

Indian Diaspora in GCC Countries

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Abstract: *Indians have always been present in West Asia, the last 40 years have seen large-scale migration of Indian nationals to the region seeking job opportunities, especially to the Gulf States. Initially comprising primarily of unskilled and semi-skilled labour, this expatriate community is steadily encompassing small but growing numbers of skilled and professional migrants. Indians moved to the Gulf in large numbers following the oil boom of the 1970s, and their numbers grew further as the economies of the GCC states expanded in the following decades. As of date, they are one largest number of Indians living and working in the six Gulf States. Not only they are the second largest overseas Indian community situated in a geographical region, billions of remittances by the Indian expatriates are also send to India. Collectively, they also outnumber expatriates from other individual countries in the region. The Ministry of Overseas Indian Affairs (MOIA), dealing with the Indian diaspora, estimates that largest Indians live and work in West Asia, mostly in the GCC countries The majority of the Indian population in the GCC is from the southern Indian states, Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu and Kerala, while the rest belong to Gujarat, Maharashtra, Goa, Punjab, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar and Rajasthan. The original settlers in the region were mostly Sindhis and have been the integral part of the business community in the Gulf (especially in the UAE).*

Key Words: *Keywords: Diaspora, challenges, initiatives, government, trends.*

1. INTRODUCTION:

Diaspora is a Greek word which is composed of dia and speirein, means to spread or to scatter. Broadly understood as people living or settled permanently in other countries, but maintaining ties with the parent countries also. The word diaspora was initially used to refer to the dispersal of Jews and communities of Jews dispersed in exile outside Palestine. With the passing of time the term has become used for the people outside their homeland territories (Abraham, 2016). In the globalized world where any country cannot remain in isolation. All are becoming interdependent and interconnected with each other through different dimensions like social economic, political and cultural. Globalisation is a process of amalgamation of services, trade, labour and foreign investment etc. Therefore, today every country has been affected by the process of globalization either directly or indirectly. Migration is also one of the significant aspect in the process of globalisation, where people are moving from one country to another. And in this advanced world of communication technology and transport sector people easily move from one country to another. Indian Diaspora is composed of People of Indian Origin (PIOs) who have acquired the citizenship of another country and Non-Resident Indians (NRIs), Indian citizen not residing within India (Abraham, 2016). Indian government is also helping Indians to work outside through adopting liberalisation policy in 1991. Migration is not a new phenomenon. According to MOIA reports about 25 million Indians are living outside and simultaneously maintaining ties with the parent nation (Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), 2013). A big section of this diaspora are living and working in GCC countries, sometime temporary while sometime on contract basis (Kumar, Globalisation, Migration and Remittances: A Study of Indian Emigrants in Middle-East, 2016). The Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) is a regional organisation consisting of six members Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and UAE was established on 25 May 1981 through an agreement concluded in Riyadh. They all have some similarity like similar political systems founded on Islamic beliefs, same geographical condition, shared destiny and common objectives. It covers an area of 2,672,700 sq.km and the official language of the organisation is Arabic (Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), 2013).

Gulf region is wealthy with hydrocarbon resources but lacks local population (with the exception of Saudi Arabia) necessary to build or manage economic development and infrastructures. (George S. Naufal, Contemporary Indian Labor Migration in the GCC Region: Emerging Challenges and Opportunities, 2016) .

2. Nature and Trends of Indian Migration to GCC Countries:

The Gulf migration is fundamentally different from that of other mainstream destinations for several reasons. For example;

- Gulf migration is temporary by nature;
- Local citizenship is severely restricted for foreigners, nor can they invest in the local real estate market.

▪ Family reunification is limited and depends on the expatriate's monthly salary. (George S. Naufal, Contemporary Indian Labor Migration in the GCC Region: Emerging Challenges and Opportunities, 2016)
Majority of Indian migrants about 70 percent in the Gulf countries has comprised the semi-skilled and unskilled labour and the rest being white collar workers and professionals. Indian migrants in the Gulf region can be divided into the following categories:

- Unskilled labour employed in construction companies, municipalities agricultural farms domestic workers and as housemaid.
- Skilled and semi-skilled workers employed as craftsman, driver, artisan and other technical workers
- White-collar or professionals such as doctors, engineers, accountants, nurses, and paramedics, employed in government
- Private sectors and entrepreneurs.

Most of the Indian migrant labours migrate to Gulf countries for short period of time and the main reason of emigration is economic betterment, inadequate employment opportunities in origin country and better living standards in hosting country. Economic success of migrants encourages others in the origin country to migrate. (Naresh, 2015, p. 79)

Indian migration to gulf countries is not a new phenomenon. It was started 5000 years back. Census of India and any other Government agencies did not have systematic records of Indian migrants into these countries or other countries. Mostly result based on the sampled and worked done by the different author in respective countries. Information collection was mainly started in 1983 when the government of Indian take initiative for keeping records of Indian emigrants living in other countries. It comes under the preview of Ministry of Overseas Indian Affairs (MOIA) (Kumar, Globalisation, Migration and Remittances: A Study of Indian Emigrants in Middle-East, 2016).

In the early 1980s, the total population in the Gulf region (including foreign workers) was less than 15 million spread out on an area, which is roughly estimated one third of the US' land size. GCC government had to import foreign migrants at almost every skill level to address the labour shortage for infrastructure development projects. (George S. Naufal, Contemporary Indian Labor Migration in the GCC Region: Emerging Challenges and Opportunities, 2016) .The oil price increase in 1973 gave rise to a massive investment programme by the oil producing Arab countries, resulting in an increase demand for labour. These oil producing countries permitted the immigration of workers from other countries. This process resulted in a massive emigration of workers from India to gulf countries (Begum, Gulf Migration, Remittances and Economic Impact, 2009). At the initial stage although non-GCC Arab countries with the common language, religion and culture made them strongly preferred in the GCC market. However, few years later, the GCC countries had to replace Arab foreign workers with South Asian workers after the 1991 Gulf War due to various pan Arab ideologies that directly posed threats to the Gulf governments. This labour replacement benefited the South Asian countries—mostly India and Pakistan—that acted as main providers for unskilled workers for the construction sector (George S. Naufal, Contemporary Indian Labor Migration in the GCC Region: Emerging Challenges and Opportunities, 2016).

Consequently, after flourishing of oil GCC Countries in 1970s, when her economy expanded, large number of Indians migrated towards the region in search of employment and to make their life better. (Kohli, Indian Migrants in the Gulf Countries, 2014). As of date about seven million Indians are living and working in the prosperous oil-rich nation. Majority are from Saudi Arabia, UAE and Kuwait. (Shukla, 2015)

Although in the early 1990s, there was declined trend of Indian labor migrants and most of them come back to home due to political crisis. Political uncertainty in Gulf region could result in hostilities which would directly impact all the foreign labor working in this region. But in the aftermath of the First Gulf War, the labor outflows from India to Gulf almost doubled from 1991. This trend indicates large number of migrants would make their way back to the Gulf countries to meet the demand for labor in the post-war reconstruction. Again the decreased trend observed during 1997-99 period due to some host countries particularly Saudi Arabia and Kuwait adopted control and restrictive immigration policies to control foreign non-Arab population through localization (Naresh, 2015, p. 80). The number of Indian migrants increased dramatically from 1990 to 2013 in all GCC countries, with the growth the greatest in the United Arab Emirates. Along with growth in absolute numbers, the proportion of Indians among the migrant population stock also increased in all countries except Saudi Arabia, where a marginal decline occurred (R, 2016, p. 91). Indian migrants dominate the largest group of foreign workers in every Gulf country. While Indian expatriates currently constitute almost 50% of all foreign workers in the private sector in Oman. In 2014, Indian migrants had the largest share of migrants in the UAE, totalling nearly 3.1 million.

Indians, along with other migrants to the region, benefited from the Gulf States' policy of inviting foreign manpower in order to offset the mismatch between the availability of local workforce and the requirement to sustain the rapid modernisation of these economies. The presence of migrants comprising almost 70 per cent of the total workforce in the GCC, thus, has profound implications for the GCC states in the social, political, economic and cultural spheres. (Kohli, Indian Migrants in the Gulf Countries, 2014)

3. EXISTING PROBLEMS:

The high level committee estimates that of the total migrants 70 percent are semi- skilled and unskilled, 20 percent are white collar workers and 10 percent are professionals. The living and working condition of unskilled and semi-skilled Indian workers in the Gulf leave much to be desired. A majority of these NRIs are young males. Over 60 percent have had little formal education. On arrival in their country of destination in the Gulf, they are usually fed and housed in barrack-like tenements and engaged as labour as construction projects. There are many unfortunate cases of recruiting agents duping illiterate job seekers, often in collusion with perspective employers. As per prevalent practice, the employee is required to hand over his travel documents to the employer on arrival. The document is kept in the custody of the employer, enabling him to exercise undue hold over the employee and to ignore alter the terms of the employment.

The other problem faced by migrants in the Gulf countries are the following.

- Non-compliance labour contract by the employer after arrival. Denial of jobs, wages and non-wage benefits as per the original labour contract. In many cases, forcing skilled workers to do unskilled jobs with low wages.
- Creating hardship for the new migrants by employers by not receiving them on arrival at the airport after sponsoring their visas.
- Salaries are often not paid due. At times, they are not paid at all for several months towards the end of contractual period.
- Forcing them to work long hours, more than the recognized eight hours per day
- Non-payment of legitimate overtime dues.
- Poor and unsatisfactory transportation arrangements for labourers from camps to work sites.
- Lack of adequate medical facilities for workers.
- Non-payment of airfare for return journey to India after two years per labour rules.
- Ill- treatment and molestation of Indian women who were recruited as cooks or housemaids by the employers or agents sending them under false pretences.
- Severe stress leading to serious psychological problems and suicides. Concerns for their families left behind in India, difficult living and working conditions and insecurity of jobs has often led to depression and melancholia, resulting in suicide in extreme cases.
- Workers who want to return India on completion of their contracts or due to an unforeseen emergency like sickness or death in in the family often find that exit formalities are inordinately delayed.
- The usual practice in the Gulf is to deposit the passport of migrants with the employer. Employers refuse to give the passport to the worker when he wants it, creating much hardship. In some cases, when he changes the employer without his consent, the worker becomes an illegal migrants. (Prakash, 2009)

4. REMITTANCES:

Recently much attention has been given to the role of remittances in the economic development of developing countries. Remittances are generally defined as that portion of migrants earnings sent from the migration destination to the place of origin. Remittances can be sent in cash or kind. But, usually the term remittances is limited to indicate the monetary and other cash transfers by immigrants to their families at home country. Remittances reflect the local labour working in the global economy and have been shown to explain partly the connection between growth and integration with the world economy. According to a World Bank report workers remittances provide valuable financial resources to developing countries, particularly the poorest. The remittances from migrants working abroad are important for both families of migrants and the balance of payment of their home country. The remittances contribute significantly to the gross domestic product as well as foreign exchange earnings of developing countries. India has ranked first among all other countries in terms of volume of remittances with US\$ 11 billion and contributed 2.6 percent of the gross domestic product in the year 1999. According to International Migration Report 2002, India has received US\$ 9.034 billion in the year 2000 compared to US\$ 2.352 billion in the year 1990. Meanwhile the contribution of remittances to gross domestic product during the year 1999-2000 was 4.4 percent compared to 1.5 percent during the year 1991-92. In the year 2003, India shared 73% of the total remittances received by South Asian Countries and 15% of the world wide remittances. In the year 2003, the total volume of remittances received by India rose to US\$ 17.4 billion compared to US\$ 11.1 billion in the year 2001 showing an increase of US\$ 6.3 billion. About 50-60 percent of total remittances received by India has come from West Asian countries.

According to Reserve Bank of India, Indians worldwide remit about US\$ 15 billion a year contributing about 3% of the gross national product. (Begum, Gulf Migration, Remittances and Economic Impact, 2009). In 2014 more than US\$ 35 billion of remittance to India came from the Gulf accounting for more than half of all the remittance inflows. Remittances from the Gulf region have steadily increased since 2010, while money from other destinations have decreased in 2012 and have not fully recovered since then. The share of remittances from the Gulf region also increased between 2010 and 2014 while the share of money transfers from non-GCC countries partly declined. Still, any change to the amount of remittances sent by Indians could have significant effects on the receiving end. For

instance, almost 90% of emigration from Kerala is towards the GCC countries. Historically, Kerala's local economy is heavily supported by remittance inflows from the Gulf region. Any long term changes to remittance flows would have significant effects on the receiving communities back in India. (George S. Naufal, Contemporary Indian Labor Migration in the GCC Region: Emerging Challenges and Opportunities, 2016)

The major share of remittances from Gulf countries is received by Kerala. A survey of Kerala migration of 2014 has found that flow of Keralites to abroad still continues mainly because of the state's inability to provide suitable jobs for the increasing number of educated youths and the glamour associated with Gulf emigration was still strong among the state's youth. The number of Kerala emigrants as estimated by the migration survey in 2014 is 23.63 lakhs (Philip, 2014).

5. IMPACT OF WORKFORCE

Indian workforce contributes to the development of both sending as well as receiving countries even though the contribution to sending country is significant. Development of significant level has been seen at the national as well as the micro level or household level in terms of household earning, food, health, housing and educational standards. This significant level of change also has been also seen at the community level (Kumar, Recent trend and Pattern of Indian Emigration to Gulf Countries: A Diaspora Perspective, 2016).

5.1 On Sending Countries

Migration has impact on the development of the sending countries in various and complex ways, with the remittances having a multiplier effect upon them. Diasporas play important role in promoting trade and investment flows between the receiving and the sending countries. Temporary migrations encourage more remittance flows than compared to the permanent settlements, especially in case of semi-skilled workers, who are not accompanied with their families and are expected to return to their native country. The process of brain drain is commonly considered one of the most negative facets of international migration from the perspective of home country development. The loss of highly educated individuals can impose at least three kinds of specific losses on those left at home. First, the presence of highly educated people may generate spill over benefits to other citizens. Bright people, and especially scientists and engineers, contribute to innovation, technological adaptation and adoption, accelerating productivity growth. Having bright colleagues or counterparts can raise productivity through mutual interaction. And enlightened elite has the Potential to improve governance and civic performance of society. Of course, highly educated people also earn relatively high incomes, so it is not always obvious how much of these spill-over benefits are effectively captured by the highly educated individuals themselves. Second, in many countries a significant portion of the cost of education is paid for out of fiscal revenues. The departure of highly educated emigrants then represents an export of human capital in which the nation has invested. In addition, there is a loss of potential tax revenue that might have been raised from the income of the emigrant, though this needs to be balanced against diminished public spending on the emigrant and his or her family. Third, the loss of key personnel can render more difficult the delivery of critical social services, such as health care and education.

5.2 On Receiving Countries

Developed countries, are often on the receiving end of migration streams, the positive economic gains from immigration are largely the result of the mixture of cheap and eager labourers into the economy (Guha, 2016). More than 6 million Indian workers are engaged in various kinds of jobs in these six GCC countries. These are doctors, nurses, engineers, architects, accountants, and managers in white collar jobs category. They are very necessary to run any country in modern time. They prepare and educate the upcoming generation of receiving countries. They also help to the people in basic health care facility. The GCC Countries has been receiving largest number of nurses from India. Without them, people of these countries could not receive smooth facility of health care. Indian migrant peoples also consist important number of engineers and architects who provided countries as modern looks like present infrastructure (Kumar, Recent trend and Pattern of Indian Emigration to Gulf Countries: A Diaspora Perspective, 2016). There are some dark side also like:

Firstly receiving country faces the problem of unemployment, especially young generation.

Receiving country become dependent either directly or indirectly on foreign workforce, which is also not good for them.

Sometime clash of culture also become the reason of concern when nationals cannot mix themselves with the foreigners.

6. CHALLENGES:

- The ongoing unethical or illegal recruitment conducted by recruitment agents is an important challenge faced by the Gulf, Indian governments and migrant workers. For example, excessive charging of fees on workers, along with contract substitution, do not only raise important regulatory concerns for Indian migrants, but also harm the

efforts of both Indian and Gulf governments in securing labour rights under major international labour organization (ILO) conventions.

- The development of local human capital known as “localization” is a direct challenge to Indian migrants and all other migrants – particularly high-skilled – in the Gulf markets.
- The changing price of oil is another major concern that also affects the Indian and all expatriate communities in the Gulf region. While this challenge is not a new phenomenon, it has recently developed due to the emergence of shale oil and also the signed deal between Iran and the six major powers that brings expectations of an increase in the supply of oil due to the introduction of Iranian oil in international markets. Low long-term oil prices greatly affect oil revenues for the GCC countries, which create budget deficits and affects their short and long-term construction projects in the region. (George S. Naufal, Contemporary Indian Labor Migration in the GCC Region: Emerging Challenges and Opportunities, 2016)

7. Indigenization in the GCC Countries:

The discovery of oil in early 20th century opened the new opportunities in international market. Till 1960’s most of the migrants to GCC countries in the form of work force came from the neighbouring Arab countries like Lebanon, Palestine, Jordan, and Syria etc. But the hike price of oil in 1973 encouraged gulf countries to expand their economic plans rapidly. In such a situation, Asian workers began to migrate for work to these countries. Ever increasing labour migration is seen after the effect of oil boom and is engaged in various occupations ranging from building and construction, maintenance, repairs, trading and domestic work. Asian workers migration to the Gulf was the move of mutually beneficial option for both the origin and destination countries. During the last twenty years, the flow of Asian workers to Middle East has increased in such an amount that increasing proportion of expatriates to total population is considered as growing dependency on foreign labour force as well as one of the root causes behind unemployment in those countries. Many countries like Saudi Arabia, Oman, U.A.E. and Qatar have come up with its policy of localization of labour means reserving proportion of jobs for local people (for nationals) only. The term “localization” carries specific socio-economic reference derived from the term “locals” which is distinctly used to indicate nationals and issues related to nationals. Gulf nations view localization as the desired alternative to continuous dependency on expatriate workers, where a country that imports labour faces a problem of unemployment amongst its citizens (or nationals). This situation is prevailing in all the six GCC countries and the problem is continuously provoking, particularly for educated citizens (Das, 2010, pp. 1,2). Nitaqat is an aspect of the “Saudisation” programme started by the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia for an internal security and demographic challenge. A large number of educated youth, unemployed Saudis that need jobs came together with a desire to avoid the agitation witnessed in the region during the Arab Spring. (Kohli, Indian Migrants in the Gulf Countries, 2014) Protest encouraged the leaders to begin the process of nationalism to give employment to their citizens and remove the dissatisfaction of youth. As a large number of youth jumped in protest because of dissatisfaction of the existing regimes. They demanded for better employment opportunity and contribution in state affairs. Locals believe that they would not get employment as foreigners was getting more opportunity as compare to them. In this regard Saudi Arabia taken an initiative and started ‘Nitaqat’ programme, which aim was to give more and more employment to their citizens. (Pradhan, 2014). Nitaqat programme was meant to legalise the foreign workers. It made it obligatory for local companies to employ one Saudi for every ten migrant employees. Those who could not get another job has to return home. As a consequence of this law many people who were working illegally, has to leave (The Indian Express, 2013) This programme make it obligatory for companies to reserve some percentage of jobs for nationals of Saudi. This law has affected Indians working in Saudi. Other GCC Countries like Kuwait, UAE, Oman and Bahrain also considering about such type of plans although still not implemented. Like in 1990s government of UAE issued policies to fix some quota to emigrant labour and give employment to their nationals. And indicated that personal managers and secretaries had to be the nationals of UAE. The Manpower and Government Restructuring Program of Kuwait suggested quota 60 percent, 15 percent and two percent in banks, real state sector, manufacturing industries respectively and so on. These programmes will certainly affect those Indians who are working in these countries, if implemented (Pradhan, 2014).

The Govt. of Oman since 1988 with an aim to Omanise its labour force and cut down the growing dependence on foreign labour, increasing local unemployment, has become a growing concern for the citizens as well as for the Omani government. Omanization program targets was to increase the percentage of Omani and stop the continuous country’s dependence on the expatriate manpower by replacing Omani nationals for foreign labour (Das, 2010, p. 2). The GCC is considering a uniform law to control the presence of foreign workers in the region through returning non-contracted and unskilled foreign labour to their home states. The council will also attempt to eliminate workers who claim skills that they do not possess. Bahrain and Qatar, where emigrants constitute around 80–85 per cent of the total population, would be able to enforce limited indigenisation. Few see it as a temporary phase and remain positive about working in the Gulf: if opportunities are limited in one country, for example, Saudi Arabia, as a result of government policies, they are optimistic about finding work in another country, for example, in the UAE. An article in *The Diplomat* quotes a returnee migrant from Saudi Arabia to Kerala’s Mallapuram district as saying: “I have already

contacted agents for a job in the UAE or Bahrain...” adding that he is ready to leave again for the Gulf (Kohli, Indian Migrants in the Gulf Countries, 2014, pp. 124-127)

8. MEASURES TAKEN BY THE INDIAN GOVERNMENT:

The 1983 Emigration Act, which replaced the 1922 Emigration Act, has been designed mainly to ensure protection for vulnerable categories of unskilled and semiskilled workers, and women going abroad to work as housemaids and domestic workers. The Act provides a regulatory and legal framework in respect to emigration of Indian workers for overseas employment on a contractual basis. Under the Act, all “Recruiting Agents” are obliged to register with the government before recruiting for overseas employment. The new Ministry of Overseas Indian Affairs, constituted in 2004, has taken the initiative to bring about a paradigm shift by amending the Emigration Act (1983) and introducing welfare measures to complement its protection objectives, such as:

- An e-governance project to modernize the offices of the Protectorate of Emigrants (which administers the Emigration Act and the associated ECR monitoring) and make emigration of uneducated workers simple, transparent, and orderly.
- A Universal Integrated Electronic Remittance Gateway, a partnership between the Ministries of Overseas Indian Affairs and Indian banks, aimed at making the transmission of remittances more convenient and less costly.
- Pravasi Bharatiya Bima Yojana (PBBY), since 2006 a compulsory insurance policy with an enhanced cover of 500,000 rupees for all worker migrants recruited by agents. An increasing number of insurance companies are to provide cover at a reasonable premium for contingencies such as death, physical disability while in employment abroad, transportation of the body in case of death, maternity benefits for female migrants, and medical benefits for families of migrants in India, etc.
- An Overseas Indian Workers’ Welfare Fund.

The Indian government also has introduced the landmark Overseas Citizenship of India (OCI) initiative, which affords partial dual citizenship benefits. (To date, mainly highly skilled migrants settled and naturalized in developed countries have taken advantage of these benefits.) Another measure, which is primarily intended for Indian workers in the Gulf — who send large remittances back home but can never hope to become naturalized citizens of the countries where they work because of restrictive regimes — grants Indian citizens abroad the right to vote in India elections.

These two major policy measures aim to empower migrant workers to participate in India’s socio economic and political development rather than merely looking to India for protection and/or welfare. The measures are complemented by the introduction of Pravasi Bharatiya Samman awards to 15 overseas Indians each year “to recognize achievements of the Indian Diaspora and their contribution to strengthening of India’s relations with other countries, promoting the honour and prestige of India, and fostering interests of overseas Indians.” (Khadria, 2010)

9. CONCLUSION:

Recently, diaspora, as a word, has been most commonly used in international politics. It plays an important role in strengthening bilateral relations between countries. Indian diaspora is a leading phenomenon in the world because of its position as the second largest diaspora and due to its large expat population. Indian people migrate around the world, in particular to the West Asian region, which saw a rise after the oil boom in 1970. The GCC countries have reached to an advanced level of economy and are searching for diversification. Therefore, it needs larger number of manpower, both skilled and unskilled. Thus, substantial number of expats migrate to GCC countries from the all over the world. Nature of diaspora is different from other parts of world and expats face certain problems in the GCC. However, Indian people have migrated in large numbers to GCC countries almost for four decades now. GCC authorities provide them attractive salaries and incentives. The number of Indian migrants has seen a significant rise and currently, there are more than six million expats living in the GCC countries who contribute to the development, and help in education, health, and infrastructure of these countries. On the other hand, they receive handsome salaries, which results in the increase of their standard of living as well as GDP of their parent country. The Indian diaspora also plays a crucial role to strengthen bilateral relations of India and GCC countries. Although, diaspora has also several negative impacts on GCC countries like migrated people control the large number jobs these in these countries and their dependency on foreign manpower. This leads to the enactment of laws to stop unemployment of the natives. Expats also face problems due to the nature of migration and the work place. India government also taken several initiatives to stop the exploitation of their workers abroad.

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