

A Sociological Preview on the Effects of Migration on Families Left Behind in Homeland

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Abstract - Migration is a multidimensional process involving interrelated aspects that affect those who move, those who are behind, and the host country. Kerala has contributed significantly to the outflow of workers to the Middle East. Often the positive impacts of migration are as highlighted as it makes an important contribution to the economy, to welfare and of course to cultural diversity of the state, but it affects the psycho-social and emotional well-being of the left behind family members. This paper addresses effects of migration on the families left behind in homeland; the objectives include: 1. to analyze the socio-economic background of emigrant worker's family. 2. To identify the nature and the reasons of migration. 3. To find out the benefits received by family through the migration of a member. 4. To find out the effect of emigration on family relationships and psycho-social and emotional stresses experienced by the left behind family. The study is based on primary data of families of emigrant workers to the Middle East, mostly unskilled and semi-skilled workers who were not eligible for family visas. Mixed method was used in the study. Sample sizes consist of 150 families selected through snowball sampling method. The study revealed that migration improved their socioeconomic conditions, and they were started to acquire their aspiration and apart from benefits, the migration also added socio-psychological stresses to the family members

Keywords: Migration, Emigrant labourers, Left behind families

I. INTRODUCTION

The tendency for global linkages to embrace every geographical area and every human group provides opportunities for some to become members in the new global order while others are marginalized. Throughout the history of humankind, people have migrated. From ancient peoples crossing oceans in wooden or even reed boats to entrepreneurs traversing the globe on jet planes, migration is part of human existence. People have migrated to find food, safety, or shelter. They have migrated to flee from enemies, to find work, or to practice their faith. Some migrations are local- meaning within the same state or within a country, while others are across national borders, or from one continent to another.

II. MIGRATION: CONCEPT AND MEANING

Migration is a Latin word meaning "to move." It deals with individual mobility. It indicates the movement of people from one place to another. Migration may be within the state (in migration or internal migration) or outside the states (external or international migration). Practically all

over the world today, there is a large shift of population from rural regions to cities and urban areas where there are more job opportunities. In many places people flee from ecological disasters and political oppression. Migratory flows (internal as well as international) are part of the globalization processes and these are linked to the flows of capital and goods, ideas, and images, information and remittances. Migration has become a central concern in today's international relations. It is a major factor of economic and political change. It is an important issue in both domestic and international politics both in the mother country and host countries.

But in the recent past, especially during last three, or four decades voluntary external migration has gained momentum due to complexity of human life and fast changing socio-economic conditions. People are migrating to the countries like USA, Middle East, Canada, European countries, Australia and South Asian countries. (Azeez & Begum, 2009). These migrants vary from unskilled workers to large scale businessmen. A shift in migration trends witnessed from 1970 on words. In 1973, the oil prices had increased considerably, and this leads to large scale investment by oil producing Arab countries and this in turn leads to high demand for labourers in the oil producing plants. As a result, large numbers of labourers were immigrated to Arab countries. This development ensued in the emigration of labourers from India to gulf countries. The flourishing of software industry during 1990 to 2000 also persuades the computer professional to migrate to USA and other European countries (Azeez & Begum, 2009).

III. MIGRATION-THE KERALA EXPERIENCE

People from Kerala have been migrating to other states in India and to other countries for several decades in search of employment. As per Kerala Migration Survey 2018, the number of NRKs is estimated to be 34.17 lakh in 2018("Economic Review", 2018). A Country-wise distribution of the NRK's destination shows that 39.1 per cent were in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and 23 per cent were in Saudi Arabia. The countries in the Gulf region account for 89.2 per cent of Kerala's emigrant population ("Economic Review", 2018).

The transition of Kerala from a net in-migration state to a state of net out-migration came about after Second World

War. Several factors contributed to this transition. Firstly, until Second World War, Travancore and Cochin were native states not fully integrated with British India. During the war, large numbers of the Malayalam speaking population were recruited for war related jobs such as soldiers, military officers, and civilian clerks. The war offered for the first time an opportunity to large number of persons from Travancore and Cochin to familiarize themselves with the conditions beyond the Western Ghats. The second factor which contributed to this transition was the integration experienced in Indian independence struggle that ended in August 1947. And consequently, the formation of state of Kerala in November 1956, by integrating the Travancore –Cochin State. Third factor was demographic expansion. While the death rate dropped rapidly in 1940s and the 1950s the birth rate remained high and stable, which resulted in a widening of the demographic gaps (the gap between the birth rate and the death rate). The progress that the region experienced in education was another major factor which facilitated out-migration. Demographic expansion brought to the forefront, for the first time in Kerala, the problem of acute pressure on land. There were only very few employment opportunities besides agriculture available within Kerala. While the rest of India had not made much progress in education especially percolation of education to all. The state was unable to absorb this expanding stock of educated persons. However, opportunities were developing in the rapidly growing public sector establishments and the mushrooming private –sector establishment elsewhere in the country, especially in the metropolitan cities of Mumbai, Kolkata, Chennai and Delhi. The educated Kerala youth made full use of these opportunities and migration whizzed in Kerala.

Kerala is a leader in terms of emigration or external migration trends. Five decades ago, emigration from Kerala was mainly to the South East Asian countries like Malaya, Singapore, Burma and Ceylon. Employment opportunities in these countries in the rubber plantations, and construction activities were, in those days, the main attraction of the emigrants. After these countries became independent most of the Keralites, along with immigrants from other parts of the world, had to leave those countries because of the newly introduced restrictions on immigration.

There are historical, economic and social reasons for the large-scale international migration from Kerala. Economically Kerala has been largely agricultural and agro processing based with a negligible industrial sector. However, due to the tremendous population density of the state, land has been scarce, resulting in a very high unemployment rate. These two factors coupled with relatively high educational levels, give rise to strong push factors propelling migration. The large-scale international migration from Kerala began in the early twentieth century with the first migrants going mainly to Sri Lanka and Malaysia. While both historical and economic factors were important preconditions for the Middle Eastern migration its spread and concentration in a few areas of the state (known

locally as gulf pockets) was largely due to the functioning of social networks which resulted in chain migration. These networks worked particularly well in Kerala, since; the migration was mostly from rural communities.

Kerala received much attention in the 1970s in view of the large number of emigrants to gulf countries. The emigration to Gulf countries totally changed the socio- economic conditions of certain regions in Kerala like Malappuram, Kasaragod and Thrissur. The changes are seen in the consumption pattern, investment pattern, lifestyle, religion and education. Some migrants have come back and settled down in their native places seeking self-employment (Prakash, 1998). Inflow of large amount of Gulf remittances and its spending has resulted in unprecedented economic changes since mid-1970s in poor and industrially backward economy of Kerala (Zachariah et al., 2002).The migration which started with a few thousands per year during the mid-1970s assumed large proportions during the 1980s and 1990s. Currently, the total stock of Indian migrants in West Asia is estimated at 28 lakhs. Of this, the migrants from Kerala are estimated as more than 14 lakhs. Currently, Kerala is getting about Rs 5,500 crore from the Gulf as workers' remittances. The migration and the flow of remittances had resulted in unprecedented economic changes in Kerala's economy sincemid-1970s. The Gulf migration has helped the migrant households to attain higher levels of income, consumption and acquisition of assets, resulting in overall reduction of poverty in Kerala (Prakash, 1998). But, on the other hand, the Gulf remittances have also pushed up prices of land, construction material, consumer foods and charges on health, education, and transport, adversely affecting non-migrant households belonging to poor, middle class and fixed income groups (Prakash, 1998). In the early period of migration (1950s and 1960s) Middle Eastern migration was not regulated very much, but as the migration became institutionalized gulf countries imposed a variety of restrictions on migrants. Overtime the whole process of getting the necessary papers and clearances to enter the gulf countries became complex because of the proliferation of intermediaries and types of visas granted- some legal and other illegal to differing degrees.

IV. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

Millions of people all over the world move out of their normal place of residence to seek their fortune elsewhere (Reddy, 2014). Migration has far-reaching impact not only on the migrants, but also on the society at large both in the place of origin and destination. Migration has been the single-most dynamic factor in the development scenario of Kerala in the last quarter of the twentieth century. It has been a key engine of social, political, and economic change in Kerala in the last thirty years. There has been a steady emigration from the state to countries in the Gulf which was often referred by the term Gulf boom. A large population of Kerala lives outside the country, especially in the Gulf region. Migration is affecting every facet of life in Kerala.

Migration has been recognized as a significant factor in reducing poverty, unemployment, and relative deprivation in Kerala. The pattern of migration and resultant socio-economic consequences influenced the culture and political process of Kerala is significant. For the left behind family in Kerala, migration can be understood as a solution to their difficulties such as poverty and unemployment and as a hope towards a better future. Emigration had far-reaching effects on family structure, gender roles, family unity, cohesion, and well-being in migrant’s households. The separation of family units resulting from migration induces stressors that affect the emotional well-being of both migrants and their family members (Silver, 2006).The family experiences different kinds of psychological, social, and emotional stresses as a result of migration of their head member.

V. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The study is based on Robert K Merton’s theory of relative deprivation. Deprivation means people who are deprived of things deemed valuable in the society- whether money, justice, status or privilege, etc. Relative Deprivation happens wherever individuals or groups subjectively recognize themselves as unfairly underprivileged over others perceived as having similar qualities and deserving similar rewards. In applying this theory, it is evident that individuals migrate not only to maximize absolute income, but also to improve their position compared to other relevant reference groups. Individuals from a relatively more deprived household were likely to migrate for work compared to those from a relatively less deprived household.

VI. METHODOLOGY

The objectives of the study were:

1. To analyze the socio-economic background of emigrant worker’s family
2. To identify the nature and the reasons of migration
3. To find out the benefits received by family through the migration of a member
4. To find out the effect of emigration on family relationships and psycho -social and emotional stresses experienced by the left behind family

VII. SAMPLE AND METHOD

The descriptive research design was used in the study. The study is based on primary data. Families of emigrant workers to the Middle East, mostly unskilled and semi-skilled workers, who are deprived of family visas in Kottayam district, were taken for the study. Snowball sampling method was used for collecting data. Sample sizes consist of 150 families. Method of study followed is mixed method. This means both quantitative and qualitative data were used in this study. Interview schedule and interview guide were used for the data collection.

VIII. MAJOR FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

Emigration is a significant socio-economic process of Kerala society. It had brought about wide-ranging changes in the socio-economic scenario of Kerala. Its repercussions are felt almost in all fields of society. The major findings of the study are divided into three sections. The first section deals with the socio-economic background of the respondents. The analysis of the socio-economic background revealed that most of the families consist of migrants in the age group 25-35 (67 %).

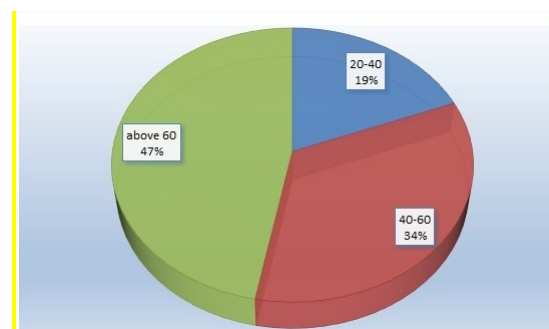


Fig.1 Age of the family members

The age of the family members of the emigrant workers showed that 47% of the family members belonged to elderly population (above 60) and 34% were belonged to 40-60 age group and 19% were in the age group 20-40. The study also revealed that 47% were Christians and belonged to backward class communities like ST/OBC (60%). Most of them were coming from extended families (63%). Majority were lower middle-income families (83%) and 33 % of family consist of 4 members. Majority resides in rural areas (53%).

TABLE I EDUCATIONAL QUALIFICATION

Education	Frequency	Percent
Below SSLC/SSLC	45	30
Plus two/ Pre degree	27	18
Degree	59	39
PG	19	13
Total	150	100

The educational Qualification of the emigrant workers were showed in table 1. The table revealed that 39 % had degree as their educational qualification while 30 percent were below SSLC/SSLC. 18 percent had plus two/pre degree as educational qualification. 13 percent have post-graduation as educational qualification. The study revealed that majority were in the income group Rs.10,000-20,000. (80%).

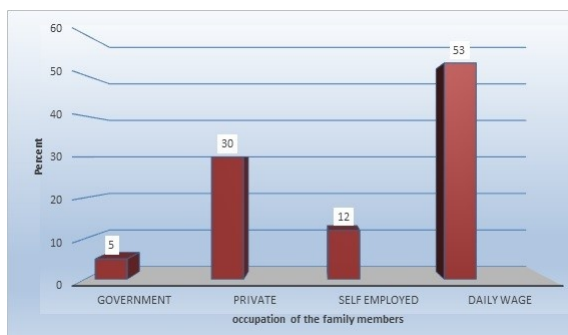


Fig.2 Occupation of the Family Members

Majority (53%) of the family members were employed and belonged to the category daily wage workers like auto drivers, tailoring, and housemaid, and agricultural labourers. 30% were employed in private sector and 12 % were self-employed and only 5 % were in government sector. 87% of families mainly depend on remittances from the emigrant worker for meeting their necessities.

TABLE II NATURE OF REMITTANCE

Nature of remittance	Frequency	Percent
Monthly	21	14
Bi -monthly	81	54
Once in three months	48	32
Total	150	100

The above table revealed that majority (54%) of respondents were getting remittance bi-monthly and 32 percent was getting remittance once in three months. Only 14 percent was getting remittance every month. This shows that for 86% of respondents the remittances were irregular at times, bi -monthly, or once in 3 months. Mostly they were receiving monetary help between Rs. 10,000- Rs. 20,000/-

The second section deals with the nature and reasons for migration. This section revealed that almost all the families had a financial liability due to migration. 47% of families had financial liability between Rs. 3-5 lakhs. Mainly two ways, the migrant workers obtain their visa through Relatives and friends working abroad and through recruitment agencies'. For meeting the emigration costs, they raised money from different sources like selling land, vehicle, gold ornaments and jewellery, borrowing from relatives, borrowing money from money lenders, bank loan, mortgaging land etc. Majority of the migrants (63%) used more than one source for funding.

The main reason for migration is better prospects. Majority (84 %) opined that through migration they were getting better employment and income than working in Kerala. Majority (74%) presumed that through migration they will achieve a better standard of living, and economic stability. Another reason was the prestige associated with emigration. In Kerala, the emigration helps families to improve their

status in the locality, and they were receiving respect from neighbours. The expectations of the family regarding sending their member outside include construction of house. The other reasons for opting job outside is high remuneration, meeting children's studies, and daughter's/sister's marriage.

Third section deals with the benefits received from emigration. This section revealed that, almost all the families able to generate bank deposits, and savings. 34% of them started the construction of new houses with good amenities. 40% of the respondents were able to admit their children in good English Medium Schools and can cater to the needs of their children. 60% were able to get their sisters and daughters married. Almost all the respondents opined that migration increases the social prestige of the family, and they were getting more acceptances in local society.

Fourth section deals with the effect of emigration on family relationships and psycho -social and emotional stresses experienced by the left behind family. Qualitative data was used in this section. The section showed that most of respondents felt an increased dependence on kins and relatives for meeting needs. They also opined that their relatives expect monetary benefit and other goods when their emigrant worker returns for leave. Most of the wives of emigrant workers feel loneliness, and frustration some even experienced psychological problems. Another issue faced by the family was the lack of emotional security due to the migration of their important member. Another issue was managing the children and it was found that they have trouble in managing their children and to provide proper guidance regarding their studies in the absence of spouse. Another issue was managing the situation of elderly parents of the migrant laborers. They feel lot of problems including emotional insecurity, social insecurity, and helplessness in times of crisis. They also felt that their children were not catering to their needs. The family members back home often felt frustrated and were anxious about the developments in the Middle East regarding rules of migration and internal tensions in the region. Most of the wives, and mothers must manage added responsibilities for running households as a result of migration of the husband or son. This also adds extra stress on them.

IX. CONCLUSION

Migration has been viewed as an engine of growth for the economy of Kerala. It has been considered as one of the positive outcomes of the Kerala model of development. Migration can occur due to push factors like unemployment, poverty, and lack of opportunities or may be due to pull factors including economic opportunities, quality of life, and high salary. Almost all the aspects and social institutions of Kerala society is affected both positively and negatively by the massive migration to gulf countries. This study revealed that most of the migrants' family belonged to low socio- economic background, and their standard of living was satisfactory. The migrant worker was their main

hope for future survival. The family's dependence on them poses extra responsibility and burden on the migrant worker. The study also revealed that most of the migrant workers were financially and socially backwards groups and as a part of migration they have added financial burden. The migration also improved their socio-economic conditions, and they were acquiring back their lost property and jewellery. Apart from these benefits the migration of the head member added socio-psychological stresses to the family members. Wives were emotionally disturbed and elderly parents face the issue of empty nest syndrome due to the migration of their spouse or son. Even though the stresses, and strains posed by migration was unbearable, most of the left behind families were ready to put up with the difficulties in the process of migration because they view migration as a better way to improve their status, social recognition, and easy way to make money.

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