

## Agonies Of Expats

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### Abstract

*Expatriates are people who live in a foreign country, but this article confines itself, in the main, to GCC expatriate labours and teachers in private companies and schools. Most of the examples are taken from Bahrain, where I have been working as a teacher since 2014. No doubt Bahrain is typical of GCC which has diversities, but carrying little rigidity at the same time, limiting others in many ways. For me the country can be little friendly for I am a Muslim. Few would dispute; however, that Bahrain is a country that prides itself in being a thriving multi-cultural hub which welcomes people from all around the world. It is enough for us that the country's currency is the second largest in the world and its economy has grown successfully over the past 10 years, due to its liberal economic policies, and has a clear roadmap for improving the prosperity of all in society.*

### Introduction

The word Bahrain means 'two seas' in Arabic, indicating the country's geographic position that glorifies its economy and history both.

Being the land of the ancient Dilmun civilisation, it has long been a trading centre linking east and west. The country has benefited from its position at the centre of the Gulf's trade routes and rich pearl diving industry.

By the mid-19th century, the country was the Gulf's pre-eminent trade hub, emerging as a modern state. Merchants from countries across the Gulf and beyond established themselves on the islands.

Bahrain was the first Gulf state to discover oil, in 1932, and in the past 40 years has led the regional transition to a modern economy. Subsequently, as the first Gulf state to move away from dependence on oil, it has become the region's most diversified economy.

In consequences of world's second largest currency value after Kuwait i.e. 1 BHD (Bahraini Dinar) for 170 rupees, it has been catching fancies of many to come and settle here. I, being one of them, landed with my family with lumps of dreams and pride of becoming an NRI. Initially, the value was 1 BHD for 158 rupees, but enough to salivate. As soon as I landed, I recognized that I am not representing India but Kerala the one leading tribe from India that recognize Keralites more than any other people. The first set back was when I got a tag of "non-Keralite". However, still in the aura of being an Indian I moved on. Soon, I was among 52% non-nationals over 48% of nationals. By virtue of this, my confidence doubled. With an eye of becoming a millionaire, I started my voyage with perseverance and sheer hard work. Alas! Soon I realized that I was no more a human, but an EXPAT- a machine that must run without demanding the oil. My festivals, my customs, my family, above all my identity all I left or I had to in order to fulfill my luxurious demand that I and only I had evolved. Festivals come and go without leaving any impact. Nevertheless, the technology is helping us in adding fuel to fire. In no time the family gathering pictures are posted that we see exuberantly for a moment and contritely for ever followed by fake comments "WOW", "BEAUTIFUL", "THUMBS UP", "SMILEY", etc.

However, life is comparatively joyous here than Saudi Arabia for people are less arrogant and rude in Bahrain which is a context of particular interest for exploring identity of many self initiated expatriates by giving the highly regulated environment and the large number of non-nationals within the overall workforce. Though few (expats) find it contradictory; maybe they feel despising. Not to mention, those who are surviving there is just because of that place's religious and harmonious encompassment which brings benediction otherwise the milieu is horrendous in there like Kuwait which even minuses the spiritual values.

As per *Systematic randomized study, at Al Razi Health Centre, Ministry of Health, Kingdom of Bahrain* with an objective to determine the prevalence of stress, anxiety and depression among expatriate workers in December 2011 stress was seen in 38 (9.9%) patients. Outstanding loans, being unmarried and nationalities were the independent variables that significantly contributed to stress. Seventy eight (20.3%) expatriates reported anxiety; those with outstanding loans were significantly anxious. Fifty (13%) workers were depressed. Outstanding loans and tobacco use were the contributing factors. The percentage is lower than other similar studies conducted in the Middle East region. Apparently, life for expats in Bahrain is relatively better than other Middle-Eastern countries yet not compatible globally.

Predictably, immigrating to a new country can trigger the feelings of anxiety and depression. Being far from similar surroundings, starting a new job, new language, coping with different ideologies, getting closer to people who are suffering from superiority complex that is nothing but a reflection of inferiority complex according to one of my uncles, make adjustment difficult.

According to *Expat Explorer Survey from HSBC*, Middle Eastern countries come near the bottom of the experience league table. This looks at factors such as making friends, work environment, speaking the local language and other aspects of settling in to a new country.

Seema Hingorrany, a Mumbai based clinical psychologist who has worked with expats in the Middle East, says that working away from home without familiar comforts can lead to feelings of melancholy. She told *The National*, "Loneliness is a problem that really can make depression a lot worse. Back home you have your friends and family to fall back on. In places like Dubai, there is a very competitive atmosphere and maybe people aren't as friendly." She added, "People who work really hard all day, and then just come home and watch TV or click on the computer. But you really need a human to exchange words with. So I know expats are extremely lonely." Despite of being with my husband and a very small son I feel lonely just think about the pain of single person working here.

Several studies revealed various rates of mental illness among immigrants residing in the Middle East. Suicide had been estimated to occur at a rate of 1.1/100,000 population per annum, most common among men, people aged 30 to 39 years. The mean suicide rate was 0.06 per 100,000 for Bahrainis and 12.6 per 100,000 for non-Bahrainis, according to the suicide pattern in Bahrain from 1995 to 2004. Most of the non-Bahraini victims were Indian males aged below 35 years with financial problems.

Also, the expectations from NRI son rub salt in the wounds. Generally, parents (especially in remote areas) of NRIs are on cloud nine as soon as their son flies abroad. Their life style, perspectives, attitude, desires, everything change. Consequently, they start demanding sometimes using their parental rights and at times emotional tricks. Former can be effective while the later is the ultimate weapon. I remember a video I came across a few months ago where son was living on khaboos (roti in Arab countries, four times bigger than Indian ones) for months with water in order to fulfill the luxurious demands of his related ones.

Though I have no one to look after other than my own family but still I ration for my son's secured and bright future that I have never seen. Despite of earning reasonable amount I cut short the essentialities of my life which is way difficult. Just imagine the life of those who are earning as low as 60 BHD and meeting demands of their families on their homeland. This is when the things were relatively cheaper but after Saudi's 2030 plan things have been changed upside down. Electricity rate is doubled; tax on petrol, groceries, living, etc have hyped up.

### CONCLUSION

Hence, life of expatriates is good to some extent but emotionally, financially and culturally, we die every day. Things would have exacerbated had there not been summer holidays that act as doze to reenergize me and eventually when I am in India I boast how the country's traffic is more systematic than India; how the roads are very well constructed; how they construct towers in just few days while hiding the fact that none of these affect me and my life style since I am sailing on two boats without firming my foot in any of them. Still I visit my homeland at least once in a year but what about those who are here for years due to their Arbabs'(Sponsors) self-centeredness or to collect more and more for their loved ones back home who maybe or may not be waiting for them.

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