NAVIGATING HOMECOMING: FACTORS INFLUENCING MIGRANT RETURNS AND THEIR INVOLVEMENT IN KERALA'S ECONOMY

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Abstract

This study explores the dynamics of return migration in Kerala, where a significant portion of the population has historically worked in Gulf countries. The research identifies key factors influencing migrants' decisions to return, categorized into personal, legal, and organizational reasons. Organizational factors emerged as the most critical, affecting over 98 per cent of returnees. Additionally, the study examines the involvement of returnees in their home society post-return, focusing on cultural, political, religious, family, and social aspects. Using statistical analyses, the findings reveal variations in engagement levels across different age groups, with younger returnees showing less involvement compared to their older counterparts. Challenges such as economic disparities, social stigmas, and adjustment issues complicate the reintegration process. The study underscores the necessity for targeted policies and support systems to facilitate successful reintegration, thereby leveraging the potential contributions of returnees to local development and fostering a more resilient and inclusive community.

Keywords:- Return Migration, Involvement, Organizational Factors, Socio Economic Conditions, Reintegration.

W hile considering the states in India, Kerala exists primarily on overseas money. It became a progressive and prominent state utilizing the contribution of migrants for its economic construction. Out of the total migrants in Kerala, 89 per cent are located in gulf countries and the balance is shared in all other foreign countries.

The major destinations of Kerala workers in the Gulf include United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, Oman, Bahrain, Kuwait and Qatar (Kerala Migration

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Survey 2018). Return migration is one of the foremost problems faced by the Kerala economy in recent years. As per the Kerala Migration Survey 2018, the number of return emigrants was estimated as 12.95 lakhs - specifically 60 per cent of the total migrants. The intensity of the situation can be measured from the above numbers and it cannot be denied that its impact the migrants as well as the whole economy that depends more on migration and remittance affects.

So, it is very essential to bring together the returned migrants for the inclusive growth and overall development of the economy. Subsequently, it is very essential to empower returned migrants through self-employment and utilize their skills, abilities and the human and social capital to maintain development in all sectors and to generate employment opportunities.

1.1 Objectives of the Study

The primary objectives of this study are twofold. First, to identify the major reasons for the return of migrants to their native places, focusing on economic factors, family ties, health considerations, political circumstances, and environmental influences. Second, the study aims to explore the involvement of migrant returnees in their home society after their return. This includes examining their economic contributions, social engagement, cultural reintegration, and political influences, as well as the challenges they may face in readjusting to their communities. Together, these objectives will shed light on the multifaceted impact of migration on both individuals and their home societies.

1.2 Research review

This research review highlights various studies focused on the challenges and experiences of migrants, particularly those from India and Kerala, who have worked in Gulf countries and other regions. Prakash (2013) identified an increasing trend of migrants returning from Gulf countries due to declining employment opportunities and wages, which impacted their savings. Various reasons for return included contract expiration, health issues, and compulsory expatriation. The study emphasized the need for policies to support returnees in finding employment and aiding families who lost their primary earners due to migration. George (2005) reported on the adverse living and working conditions faced by Kerala workers in the Middle East, highlighting the mismatch between job guarantees and actual work conditions, often leading to exploitation. Zachariah et al. (2002) further elaborated on the struggles faced by migrant workers in the UAE, including long working hours, unpaid wages, and poor living conditions. Sander (2007) discussed the additional stresses immigrants face, such as language barriers and disrupted family life, which can affect their health and well-being. Migrants often maintain ties to their home countries through remittances and family connections.Reichert et al. (2013) examined return migration in the rural U.S. and noted that family ties significantly influence decisions to return. Zachariaand Rajan (2015) focused on the adaptation patterns of migrants, noting that support systems in destination areas greatly aid adjustment.

Mehra (2012) highlighted social and cultural factors affecting adaptation, including marital status, cultural participation, and changes in lifestyle. Azeez and Begum (2009) found that migration positively impacts family income and community infrastructure.Islam (2010) pointed out that while returnee migrants can drive development, lack of investment opportunities hinders their contributions. Mukherjee (2013) explored the post-return conditions of skilled professionals, noting that return migration enhances social ties and provides new opportunities in their home country. Geller and Latek (2014) highlighted the challenges faced by returnees, such as exclusion from social networks and difficulties in reintegration. Many returnees faced unexpected returns, complicating their ability to reintegrate into their home society.

The studies collectively underscore the complexities of migration, highlighting both the challenges faced by migrants in host countries and the potential for returnees to contribute positively to their home communities. There is a clear need for support systems that facilitate reintegration and address the economic and social barriers faced by returning migrants.

1.3 Scope of the Study

The study is confined only to Kerala and to the returned migrants from six Gulf countries. The study includes the returned migrants who reintegrate to home country were also taken into consideration. The study evaluates the reasons for return of migration after long years of stay in gulf countries and the involvement after return to the home country.

1.4 Significance of the Study

Migration to Gulf countries has played a crucial role in advancing technologies, improving human development indicators, fostering socio-economic growth, and enriching Kerala with valuable cultural and resource exchanges. However, the recent trend of return migration has had a notable impact on the Kerala economy, which has long relied on migration and remittances for its financial stability. Despite the skills and experiences gained by migrants abroad, their involvement in the state's economic development post-return remains minimal, with limited changes in terms of utilizing their potential.   This study is significant because it emphasizes the need to integrate return migrants more effectively into the local economy, ensuring their active participation in fostering inclusive growth and sustainable development. By exploring the factors that hinder the economic engagement of returnees, the study aims to uncover how Kerala can better capitalize on their capabilities and resources.

1.5 Materials and Methods

The study employs a descriptive and analytical research design, utilizing both primary and secondary data to explore the reasons for the return of migrants to their native places in Kerala and their involvement in local economies for effective reintegration. Primary data were collected from returned migrants from six major Gulf countries-United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, Oman, Bahrain, Kuwait, and Qatar while secondary data

were collected from various research reports, organizational annual reports, and other relevant publications. A purposive sampling method was used to identify sample districts based on the highest concentration of returned migrants as per the Kerala Migration Survey 2018, focusing on Kollam, Kozhikode, and Malappuram. Structured interviews were conducted with the selected migrants to gather comprehensive data. This methodology aims to provide insights into the challenges faced by returned migrants and their contributions to the local economy, enhancing the understanding of their role in successful reintegration.

1.6 Reasons for Return of Respondents to Home Country

Reasons for return of migrants to home country involve a variety of factors

and return migration is an important problem faced by the economy in recent years. As per the Kerala Migration Survey 2018, the number of return migrants in Kerala is estimated to be 1.3 million. It constitutes 61 per cent of the total emigrants. The various factors that lead to their return is categorized into personal, legal, organizational and others. The extent to which these reasons caused for migrants to return are identified through the opinion of the respondents. The reasons for return of the respondents are represented in Table 1.1

Among the various reasons that forced the migrants to return, the most important one in the retuned migrants' opinion is organizational factors with 98.5 per cent. Following it, legal and personal factors were shared by 26.9 per cent of the returnees. 20.3 per cent of the

Table 1.1

Reasons for Return (Multiple Responses)

		Responses		Percent of cases	Total
		N	Percent		
Personal	Problems at home	58	7.50%	12.90%	26.90%
	Ill health	63	8.10%	14.00%	
Legal	Compulsory expatriation	121	15.60%	26.90%	26.90%
	Released from detention camp	0	0	0	
	Low remuneration	92	11.90%	20.50%	
	Poor working condition	192	24.80%	42.80%	
Organizational	Harsh behavior of employers	41	5.30%	9.10%	98.50%
	No timely payment of salary	117	15.10%	26.10%	
Others	Voluntary return,		11.70%	20.30%	20.30%
	Betrayal of sponsors etc.	91			
	Total	775	100.00%	172.60%	172.60%
Dichotomy group tabulated at value 1 i.e. Yes					

Source: Primary Data

respondents returned due to other reasons such as voluntary return, nostalgic feeling about home and society and so on.

1.7 Involvement in Home Society after Return to Home Country

Involvement of the returned migrants in home society is analysed on the basis of the age of returned migrants. Five-point scale was used for collecting opinion from returned migrants where, 5 point is given for highly decreased, 4 for moderately decreased, 3 for neutral, 2 for moderately improved and 1 for highly improved.

1.7.1 Age Group Wise Analysis of Involvement in Home Society After Return to Home Country

A one-way multivariate analysis of variance was run to determine the involvement in home society after return to home country. The age-groups of respondents included 5 categories such as less than 30 years, 31 - 40 years, 41 - 50 years, 51- 60 years and more than 60 years. The descriptive statistics of test variables under each category of each group is shown in Table 1.2.

Table 1.2
Descriptive Statistics

Test Variables	Age Groups	Mean	S D	N
Cultural aspects	Less than 30 years	3.160	0.746	25
	31 - 40 years	2.748	0.963	115
	41 - 50 years	2.747	0.928	162
	51- 60 years	2.882	0.857	144
	More than 60 years	3.000	0.816	4
	Total	2.816	0.907	450
Political aspects	Less than 30 years	3.040	0.841	25
	31 - 40 years	2.661	1.016	115
	41 - 50 years	2.556	0.885	162
	51- 60 years	2.764	0.885	144
	More than 60 years	3.000	0.816	4
	Total	2.680	0.922	450
Religious aspects	Less than 30 years	3.080	0.862	25
	31 - 40 years	2.574	1.085	115
	41 - 50 years	2.549	0.997	162
	51- 60 years	2.875	1.064	144
	More than 60 years	2.750	0.500	4
	Total	2.691	1.043	450
Family involvement	Less than 30 years	3.040	0.935	25
	31 - 40 years	2.574	1.068	115
	41 - 50 years	2.593	1.007	162
	51- 60 years	2.965	1.060	144
	More than 60 years	2.750	0.500	4
	Total	2.733	1.047	450
Social involvement	Less than 30 years	3.000	1.118	25
	31 - 40 years	3.017	1.139	115
	41 - 50 years	2.815	1.076	162
	51- 60 years	2.972	1.109	144
	More than 60 years	3.250	0.957	4
	Total	2.931	1.104	450

Source: Primary Data

While considering the involvement in home society after return based on the age of the returned migrants, it was found that the social involvement was a major factor of reduction as indicated by a high mean score of 3.250 ± 0.957 among the age group of more than 60 years. However, religious involvement was found highly improved after return from abroad with the lowest mean of 2.549 ± 0.997, among the age group of 41 - 50 years.

The analysis reveals that returned migrants in the age group of 41- 50 years were more involved in-home society after return as their mean score of all the test variables were lowest. However, the returned migrants with less than 30 years were less involved in-home society after return except in the case of social aspects in neutral position with the mean score of 3.000 ± 1.118. The involvement in social aspects is found to be improved to the age group of more than 60 years at the same time decreased to the age group of 31-40 years with the mean score of 3.017 ± 1.139.

The combined effects of all the five measures representing the involvement in home society after return of the respondents are shown in Table 1.3.

The differences between the age groups on the combined dependent variables was not statistically significant, F $[20, 1463.581] = 1.495$, p>0.05; Wilks' Ë = .935. It is inferred that when all the test variables are considered as a whole, significant difference were not found to exist across age-groups of returnees from abroad.

Follow-up univariate ANOVAs was made for each of the five dependent variables to identify whether statistically significant differences exist between the age groups of returned migrants.

The results of univariate tests in terms of estimated Means, Standard Errors and ANOVA test results are depicted in Table 1.4

H_{01}: There is no significant difference in individual measures of involvement in home society subsequent to return, across age groups of returnees.

The follow-up univariate ANOVAs showed that involvement in home society based on religious aspects (F $[4, 445] = 3.164$, p<0.05), Family involvement (F $[4, 445] = 3.795$) were statistically significant difference across the age groups of returnees.

Table 1.3

Multivariate Test Results – MANOVA

	Value	F	Hypothesis df	Error df	Sig.
Wilks' lambda	.935	1.495	20.000	1463.581	0.073
F tests the multivariate effect of Age.					

Source: Primary data

Table 1.4

Estimated Means, SE and ANOVA Results

Dependent Variable		Mean	Std. Error	Hypdf (Error df)	F	Sig.
Cultural aspects	Less than 30 years	3.160	.181	4 (445)	1.534	0.191
	31 - 40 years	2.748	.084			
	41 - 50 years	2.747	.071			
	51- 60 years	2.882	.075			
	More than 60 years	3.000	.453			
Political aspects	Less than 30 years	3.040	.184	4 (445)	2.142	0.075
	31 - 40 years	2.661	.086			
	41 - 50 years	2.556	.072			
	51- 60 years	2.764	.076			
	More than 60 years	3.000	.459			
Religious aspects	Less than 30 years	3.080	.207	4 (445)	3.164	**0.014**
	31 - 40 years	2.574	.096			
	41 - 50 years	2.549	.081			
	51- 60 years	2.875	.086			
	More than 60 years	2.750	.516			
Family involvement	Less than 30 years	3.040	.207	4 (445)	3.795	**0.005**
	31 - 40 years	2.574	.096			
	41 - 50 years	2.593	.081			
	51- 60 years	2.965	.086			
	More than 60 years	2.750	.517			
Social involvement	Less than 30 years	3.000	.221	4 (445)	0.782	0.537
	31 - 40 years	3.017	.103			
	41 - 50 years	2.815	.087			
	51- 60 years	2.972	.092			
	More than 60 years	3.250	.552			
The F tests the effect of Age						
Figures in bold indicate significant at 5% level						

Source: Primary data

The null hypothesis gets rejected only in the above cases since the p value of F statistics falls below 0.05. In all the other cases, no significant differences could be traced across age groups of returnees since null hypothesis fails to get rejected, at 5 per cent significance level. Pair-wise comparisons, using Bonferroni adjustments for multiple comparisons, were made only in the cases of these two dependent variables where a significant difference was found to exist across age groups.

However, the reintegration process is not without its challenges. Returnees may encounter difficulties in readjusting to local conditions, facing economic disparities or social stigmas that hinder their engagement. Differences in expectations between returnees and community members can also lead to misunderstandings or tensions, complicating the reintegration process.

1.8 Findings and Suggestions

The analysis of factors leading to the repatriation of migrant workers from Gulf countries reveals that an overwhelming 98.5 per cent cited organizational issues as the primary reason for their return. Key among these were low remuneration, poor working conditions, harsh employer behavior, and delayed salary payments, all contributing to an unsatisfactory work environment that left many feeling undervalued and exploited. Additionally, legal constraints and personal circumstances played significant roles; workers faced challenges related to visa regulations and labor rights, alongside family responsibilities and health issues.

The study reveals important insights into the involvement of returned migrants in their home societies, particularly concerning age and duration of stay abroad. Younger returnees (under 30) exhibit lower engagement in social spheres compared to older age groups, while middle-aged (41-50) and senior citizens tend to prioritize religious and family matters upon their return. Interestingly, those aged 31-40 show a greater focus on family responsibilities. Despite these age-related trends, the overall involvement of migrants across different age groups remains relatively stable. Similarly, while long-term migrants (20-25 years abroad) demonstrate less involvement in family matters, short-term returnees (less than a year) maintain balanced engagement across various aspects of their communities, excluding cultural factors. Migrants with 6-10 years of experience abroad are more active in political, religious, and family areas.

Overall, the findings emphasize the complexity of reintegration, suggesting that while general levels of community involvement may not vary widely, individual experiences and priorities do significantly shape how returned migrants engage with their home societies. Community Support Groups, through their focus on shared experiences and practical business-building strategies, play a crucial role in empowering returned migrants both emotionally and financially. These groups could be an effective model for ensuring successful reintegration and long-term economic security for returnees.

1.9 Conclusion

In conclusion, the phenomenon of return migration in Kerala presents both challenges and opportunities for the state's economy. The significant number of returned migrants, driven by economic downturns and adverse working conditions in the Gulf, necessitates reintegration to home country. While these individuals possess valuable skills and experiences, their limited involvement in the local economy highlights the need for targeted interventions. The decision to return to one's home country is influenced by a complex interplay of economic, social, political, and personal factors. The reintegration process is complex and varies significantly by age and duration of stay abroad. Younger migrants tend to be less engaged socially, while older and middle-aged returnees focus more on family and religious commitments. Overall, the findings highlight that while community involvement among returned migrants may not fluctuate widely, individual experiences and priorities greatly shape their reintegration into home societies. By understanding these dynamics, policymakers and community leaders can better support returnees and leverage their potential contributions to local development. Ultimately, facilitating successful reintegration can enhance the resilience of communities and foster a more inclusive society that benefits from the diverse experiences of its members.

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