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IMPACTS OF MALE MIGRATION TO THE MIDDLE
EAST ON THE FAMILY :
SOME EVIDENCE FROM KERALA

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MALE MIGRATION TO THE MIDDLE EAST
AND ITS IMPACT ON THE FAMILY :
Some Evidence from Kerala



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This paper is divided into two parts. Part I gives a brief background of the extent and pattern of recent migration to the Middle East from India as a whole and from the State of Kerala in particular. In Part II, the paper goes on to discuss the impacts of this migration, male dominated as it has been, on the family as such. The paper concludes with some general observations.

I

BACKGROUND

Emigration of skilled and semi-skilled labour is not a new phenomenon for India. Even during the nineteenth and early part of the twentieth century, Indian labour was transplanted by the British in many parts of the world in substantial numbers. Emigration from India, even in those days was larger from some parts of the country than from others. Labour was recruited from Kerala for work in Ceylon, Malaya and Singapore. Actually, the emigration of labour from some parts of Kerala had reached such a proportion in the nine-

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teenth century that the authorities were alarmed at the consequences of labour shortage in agriculture. Around 1920, under public pressure Indian emigration in the form of indentured labour was brought to an end. The rest of labour emigration died a natural death by the thirties due to the great depression.

The post-war revival of emigration of unskilled and semi-skilled labour from India can be divided into two phases. In the fifties and early sixties, emigration was principally to the United Kingdom. In the seventies, on the other hand, migration has been predominantly to the Middle East. It is in the second phase of emigration that Kerala has made a significantly large contribution far out of proportion in comparison with the State's share in the country's population, which is less than four per cent.

There is evidence that people from India have been migrating to the Middle East even during the 50's, 60's and early 70's. However, it gathered momentum and reached sizeable proportions during the second half of the seventies. The pioneers in this recent surge in migration to the Middle East have been Muslims of Kerala. Due to certain historical and religious links, they found it easier to venture out to the Middle East. The district, taluks (sub-districts) and villages in Kerala with a substantial proportion of Muslim population still lead in their contribution to the outflow of workers to the Middle East. The other communities, Hindus and Christians,

joined the outflow subsequently, often with the help of Muslim neighbours and friends.

Estimated Migration to the Middle East

That India has participated actively in the recent export of labour to the Middle East is generally true, but data on the extent and pace of this export is not easy to come by. Only certain broad orders of magnitude and trends can be had by piecing together information from various sources.

It is estimated that the number of Indian workers in the Middle East increased from 150 thousand in 1975 to 800 thousand in 1982. This approximates to a growth at the rate of 35 per cent annually. The proportion of Indian workers among all migrant workers in the Middle East is believed to have increased from an estimated 8½ per cent in 1970 to 13 per cent in 1979 and is perhaps as much as 20 per cent in 1983.

Within the region, however, the rate of inflow of Indian migrant workers has possibly varied from country to country. The United Arab Emirates has still the largest number of Indian migrants but their proportion has been on the decline. In 1975, 39 per cent of the total Indian migrant workers in the Middle East were located in the U.A.E. In 1979 this proportion had declined to 33 per cent. On

the other hand, Saudi Arabia, which accounted for less than five per cent of the Indian migrant workers in the Middle East in 1975, had raised its relative share to over 20 per cent by 1979. It would appear that by 1982 Saudi Arabia's share had reached around 25 per cent.

Migration from Kerala

According to a survey conducted by the State's Directorate of Economics and Statistics, the number of workers from Kerala working abroad was 135 thousand towards the end of 1977. The same agency's survey conducted after a lapse of some two years, showed that the number had gone up to 208 thousand by the beginning of 1980. Of these, as many as 187 thousand were found to be working in the Middle East. The estimated number of all Indian workers in the Middle East for 1979 is 350 thousand. Thus, the workers from Kerala comprised over half of the Indian workers in the region.

The outflow of workers from Kerala to the Middle East has not declined in absolute number during the period, 1980 to 1982. It is estimated that there were over 300 thousand Keralites in the Middle East in early 1983. It would appear, however, that the outflow from other parts of India to the Middle East was much larger, so that in early 1983, workers from Kerala were only a third of the total number of Indian workers. Table I presents the information on the migration of workers from Kerala as well as India as a whole.

District-wise Distribution of Emigrants

In Table II is provided a districtwise breakdown of net migration abroad from Kerala. It can be seen that :

- (a) In all the districts of Kerala, migration abroad increased in absolute numbers between end - 1977 and end - 1979;
- (b) Almost 90 per cent of the migrant workers in 1979 were located in the Middle East;
- (c) In all the seven districts with the number of migrant workers in excess of 15,000, the proportion working in the Middle East is 85 per cent or above; and
- (d) The three districts that had the largest number of migrant workers in the Middle East are Trichur, Malappuram and Cannanore. Malappuram which is a close second to Trichur in sending migrants to the Middle East is the only district in the State with Muslim majority.

Change in Intra-country Migration

In recent years, migration from Kerala State to other parts of the country appears to have come down sharply. According to the surveys conducted in 1977 and 1980, of the total net migration outside

of Kerala State (i.e., including migration to other parts of the country) during the two years, 1978 and 1979, 93 per cent went outside the country in search of work, although of the total number of workers employed outside the State at the beginning of 1980 as many as 60 per cent were located within India.

Whether this drastic decline in migration from Kerala State to other parts of India can be ascribed to the spurt in migration abroad is difficult to say. But the State still suffers from a rather high degree of unemployment. The proportion of the labour force which is unemployed was as high as 18 per cent at the beginning of 1980. This was in addition to the large proportion (36 per cent) of workers, not permanently employed, who get work for less than 120 days in a year.

Characteristics of Migrants

(a) Sex

Workers going to the Middle East are almost altogether men. Opportunities for women seem to be few and far between. Some categories of workers with salaries above a prescribed minimum are entitled to take their families. These categories include certain specialized skills in addition to professions like engineering and accountancy. So, some women and children also migrate to the Middle East.

However, not all those who are entitled to take their families with them do so. This is largely because of lack of suitable educational facilities in the Middle East. Also housing there is said to be very expensive. Furthermore, most people want to save as much of their Middle East income as possible since the jobs there are regarded as purely temporary. Lastly, adjusting to the cultural condition of the Middle East is considered hard for women not used to living away from home.

As indicated above, the number of Indian workers in the Middle East was 150 thousand in 1975, whereas the total population of Indians there was close to 270 thousand. On the assumption that on an average the size of each migrant worker family was four, including the worker himself, the workers living alone were around 110 thousand. Of the 800 thousand Indian migrant workers in 1983, the number of those living with families is estimated to be 70,000; the balance of 730,000 are living singly. Thus, the proportion of workers living without families has gone up considerably.

Village studies of migration from Kerala State confirm that very few women have migrated to the Middle East. A village level study of 402 households in four taluks of high migration in the State showed that of the 514 persons who went abroad for work, only 11 (2 per cent) were women (Comarco, 1977). Another village level

study covering 125 households, whose results were reported in mid-1978, found that all but one of the migrants from the sample households were men. (See Mathew and Nair, 1978). Still another village study, undertaken around the same time, based on the survey of 95 households in a village of high migration does not mention a single woman out of 136 migrant workers (Prakash, 1978). Thus, it is clear that migration from Kerala to the Middle East is predominantly of men.

(b) Marital Status

Not only are migrant workers going to the Middle East almost exclusively men but also they were usually quite young in age, one village study showed that 79 per cent of the migrant workers were 35 years in age or younger (Commerce, 1977). According to another of the village studies, only 16 per cent of the emigrant workers, identified in 125 households surveyed, were about 35 years in age. (Mathew and Nair, 1978). The same study also found that almost half of the migrant workers identified were unmarried at the time of the survey. Since half of the migrant workers were also found to be 25 years of age or below, it would appear that almost all young workers went away to work abroad without getting married and that quite a large percentage did not get married for several years thereafter.

(c) Education and skill levels

The educational level of the workers going abroad for work seems to have been rather low. It can be seen from Table III that nearly two-thirds of the migrants going abroad from Kerala have not completed ten years of schooling to qualify for the secondary level certification. This proportion is even higher for those going to the Middle East. These are the findings of the recent all-State survey referred to already. The village level studies, however, show considerably lower figures for the less educated migrants. While one study (Prakash, 1978) shows the percentage of those without secondary level certificate as 85 per cent, the other two village level studies put the corresponding percentages at 50 per cent (Commerce, 1977) and 45 per cent (Mathew and Nair, 1978). These latter figures cover migrants who are classified as illiterates.

Alongside the level of education, the skill level of the migrants is also found to be quite low. As can be seen from Table III, while only 30 per cent of those who did not complete school did not possess any skill, only half of those migrants, who completed the school successfully but did not go for higher education, were in possession of a skill. Thus, the unskilled component of the migrants from Kerala was as high as 60 per cent.

Between migration to the Middle East and that to the rest of the world, there is however a clear difference in skill composition. The unskilled component in the latter stream is 43% as against the former's 61 per cent. The skill component of even migration within the country is somewhat higher, being 52 per cent, compared to the corresponding figure of 39 per cent for the migrants to the Middle East from Kerala.

Thus a typical migrant worker from Kerala to the Middle East can be described as a young man, unmarried, with education of below secondary school level and with little skill.

GROWTH OF REMITTANCES

One of the most obvious and direct impacts of migration of workers to the Middle East has been the flow of remittances. Most studies so far have concerned themselves largely with level and use of remittances. This is quite understandable. Firstly, a labour exporting country like India faced with sizeable deficit on account of trade and services should rightly be concerned with what its migrant workers remit back home out of their earnings. The more the country can secure by way of remittances, the less it has to depend on foreign borrowings and reserve depletion for financing its payments deficits. India's foreign exchange receipts from remittances are estima-

ted to have gone up from a little over \$300 million in 1974 to almost \$3,000 million in 1980. Secondly, the disposition of remittances has important implications for the domestic economy. Are they going to be spent or kept in deposits? Is spending going to be largely for purposes of consumption or investment? How is spending going to be distributed amongst different items of consumption and investment? Thirdly, there arise questions about the distribution of remittance receipts between different regions and between different regions and between different income groups.

In the context of Kerala State, the importance of remittance receipts arises both from the distributional angle as well as from the point of view of their disposition. As can be seen from Table IV, remittance receipts in Kerala are estimated to have increased fivefold between 1976-77 and 1980-81. As a proportion of the State's domestic product, the contribution of remittances is estimated to have arisen from five per cent to 17 per cent in the same period. Thus, there can be little doubt as to the increasing importance of the remittance receipts to the economy of the State.

Migrant remittances as such are not a totally new phenomenon in Kerala. As stated above, some migration from the State was always taking place both to other parts of the country as well as to other parts of the world. In 1961, the percentage of households reporting the

receipt of remittances formed as high as 16.3 per cent of the total number of rural households. The average amount of remittance receipts per rural household was the second highest for Kerala among the States of India (Reserve Bank of India Bulletin, 1965). Since a good proportion of internal migration was accounted for by movement within the State, it is possible that a major part of the remittance receipts of the households was emanating from within the State.

In consequence, however, of the new phase of migration of workers which started sometime in the mid-sixties, migration abroad, and especially to the Middle East, seems to have completely overshadowed migration from Kerala to the other States of India. It is as a result of this recent migration that remittance receipts seem to have received a quantum increase from the level that prevailed in the 50's and early 60's. As noted above, remittance receipts of the State from abroad have increased five-fold within a short period of five recent years. Thus, if we assumed that 80 per cent of the migrant remittances are received by rural households in 1980-81, remittance receipts in Kerala should have made a net addition of 30 per cent, to the average rural household's income from domestic activity. Naturally, the contribution of remittances to the average migrant household income would have been very much in excess of 30 per cent. According to the various village level studies referred to, the majority of the migrant households in Kerala belong to the lower rung of income. One such study

showed that half of the migrant households reported no income from sources other than remittances (Mathew and Nair, 1978). The latter study makes a large amount of under-statement in reported incomes as well as remittance receipts. Since for most of the migrant households, remittance receipts comprise the major source of income, it is only to be expected that these households would depend considerably on remittance receipts to meet their day to day consumption expenses. In most cases, it is also possible to lay aside some amounts with a view to repaying loans and / or making investments.

better living standards

That as a result of these remittances, living standards should have improved considerably in the migrant households is a reasonable assumption. The village level studies referred to can be said to confirm this. According to one of these studies, the persons in migrant households report "a fairly high level of consumption". (Prakash, 1978). Also, migrant households do well in regard to the possession of consumer durables, particularly radio receivers. One visible evidence of higher living standards of migrant households is the spate in construction activity in the villages of high migration in Kerala.

As an investment, house construction and renewal has been found to be on top of the priority list of the migrant households. According to one village level study, one-third of the households had built

new houses within five years of the migration of the worker. Another 20 per cent had repaired and reconstructed their houses within that period (Prakash, 1978).

Clearly, a major improvement in the life style of the migrant households is reflected in their housing. Though of the various village level studies referred to, none seems to have gone into the question of the extent of availability of light, water and toilet facilities in the new or renewed houses of migrant households, it stands to reason that most, if not all, of these houses have been provided with all these amenities. Where pipe water has not reached a village, the new or renewed houses have access probably to a properly protected well within its own compound.

In this context, it is worthwhile noting that easy access to water and ~~private~~ toilets are the two amenities of direct interest to the women of any household. They make living so much easier for them. Also, they contribute to the general improvement in the environmental sanitation in a community where open defecation has been widely prevalent.

II

IMPACTS ON THE FAMILY

The preoccupation of most studies done on the subject of migration of workers to the Middle East has been mostly in terms of conventional analysis of outward labour flows and inward remittances. The varied effects and consequences of migration on the families of the migrants left behind has largely been left untouched and unnoticed. There can be several explanations or justifications for this neglect.

- (a) This phenomenon is too recent to warrant such a study. Its impact on the family can be felt only after a lapse of a time period.
- (b) Social and psychological effects are usually such that they cannot be quantified, whereas remittances and migration flows can, to a large extent, be captured in figures.
- (c) When one looks at the overwhelming importance of remittances from the point of view of the economy, the other effects are considered relatively less significant.
- (d) Generally speaking, the impact of any occurrence or change on women's issues is always the last

to catch the notice of policy makers as well as researchers.

In this paper, we would like to make an attempt to focus the attention on the kind of impacts large scale male migration is having on family members left behind, particularly women. Not all of this impacts are possible to quantify; nevertheless an attempt is made to study them.

For this purpose, we shall draw largely on various micro level studies done in recent past. Insights gathered from observing households that have sent or ^{are} planning to send workers to the Middle East provide a basis for most of the observations made hereafter.

Dependence on Family Networks

One of the most noticeable impacts of any migration is that on the whole, it increases the inter-dependence among family members. Also, kin networks become stronger and reinforced. This happens largely for two reasons:

- (1) The need for family support to meet the initial cost of migration, and
- (2) the dependence on the family to provide the necessary support and protection to the wife, children and

other dependants of the migrant when he leaves behind.

In order to migrate to Middle East it is necessary for a worker to have authenticated documents from the host country employer (this is usually referred to as NOC short for No Objection Certificate). To obtain NOC is no joke. While relatives and friends already working in the Middle East can be a great help in obtaining NOC's, those left to fend on their own have virtually to buy the documents by making payments, most of which is illegal. According to the village level study, while 37 per cent of the migrants could obtain their NOC's through close relatives (fathers, brothers; or brothers-in-laws) another 24 per cent secured NOC's with the help of other relatives and friends (Mathew and Nair, 1978). The same study observes that "while close relatives secure and send the NOC's to the prospective emigrants, either free of charge or at actual cost involved, other relatives and friends usually take some margin of profit out of the transaction". So clearly the dependence on relatives and friends in the initial stages of migration is quite considerable. Thus, relatives and friends are an important source of not only information about the availability of job opportunities abroad, but also help in gaining entry into those jobs and countries.

The need for family interdependence and jointness becomes no less acute the migrant worker is living abroad. If he is married and has

children, he has to entrust his wife and children to the care of his or her parents, or in their absence, to that of the other relatives. If he is unmarried he depends on his relatives to keep on the look out for a suitable bride for him.

The migrants need the help from relatives in the management of funds they remit home over and above what is required to meet the day to day expenses of the dependants of the migrants. A wife may be able to manage the day to day budget of the household, but she may need help and advice when it comes to repayment of debts and deployment of savings. On his part, the migrant worker has to look out for opportunities abroad for his relatives. So, the family interdependence and kin networks can certainly be said to have increased as a result of the recent migration.

The following story of a fishing household in Kerala wanting to send a young unmarried son to the Middle East is related by the interviewing migrant's mother (Gulati, 1983):

"Our younger son Iham, has been very keen on going to the Gulf. Twenty years old, he has finished ten years of his schooling. He appeared twice for the school leaving certificate examination, but could not make it. English language was his weak point. This is the case with most of the children here. We were hoping that we would send him to college. Since going to college was out of question, he went on to a technical training school for a diploma course in fibre moulding. This school run by the Government was

located some twenty kilometers away from our village. That is how we could manage to change his profession. We are fed up with our type of uncertain and hand-to-mouth existence. I would like my children at least to have a steady income. I don't care if they have to give up fishing. After finishing the course, Dharm could have gone for a more advanced course in Madras, but before we could decide on that we met an agent from Quilon who came looking for young men willing to go to the Gulf. In recent years, quite a few young men from our own village have gone to the Gulf. I know all of their names. They are the talk of the village because their families have become suddenly rich. I never thought that either of our two sons will make it to the Gulf. When the agent from Quilon suggested that Dharm would make it, if we raised the necessary money, I jumped at the idea. The agent felt that with his education and technical training he would get for Dharm a contract as part of a group of some fifty men required by an Italian furniture-making firm in Abudhabi. According to this agent, 20 out of 50 persons enrolled for this contract were from Kerala State.

Dharm's job will carry a pay of Rs. 2,000 plus board and lodging. Usually people going to Gulf can send back more than two-thirds of the cash salary for which they are hired there. So the debt one incurs to send young men to the Gulf is possible to clear within 16 to 18 months. Then one can think in terms of improvements in one's own working and living condition.

The first thing to do immediately was to raise the sum of Rs. 13,000. This would cover not only the premium payable to the agency for arranging the job and providing NOC for immigration clearance, but also the one-way air ticket which alone costs Rs. 3,442. Immediately, I offered to give away whatever gold jewellery I had accumulated over the years from my earnings from net making. Savings from fishing gets always used up in replacing the crafts and nets, though, over the years, our craft and equipment both have become not only better, but more expensive. The nylon net, Raman uses now is quite expensive. Also, his Thangavallom, the craft, is only two years old. But then there was no question of selling or mortgaging our craft and gear. By pooling together my gold and my daughter-in-law's, I could raise Rs. 4,500. For the rest of the money,

I had to go around and ask all our relatives and friends to give cash or a gold bangle or two, to be pledged for cash, on the clear understanding that each of them would be paid back in cash as soon as the son starts sending money home. The money was not difficult to raise. People in the village are now used to contributing their mite for the purpose. I do not know of a single case in our village where money thus raised has not been paid back. We have deposited the full amount with the agent. Dharm has already received his passport and is now waiting to be called any day.

We are keeping our fingers crossed. We hope very much that once Dharm makes it, he will work out some way of getting his elder brother, Gyan, also to the Gulf*.

Jointness of living

On the basis of the evidence available from micro-level studies it would appear that the tendency seems to be for migrant households to get together not only to meet the obligations arising in consequence of a worker's migration abroad but also for the purpose of living. The latter becomes necessary with a view particularly to take care of the wife and children of the married migrant worker who, as noted above, generally, goes without his family. Where the wife and children are living separately with the migrant worker before his departure, the tendency is for the wife to move in with the husband's parents or her own parents, along with her children. Alternatively, either of the parents move in with her. Sosha is one example of a daughter of a fisher woman from a Latin Catholic fishing village staying with her mother along with her two children while her husband has been working in the Middle East for the last four years. Sosha feels more secure

living with her parents than if she were to be running her household separately.

Mary works as a prawn peeler in the same fishing village. Two of her brothers and her younger sister's husband are working in the Middle East. While her old parents have moved in with her married brother, her sister and her two children live with Mary.

Female Centeredness in the Households

Since households that succeed in sending one male member to the Middle East are usually the ones that are able to send even other male members. Often, quite a good proportion of the households as a result of this get left with old, retired males or become altogether female dominated. Village level studies have shown that in villages of high migration, ^{such} households can be as high as 30 per cent or more of the total number of migrant households. (Prakash, 1978, and Mathew and Nair, 1978)

Regardless of the extent to which individual households get depleted of their menfolk in consequence of the prevailing drift to the Middle East, there can be no doubt that the sex ratio in villages of high migration was found to have been considerably changed. In one village level study (Mathew and Nair, 1978), the average ratio of women to men was found to have reached 1454 as against the corresponding ratio of 1034 for Kerala State in 1981.

Incidence of Dowry

As stated already, migration to the Middle East is principally from low income, low skill occupational groups. Whatever the prevalence of dowry among these groups — and here it is important to remember that the practice of dowry differs between various religions and caste groups — since as a result of migration income differentials within each of the groups affected could have increased, it could well have resulted in raising the level of dowry in these groups. At the same time, however, as the migration became more widespread, the proportion of families with no migrant declined in each of these groups. So was the net impact of migration to increase or decrease the level of dowry.

"Gulf boys" are said to be at a premium. They are considered prize bridegrooms and they command a higher dowry than local boys. At the same time, it would appear from actual observation that many of these Gulf boys have been less keen on cash than on family status, education and looks. In the matrimonial advertisements appearing in the local language newspapers, one often notes that Gulf migrants explicitly disclaim interest in dowry. Instead, they ask for good looks and education. Still, cases where dowry is actually taken cannot be considered rare though preference is said to be for land rather than cash: Possession of land is still considered an easier route to

respectability than wealth in any other form. Also land has lately been appreciating the fastest in value.

In the households in Trivandrum District recently studied by the author personally, the bachelor migrants workers got married during the course of their one-month vacation to girls who brought dowry in the form of valuable land. One of the young men had been working in the Middle East for six years and the other for four years. In both the cases, the marriage was arranged by relatives in their absence, though the final decision was taken after they arrived on the scene. The boys went back to work within weeks of their marriage.

Another aspect of dowry that came to light in the case of the two migrant workers referred to in the preceding para, was that both of them waited for their younger marriageable sisters to get married. In fact they urged their relatives to find 'good' bridegrooms for these girls even if it meant promising a higher than normal amount in dowry. When the girls were married off, their migrant brothers gave away liberal dowries. So evidently, not only do 'Gulf boys' accept more modest dowries, but also they give away dowries liberally.

Marriage patterns

It was noted above that a very large proportion of workers migrating from Kerala to the Middle East are young and unmarried.

Though unmarried, these workers usually carry heavy family responsibilities on their young shoulders. Very often, they come from poor families. Parents are in low income jobs and have children too young to work or are unemployed. So not only have these migrant workers to repay the huge debt they incur in order to migrate, but also they have to supplement the income of their parents for covering their day to day expenses.

If there are girls to be married, money has to be set aside for their marriage and dowry. Cases are easy to come by where a young man prefers a girl from a migrant household over that from a non-migrant household. This is not only because of the larger dowry that the girl is expected to bring but also because one can then hope to migrate to the Middle East much more easily with the help of the wife's father or brother. In fact, the prospect of a NOC through a girl's father or brother carries quite a high premium in the marriage negotiations.

The average age at marriage of girls is already quite high for Kerala State. It was estimated at 21 years for the decade, 1961-70. The corresponding average for India as a whole was 17 years. But the average for the State as a whole conceals significant differences not only between various regions and religious groups, but also when the population is classified on the basis of income and education. Since

the majority of migrant workers from Kerala are drawn from low income, low education groups, any signs of upward movement in the age at marriage could have significant implications for fertility levels.

Women's increasing responsibilities

The implications of short term absence from home are different from long term absence of male members from the household. When people started going to the Middle East for work, no one believed that their job there would last beyond a couple of years. Now increasingly the proportion of those who have stayed away for periods beyond two years is rising. In the beginning when migrants expected to stay abroad for a year or two, the tendency was to entrust the family (i.e., wife and children) to the care of close male relatives. With the length of stay prolonging, the men have started taking on a more active role in the management of the family affairs and becoming, as a result, less dependent, if not altogether independent.

Basic household responsibilities

Women from even traditional and conservative households have started coming out of their shell. For instance, Muslim women from migrant households have started operating their bank accounts independently. In villages of high concentration of Muslim migrants, banks have opened special counters where Muslim women can be catered to without

being seen by male customers.

In order to deal independently with banks, women have felt the need to learn to read and write. In particular, women, otherwise illiterate, are learning to fill the deposit and withdrawal slips. Then there is the need to communicate with their husbands without the mediation of any third party. Women do not want to depend on even their closest relatives to write their letters, nor do they want others to read the letters they receive. This is a very strongly felt need among women left behind by the migrants and is reflected clearly in their willingness to attend literacy classes. In Muslim villages of high migration the community itself is making efforts to organize special classes for women.

In households with no close male relative, the women have to play a very much more active role in the management of family affairs, take, for instance, the question of repaying the debt incurred at the time of migration. One comes across women who handle repayments and keep track of what remains to be repaid and to whom. Of course this involves dealing with menfolk outside of the circle these women traditionally dealt with and therefore not only raises eyebrows but also actually creates difficult situations. But it is only to be expected.

On his trip back home every one or two years, each migrant comes loaded with gifts and gadgets. Some of those the family keeps but others are clearly meant for sale, knowing that these items command a high premium. Usually the migrant worker does not have enough time to spare for the disposal of such items. In order not to be faced into distress sales, the family has to undertake the sale of such items. No doubt, practically in every village there are a couple of dealers who act as agents for the purpose. But even those dealers could be too ready to exploit a situation should they sense one. Where women of the migrant household have to transact matters with these dealers, they have to be on extra guard against being exploited. But women from these households are gradually learning to cope with these situations.

Also, women from migrant households have been found to be taking more and more interest in the supervision of land transactions and house construction activities that are very common to migrant households, practically all over the State. Not that the help and advice from the relatives is being dispensed with altogether, but women can be said to be taking increasing interest in these matters.

Schooling of children

In the absence of their husbands, children's schooling seems to have become almost altogether the responsibility of the wives left

behind. To ^{which} kind of schools to send the children, how much help should be given to them in ^{their} studies and what all is necessary to do for their upkeep are matters decided upon increasingly by women.

Interestingly in several cases children from migrant households are found to be going to expensive schools in preference to State-run or State-aided private schools. The fisherman's daughter, Sosha, who is staying with her parents sends her children to English language schools. "My husband wants them to have the best education and be fluent in English". Not only are these schools expensive in terms of fees but a great deal more has to be spent on the children's school dress and books. Indeed, the major additional item of expense to be incurred in this particular case is on their transport to and from school. But Sosha is willing to incur all this additional expense.

Psychological impacts

There is growing evidence to suggest that women in the migrant households face many tensions, pressures, conflicts and anxieties and pressures on them are increasing day by day. These pressures are of different kinds and intensities, some of them depending on the age and relationship of the women to the migrant worker.

Worries or anxieties for the wives and/or mothers start the moment the worker leaves home for Bombay, the usual point of exit for a

new migrant to the Middle East. As things stand, a long visit extending over weeks, and sometimes months, is commonly heard of. Unscrupulous agents, who engage in the business of arranging employment abroad for unsuspecting young men, often promise fictitious dates and modes of departure. Cases of persons going up to Bombay and then returning home empty-handed after a few months are not rare to come by.

In one of the fishing households referred to above, the son came back after spending two months in Bombay under sub-standard living conditions. His parents spent some fifteen thousand rupees to prepare him for migration. The agent sent him back from Bombay saying the employing firm in the Middle East had not called for the expected number of workers. So, this boy was asked to wait for a call. His money is still with the agent and the hope is that he will soon fulfil his promise. The boy's mother had not only given away her own gold ornaments, but also gone round to collect funds from relatives and friends. It had taken her months to put together the required amount of money. At the end of it, she finds that her son has not ^{yet} made it to the Middle East. He will have to cool his heels till he is sent for. How long that will take, no one knows. But when the call does materialise, it will mean a further expense of a few thousand rupees.

Every one going for an unskilled or semi-skilled job in the Middle East is quite aware by now that the work could be hazardous, hours would

be long and living conditions quite hard. In addition, however, it also appears that the jobs migrants from India and other South Asian countries are asked to do carry risk to life. Mortality in accidents among the workers is reported to be on the increase.

A report is currently circulating in the local language press in Kerala of several hundred dead bodies of migrant workers lying unidentified in the mortuaries in the Middle East.

It is widely suspected that the jobs offered to migrants from India are very dangerous. In the course of her field work the present author came across a mother who was virtually a nervous wreck, because of the type of job her son has gone for. Her husband was in a similar job in Saudi Arabia and although he survived and is safely back home, the fatality rate in that job was very high.

There are some problems which only wives face. Probably the worst sufferers are the one-month old brides. Very often the migrant worker gets married during his brief vacation of a month or two and leaves behind the wife to the care of his relatives. Often the bride has to live with her in-laws. Apart from loneliness and long separation, her problem is of living in strange, unfamiliar and often hostile environment, with virtually no one to communicate with.

Leading psychiatrists in the State are said to be alarmed at the

increasing incidence of mental disturbance. The problem of mental illness has been found to be especially acute in the 'Gulf Pockets' of the State. The Medical Superintendent of Government Mental Hospital at Trichur, the District with the highest number of migrants to the Middle East, is reported to have observed that 'almost every second family which has a relative in the Gulf has a history of mental illness. The worst victims seem to be women between 15 and 25 years. According to this Specialist, "it is their incompatibility with their in-laws which lead to most women cracking up". Another leading Psychiatrist in Kerala fears that "the entire family situation seems to be heading for a total break down in the Gulf belts of the State".

(India Today, 1982)

Evidently married girls who stay with their mothers have fewer psychological problems than those who have to stay with their in-laws. This is quite understandable. But often the decision with whom to stay does not rest with the girls. It is usually decided for her where she will stay during her husband's absence. Once the decision is made, to change it later, becomes problematic involving as it does inter family relations.

Not only does a young wife have problems of communication when living with her husband's family, but also the possibilities of conflict there are greater. Conflict between the wife and her in-laws

can arise over the sharing of remittances sent by the worker. If the remittance is addressed to the parents, the wife feels at the mercy of the in-laws. If the wife receives the remittance, she is often suspected of not sharing it liberally with her in-laws. Suspicion is no doubt mutual but the result and psychological pressure is greater on the wife, given the environment. This need to be extra cautious in one's movements and behaviour also places these young women under great strain.

Even not-so-young wives, face the danger of their chastity being questioned the moment they start taking active interest in the management of the household finances and other affairs, particularly when it involves dealings with men. At the same time, such a wife incurs the displeasure and sometimes active hostility, of the male relatives who take offence that she is not taking them sufficiently into confidence in the running of her household. So pressures on older wives can also be quite onerous and even they could find the strain too much to cope with.

Fertility implications

Given the situation in which, as noted earlier, migration results in postponement of marriage and prolonged post-marital separation of couples during that critical phase of the life cycle when couples are



most fertile, fertility behaviour is bound to be affected and the effect is most likely to be negative. No doubt, once a migrant worker gets married, he visits his family occasionally, with the gap seldom exceeding two years, but, from the point of view of fertility behaviour, such visits seldom make up for continuing living together of couples.

The impact of migration in general on the birth rate is a much researched subject. For studying the impact of the migration to Middle East on the fertility patterns of people from a particular region and group, it is not only necessary to undertake a thorough-going survey of the fertility behaviour in migrant households, but also in non-migrant households.

However, some indications are available from the village level studies referred to above about the type of impact migration to the Middle East seems to be having on fertility behaviour in Kerala. In the village level study, it was noted that the proportion of children below 15 was only 30 per cent among the migrant households as against the all-State average of 40 per cent among the non-migrant households. The proportion of children below five was as low as seven per cent. This finding led the authors of the study to infer that "if the present pattern of emigration continues, population growth in the emigration districts is likely to decline irrespective of the communities to which

the emigrants households belong". (Mathew and Nair, 1978). In this context, it is relevant to note that there is already a significant decline in the population growth rate in Kerala from 26.29 per cent during the decade, 1971-70 to 19.00 per cent during the decade 1971-80. While it is difficult to say what part of this decline is attributable to migration of workers from the State to the Middle East, the fact that one out of every twelve households has a worker living and working far away from home cannot have been without its impact on fertility behaviour and, therefore population growth.

Whether migration as such is changing the ideas of men and women on family size is not easy to say as yet. But it would appear, from personal observations, that along with increased family incomes and greater exposure to modern means of communication, awareness of options to limit family size facilities existing for the purpose has also increased among the migrant household in Kerala. Given the enhanced awareness, the likelihood that these households will be influenced by it in their fertility behaviour cannot be ruled out.

Concluding Observations

Migration from Kerala State to the Middle East, has been quite substantial in recent years. Migrants are not only overwhelmingly men, but also seem to come from certain regions and religious backgrounds more than others. There also seem to be a selectivity in terms

of both age and skill levels in that most of the migrants are quite young and possess rather low skills. The major economic impact of this migration at the family level has been the inflow of remittances and consequential improvement in living standards. The most visible impact of this can be seen already in the widespread improvement of housing. However, there is growing evidence to indicate several other impacts of this migration on the family and in particular on women, not all of which can be regarded as positive, are taking place. On the positive side, migration has increased the family interdependence and strengthened informal family and kin networks. It has also had a positive effect on female roles. On the demographic side, impacts on the female as well as male age at marriage, sex ratio and fertility cannot be ruled out. There is, at the same time, accumulating evidence of a negative kind of impact which goes to show that psychological strain as a result of this type of migration on women has been quite great. The worst affected seem to be young wives left behind by migrant workers to the care of their in-laws. Whatever may have been the short-term effect of migration in terms of enhanced family interdependence, its long-term effect may well be quite the opposite. Estrangement between wives and their in-laws may well outlive the migration, which, in any case, is extremely temporary. When the men return and settle down, the damage to intra-family relationship may well be beyond repair.

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TABLE I: ESTIMATED NUMBER OF WORKERS AND DEPENDENTS IN THE MIDDLE EAST FROM INDIA AND KERALA

(in thousands)

Year	India			Kerala
	Workers	Dependents	Total	Workers
			(1)	(2)
1975	154	112	266 (42)	N.A.
1977	214	N.A.	N.A.	135
1979	350	140	490 (29)	167
1982	900	210	1010 (21)	350

(1) Figures in brackets are of dependents living with migrant workers as percentage of the total Indian population (migrants plus dependents) in the Middle East.

(2) The figure for 1977 includes migrant workers from Kerala in other parts of the world; the comparable figure for 1979 is 200 thousand.

Source: Gulati and Mody, 1993. (The figures are tentative and subject to confirmation by the authors until the publication of their paper.)

TABLE II: INTER DISTRICT VARIATIONS IN NET
MIGRATION ABROAD AND TO THE MI-
DDLE EAST — 1977 and 1979 KERALA

District	<u>Total number of persons working out- side India</u>		Rate of in- crease	No. of people in the Middle East	% of workers in the Middle East	% of per- sons outside India	% of w in M E
	1977 (1)	1979 (2)					
Trivandrum	20,530	33,769 + 2,239	11%	21,125 (4)	92.7	10.95	11.0
Quilon	13,735	21,639 + 7,904	58%	18,758 (5)	86.6	10.41	10.0
Alleppey	14,777	21,363 + 6,587	46%	17,029 (7)	79.7	10.20	9.0
Kottayam	4,987	7,094 + 2,107	42%	4,160 (9)	53.6	3.41	2.0
Idikki	467	577 + 110	23%	287 (11)	49.7	0.27	0.0
Ernakulam	4,543	5,128 + 585	13%	3,822 (10)	74.5	2.46	2.0
Trichur	26,367	40,224 +13,857	53%	37,878 (1)	94.0	19.35	20.0
*Malappuram	19,762	36,175 +16,413	83%	34,845 (2)	96.3	17.48	13.0
*Palghat	3,171	7,735 + 4,564	143%	7,034 (8)	90.0	3.72	3.0
*Kozhikode	9,056	17,731 + 8,675	96%	17,099 (6)	96.4	3.53	9.0
*Cannanore	17,792	27,369 + 9,577	54%	24,563 (3)	89.7	13.17	13.0
Total	135,157	207,305 106,545			39.7	100.00	100.0

* These are the districts with Muslim population in excess of the average of the State as a whole, Malappuram 64%, Kozhikode 31%, Cannanore 24% and Palghat 21%. It ought to be added that Malappuram is also the District with the lowest per capita domestic produce, (i.e., income without taking into account of remittances sent by migrant workers).

- Sources: (1) Bureau of Economics and Statistics, Government of Kerala, Office of Employment and Migration, November-December, 1977 (unpubl.)
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TABLE III: DISTRIBUTION OF MIGRANT WORKERS
FROM KERALA ACCORDING TO EDUCATIONAL AND SKILL STATUS AND
DESTINATION, 1979

Sl. No.	Place of Destination	No. of migrants (in '000.s)		Below Secondary		Secondary possessing		Graduate Level		Total
				Skill-ed	Unskil-led	Diploma/ certifi- cate	nothi- ng	Prof. Deg- ree	Tech de- gree	
		No.	%							
1.	Middle East Countries	136.5	36.6	20.3	40.9	11.5	13.2	4.6	1.5	100
2.	Non-Middle East Foreign countries	21.2	4.2	11.7	24.0	19.3	13.5	10.6	7.0	100
3.	All foreign Countries	227.7	40.8	19.5	46.4	12.3	13.7	6.0	2.2	100
4.	Other States within India	301.8	59.2	16.4	32.8	16.6	25.6	6.5	2.0	100
	Total	509.6	100	17.7	38.8	14.3	20.3	6.3	2.1	100

Source: Directorate of Economics and Statistics, Government of Kerala, Survey of Housing and Employment, 1980.



TABLE IV: ESTIMATE OF REMITTANCE RECEIPTS
FROM THE MIDDLE EAST, INDIA AND
KERALA

(In Rupees Millions)

Year	India		Kerala
	All Countries	Middle East	Middle East
1976-77	8,000	3,300	1,160
1977-78	11,400	5,600	2,060
1978-79	11,200	6,500	2,475
1979-80	16,760	10,900	4,200
1980-81	23,790	17,000	5,650

Source: Gulati and Mody, 1983. (The figures are tentative and subject to confirmation by the authors until the publication of their paper.)

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