

## **Gulf migration took toll on children's education in Azamgarh-Abu Zafar**

Azamgarh (Uttar Pradesh), Jan 1 (IANS) For 25 years, Mohammad Ikram worked day and night in Saudi Arabia to fund the education of his four sons back home here, waiting for the day they would be able to stand on their own feet. But they dropped out of school and ruined his hopes forever.

He is just one of many men in Azamgarh who left their families to eke out a living and support the education of their children, only to find them drifting away from studies in their absence.

'After spending 25 years abroad, I realized that I did wrong. Only god knows how hard I have worked to feed them and to educate them, but it remained a dream for me,' Ikram, who hails from Sagri village and worked as a barber in Dammam, told IANS here.

Ikram ponders whether it was worth the effort to live a life of self-denial and austerity for his children.

Migration, particularly to the Gulf countries, is a common phenomenon in Azamgarh and nearby areas for want of good opportunities here.

According to Mohammad Arshad, head of the primary section at Madrasatul Islah -- a century-old madrasa, fathers of only 20 percent students in the institution are present here. Though the mothers are at home, they are not able to exercise much control over the children once they enter teenage.

Writer Imran Ahmad says over 60 percent of the district's people work in Mumbai, Delhi and Gulf countries. The trend is more common in the Muslim community.

Ahmad himself has worked in Saudi Arabia for 13 years as a perfume seller.

At the time of his eldest son's education, he was in Azamgarh and the boy went on to pursue his graduation. However, he soon went to Saudi Arabia to work and his other two sons stopped studying. One of them dropped out in Class 5 while the other discontinued studies after Class 11.

Ahmad has written about this incident in his book 'Dastan Zakhmi Musafir ki'.

'If the father is not at home, who will take care and insist children to go school? Children, especially boys, leave their studies from Class 4 to Class 7,' he said.

He feels there should be more awareness about the importance of education and dropouts should be counselled.

Wiser after his own experience, Ahmad advises people against migration. 'Life is a social responsibility but people work there like machines,' he says.

Abdul Ahad Rahbar, ex-principal of Abdul Aziz Ansari Degree College in Jaunpur district, however, says it's not so easy.

'Nobody wants to leave their families and go out, but they have to because of compulsions. There is no

other way to work, that's why people run to Gulf countries and metro cities,' Rahbar told IANS.

According to government data, there is only one factory in the district -- the Kisan Sahkari Chini Mill (sugar mill) established in 1975, and even that has been closed for the last three years.

Ravi Kumar, who works at an embroidery firm in Mumbai, dropped out of Class 9 in 2004. In hindsight, he feels he made a mistake.

'It was a very big mistake, but there was nobody to counsel me,' said Kumar, whose father works as a construction labourer in Punjab.

(Abu Zafar can be contacted at abuzafar@journalist.com)

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