



Rehabilitation of Repatriates from Gulf: New Challenge to the State of Kerala

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Abstract

Kerala is the Indian state from where highest number of emigration took place prominently to gulf countries. The remittance of these people helped the state to reduce poverty and unemployment to a great extent directly and indirectly. Though the return of these people is inevitable, recent intensity of this phenomenon is high due to the job localization policies of the GCC countries especially by Saudi Arabia and the UAE. Therefore, the state need to address the problem and to design sufficient rehabilitation programmes to address the issue. Most of these persons belong to the working age category between 18 and 60 years. Majority of them are moderately educated male without any technical education. The prominent reason for their repatriation is job loss due to various factors. Unemployment is wide spread among the repatriates. About 40 percent of them are unemployed. Extent of critical illness and life style diseases are high. Their share is 12.57 percent and 42.86 percent respectively. One out of every three persons have no own houses among the repatriates. Near half of the respondents incurred debt burden. More than half of the repatriates are either land less or have land below ten cents (4 Ares). Lack of registration in any governmental agencies is the main hurdle in the rehabilitation of the repatriates in the state. Only 9.44 percent respondents have been registered. Therefore, the registration formalities have to bring to the door steps of the repatriates. Out of the three policy suggestions, 69.14 percent respondents selected proper job training as the prominent rehabilitation method following loan facility (21.71 percent) and political and diplomatic interference (9.14 percent).

Key words: Emigration to Gulf, Job localization policies, Repatriation of workers, Rehabilitation of repatriates

Introduction

Abroad migration from Kerala started from the beginning of the twentieth century. The major destination centers were Malaya, Singapore and Shree Lanka. By 1960s the trend turned towards gulf countries. Mass migration from the state continued during eighties and nineties. It did not create any labor shortage in the state since most of emigrants were unemployed or underemployed youths. If surplus labour prevails in the sending area, this type of labour loss has zero opportunity cost (Taylor JE, 1999). Therefore, this phenomenon did not affect the state negatively. However, on the positive side, it caused for huge amount of foreign remittance to the state. It helped the downtrodden families to escape from poverty and unemployment. The benefit of remittance did not limit in the migrant families. Market linkages transmitted the impact from migrant to non migrant families in the sending economies (Taylor JE, 1999). The recent annual flow of foreign remittance to the state is higher than total revenue receipts of the state government. This remittance caused for construction

boom and created large employment opportunities to unskilled and semi skilled workers from the state itself as well as to those from remote states of India, for example, Bihar, Orissa, Assam and West Bengal. The policies promoting the native employment, abandonment of large scale construction and economic crisis in the oil industry have pushed the marginal and low paid workers in many countries particularly gulf countries to return to Kerala temporarily or permanently (Pravasy Malayali Census, 2013).

Repatriation is a natural outcome and part and parcel of migration (Cassarino, 2004). It occurs when the objectives of the migrants are fulfilled or if conditions in home country are favored. The term repatriation is used when people return to their country or region of origin after a significant period stayed abroad. This return is not the initiative of the migrant themselves but is forced on them by political and economic events. Personal and natural disasters also cause for repatriation. The economic recession emerged in gulf countries since 2008 made a high and sudden return of emigrants to the state (Muhammed Jabir MM, 2014). Most of the Gulf countries implemented job localization policies in different names, for example, 'Nitaqat' in Saudi Arabia, 'Emiretisation' in the UAE and 'Omanisation' in Oman (Khondker, 2009 and Ramady, M. A. 2012).

Emigration of all persons may not be a success. The emigration of one fifth of the repatriate was a failure and has resulted in the loss of wealth, wastage of energy and loss of health (Zacaria, Nair and Rajan, 2001). Around 239248 repatriate workers are there in the state mostly returned from various gulf countries (Economics and Statistics Dept., 2013). Rehabilitation of them is a major challenge to the state since their number is increasing year after year.

Objectives of the Study

1. To analyze socio economic characteristics of repatriates from Gulf.
2. To find the major challenges of the repatriates.
3. To suggest policy implications for the rehabilitation of repatriates.

Methodology

This study is based on both secondary and primary data. Secondary data are collected from various government publications, Non Resident Indian (NRI) organizations' reports and literature published by various authors. Primary data are collected from 525 repatriates through a sample survey conducted in Malappuram district from where highest number of migration and repatriation took place. Selection of sample respondents is done using judgment sampling technique. Appropriate tables are used to infer conclusions and findings.

Socio Economic characteristics of Repatriates

Repatriates from Gulf countries are heterogeneous in character. They are different in sex, education, employment abroad, reason for return etc.

Age wise Distribution of Repatriates

Age is usually an important cause for return of emigrants. Emigrants return back to their originating place at the old age. If there is any special force, return takes place earlier.

Table 1

Age group	0-17	18-45	46-60	61-70	Above 70	Total
Number of persons	2147 (0.89%)	170317 (71.18%)	61042 (25.51%)	5430 (2.26%)	312 (0.13%)	239248 (100%)

Source: Economics and Statistics Department, 2013

Table 1 examines the age wise distribution of returned emigrants. The data are about the total of returned emigrants not only return from Gulf but return from other countries also. Almost all (96.69 percent) of the emigrants return during their working ages, that is between 18 and 60 years.

Gender wise distribution of Repatriates

Table 2

Gender	Number of Persons (%)
Male	227519 (95.1)
Female	11729 (4.9)
Total	239248 (100)

Source: Economics and Statistics Department, 2013

Table 2 illustrates that 95.1 percent of them are male while 4.9 percent are female. The lower share of female among repatriates is due to their lower share in the emigrant population.

Educational qualification of Repatriates

Capability of the repatriates to find a job varies according to their education and work skill. Their employability in the state after return is also depends upon that. Therefore, it is necessary to examine the educational levels of the returned emigrants.

Table 3

SL No	Educational qualification of the repatriates	Number of persons (%)
1	Illiterate	693 (0.28)
2	Literate and below LP	5428 (2.26)
3	LP	16638 (6.95)
4	UP	54990 (22.98)
5	SEC	104651 (43.74)
6	HSE/PDC	40049 (16.73)
7	Degree	16068 (6.71)
8	Others	731 (0.31)
	Total	239248 (100)

Source: Economics and Statistics Department, 2013

Table 3 illustrates education wise distribution of repatriates. Prominent education categories among repatriates are Secondary Education Certificate (SEC) level and Upper Primary levels. The shares of these two groups are 43.74 percent and 22.98 percent respectively. Only 7 percent have graduation or higher level of education among the repatriates. Proportion of repatriates having lower level of education is also

comparatively low (9.5 percent only). The figures reveal that repatriation is the problem of those having education between UP and HSE/PDC.

Technical Education Qualification of Repatriates

For the better employability of a person his technical knowledge and skill are important. Job localization policies in gulf countries are implemented mostly in the unskilled and semiskilled activities. If the emigrants have sufficient professional proficiency they can find another job easily if loses one. Besides the employability abroad, technical qualification helps the returned emigrants to find job in the state after the return.

Table 4

SL No	Technical Education	Number of persons (%)
1	No Tech Education	190434 (79.59)
2	Certificate Courses	20765 (8.67)
3	Diploma	9552 (3.99)
4	Engineering Degree	1539 (0.64)
5	Medical Degree	271 (0.11)
6	Nursing Degree	1592 (0.66)
7	Other Technical degrees	3245 (1.35)
8	Others	11850 (4.95)
	Total	239248 (100)

Source: Economics and Statistics Department, 2013

The table 4 illustrates the technical education qualification of the repatriates. 79.59 percent of them have no technical education. Even out of those having technical education, 8.67 percent is certificate holders and only 6.75 percent have any type of diploma or degree. All these figures reveal that most of the repatriates are not qualified technically.

Religion wise Distribution of Repatriates

Table 5

SL No	Religion	Number of persons (%)
1	Hindu	92168 (38.52)
2	Muslim	105068 (43.92)
3	Christian	41598 (7.39)
4	Others	414 (0.17)
	Total	239248 (100)

Source: Economics and Statistics Department, 2013

The table 5 illustrates the religion wise distribution of returned emigrants of Kerala. 38.52 percent of them are Hindus, 43.92 percent are Muslims and 7.39 percent are Christians. The difference of the share of Hindus and Muslims among them is only 5 percent. The shares of these three communities among the total migrant population are 36 percent, 41 percent and 22 percent respectively (Zachariah, 2016). Comparing

with the proportion of migrants, repatriation is higher among Hindus and Muslims while lower among Christians.

Distribution of Repatriates according to employment abroad

Table 6

SL No	Employment	Percent	SL No	Employment	Percent
1	Government /Semi Govt.	5.1	7	Non agricultural Labour	7.6
2	Corporate/Board/PSUs	1.5	8	Business/Trade	0.7
3	Bank/ Finance	0.2	9	Self employment	1.5
4	Private jobs	48.2	10	Other Labour	10.6
5	Trade Labour	1	11	Others	11.2
6	Agricultural Labour	12.4	12	Total	100

Source: Economics and Statistics Department, 2013

The table 6 illustrates the percentage share of returned emigrants according to their job abroad. Out of the various jobs private job is the major item from which a considerable share of repatriation took place. Major share of the unskilled and semi skilled persons found their jobs mostly as laborers in many fields. Consequently the repatriation of workers mostly took place from these activities. Repatriation from superior activities of government, finance and corporate sector is comparatively low (6.8%).

Reasons for Repatriation

Just like the reasons of emigration, return of emigrants also have push and pull factors. Employment loss abroad is prominent among the push factors for return while better employment opportunities in the state, family responsibilities and health problems of self or relatives are the major pull factors. It is necessary to analyze the relative importance of various reasons for the return of the emigrants.

Table 7

SL No	Reason for return	Percent
1	Employment in the State	1.4
2	Employment loss abroad	43.7
3	Education	0.5
4	Business in the state	0.6
5	Health problems	14.5
6	Marriage	0.7
7	Disaster	0.1
8	Others	38.5
9	Total	100

(Source: Field Survey)

The table 7 illustrates the reason for return of emigrants in Kerala. Major reasons for return are employment loss abroad, health problems and others. Prominent reason for

return is employment loss (43.7 percent) and other important reason is health problems (14.5percent). 38.5 percent people expressed many other reasons for their return.

Major challenges of the Repatriates

Repatriates face numerous socio economic problems after their return such as unemployment, debt burden, health issues, housing, problem of dignity in the family and society etc. A few of them are analyzed in detail.

Unemployment among Repatriates

Most of the emigrants were unemployed before their emigration. Emigration caused to reduce unemployment of the youth in the state. Unfortunately, their return after loss of employment abroad causes to increase unemployment level in the state. Unemployment among the returned emigrants before emigration and after return is analyzed.

Table 8

Intensity of unemployment before emigration and after return

<i>Status of employment</i>	<i>Before emigration</i>	<i>After return</i>
Unemployed	123 (23.42%)	205 (39.04%)
Employed	402 (76.57%)	320 (60.95%)
Total	525	525

(Source: Field Survey)

As per table 8, out of the total repatriates 23.42 percent were unemployed before their emigration but the rate has increased to 39.04 percent after their return. Correspondingly, the proportion of the employed fell from 76.57 percent before the emigration to 60.95 percent after their return. The figures illustrate the situation that around 40 percent of the returned emigrants fail to find out sufficient employment after their return.

Health issues of the Repatriates

Most of the emigrants had faced challenging living conditions in gulf countries due to extreme weather, food and long hours of work. Moreover, they separated their families for long years. All these made them ill at the time of return. Many of them are suffering from serious illness as well as chronic diseases.

Table 9

Repatriates suffering from serious illness

Diseases	Count	Proportion of Disease affected	Proportion of Total Respondents (525)
Heart Diseases	25	37.88	4.76
Kidney Diseases	24	36.36	4.57
Liver Diseases	0	0	0
Cancer	9	13.64	1.71
Stroke	8	12.12	1.52
Total	66	100	12.57

(Source: Field Survey)

The table 9 illustrates the extent of the serious illness among the repatriates. 12.57 percent of them are suffering from serious illness listed in the table. Heart disease and kidney diseases are the prominent. More than 9 percent of the returned emigrants are suffering from these diseases. Another 3 percent of them are suffering from cancer or stroke. Nobody is suffering from liver diseases. This is possibly because of the least level of consumption of alcohol by these people. The proportion of serious illness affected persons among the returned emigrants is more than the average of the state as whole.

Table 10

Repatriates suffering from life style diseases (Diabetics, High Blood Pressure and Cholesterol)

Status of Disease	Count	Proportion
Disease Affected	225	42.86
Not affected	300	57.14

(Source: Field Survey)

The table 10 illustrates the extent of life style diseases among the returned emigrants. 42.86 percent of the people are affected at least one disease from diabetics, high blood pressure and cholesterol.

Housing issue of the Repatriates

After health next important issue of any person is housing. Usually, emigrants spend large share of their earnings for the construction of houses. However, housing shortage still exists among emigrants.

Table 11

Ownership of house dwellings by the returned emigrants

Status	Count	Proportion
Have own house	357	68%
Have no own house	168	32%
Total	525	100%

(Source: Field Survey)

The table 11 illustrates the housing problems of the returned emigrants. Only 68 percent of the people have their own houses and the remaining 32 percent have no own houses. In other words one third of the returned emigrants have no own houses to reside. Housing shortage problem remains as a serious issue of these people. Most of them reside in their parents' or relatives' houses.

Debt burden of Repatriates

Going abroad and getting a job there are not costless efforts. Large amount of money is required to get visa, avail plane ticket and to meet other costs of emigration. A person from an ordinary family cannot meet all these by himself. It compels him to borrow from various sources. Besides the cost of emigration, the emigrants borrow money to construct residential houses, for the marriage of their daughters and

education of children too. However, as a result of an unexpected return, most of the repatriates are unable to repay these loans timely and that leads them to debt burden.

Table 12

Debt burden of returned emigrants

Status	Count	Proportion
Debt incurred	229	43.62
Not debt incurred	296	56.38

(Source: Field Survey)

The table 12 illustrates the extent of debt burden of the returned emigrants. 43.6 percent of them are indebted.

Land ownership of Repatriates

Though ownership of land is not a direct indicator of the standard of living of the people it is an important indicator of the wealth status of the people especially in Kerala. Many studies reveals that major item of investment of the emigrants is in land following construction and purchase of gold. However, the extent of land ownership is low among returned emigrants.

Table 13

Land Ownership of Returned Emigrants

Size of land (in cents*)	Count	Proportion
No land	175	33.33
Below 10	108	20.57
10 cents to 50	142	27.05
50 cents to 100	50	9.52
Above 100	50	9.52
Total	525	100.00

(Source: Field Survey)

*1 cent = 0 .404 are

The table 13 reveals the nature of land ownership of the returned emigrants. One third of them never possess any land. 20.57 percent of the people own less than 10 cents of land and another 27.05 percent own land between 10 cents and 50 cents. Another 9.52 percent own land between 50 cents and one acre and the remaining 9.52 percent own above one acre. The proportion of land ownership is comparatively low among the returned emigrants. Though the emigrants spend huge amount to purchase land, the condition of the repatriate persons is not better. Many of them lose their employment and are compelled to return before acquiring wealth.

Rehabilitation Problem of the Repatriates

Rehabilitation of the repatriates is a top priority of the government of Kerala. Its process actually starts from the registration of the returned emigrants and proceeds to the provision of self employment assistance, loan facilities or pension schemes. However, it is questionable whether these activities are effective. It is very necessary to analyze the extent and effectiveness of the rehabilitation programmes designed for the returned emigrants.

Table 14
Registration of Returned Emigrants in Government Institutions

Status	Count	Proportion
Registered	49	9.44%
Not registered	476	90.66%
Total	525	100 %

(Source: Field Survey)

Table 14 illustrates the extent of registration of returned emigrants in the institutions for example the NORKA. Only 9.44 percent of the returned emigrants are registered. The remaining 90.66 percent people are out of the government records. This fact discloses the failure of the governmental effort to register the returned emigrants. Therefore, it is necessary to bring the registration process to the door steps of the returned emigrants. Mass campaign is also necessary to motivate the returned emigrants to register under governmental agencies.

Measure to Rehabilitate the Repatriates

Various measures are there that can be implemented by the government to rehabilitate the returned emigrants. A few of them such as provision of more loan facilities, effective job training, more effective political interference for re-employment in gulf counties and help for emigration to countries other than GCC countries are suggested to get response of the returned emigrants.

Table 15

Alternative measures of Rehabilitation		
More loan facilities	Effective job training	More effective political and diplomatic interference for re-employment abroad
114 (21.71%)	363 (69.14%)	48 (9.14%)

(Source: Field Survey)

Table 15 illustrates the view of returned emigrants on various rehabilitation programs. Out of the total respondents 69.14 percent consider effective job training, 21.71 percent consider more loan facilities and 9.14 percent consider more effective political and diplomatic interference as suitable measure of rehabilitation. Nobody considers emigration to countries other than GCC countries as a measure of rehabilitation.

Conclusion

The return of emigrant Keralites from gulf countries is high in recent years due to the job localization policies of the GCC countries especially by Saudi Arabia and the UAE. This situation poses a challenge to the state to design a suitable rehabilitation programme to address the issue. Most of these returnees belong to the working age of between 18 and 60 years. Majority of them are moderately educated male with no technical education. The prominent reason for their return is job loss. Unemployment

is wide spread among these people. Extent of critical illness and life style diseases are high among them. One out of every three persons have no own houses consequently most of them reside with their close relatives. Nearly half of the respondents incur debt burden. More than half of them are either land less or holding meager size of land only.

Most of these returned persons are not registered in any government agencies consequently the rehabilitation of them is difficult. Only 9.44 percent respondents have registered. It necessitates bringing the registration formalities to the door steps of the repatriates. Out of the three policy suggestions respondents selected proper job training as the prominent rehabilitation method following loan facility and political and diplomatic interference.

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