

RETURN EMIGRANTS FROM GULF COUNTRIES: STRATEGIES FOR ADAPTATION AND SUPPORT MECHANISM

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Abstract: The present study focus on strategies of adaptation and the supporting mechanism available for return emigrants from Gulf countries in Kerala. The evidence is drawn from in-depth interviews conducted among 250 return migrants and 30 key informants. The study used Kerala, a southern state of India as a study area where the state with largest concentration of migrants and returns migrants in the country. The State has been highly affected due to the sudden return of migrants from Gulf countries due to Economic recession in 2008, 'Nitaqath policy' in 2012, Localization of business and trades adopted by the Saudi government, Oil price decrease and internal conflict among Gulf countries recently. The impact of return flows is very severe to the state as well as to the migrants in the form of declining remittance, unemployment scenario, demographic changes and rehabilitation problems, etc. This paper examines the coping strategies adopted by migrants to various problems in post return period and supporting mechanism available for reintegration process. The paper argues that there is less opportunities for enhanced reintegration in the State and suggests the need of systematic policy initiatives and planning in accordance with the larger strength return migrants at the local level with support of every stakeholder, i.e., the local communities, local self-governments and the migrants themselves.

Keywords: Return migration; Coping strategies; Reintegration, Supporting mechanism, Policies

1.0 Introduction: Migration from one area to another in search of improved livelihoods is a key feature of human history. In some regions of India, especially in Kerala, three out of four households include a migrant. The large-scale migration of Keralite workers to Gulf countries during the last four decades has contributed to the major socio-economic and demographic changes in Kerala. This has resulted in an unparalleled increase in migration, receipt of migrant remittance and widespread changes in socio economic and social front.

The migrants from Kerala have moved to the Arab Gulf countries, especially after the 1973 oil crisis benefiting from the need for foreign labour to implement massive scale development plans and projects in these countries. Kerala contributed to a half of the total migration to Gulf countries and it continued to be an important topic of research during the last few decades. The major destinations of the migrants are gulf countries which include UAE, Saudi Arabia, Oman, Qatar, Kuwait and Bahrain (Shekhar, 1993). Within the Gulf region, the UAE retained its number one rank, with Saudi Arabia coming in the second position. Nearly 40 per cent of Kerala's migrants live in the UAE and 25 per cent in Saudi Arabia. According to the recent Kerala migration survey, the number of Kerala migrants living abroad in 2014 is estimated to be about 24.0 lakhs, up from 22.8 lakhs in 2011, 21.9 lakhs in 2008, 18.4 lakhs in 2003 and 13.6 lakhs in 1998 (Zacharia,2014).

The global economic and financial crisis since 2008, The 'Nitaqat Policy 2012', internal conflicts among Gulf countries and localization of business and trade in Saudi Arabia created unprecedented loss of employment and fall in economic activities in the Gulf that resulted return migration. The policies of promoting the native employment, abandonment of large scale construction and economic crisis in the oil industry have pushed the marginal and low paid migrant workers in gulf countries to return to India temporarily or permanently. The number of Kerala migrants who returned from abroad is 12.5 lakhs in 2014, up from 11.5 in 2011, 11.6 in 2008, 8.9 lakhs in 2003 and 7.4 lakhs in 1998 (Zacharia, 2014). From the estimates we can assume that the magnitude of return migrants increases year by year.

The impact of return flows is very severe to the state as well as to the migrants in the form of declining remittance, unemployment, demographic changes, reintegration and rehabilitation problems and policies, etc. There is extensive debate on the adverse impact of return migration on economy and demography of Kerala. The state has not in a

position to host and reintegrate the return migrants due to high unemployment rate, low industrial development, lack of return migration policies and plans, etc. Therefore, the problems and experience of return migrants in post return period will be very traumatic. The present study has examined the current socioeconomic profile of return migrants, major living difficulties, support mechanism, coping strategies adopted by migrants and existing government legislation and policies for the reintegration of return migrants in Kerala. The study also suggests measures for the welfare of return emigrants.

2.0 Review of Literature

2.1 Return Migration in Kerala: Return migration is a predictable feature of short-term or contract migration. Return migration may be defined as the process whereby people voluntary or involuntary return to their country or region. United Nations Statistics Division for Collection data on International migration (UNSD,1998), return migrants are persons returning to their country of citizenship after having been international migrants (Whether short term or long term) in another country and who are intending to stay their own country for at least a year. Return migration failed to get adequate attention from researchers and policy makers. It was a great unwritten chapter in the history of migration process.

Return migrants have become demographically, politically and economically a significant component of Kerala's population. The global economic crisis, policies of giving larger share of jobs for natives like Nitaqat, abandonment of large scale constructions and conflicts among gulf countries have created a context in which return of low and unskilled migrant worker from Gulf to their home society in Kerala. Now a day, the employment possibilities in the Middle East is not assured due the scenario of declined demand for imported labour.

The statistical data on migrants in Kerala bring us to the importance of migration and return migration in the social and economic scenario of the Kerala population. The state wise distribution of return migrants in India from abroad shows that Kerala has around 50 percent of the total return migrants in the country. As per the Kerala Migration Survey (2014) the number of Kerala migrants who return from abroad is 12.5 lacks in 2014, up from 11.5 in 2011, 11.6 in 2008 and 7.4 lakhs in 1998. The largest number of Kerala migrants had returned from Saudi Arabia, that is, 34.5 per cent of the total. Almost an equal number (33 per cent) had returned from UAE. Other countries from where Kerala migrants had returned are: Oman (13 per cent), Bahrain and Kuwait (5 per cent each) and Qatar (4.3 per cent) (Zachariah, 2012).

At present one out of every 29 persons in Kerala, one out of every 22 adult population of Kerala, one out of every 19 working age population of Kerala, and one out of every 9 working age male population of Kerala are return emigrants. At present, there are roughly over 1.3 million return emigrants in Kerala. (Zachariah, Rajan, 2012).

2.2 Return Migration from Gulf: Context : Return migration is an indispensable process in migration cycle and people have different motives and explanation for their return such as retirement, need care for family, health issues, job loss, and unsuccessful migration experience, etc. The return may be voluntary or involuntary (forced) according to their context and causes for return. It has been observed that some specific contexts and situations in different periods since 2007 to present time where large scale of migrants returned to Kerala. Some particular events and issues like financial crisis in 2007, Nitaqat policy 2012, localisation of trades and business in Saudi Arabia and internal conflict among oil producing countries aroused during these periods in Gulf countries resulted mass movements of migrants from Gulf to Kerala.

Global financial crisis between 2007 and 2009 resulted job loss and return of a large number of migrants from Gulf countries to Kerala. It is estimated that more than two lacks workers in the Gulf have returned to India as a result of the delay in execution of projects due to global economic slowdown and recession (Shamnad, 2012). The World Bank estimated the biggest economic slowdowns in the Gulf and Europe during this period. The most visible impact of recession happened in Dubai and \$ 59 billion debt woes of state run Dubai World, one of the largest global conglomerates. The largest number of migrants who returned during this period turned up from the UAE (46.4%). Zachariah and Rajan (2010) have estimated a total of 173,000 Kerala emigrants returned home during the months between October 2008 and June 2009 (the recession months).

The number of migrants who lost their jobs and returned to Kerala is high in 2012-13 due to the new labour law adopted by Saudi Arabian government which is called 'Nitaqat (Naruralisation)'. The law makes it mandatory to employ a minimum of 10 per cent of Saudi nationals over foreigners in government and private sector. Unlike other

Gulf countries Saudi Arabia itself has large number of unemployed citizen and unemployment rate has reached 12 percent according to the new estimates. Under Nitaqat law, the government will evaluate the performance of companies by calculating the percentage of Saudi nationals employed by the firm. The nationalisation performance of the companies will be calculated on a moving average basis over successive periods of 13 weeks. Enterprises are categorised into different quotas of Excellence, Green, Yellow and Red based on the level of compliance. The firms being in the highest localisation ratios will be in Excellence and Green category and they will be granted with special incentives. Yellow categorised firms being in the mid-way would be awarded time to improve their compliance level. The firms which has lowest localisation ration will be in Red category and will be subject to various sanctions.

According to Non-Resident Kerala Affairs (NoRKA) department who had opened returnees' registration centre at three airports during this period shows a higher number of returns due to the new Law. During the first two month of the implementation of 'Nitaqat' more than 15,000 migrants returned to Kerala. Most of them are skilled labours and company workers.

Saudi Arabia commenced localisation of selected job sectors and trades for natives only from the year of 2015 due to its increasing unemployment ratio. The supply of foreign labour is calculated higher than its demand during last few years and majority of trades and business are occupied by foreigners. This decision from the Saudi government also contributed a large level forced return migration of Kerala people from Gulf.

The recent diplomatic conflict between the Gulf countries with Qatar created a context of job loss and forced return of Kerala migrants during mid of 2016. Saudi Arabia, UAE and Bahrain severed diplomatic relation with Qatar accusing it of working with its enemies. It is estimated that around 6.5 lakhs Indian nationals are living and working in Qatar that is nearly twice the number of native Qataris. Out of that almost half of them are from Kerala. The economic impact of the present crisis was high and led to the job loss of many Indians.

2.3 Impact of Return Migration

Return migration by various reasons has serious consequences on the life of migrants. The life after return in home society directly depends on the nature and context of their return migration. The impact of forced or involuntary return makes their life more vulnerable with the immediate loss of jobs and not having pre-departure planning to home society. There are many cases where the average NRK returning home after decades do nothing and sink in to depression. The state is also struggling with a compound range of socio-economic problems faced by Gulf returnees without having systematic supporting mechanisms and policy plans.

Return migrants are likely to be more vulnerable with exoticism with the changed socio cultural and economic environment of the home society due to their long time absence as a migrant in another country. Majority of the migrants from Kerala are skilled, unskilled or semiskilled labourers. The present labour market system has a speedy change over the last few years and skilled and unskilled employments are being filled with immigrant workers from other states of Uttar Pradesh, West Bengal, Bihar and Tamil Nadu. This affects the economic reintegration of return migrants after return. The present low wages in Kerala comparing to Gulf will also affect the total financial management of family after return.

Moreover, the entrepreneurial opportunities compared to other states are very low in Kerala. This leads to many migrant returnees forced to remain unproductive for the rest of their life. On the whole, the investment activity of the return emigrants was minimal after return. Very few had tried to start any kind of economic activity. Other than a few trading shops, taxi services or agricultural processing establishments, the return emigrants of Kerala did not get involved in any sort of investment activity. Those who did try were not very successful (Zachariah, Rajan, 2011).

A study conducted by Zachariah and Rajan (2011) have found that a large proportion of the prospective emigrants from Kerala had no income at all at the time of their emigration. When they returned, as much as majority of the return emigrants had to use part of their savings to pay back the debts they had incurred to meet the cost of their emigration. The migrants have to spend more money for migration purpose viz., VISA, ticket, emigration charges, medical test, etc. The consumption habit of migrants in Kerala shows that the major part of remittance are being spend on house construction or purchasing vehicles, etc. Most of the time migrants construct big budget houses that make gulf impression among people. If once a forced repatriation happens he has to come back and will fall in economic crisis. Then he takes loans and debts for completing the house construction and repaying debt. As the

sources of income of migrants are limited after coming back to home society, it is very difficult to meet the repayment of their debt obligations.

Health problems among return migrants observed as one of the main challenge for the reintegration after return. Health problems are also considered as one of the main reasons to discontinue emigration in Gulf and come back to Kerala. The changed food habits, long working hours and hard climate make them fall prey to many life style diseases like diabetes, cancer and hyper tension, etc.

Return migration has a great impact on migrant's family and community relationship. The long absence and separation from family and community makes a type of detachment. The involuntary or forced return becomes reason for disappointment of the family due to sudden return. The household is expecting a continuous flow of remittance or income from the migrant which did not happen. The return also affects the migrant wise children relationship.

The problems of return migrants and their reintegration into family, society and current economic system has become a much-debated issue of recent times in Kerala. The government and other many NGOs/INGOs are involved in the process of successfully reintegrating migrants to their home societies. The government has planned certain schemes and policies to return migrants on an emergency basis. The migrants also have some coping strategies and resources that make them more adaptive with the unfriendly environment in the home country.

2.4 Research Methodology

The objectives of the study are to;

1. Analyse the context in which the respondents returned back to home society in Kerala
2. To identify the changes in socio economic characteristics of migrants and major difficulties they faced with employment, health, family, re adjustment, and accessing supporting services after return.
3. Understand the coping strategies adopted by the migrant respondents to deal with the situation at home society after return
4. Analyse the support mechanism available for the respondents in the State

The study was carried out in northern part of Kerala by applying a descriptive research design method. Both qualitative and quantitative data are gathered from the respondents using a multi stage stratified sampling method- Among the 15 block Panchayaths of Malappuram district, two blocks were randomly selected. Out of the total 15 grama-panchayaths of above two blocks, five were randomly selected. The sample size for the study was limited to 250 and the households were distributed equally between the panchayaths. The return migrants included individuals, who had returned from Gulf countries (gulf countries in this study included United Arab Emirates (UAE), Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Oman, Kuwait and Bahrain) prior to the survey. The study was conducted during the months of June to November 2016. The data was collected with the help of a structured interview schedule. All the participants for the study were interviewed at their homes by the author. Each return emigrant was asked to respond on a good number of wide ranging and interconnected questions regarding the post return phase of their life. Data on household profile were also obtained from the return emigrants. For the analysis of data SPSS-19 software package was used and appropriate statistical measures such as arithmetic mean, percentages and ratios were obtained for analytical purpose.

3.0 Results

3.1 Support Mechanism and Coping Strategies: The return migrants require rapid assistance and support in their specific needs in post return period and their reintegration highly depended upon the supporting mechanisms that are available in home society. The provision of assistance to returnees in their country of origin is an essential element to ensure their sustainability in remaining period of life. From the finding of secondary data it can be said that the migrants are in unfavorable circumstances with factors of health related issues, family problems, reemployment issues and economic crisis, etc.

The results of the present study shows that the major source of support and assistance for return migrants are their family, neighboring community, local and state government and other nongovernmental organizations which include pravasi organizations and community based organizations. Out of total 250 migrants, 68.8 percent were supported by their family after their in return in different forms. Further it shows that half of the total migrants were supported by their community. The support from Government and other Non-governmental organization was low compared to family and community assistance. Only 22.8 percent of return migrants were supported by government through

different schemes and programmes. The study finding reveals that the family was one of the major sources of support and assistance in post return period.

The emigrants has been supported in different ways viz., psychological/mental support, financial assistance, support to access health care, support to manage legal procedures and other assistance. Return migrants are vulnerable with different problems and their needs are different in accordance to their living situation after return. Many problems are general in nature and some problems are individualistic. So, the need based assistance has to be provided based on the nature of problems that they are addressing currently. The migrants needed support in different stages of their life after return which contains a rapid psychological and mental support soon after their return. This is probably has been given by family, friends and relatives. In the cases of forced return, the psychological effect of return will be very high and migrant will be in frustrated position with their job loss and unsuccessful migration experiences. In later stages they required support in searching employment and access to health care and managing legal procedures, etc.

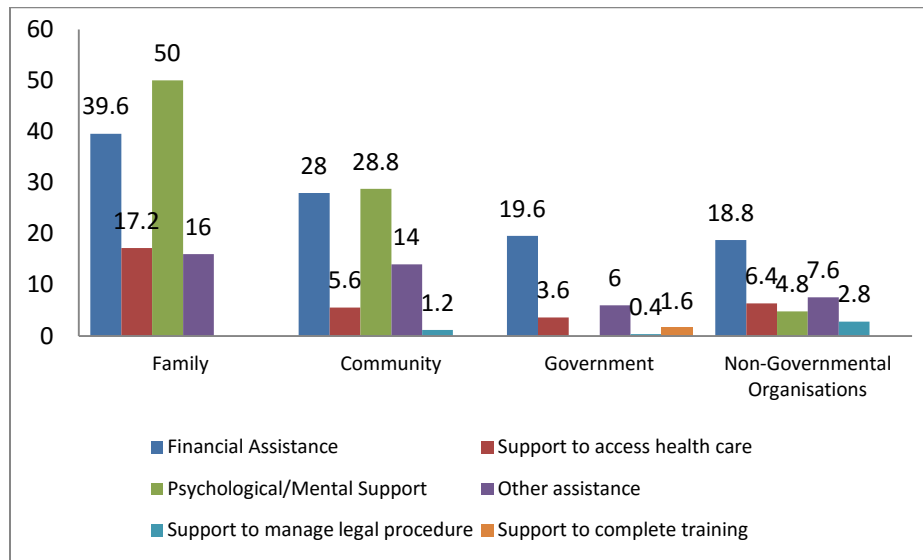


Figure 1- Nature of Support/Assistance

The figure 1 shows that the migrant’s family was one of the major sources of assistance for returnees. They have supported them financially, psychologically and assisted in health care. Around half of the respondents were assisted psychologically by their family. 39.6 percent was assisted financially and 17.2 percent in accessing health care. A small number of migrants got other assistance which includes searching jobs and providing accommodation.

The migrants cannot be reintegrated successfully without having proper assistance and support from own community. Here the study results shows that the neighboring community was one of another important agency that promotes and helps for better reintegration in post return period. The community can provide mental relief, financial assistance, employment and other assistance related to health and family. The figure shows that 28 percent of return migrants has been supported by their community psychologically and financial matters. 5.6 percent got assistance in access health care after return. Only few migrants have been supported in managing legal procedures.

The study indicates that the support from government was minimal compared to family and community. 19.6 percent of migrants were supported financially through different schemes and programs after their return. None of migrants were supported psychologically or mentally with proper counseling or other measures by government in post return period. A small number of migrants were assisted in accessing health care that accounts 3.6 percent of total return migrants. The government has given skill up gradation training to 1.6 percent of migrants after return. Another 0.4 percent got assistance in managing legal procedures related to their migration and return migration.

The nature of assistance provided by nongovernmental organization shows that majority is helped financially by NGOs or other community based organizations that account 18.8 percent. The other assistance, 6.4 percent in health

care, 4.8 percent in psychological support, 2.8 percent in legal help and 7.6 got other assistance. Most of the supporting organizations were community based religious organization from their community which they belong to.

The study results on the migrant's awareness on government programmes and schemes shows that the awareness levels are at very low level. Only 37.6 migrants are aware about any government schemes which support return migrants. A majority (62.4 percent) of them have no idea about any specific project. For assessing the satisfaction level of migrants on schemes, the responses from them has been categorized viz., highly satisfied, satisfied and not satisfied. The study shows that majority of the respondents are not satisfied with current schemes that accounts for 64 percent. 32 percent of them are satisfied and only a few number is highly satisfied with current schemes that account for four percent. The migrants reported that the current schemes are not attractive or adequate to help them. Therefore, the study strongly suggests that the current schemes are not adequate and striking in accordance with highest strength of return migrants in the state. The study also suggests that government should formulate and implement more new schemes and programmes for the welfare of return migrants.

The study collected data regarding to the membership status of return migrants with pravasi organization to assess the level of social reintegration of the return migrants to home society after their return. It was found that 41.2 percent of migrants are associated with or member of any pravasi organization in their post return period. The rest, majority is not having membership with any organization.

3.2 Coping Strategies

This section present the different strategies that have been adopted by return migrants to cope with various problems that created due to return migration. The data collected on their financial coping, health coping, coping to readjustment issues and loneliness, coping to psychological and mental problems. The migrants have used positive and negative strategies to cope with different problems in post return period.

Based on the Table 1, the most common strategy being 'Borrowing money, bank loans, selling valuables, etc' (52.4 percent) and 'Ask for help from family, relations, etc' (51.2 percent). The most common strategy for health problem was 'Consult a doctor or a medical practitioner' (82.4 percent) and strategy for loneliness and isolation 'I learn to live with it' (47.2 percent). The most common used strategy for psychological problems was 'Turn to prayer and spiritual thoughts' (75 percent) and only few percent seek drugs and alcohol to relieve mental stress. The study indicated migrants have used negative and positive strategies to cope with different problems in post return period.

Table 1- Coping Strategies

Sr No	Problems/Coping Strategies	No. of Respondents	Percent
Financial Problem			
1	Ask for help from family, relations, etc.	128	30.0%
2	Borrowing money, bank loans, selling valuables, etc.	131	30.8%
3	Denial of needs	54	12.7%
Health Issues			
1	Consult a doctor or medical practitioner	206	68.9%
2	Self-treatment	69	23.1%
3	I learn to live with it.	17	5.7%
Family Problems			
1	Take advice from relatives or friends	141	76.6%
2	Seeking counseling if I continue to struggle with stress	15	8.2%
3	I use alcohol or drugs to help me get through it	15	8.2%

Readjustment Problems			
1	Express my feelings to the one who caught the problem	106	42.2%
2	I accept that this has happened and that it cannot be changed.	55	21.9%
3	I make a plan of action.	80	31.9%
Loneliness/Isolation			
1	Keeping myself busy	76	27.0%
2	Going out with a friend (shopping, movie, dining, etc)	79	28.0%
3	I learn to live with it	118	41.8%
Psychological Problems			
1	Share Problem with family members	82	25.9%
2	Seek counseling services	17	5.4%
3	Try to feel better by eating, drinking, smoking, using drugs, or medication	21	6.6%
4	Turn to prayer & spiritual thoughts	186	58.7%

4.0 Conclusion

The present study is focused on the coping strategies supporting mechanism of Gulf return emigrants in Kerala. It can be concluded that the return migration have highly impacted on the life returnees in Kerala and they are living in a traumatic life situation after return without having adequate job opportunities, economic difficulties, readjustment problems and health related issues, etc. The supporting mechanism shows that the family and neighboring community are the major sources assistance and government support was minimal for them. The migrants have adopted different strategies to cope with their living difficulties. The strategies for adaptation is vary from person to person. The government and other departments should study the problems of return migrants in Kerala and make appropriate rehabilitation programs and schemes for their welfare in an immediate basis.

5.0 Suggestion and Recommendation

The return of large number of migrants will create very serious economic consequences especially in employment, unemployment, consumption, savings and investment and in the general wellbeing of the people. So, the State and central Government should give high priority to the issues of return migration and rehabilitation of return emigrants. Policies should aim at providing credit and other support for providing gainful employment to the return emigrants and relief to those households who lost their head of the household after migration.

Health issues like sickness, accidents, lack of treatment facilities is prevalent among a sizeable section of return migrants. In order to provide medical assistance to this category of return emigrants a health insurance scheme exclusively for the return migrants may be formulated. They may be given a monthly pension of Rs.1500 per month till his death. An insurance Company may be entrusted to administer this insurance scheme.

The unemployment rate is high among return migrants and those unemployed are not getting any income. In this context, there is a need of an employment scheme to provide credit support may be formulated for the purpose. The return emigrants are not aware of the various welfare schemes/pension schemes implemented by the Central Government and the State Governments. Therefore, the Governments should take necessary steps to enroll the emigrants in the various welfare schemes. Measures to raise public awareness about such schemes should be adopted. Grants may be given for constructing old age homes for return migrants and meeting the running expenditure. In order to promote investment of emigrants and return emigrants, special incentives may be given for small scale production, repair and service units started by them

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