

“Beyond Borders: Unveiling the Socio-Economic Realities of Emigrants in Kuwait”

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ABSTRACT

Migrant workers in Kuwait, despite contributing significantly to the nation's economy, often face socio-economic challenges including low wages, poor working conditions, and limited access benefits and rights. Though Kerala occupied high literacy rate among other states in India, majority of the educated youth prefer to go abroad. They are not offered a suitable job appropriate to his/ her education level. Better job opportunities and high income prospects prompted people especially married persons to migrate. But in reality emigrants who got job in Gulf which is not related to his or her education qualifications. Majority of the migrant workers were engaged in private sector, where major portion are male emigrants worked in technical and low skilled field. Survey findings shows that emigrants especially those lived with family have lesser savings than those lived in single. The decline in oil price followed by economic crisis and COVID pandemic resulted a slowdown in the activities of government. Many companies cut the salary by half, completely cut incentives and allowance which laborers' got before crisis and most of them lose their job. Many of them faced some kind of mental depression which may lead to other health problems.

Keywords : Emigration, Remittance, Emiritisation, Gulf Cooperation Council

I. INTRODUCTION

Gulf Cooperation Council (GCCs) is one of the major migration corridors from India in the world. Migration to GCC (Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates) countries is not a new phenomenon; it was started since 1930s when the discovery of oil in the Gulf region and the related investments began. But at that time labour flow was relatively small. Migration towards the gulf region became more prominent during 1970-1973. Due to oil boom, there was a rapid increase in the demand for foreign labour for the infrastructure development projects and oil related projects. These countries attracted migrant labours across the world, especially from the South and South-east Asian countries such as Pakistan, India, Bangladesh, Malaysia, Indonesia, Sri Lanka and so on. India is one of the labour contributing countries in the Middle East. Indians have been working as skilled / unskilled and semi-skilled workers there. They are the important source of remittances at the place of origin in addition Gulf remittances also constitute a major share of the annual GDP of Kerala.

According to the latest data of World Bank regarding the remittances, India secured the highest share of global remittances in 2024 accounting for 14.3 percent. The country received \$129 billion in remittances, the highest amount ever, making it the top recipient globally. Remittances have been playing a vital role in reducing poverty and increasing household income especially for those workers who were not involved in any productive employment in the home country before they migrate. Indians are engaged in many fields of activity in the Middle East. According to the Ministry of External Affairs, there are 35.4 million non-resident Indians (NRIs) and People of Indian Origins (PIOs) residing outside India (MEA 2023) and about 9.0 million Indian migrants were working in the gulf region. Boere (2010) have examined that in the Gulf, where millions of migrants from South Asia have come to work, often are engaged in temporary labour contracts. Expatriates are primarily attracted by the employment opportunities in Kuwait, one of the principal destinations for Indian migrants. Due

to the discovery of oil and increased living standards in the country, expatriates account for 70 percent of Kuwait's total population.

But the situation has drastically changed since 1990 war. Iraq attacked Kuwait on August 2, 1990. During the war a large number of Indian emigrants were forced to return to India leaving their jobs and life time earnings there. But the fear of a rapid demographic imbalance has prompted for a policy shift – ‘emiratisation’ – which has led to a decline in numbers of unskilled and skilled emigrant workers from India. According to the Indian ministry of external affairs, there are around 1028274 Indians as on 1 January 2025, constituting the largest expatriate community in Kuwait.

In India, Kerala has been a major exporter of human resources to gulf countries. According to the Gulati Institute of Finance and Taxation around 4 million Keralites have been working as skilled/ unskilled and semi-skilled workers there (KMS 2023). They are the important source of remittances at the place of origin. This study focuses on socio-economic conditions of Kerala migrants worked in Kuwait. For earning more, people prefer gulf countries because Gulf countries boost the migrant people to earn more. But our country faces a massive problem that is brain-drain. The gulf countries prefer various categories of out migrants like professional, both skilled and unskilled. But the problem migrants face is that after certain years the gulf countries change their rules and regulations in favour to their natives. Gulf companies also exploit the migrant workers by giving over load work, over time duty with less salary, low quality food and accommodation. After maximum utilization of migrant labours, companies were eager to terminate these labourers for their minor mistakes. So these labourers were forced to return to their own land.

1.1 OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

- To examine the main reason behind migration to Gulf countries.
- To examine the employment, wages, working conditions of Kerala emigrants in Kuwait.
- To examines the positive and negative impact of migration on family and children.

III. METHODOLOGY

Though Indian migration to west Asia is an important economic issue, not many attempts have been made to examine the various dimensions of the problem. Most of the studies provide a lot of basic information about different aspects of Kerala emigration to west Asia based on the data collected in Kerala. But so far no attempt has been made to conduct a study of Indian emigrants in West Asian countries. In Kuwait Indian migrants especially Keralites face a lot of socio- economic and psychological problems. It would be no exaggeration if we state that Kerala economy is surviving due to the large scale remittances from the Gulf. When large number of migrant's return to their domestic countries, it will adversely affect the economy of Kerala. This study focuses on the present status of Kerala emigrants in Kuwait. In order to study employment, wages and working conditions of emigrants, the study conducted a field survey in Kuwait covering a sample of 106 Kerala emigrants by using a structured interview schedule. Purposive random sampling technique was used for collecting data for the study as it relevant because it examines the existing situation of Indian migrants in Kuwait.

IV RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Motivation behind Migration

The migration seems to be the single most dynamic factor that has contributed much to the socio-economic development of the state. The various demographic factors that have contributed to the accelerated development in the growing economic and employment opportunities in metropolitan as well as in Gulf countries were the major reasons for migration. A high density of population, high rate of unemployment and low rate of growth of productive sectors pushed the migrants to the Gulf countries. The rising demand for labourers and relatively high rates of wages were the most important pull factors behind migration. Though Kerala occupied high literacy rate among other states in India, why majority of the educated youth prefer to go abroad is a question. In this respect, conditions in Kerala drive them for emigration. Another reason behind unemployment in Kerala is bad political situation and bad approach from trade unions. Due to this problem, excluding some IT sectors, national/international level companies are reluctant to start business in Kerala. Obviously this problem

disappointing the attitude of small entrepreneurs who wants to start business in micro level. Today a person from low class family is able to possess a higher level of education. But they are not offered a suitable job appropriate to his/ her education level. The Kerala Migration Survey-2023 has found that flow of Keralites to abroad still continues mainly because of the State's inability to provide suitable jobs for the increasing number of educated youths.

Better job opportunities and high income prospects prompted people especially married persons to migrate. But while coming to reality, a small percentage of emigrants got job suitable to their educational level. Majority of emigrants in Gulf were forced to do the jobs which are totally unsuitable for them. Among these persons there are some who have poor educational qualification, got placed with a better job and income. Survey findings reveals that excluding workers in medical field, professional degree holders and skilled technicians, emigrants who got job in Gulf which is not related to his or her education qualifications. Joseph, who worked as a sales executive in a reputed trading company said that "sometimes emigrants receives higher income even when with a poor educational qualification but they are found efficient in handling Arabic and English language and possess a better experience on the field".

Through social interactions and observation, migrants may gain valuable skills, including language and communication with individuals from different cultures or backgrounds and ideas. (Ammassari and Black 2001, 29-30) Such skills and competencies are entirely transferable and applicable to occupations. Others got job totally different from their education degrees. Gulf companies prefer various categories of out migrants both skilled and unskilled and they look upon workers experience too.

Compared to other states, Keralites gave more importance to construct luxurious house. It is evident among emigrant population who have better and luxurious house, as they spent majority of their income to construct a house. A person who works abroad can build a house with in a short duration period. From the survey findings it is found that mostly people went to Gulf with a motive of house construction. In addition to this emigrants gave more importance to family's health status and children's education compared to non-emigrants they try to possess a better social status in the society.

4.2 Migrant workers in Kuwait

The study surveyed 106 emigrants in which it consists of 82 male and 24 female migrants employed in various sectors. Compared to other sectors, 78 percent of migrants worked in Private sector. In all sectors except private sector female participation is higher than male. Majority of the migrant workers were engaged in private sector.

Table 1: Sector- wise Distribution of Workers

Sectors	Female (%)	Male (%)	Total (%)
Govt Sector	25.0	4.9	9.4
Semi Govt Sector	12.5	8.5	9.4
Private Sector	58.3	84.1	78.3
Self-Employee	4.2	2.4	2.8
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0

The distribution of income among the workforce reveals that 37 per cent of male workers earn income between the range of 20,000 to 35,000 where as females have less proportion earns income between the range of 50,000 to 75,000. Being a small number, majority of females worked as nurses in both private and public sectors. Whereas major portion of male emigrants worked in technical and low skilled field.

Table 2: Gender-wise Distribution of Income

Income Range	Female (%)	Male (%)	Total (%)
<20000	8.3	3.7	4.7
20000 – 35000	8.3	36.6	30.2
35000 – 50000	8.3	19.5	17.0
50000 – 75000	45.8	15.9	22.6
75000 – 100000	20.8	3.7	7.5
100000 – 150000	0.0	7.3	5.7
150000 – 200000	4.2	2.4	2.8
> 200000	4.2	11.0	9.4
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0

4.3 Savings of Migrant Workers

When analyzing the savings of emigrants per month, findings shows that emigrants especially those lived with family have lesser savings than those lived in single. This is mainly because of high expenses come in accommodation and education purposes. From the survey it is found that emigrants who leave their family and children at home may save considerable amount of income for future purpose. Majority of the company provide bachelors accommodation camp for men and ladies hostel for women. If company cannot provide this facility, they are given accommodation allowance. But these migrants are suffering from psychological issues as a result of separation from their families, friends, cultures for a long period of time. Many of them faced some kind of mental depression which may lead to other health problems.

Table 3: Migrants Saving Pattern

Savings	Family	Bachelor	Total
< 10 percent	19.0	13.7	15.3
10 – 20 percent	38.1	21.6	26.4
20 – 30 Percent	4.8	25.5	19.4
30 – 40 percent	14.3	29.4	25.0
40 – 50 percent	19.0	3.9	8.3
> 50 percent	4.8	5.9	5.6
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0

4.4 Status of Emigrants at Host country

Worldwide decrease of crude oil negatively affected the life of expatriates in Middle East countries. These countries have a major share in the production and distribution of crude oil. Kuwait possess tenth place in the production of oil in the world (Sam 2016). The decline in oil price followed by economic crisis resulted a slowdown in the activities of government. Government will not sanction new projects for companies whose existing projects are finished. Besides, companies did not received proper fund for the functioning of existing projects. Because of unavailability of funds, companies delay the employers' salaries. Many companies cut the salary by half, completely/ partly cut incentives, allowance which laborers' got before crisis. Some may lose their job. All these conditions negatively affect the emigrants particularly those living with their family. It is difficult for them to meet expenses of education of their children, room rent, basic needs etc. But if partner have secured job in public/private sector they may not face that much of stringency to meet those expenses. Some companies exploit the migrant workers by giving overload work, overtime duty with less salary, low quality food and accommodation. Compared to male, female emigrants faced some type of harassment at workplace.

4.5 Emigrants Health Status

Keralites, who are migrating from an environment of moderate climate, find it difficult to face the extreme hot / cold climate in the Gulf countries. During hot climate, temperature in Gulf countries increased from 45 to 55 degree Celsius. In July 21, 2016 Kuwait recorded a highest temperature of 54 degree Celsius (Samenow 2016). This unhealthy scorching climate negatively affects emigrants' life. Many of them are affected with some diseases during this climatic variation. In addition to this bad climate, air pollution level in Gulf countries is very high. According to the latest report compiled by the World Bank, United Arab Emirates tops the world for exposure to tiny air pollutants; Kuwait stands fourth in the position. Poisonous gas emitted from oil companies, from vehicles, from air conditioner etc makes a polluted atmosphere in these countries. Not only this, consumption of junk food, colas, heavy dependence on oven, fridge- all these caused so many serious diseases to emigrants especially those lived without their family. So a healthy person may become a ill health person after 15 to 25 years of working life in Gulf.

Table 4: Distribution of Migrants have Health Problems During the Working year

Working Year	Diseases at Abroad (Percent)		
	Yes	No	Total
1 - 2 yrs	3.6	7.7	6.6
3 - 4 yrs	14.3	20.5	18.9
5 - 6 yrs	7.1	15.4	13.2
7 - 8 yrs	14.3	11.5	12.3
9 - 10 yrs	17.9	11.5	13.2
11 - 12 yrs	10.7	3.8	5.7
13 - 14 yrs	7.1	11.5	10.4
15 - 16 yrs	10.7	7.7	8.5
> 17 yrs	14.3	10.3	11.3
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0

4.6 Impact of Migration on Family and Children at origin

A study conducted in recent year reveals that the volume of emigration to Gulf countries had reduced but for job purpose Keralites still depends on Gulf countries. Majority of the emigrants often migrate by themselves leaving his wife and children back home may create so many positive and negative impact on the migrants' family.

Positive Impact

The purpose of migration is basically economical. The economic benefits to the emigrants' households accrue primarily from the receipt of foreign remittances, goods including equipment and tools of production, consumer durables, jewellery and gold that are transferred from abroad to home. Depending upon the amount received and their utilization, the economic status of the households may improve, which gets reflected in their consumption standards, quality of housing, health and educational status, ownership of property and income levels (Rajan 2021).

Negative Impact

Most of the emigrants dream is to live with his family in Gulf. It is possible for those emigrants who got a better income and his partner have job there. The main reason behind this is high living cost in Gulf countries. A person who lives with his family have to spent huge amount of money for accommodation. If family have children migrant have to spent considerable amount for children's education. In addition migrant have to meet expenses in food, dress, medical cost, yearly wise visa renewal process and travel expense if they want to meet relatives at origin. Because of all these expense, majority of the emigrants live alone in Gulf.

All those migrants who worked alone in Gulf get family life for short period of time. As per the Labour law in Gulf, a migrant labour gets one month leave in a year. That means migrant who worked 12 years in Gulf, get one year to live with his family. This may cause so many problems and issues in migrants' family. Loneliness is the greatest problem faced by the Gulf wives. Added to this, responsibilities of wives have also increased. Though migrant can provide better education to his children, but children may not get a proper parental care which may negatively influence their welfare. Another negative impact is that the migrant who worked so many years in Gulf may not maintain a strong and continuous relationship with distance family members (Biplab Dhak 2013) Because of unfavorable conditions in workplace migrants feel sad as they not able to back home during emergencies and special occasions within or outside the family.

V CONCLUSION

The emigrants are one of the major contributors to the GDP of Kerala economy. The emigrants from Kerala who are living alone are found to have some mental distortions as they are leaving their counterpart and children in the homeland. Also the major share of the income from the emigrants goes mainly for the construction of the houses and education purposes of the children as well. The separation of either of the parent makes the whole family resulting in negative externalities. As the emigration to Kuwait is the nature of contract migration, the demand for migrant labour, the wages and working conditions and the return migration are largely determined by the labour market factors and the immigration policy of Kuwait. Changes in immigration policy of the Kuwait government, completion of major infrastructural projects and the economic recession have reduced the demand for unskilled and semi-skilled labourers substantially since 1996. Added to this is the effect of the policy of 'demographic balancing'. The Kuwait government came to the conclusion that due to the large scale influx of foreigners, the role and importance of Kuwait nationals are marginalized in the country and economy creating a very dangerous situation for the country. So the government is pursuing a policy of emiratisation, banning visa for unskilled Asian workers and taking measures such as large scale mechanization to make unskilled labour more expensive.

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