

Why Do Some Indians Opt To Migrate To Other Countries?

—By Wing Commander Dinesh Mathur, VSM (Retd.)

Group Discussion is widely known as a platform for the exchange of ideas, the promotion of teamwork, the development of critical thinking, and the refinement of communication skills. Notably, the significance of the Group Discussion is not confined to conducting a simple conversation; it is an indispensable mechanism for decision-making and interpersonal development. It is now considered an essential tool of communication, learning, and cooperation in a variety of settings, including business, politics, education, and various social interactions. Yet another significant feature of Group Discussions is that they encourage a culture of open dialogue, critical enquiry, and mutual respect among participating members.

Group Discussions are also a popular part of the selection procedure in a large number of entry-level job interviews and academic admissions. This is because Group Discussions help recruiters evaluate candidates' teamwork abilities, power of communication, leadership potential, ability to analyse problems and other significant personality traits. In a typical setting, to conduct a selection Group Discussion (GD) to evaluate candidates, participants are given a topic and asked to discuss it within a set time frame. The candidates are given a free hand to speak as they desire, while recruiters observe the proceedings and assess various skills and qualities of the participants. The assessors deliberately refrain from guiding the GD proceedings. This mode of conducting the GD helps assessors to observe several personality traits of the candidates as they freely interact with other group members.

Quite a few Public Sector Banks (PSBs) conduct GDs during their process of selection of Probationary Officers (POs). This topic was picked up by a group of candidates who were called for the selection of Probationary Officers in a PSB. All candidates arrived formally dressed and were allotted Identification Numbers. They were asked not to address one another by name, but by these Identification Numbers. Thereafter, they were made to sit in a semi-circle, and the assessors briefed the participants about the conduct of this GD. The candidates were given 5 minutes to recap and jot down some points, which they could refer



Wing Commander Dinesh Mathur is a senior selector and trainer. He has worked as a selector at two Services Selection Boards and as Chief Instructor at Defence Institute of Psychological Research, New Delhi. He has conducted many Interviews and Group Discussions during the last two decades and has authored four books, including two on Interviews and Group Discussions. He has received Vishisht Seva Medal awarded by the President of India and Commendation by the Chief of Air Staff.

to during the discussion. They were asked to conclude the Group Discussion within 25-30 minutes.

Subsequently, the discussion proceeded in the following manner :

Candidate No. 3 : Good afternoon, friends. We have selected a burning topic of the day that directly concerns all of us, I mean the younger generation of our country in particular. We are well aware that migration is one of the oldest stories of humanity, which broadly implies people moving from one place to another for a variety of reasons. Interestingly, it is one of the most studied topics in the Social Sciences. It is also a phenomenon which is rather complex and ever-changing. It may be due to reasons that are demographic, educational, cultural, economic, legal, and many more. But, I think, in the context of young Indians migrating to other countries, educational and economic factors play a major role, though some wealthy and successful people are now also leaving India in large numbers. This issue has now become a matter of great concern as presently India stands out as the world's largest source of migrant workers and also the top receiver of remittances through them. As per the topic given to us, we are required to deliberate on various reasons responsible for the migration of Indians

to other countries and suggest ways to address this serious issue, ensuring that our national interests are best taken care of. You may now express your views on this topic. Thanks.

Candidate No. 1 : Number 3 has introduced the topic quite well. We know India has become the world's most populated country after overtaking China recently, and as we just pointed out, it sends the largest number of migrants to other countries. India has to go a long way to become a developed nation, and we must utilise this large human capital for our developmental work rather than letting it go to help other countries. Therefore, dealing with this issue assumes utmost significance in the Indian context in particular.

Candidate No. 8 : Historically speaking, migration is an old phenomenon, and in the Indian context, it has been happening in waves. In the mid-19th to early 20th Century, a large number of labourers left India due to poverty and in search of a better life. Also, a large number of Indians left for the Gulf countries for similar reasons. Later, from 1970 onwards, brain-drain commenced owing to a lack of opportunities in India. And for the last more than 10 years or so, a large number of people coming from all strata of our society are leaving India due to multiple reasons.

Candidate No. 10 : Friends, it is felt that two factors are broadly responsible for such migrations. These factors are known as "Push Factors" and "Pull Factors". Let me explain. Push factors are usually the reasons, like a lack of job opportunities, absence of good education infrastructure, poor or unhygienic living conditions, low income, and non-availability of needed medical services, etc. On the other hand, pull factors are the reasons, like better job prospects, opportunities to earn higher wages, hope of staying in better living conditions, etc. So, friends, how these push and pull factors play out in a country at a particular time would largely guide the pattern of migration in that country. We have to reflect on these factors in the Indian context.

Candidate No. 5 : Friends, I agree with Number 10. While you may discuss these factors in some detail, the fact of the matter remains that a person will not

like to leave his/her native country and migrate to some other country unless he/she has strong reasons to do so. We have seen, more often than not, natives of countries do not welcome migrants from other countries so easily and do not mingle with them due to the vast cultural differences between them. Moreover, they consider these migrants as a serious threat to their employment prospects in their native country. Hence this dislike.

Candidate No. 2 : Yes, quite right.

Candidate No. 4 : I think that Number 5 has brought out some bare facts about this topic rather bluntly.

Candidate No. 3 : To illustrate that India sends the largest number of migrants to other countries, I would like to present some data to support this point. In the year 2020, India was the top origin of international migrants, with more than 18 million Indians living abroad. India was followed by Mexico (11 million), the Russian Federation (10.8 million) and China (10 million). Further, the top 5 also includes the Syrian Arab Republic with over 8 million emigrants, mainly refugees who have been displaced to several countries including Turkiye, Jordan and Lebanon. More than 2.9 million Indian immigrants were in the U.S. as of 2023, making it the second most popular global destination for Indians after the U.A.E., and the number of Indians in the U.A.E. in 2024 was 4.3 million.

Candidate Number 8 : Yes, while India stands out as the world's largest source of migrant workers, it is also the top receiver of remittances through them. Let me tell you that in 2024, India brought in a record \$129.1 billion in remittances—that is more than double the amount received by the next country, Mexico. India has consistently received more than 10% of the world's remittances for most of the last 25 years. We know remittances are the money sent home by people working or living abroad to support their families or communities.

Candidate No. 6 : That's quite illustrative.

Candidate No. 9 : Perhaps the main reason for such a large number of Indians going abroad is the fact that they find much better avenues to work in those countries. To illustrate, if they move to the U.A.E., they might triple their income, and if they go to the U.S., this could mean they can earn five times more. That's the state of affairs. So, all said and done, it makes much more economic sense for Indians to migrate to other nations. Interestingly, it is also said that it will take more than 20 years of economic growth for India to reach similar income levels of many of these countries today. Meanwhile, migration may continue unabated.

Candidate No. 10 : I want to add that these remittances contribute significantly

to the economies of some countries. For example, in Tajikistan, these remittances make up almost half of the country's GDP, and in Nepal, 25% of its GDP comes from remittances from workers who are in India. However, in India, it contributes to only about 3.3% of its GDP. But, let's not forget that India suffers a huge loss, as such migrations lead to a significant brain drain, since a large number of skilled and highly qualified people leave India. If India could retain this valued manpower, it could significantly contribute to India's development. That is certainly a big loss.

Candidate No. 7 : That is an important point.

Candidate No. 3 : Let us not forget that remittances are not the only way in which migrants assist their native economies. It is estimated that about 40% of migrants ultimately return to their home nation, and they bring along their savings and higher earning potential as well. They bring back a higher knowledge base and new technical skills. Upon their return, they utilise their savings to invest in building their homes and create additional assets. For example, Indian expats who returned to India from Silicon Valley have largely contributed to establishing the IT industry in the country. It is understood that most of Bengaluru's IT firms were started by Indians who had returned from the U.S., which assisted in converting Bengaluru city into a hub of the IT industry in India.

Candidate No. 2 : Yes, that's quite true. I agree with you.

Candidate No. 1 : Though a large number of Indians have been migrating to other countries, of late, these countries are becoming stricter by implementing more stringent migration policies owing to political or economic pressures. In this regard, the current difficult situations prevailing in Canada and the U.S. are relevant, and presently, protecting our diaspora in these countries has become an issue. We are well aware that the new American President Mr. Donald Trump has drastically changed the rules governing migrants, and studying and moving to Australia has also become more difficult now. Thus, the changing political environment and policy changes in the U.S., U.K., Canada and Australia have influenced students to seek alternative educational destinations.

Candidate No. 5 : Friends, we have adequately highlighted the quantum and associated issues related to Indian migrants in other countries. As required by the topic given to us, we should now focus on the reasons which explain why Indians are increasingly seeking lives outside India. Am I right?

Candidate No. 9 : Yes, you are right. At the beginning of our discussion, we briefly mentioned the push and pull

factors which are largely responsible for such migrations. I think, among all these factors, economic opportunities are the most important one. While India has certainly made good economic progress, the gap between the rich and the poor has also widened. A high level of unemployment and wage stagnation is prevalent in the job market in several sectors. There are limited high-paying jobs, and tough competition exists to grab these job opportunities. On the other hand, countries such as Australia, the U.S., the U.K., Canada and several Gulf nations offer much higher salaries, job security and better work environments.

Candidate No. 1 : Very correct. In this regard, considerably more attractive job opportunities are offered by several countries for qualified professionals, especially in the fields of Healthcare, IT and Engineering. As a result, professionals who qualify from India's top institutions in these sectors look for jobs abroad in developed countries and do get their desired jobs.

Candidate No. 8 : Another very important factor for migration is the educational aspirations of our young people. India has only a few educational institutions that are rated very highly at the international level. And, there is intense competition in India to secure admissions in these few institutions. Moreover, owing to the availability of interdisciplinary programs, subsidised tuition fees, better research opportunities, and academic freedom available in universities of some developed countries, many Indian students prefer to go to these countries to study, and more often than not, they also find appropriate job opportunities matching their qualifications on completion of their education there. In most cases, they opt to become permanent residents of these countries. Thus, educational aspirations have now become a major factor responsible for the migration of a very large number of young people from India.

Candidate No. 4 : Yes, you are absolutely correct.

Candidate No. 10 : Friends, I think the desire to enjoy a much better quality of life is another important factor for the migration of a large number of Indians. Most developed countries offer a significantly cleaner environment, improved public services, a reliable rule of law, and more discernibly enhanced infrastructure. Further more, sanitation, healthcare, public transportation, and better air quality are other factors where India lags behind significantly. Quite a few Indian cities are presently categorised as the most polluted cities in the world, which impacts health adversely. Given these conditions, the aspiration of leading a more comfortable, secure and orderly life makes a large number of Indians migrate to other countries.

Candidate No. 5 : Many Indians are disturbed by witnessing corruption, bureaucratic inefficiencies, and the current polarisation in Indian society. They wish to stay in a society which is more inclusive, secular, and democratic. The growing intolerance in our country has caused a feeling of unease in a section of the society. These factors are also considered to impact migration to other nations.

Candidate No. 6 : Yes, I agree.

Candidate No. 3 : We should not ignore the numerous current challenges in our country that contribute to migration to other nations. These would include, lack of good education, overpopulation, pollution and poor healthcare facilities, especially in rural and backwards areas. In some areas, poverty and gender inequality still prevail, making daily life more cumbersome. Some people, due to these challenges, manage to go abroad even by selling their assets. And, in this desperate effort, quite a few innocent people from our villages and small towns are cheated by migration agents and suffer a great deal.

Candidate No. 7 : Yes, these are well-known facts.

Candidate No. 8 : I want to add that due to a discernible increase in awareness and connectivity, migration has now become much easier. In this regard, much enhanced use of social media and online or virtual education has made people well-informed about international opportunities and education. Some have a strong urge for global exposure. In addition, if one member of the family goes abroad, he/she facilitates the process of migration of other family members or friends to that country as well. As a result, we find several family members of one family migrating to the respective foreign country.

Candidate No. 9 : Many Indians migrate to other countries to earn significantly more money than they can in their own country. Indian workers, especially those working in the Gulf and Western countries, send a considerable amount of money home to help their families, pay for their children's education, or build more assets at home. Some even plan to work abroad for a certain number of years and then return to India, much richer, to start a business or invest in other ventures. So, earning more money is a big pull factor.

Candidate No. 10 : Friends, I wish to talk about Indian students who proceed abroad to pursue their education. Many factors, including visa policies and the cost of living, influence where students choose to pursue higher education. After study permits were capped in Canada due to some stress in the bilateral relations of India and Canada, Australia became the top choice for students in 2024. With tighter U.S. visa policies, these choices

may further change. Recently, there has been a considerable increase in visa and admission fees in Australia, also. However, the number of students going to the U.K. and New Zealand has not changed much. Thus, migrations are substantially impacted due to changing geopolitical situations.

Candidate No. 3 : I want to draw your attention to the fact that when our students go abroad for higher studies and decide to settle in other countries, they are seen to be performing exceedingly well, working in the most prestigious global corporations. In this regard, some prominent names of Indian-origin global CEOs are worth mentioning. These would include Mr. Satya Nadella (Microsoft), Mr. Sundar Pichai (Alphabet), Mr. Arvind Krishna (IBM), Mr. Vimal Kapur (Honeywell), Mr. Shailesh Jejurikar (P&G), and Mr. Vasant Narasimhan (Novartis), to name a few. Shouldn't India seriously ponder retaining such rare talent in our own country to assist in India's development? I think this question should worry all of us. Am I right?

Candidate No. 1 : Yes, you are right, and I fully agree with you. This is high time we worried about this issue. Better late than never.

Candidate No. 8 : Friends, I want to talk about yet another dimension of the issue of migration from India. For the last 10 years or so, the rich and the influential have also been leaving India. This is an altogether new phenomenon. It has been reported that 23,000 millionaires have left India during the last few years to avoid tax liabilities and live a more comfortable life in more developed countries. While the brainy have started migrating since the 1970s, the rich have been leaving India recently. A large number of IITs/IIMs passouts have been leaving India for some time. The wealthy have even been sending their children abroad for secondary education and buying citizenship in developed countries.

Candidate No. 5 : Friends, I think we have discussed adequately the issue of migration. Let us now make a brief mention of the measures to address this issue also.

Candidate No. 10 : Yes, you are right. I think addressing the root causes, such as job creation, education reform, significant infrastructure development, political transparency, and curtailing corruption, may encourage more Indians to stay and invest in their homeland's future. Of course, addressing these causes would be a time-consuming process and would need the focused attention of our government and other stakeholders. The sooner we pay attention to these measures, the better it will be. There is certainly no other way out, friends.

Candidate No. 9 : Friends, the time allotted to us for this GD is over. Let us conclude now.

Candidate No. 8 : If you all agree, I could conclude.

Candidate No. 10 : Yes, please go ahead.

Candidate No. 8 : Friends, our discussion was quite interesting and informative. After introducing the topic, we briefly mentioned the historical background of the migration issue. Then we pointed out the push and pull factors that are responsible for migration. Thereafter, we presented some data to highlight migration trends in some countries. We also talked about the benefits which migrants accrue to their native countries and the overall impact of these migrations. This followed a fairly detailed discussion on all the push and pull factors which cause migration. We highlighted the various challenges in India which increase this problem. Finally, we also briefly suggested some measures to address this issue.

That's all, friends. Have a pleasant evening.

Critical Analysis Of Candidates' Performance:

Good: 3, 8 and 10

These candidates have certainly put up a better performance than other candidates in the course of this discussion. They were able to highlight almost all dimensions of the issue of migration. While they presented information and data on the subject, other participants agreed with them. They spoke with self-confidence and were able to convince others. Other group members appeared to have accepted their leadership conduct. It also became apparent that these candidates had come well-prepared to discuss this important topic. Due to these reasons, their performance has been evaluated as 'Good'.

Average: 1, 5 and 9

These candidates have also taken part in this discussion, but in a restricted manner. It appeared they possessed some information on this subject, but it was not quite sufficient for them to make a winning contribution. They did assist in directing the discussion to proceed in the desired direction. It was felt they were capable of making a more impactful contribution, but lacked preparation and self-confidence. Given these facts, their performance has been assessed as 'Average'.

Below the Average: 2, 4, 6 and 7

The contribution made by these candidates was barely visible. They did not have much idea about this topic and kept agreeing or appreciating those who were taking an active part in this discussion. Due to their very limited awareness of this topic, they lacked self-confidence as well. Before taking part in a competitive GD, candidates must prepare on important topics in Current Affairs. Due to these reasons, their performance has been assessed as 'Below the Average'.

CSR