, raste waste mujhe smajhae, woh kerala ka tha, raste bhe dikaha tha. Rat mein jub nikalte they chori ki gari kark, woh bhe chala tha mein bhe chala ta tha, dono phir Jeddah ke lie sawari uthate they”.* (Rashid, 2019; interview)
38. *“tou phir mein ya tou Indian se baat karta tha ya Bengali se kyonk woh urdu bol saktey they tou phir who mujhe zaban sikhate they thora thora kark”* (Rashid, 2019; interview)
39. *“meine bs yehe seekha hai k Pakistan ki buhat ehmiyat hai, Pakistan ki qadar karni chye, yeh aisa mulk hai k azad mulk hai, bahar jaker koi azadi nahi hai”* (Rashid, 2019; interview)
40. *“Mujhe zindagi mein koi kitni bhe offer kare mein Pakistan se bahar nahe jaunga. Yahan 10,000 bhe kamalun, ek baat hai, tou mein isse mein manage karna gawara karunga, bahar nahe jauna. Kubhe zindagi mein bahar nahe jaunga Pakistan se bahar. Kabhi nahi”* (Rashid, 2019; interview)