



## Understanding the Socio- Economic Issues and Challenges of Gulf return migrants from GCC Countries: A study of Kerala.

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### Abstract:

*People do migrate and cross-national borders for their livelihood since history. This process of migration is mostly visible in the developing countries like India. In India especially for the southern state of India (Kerala), Gulf has become an un-ending labour source since decades; especially after the oil boom of 1970s. This oil boom has given rise to great investment programs for the oil-producing Arab countries, which results in huge increase of demand for labourers. These labour gaps is filled by the workers from the developed countries mostly from the workers of Kerala; India. The higher rate of emigration towards the Gulf has shown a larger impact in the social and cultural life of people in Kerala. Even the food habits, socio-cultural lifestyle has been adapted from the Arab culture. The socio-economic links and development in Kerala from the Gulf money is huge; even their one-fifth of the total state GDP is Gulf money. However, there is huge exploitation for the workers engaged in the low paid jobs. Their well-being is challenged in both the origin and destination states.*

*Even after the period of migration; the life of Gulf migrants is filled with troubles and diseases; thus they lead their life without the care of extended family members or state. These migrants do face similar social and economic challenges once they lose the tag of bread-winners for the family. The study exclusively focuses on the socio-economic life- social networks of these migrants who dumped by the state and society by and large; excluded from the socio-cultural frame of society. The present research will help to frame new policies for the betterment of return migrants worked at GCC Countries (Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar and the UAE). The study gives a better outlook for the life of return migrants' in Kerala.*

**Key Words:** *Gulf Migration, Return Migrants, Issues and Challenges, Gulf Money,*

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## 1. Introduction:

People move in-search for a better life and economic opportunities within and across the national borders in search of better life and livelihood. The International Organization for Migration conceptualizes migration as “The movement of a person or a group, move across the international or national borders for the means of livelihood”. Such kind of movement of people are discussed and debated widely in the academic realm. The pull factors behind the movement of people across the borders can be different to different individuals; such as economic, social, political and cultural etc. According to United Nations Population Fund, there are an estimated 244 million migrant workers around the world; which comprise around 3.4 percent of the total population and around 7 percent of the global workforce(Yangzom et al. 2012).

Mainly, in the post-independence period, the process of migration from India can be classified into three major periods. The first phase began in the 1950s, which mostly consisted of skilled workforce migration such as doctors, engineers, scientists, teachers, architects, entrepreneurs etc. They migrated mostly to the developed part of the world such as US, Canada, the UK and other European countries. However, the stern immigration policies adopted in these countries and the limited availability of highly skilled labour led to a gradual decline in these flows. The second phase began in the 1970s, which mostly constituted of unskilled and semi-skilled migration. The main reason for such a drastic rise in migration from India is the development of the Oil boom in the Gulf and rising level of unemployment in India (Gulati and Modi, 1983). During this period, major migration flow was towards the oil-exporting Gulf countries (Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar and the UAE) broadly known as Gulf Corporation Council (GCC). Indian migration towards GCC has steadily increased over the period from 2.5 lakhs in 1975 to 3.318 million in 2001 and exceeded 3.5 million at present (Khadria, 2014). The third phase of migration commenced after the 1990s especially, after the adoption of liberalization policies. Interestingly, there appears to be an absence of any perceptible pattern in migration during this period. With the adoption of liberalization policies, there is a noticeable increase in capital and trade flows to and from various countries which paved the way for higher economic growth and creation of new opportunities in the economy. The social and economic transformation among the people in India and Kerala was possible as the aftereffect of Gulf Migration from India. Migration is the most dynamic

factor in Kerala, which reduced unemployment and raised the standard of living of the people considerably (Khadria, 2010). It has been reported that migration has contributed more to poverty alleviation in the state than any other factor including agrarian reforms, trade union activities and social welfare legislation (Zachariah et al, 2001).

Migration and its socio-economic development in Kerala has become an favourite topic among academicians and policy makers. Over the years, Gulf Migration has facilitated the migrants from Kerala in achieving a higher social and economic status. It is visible in the census of 2011, where Kerala stands with highest literacy rates in India, registering 94 percent as compared to 73 percent for India. Kerala is a small state located at the southern part of India with 1.2 percent of country's geographical area and 2.7 percent of the overall population of Kerala contributed 35 percent of the migrant's population to the total population going out of India in the last century and 25 percent in the present century (Khadria, 2010). It may be pointed out here that large-scale migration, mostly of unskilled and semi-skilled nature, from the state to the gulf countries began in 1970s. The rise in oil prices due to oil shock of 1970s resulted in sudden influx of substantial funds to oil exporting gulf countries. This paved the way for heavy investment in these countries on developmental projects alluring both skilled and unskilled labour from across the world. Kerala, being very close to it and abundant with these kinds of labourers, availed opportunity leading to the heavy outflow of labourers towards the Gulf countries. After 1970, there was a major shift in the migration trend in India, especially in Kerala. The increase of oil price increase in the 1970's gave rise to great investment programs for the oil producing Arab countries, which increases demand for labour. The higher rate of emigration towards Gulf from Kerala has shown larger impact in the social and cultural life of people in Kerala. Even the food habits, cultural life style has been adapted from the Arab culture. The socio-economic links and development in Kerala from the Gulf money is one sixth of the total state GDP.

However, the life of migrants especially who works in the low paid jobs and return migrants are challenged and in phase of difficulty most often. They work and earns for their family and native states for decades and when they came back neither the state government nor the central has provisions and policies for the wellbeing for life of migrants. They are often ignored by the state and extended family members and leading a life of social, economic and psychological challenge to attend the state of well-being. It is

true that a large number of studies have focused on remittances of Gulf migration. However, there is a lack of study focusing on the life of low paid migrants and return migrants and their social, economic and mental well-being in Kerala society.

## 2. Objectives of the Study:

The objectives of the study are as follows:

1. To understand various reasons for the large-scale return of migrants from the GCC Countries.
2. To understand the social and economic challenges faced by returned migrants back in Kerala
3. To understand life of gulf return migrants after coming back to Kerala
4. To suggest the best policies for the betterment of returned migrants in the state.

## 3. Research Questions

1. Is Gulf a favourite destination for the migrants from Kerala, if so to find out its social and economic reasons behind it?
2. Are the gulf migrants, especially return migrants are satisfied and living a better life in their native state?

## 4. Research Methodology

The present study will undertake following methods as the research methodology: Primary and secondary method was having been used for the present study; it is briefly discussed as follows:

The primary data will be collected through interview schedules, Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) and Observations. In order to record their observations and capture crucial insights into the reality on the ground, the primary source of data has been collected as follows;

- **Participant observation:** A participant observation was done to understand the socio-economic life and changes of migrants' way back to their state. Being interacting with their family members, ethnographic observation has been undertaken. This also helped the researcher to understand the socio-economic challenges and issues of return migrants in Kerala.

- **Scheduled Method:** A semi-structured interview schedules for migrant workers was used to understand the development and transformation through gulf migration. The schedules of the questionnaire have been developed for the collection of primary data from those migrant workers especially return migrants; to understand their socio-economic link and challenges from gulf return migration. A random snowball sampling was taken to find out the initial respondents and move towards the other gulf return migrants.

The schedule questions had included the questions related to their level of exploitation, issues and challenges faced by the migrants in Gulf and try to analyse present socio-economic and cultural life of return migrants in Kerala. Major issues such as wage payment, socio-economic profile, occupation of respondents in gulf, issues and challenges faced by migrants in gulf, reasons for return migration etc. has been analysed for the study.

#### **Method of Sampling: Purposive Sampling**

The researcher has followed a *purposive sampling* which is a specific type of non-probability sampling method that relies on data collection, purely selecting sample on the basis of knowledge of the research problem for the inclusion of appropriate sample. The researcher tries to cover population sample from the returned migrants engaged in different GCC Countries (Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar and the UAE). For the present study, the researcher has gone to the participants' home and places they are available and personally met by the researcher according to the convenience of the respondents. The sample will be exclusively focused on the Kerala return migrants from the GCC countries. In this way, a total number of *100 gulf returned migrant workers* was selected from the migrant pockets of Ernakulum and Calicut districts in Kerala, especially from the migrant pockets where return migrants are visible. All collected data and information were coded, tabulated, consolidated, cross-checked and entered. The appropriatedata entry formats are provided on tables/ figures in the report for reference and are converted into meaningful tables.

#### **5. Relevance and Anticipated Outcomes**

Kerala Diaspora, in fact, is one of the most studied Diasporas in India with regard to the impact of outmigration and remittances. There are several state-level studies such as the periodic Kerala Migration Surveys on Kerala. It may be noted that most of these studies

remained at the macro level, to the neglect of micro level studies, exploring the subjective and local ramifications. Hence, existing literature seem to be deficient in terms of 1) the near absence of the studies on low wage Kerala return migrants, 2) Micro level studies that unravel the process of transformation, at the personal and socio-cultural levels, especially the mobility and the socio-cultural impact and transformations 3) the effects of Gulf migration on the non-material and non-economic aspects of the subjects, in other words, the cultural and symbolic aspects of their lives and their life-world.

Nevertheless, the present study illuminates on the role of return migrants from the Gulf and their efforts in making the “Kerala Model of Development”. However, these migrants are often forgotten by the state and extended family members even at their old age or life after the period of migration. The study therefore, address the issues, challenges and rights of return migrants in the gulf and their life as bead winners (at the time of migration) and at their old age (period after migration). This study academically contributes to the existing literature on Kerala Diaspora in the Gulf with distinctive focus on mapping the low end pravasi and the subjective to the transformative processes and its consequence to return migrants in Kerala society. The present study will add up to the policy measures as understanding the issues and getting proper suggestions and recommendations for the challenges faced by the gulf migrants, will help to generate better policy for migrants in the state.

## **6. Issues and challenges faced by gulf returned Emigrants from Kerala**

The present study focuses on the social and economic problems faced by returned migrants back in Kerala. In this study, the researcher tries to understand the issues and challenges faced by the gulf return migrant workers in the state. A total of 100 respondents were selected through a purposive sampling method for this study. Equal number of men and women were selected from the migrant pockets of Kerala especially from Calicut and Ernakulum when gulf migrants are highly visible. The details of the study are discussed as follows:

### **6.1 Occupation of the respondents**

Gulf Migration has become usual practise in Kerala since the oil boom and formation of GCC countries, since 1980's Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) has become the largest

employer for the Malayalee pravasis (migrant workers) The higher wages and social status comparable to the native states attracted a large scale of semi-skilled migrant workers towards GCC countries especially from Kerala(Rajan and Akhil, 2019). Occupation which these migrant workers engaged in gulf before returning to their home state is discussed as follows.

**Table 1, Occupation of the respondents**

Occupation	Districts		Total	Percent
	Calicut	Ernakulum		
Driver	8	10	18	18
House servant	9	10	19	19
Home Nurse/ Nurse	6	6	12	12
Cook	5	5	10	10
Electrician	7	8	15	15
Construction	9	8	17	17
Super market/ Sales	6	4	10	10
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>

**Source: Primary Source; 2019-20**

Majority of them just migrated without much preparation. Although with a ray of hope on better earnings and better life style. While there was always a hardship wait in the stream line; especially in the overseas jobs. Whereas 18 percent of respondents had worked as drivers and 19 percent has engaged as house servants who take care of their babies and older family members when the employers are away from home. Whereas 15 percent worked as electricians, 17 percentage engaged in constructions sectors and 10 persons in the supermarket and other sales jobs. The timing of these workers were more than 12 hours and they need to be struggle in the foreign land to earn their means of survival. The previous literature of Manuel 2017 and Prakash 2000 also support the study.

## 6.2 Reason for Return Migration

There are various pull factors and push factors compel workers to move from their native state to destination states like Kerala. The study interviewed from gulf return

migrants from Kerala highlighted various motivating factors behind migration. While a variety of individual reasons were claimed by migrant workers, each of these reasons could be directly or indirectly related to eight main motivational factors, discussed below.

**Table 2, Reasons for return migration**

<b>Reason for Return Migration</b>	<b>No of Respondents</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Low Wages	20	20
Expiry of Contract	5	5
Nationalisation	30	30
Poor Working Conditions	10	10
Issues at Home	5	5
Bad Climate	5	5
Harsh Behaviour of Employer	20	20
Ill Health	5	5
Others	-	-
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>

**Source: Primary Source; 2019-20**

During the study it is highlighted that 30 percent of the respondents suggested Nationalisation as the key reason for return migration from Gulf. While 20 percent focus on the harsh behaviour of employers towards the employees mainly house keepers, cock and drivers seems to be difficult to cop up over the period of time. Whereas 20 percent do suggest on low wages earned as comparable to the home state, although 5 percent of people claimed expiry of contract, and 5 percent of respondents do opine the difficulty to live ahead with the bad climate due to the old age issues, whereas the rest 5 percent do opine various other reasons compelled them back to their home state from the Gulf.

### **6.3 Issues and Challenges faced by migrants after coming to Kerala**

Returnee migrants do face numerous issues and challenges due to a variety of reasons. If he or she is unable to find a steady income to meet the ongoing expenditure they may gradually drift into the trap of debt. Investing on unfamiliar business that incurred loss and financial requirements of family such as marriage, professional and private education

of children, unexpected health issues etc. adds up vulnerability for the migrants after returning back to the state.

**Table 3, Issues faced by migrant workers after coming back to Kerala**

<b>Issues faced by return gulf migrants in Kerala</b>	<b>No: of Respondents</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Lack of Earnings	30	30
Un expected health issues/ other expenses such as education and marriage of children	30	20
Social and Financial alienation (loneliness/ indebtedness)	20	20
Lack of social Respect	15	15
No government support (due to Lack of awareness and sensitisation).	20	20
Others	5	5
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>

**Source: Primary Source; 2019-20**

The present table 3, explains the issues and challenges faced by gulf return migrants in the home state. It is observed from the study almost 30percent of respondents felt that lack of better earnings is the key challenge once they reach back to Kerala. Whereas, 20 percent do suggest that un-expected health issues, education and marriage of children is the main issues once they reached back from gulf. While 20 percent responded that they do face social and financial alienation and 20 percent has not received any support from the government even they sent so much money back to the state. However, 15 percent do suggest that earning member will always have a dignity among the family and society once they lose the tag of earning member that too changes to an ex-gulf will do face lack of social respect among the family members and society. It is difficult to face the people even after losing the tag of pravasi (earning member in gulf).

#### 6.4 Measures for Inclusion and Suggestions

Suggestive measures for the gulf return migrant workers are discussed in the following section. The respondents that, although they face many issues and challenges once they return back to their home state. The migrant workers do suggest some of the measures which could make for a better life for gulf return migrant workers in Kerala. This is discussed in table 4 as follows.

**Table 4, Measures for inclusion and suggestions**

Measures for Inclusion and Suggestions	No. of Respondents		Percentage
	Calicut	Ernakulum	
Sensitize both migrants and encourage young migrants for Entrepreneur Skills Development Program (ESDP)	12	8	20
Creating a new platform to discuss the issues of migrants and combine them to NHGs	7	8	15
Free and compulsory basic medical facilities to return migrants at least to meet their basic medicines (with the support of Norka NGO and these FoM Groups)	10	10	20
Counselling sections should be given to old age return migrants as most of them are difficult to cop up with the changing demands of society.	7	8	15
Encourage new programs similar to kudumbasree with support of government exclusively for gulf migrants ( more than 2 million return migrants can create a good economic base for the state in the long run through such programs)	14	16	30
<b>Total</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>100</b>

**Source: Primary Source; 2019-20**

The study reveals the fact that 30 percent of the respondents suggested that initiating new programs similar to kudumbasree with support of government exclusively for gulf return migrants will empower the economic base of gulf return migrants. There are more than 2 million in Kerala; such programs can create a good economic base for the state in the long run. While 20 percent of respondents suggested that there is a need of

sensitisation and awareness programs among the return migrants especially among the young return migrants for empowering their Entrepreneur Skills. Whereas 15 percent also suggested that new platform for migrants which includes the neighbourhood migrant groups; through this the beneficiaries can discuss and plan for better policies for return migrants in the state.

However, 20 percent calls for the need of free and compulsory basic medical facilities to return migrants. Such initiatives will boost up the confidence of respondents as can meet up their medical expenses without depending on close family members or society. This can be also implemented with the support of Norka NGO and friends of migrant groups. While the rest 15 percent proposed for the counselling for the old age return migrants as most of them are faced by loneliness and most of them are not taken care by the family members or society as they expected.

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