

**SOCIO-ECONOMIC AND DEMOGRAPHIC  
CONSEQUENCES OF MIGRATION IN KERALA**

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\* This working paper is a companion issue of CDS working paper 297. Both are concerned with the results of the CDS-IDPAD Kerala Migration Study. While Working Paper 297 was concerned largely with the dynamics and determinants of migration in Kerala, this paper is concerned solely with the consequences of migration - consequences on the demography of Kerala, on its elderly population, on women, particularly on wives of emigrants, and on economic aspects including employment,

## ABSTRACT

Migration has been the single most dynamic factor in the otherwise dreary development scenario of Kerala in the last quarter of the past century. Migration has contributed more to poverty alleviation and reduction in unemployment in Kerala than any other factor. As a result of migration, the proportion of population below the poverty line has declined by 12 per cent. The number of unemployed persons - estimated to be only about 13 lakhs in 1998 as against 37 lakhs reported by the Employment Exchanges - has come down by more than 30 per cent.

Migration has caused nearly a million married women in Kerala to live away from their husbands. Most of these women, the so-called "Gulf wives" had experienced extreme loneliness to begin with; but they got increasingly burdened with added family responsibilities with the handling of which they had little acquaintance so long as their husbands were with them. But over a period of time, and with a helping hand from abroad over the ISD, most of them came out of their feeling of desolateness. Their sense of autonomy, independent status, management skills and experience in dealing with the world outside their homes - all developed the hard way - would remain with them for the rest of their lives for the benefit of their families and the society at large. In the long-run, the transformation of these one million women would have contributed more to the development of Kerala society than all the temporary euphoria created by foreign remittances and the acquisition of modern gadgetry.

Kerala is becoming too much dependant on migration for employment, sustenance, housing, household amenities, institution building, and many other developmental activities. The inherent danger of such dependence is that migration could stop abruptly as was shown

by the Kuwait war experience of 1990 with disastrous repercussions for the state. Understanding migration trends and instituting policies to maintain the flow of migration at an even keel is more important today than at any time in the past. Kerala workers seem to be losing out in the international competition for jobs in the Gulf market. Corrective policies are urgently needed to raise their competitive edge over workers in the competing countries in the South and the South East Asia. Like any other industry, migration needs periodic technological up-gradation of the workers. Otherwise, there is the danger that Kerala might lose the Gulf market forever.

The core of the problem is the Kerala worker's inability to compete with expatriates from other South and South Asian countries. The solution naturally lies in equipping our workers with better general education and job training. This study suggests a two-fold approach - one with a long-term perspective and the other with a short-term perspective. In the short-run, the need is to improve the job skills of the prospective emigrant workers. This is better achieved through ad hoc training programmes focussed on the job market in the Gulf countries. In the long-run, the need is to restructure the whole educational system in the state taking into consideration the future demand for workers not only in Kerala but also in the potential destination countries all over the world, including the USA and other developed countries. Kerala emigrants need not always be construction workers in the Gulf countries; they could as well be software engineers in the developed countries.

**JEL Classification :** J16, J21, J23

**Key words :** Kerala, emigration, return migration, remittances, gender, demography, elderly

## **Introduction**

Migration has provided the single-most dynamic factor in the otherwise dismal scenario of Kerala in the last quarter of the twentieth century. Mostly as a result of migration, Kerala has become virtually integrated with the world economy, with the Gulf economy to a large extent and with the economies of the United States and the West European countries to a lesser extent. Kerala has become part of the Gulf countries, if not geographically and politically, but very much so economically, socially, and culturally. What happens in the Gulf countries have their repercussions in Kerala; and what happens in Kerala have in turn, their repercussions in the Gulf countries. The Kerala Migration Study was undertaken to document these consequences of migration on Kerala's economy and society.

Migration has been one of the positive outcomes of the 'Kerala Model' of development. The State's dynamic social development in the past half a century and the relative stagnation in its productive sectors have created ideal conditions for an acceleration of migration from the state which had its historical origins in the World War II period. The accelerated process of migration, especially the more recent Gulf migration and migration to North America, have had their impact on every facet of Kerala's economy and society. It will take several more years before the full impact becomes evident. Behavioural changes are slow to come by and usually take a generation or more to become fully visible.

The various aspects of the impact of migration on Kerala's economy and society are the subject matter of this Working Paper.

## **I DEMOGRAPHIC CONSEQUENCE OF MIGRATION**

Migration has both direct and indirect impact on the demography of the population at origin and destinations. The direct effects become

visible immediately and are mostly structural in nature. The indirect consequences work through behavioural changes on fertility, mortality and other demographic parameters. They might take a generation or more before their impact on behavioural changes becomes visible on demographic parameters.

### **Structural Changes**

Migration has had a direct effect on the population growth rate in the state. Every decade since 1950 witnessed decrease in the population growth rate. The impact of migration on the decrease has been steadily rising ever since out-migration from the state started exceeding in-migration. In 1981-1991, nearly a-fifth of the natural increase of population was removed from the state through migration. The effect is likely to be much higher in the 1991-2001 decade.

Migrants from Kerala always included more males than females and migration has been a factor contributing to the unique sex ratio (favouring females) in the state, in clear contrast to other states of India.

Migration has reduced the working age population in the state and consequently increased the proportion of children and the elderly. The increase in the proportion of the elderly was not only an effect of net out-migration in the working ages, but also the effect of positive return migration at ages above 60 years. Migration has contributed substantially to an increase in the dependency burden in the state.

Migration has had only marginal effect on the marital status composition, but it had a very significant effect on the number and the proportion of married women living away from their husbands. As much as a million married women (1 out of 8) in Kerala are living away from their husbands due to migration of the husbands.

The prevalence of large numbers of very small families in the state is partly a consequence of migration. Single-member households increased by 33 per cent and two- member households by 42 per cent as a result of migration. The proportion of large families has undergone a corresponding decrease.

The birth rate in Kerala is relatively low. Had there been no migration from the state, the rate would have been even lower: the birth rate would have become lower by 0.7 per 1000 population.

### **Behavioural Changes**

The behavioural consequences of migration on demography of Kerala were analysed using data from a single district in the state, Malappuram. This district is known to have the highest fertility in Kerala, the lowest age at marriage, the lowest contraceptive prevalence rate, etc. Therefore, the findings from an analysis of the Malappuram data can by no means be generalized to represent the pattern in the state as a whole. This district was selected for this analysis for a wholly different reason. In most districts of the state, the fertility rate is below replacement level, infant mortality rate has declined to levels comparable to those of developed countries, and contraceptive prevalence rate has been very high. The scope for any significant change as a result of migration is very limited indeed. If migration is going to have any measurable demographic impact, it is only in Malappuram and other districts in which demographic transition is still far from complete. From this point of view, Malappuram was the best choice.

The survey data have provided unequivocal support to the conclusion that fertility in Malappuram has been declining at a rapid rate. The estimated CBR in 1998 was lower than that in 1990 by 4 births per 1,000 population. The average parity (among married women) in



Malappuram was 2.45 in 1998 as against 3.24 in 1990. The TFR in 1998 was 3.0 compared to 3.5 in 1990. The parity progression ratio (from 4th parity to 5th parity) was 45 in 1998, the corresponding rate in 1990 being 65. The ever-use of family planning methods was 44 in 1998 and only 38 in 1990. If the current use of family planning methods (including sterilization) were adjusted to include abstinence (due to emigration of husbands) the rate in Malappuram would be the same as that in the state as whole. Thus, the evidence is indisputable: fertility rate has indeed declined rapidly in Malappuram in the 1990s.

The analysis of the effect of migration on fertility and their proximate determinants did not always come with the same conclusions. Some explanations are called for.

Migration could have positive and negative impact on fertility. Migration should lead to an increase in birth rate due to structural factors, but should lead to decline in fertility due to behavioural factors. The reasons for these expectations are as follows:

First, migration affects birth rate at the place of origin through changes in age-sex and marital status composition. If a relatively large proportion of young women emigrate, the proportion of women in fertile ages in the residual population would decline. As a result the birth rate would decrease. On the other hand, if a relatively large proportion of young men migrate, the proportion of women in fertile ages in the residual population would increase and consequently the birth rate would increase.

Second, many youngsters in Kerala prepare themselves for eventual migration for work outside the State. Such preparations include postponement of marriage and postponement of having children. Once they migrate, innumerable obstacles stand in the way of getting married and having children. Such behavioural changes, tend to increase the age at their marriage and depress the number of children desired by them.

Third, if husbands migrate and live away from wives, and if the period of separation were sufficiently long, the physical separation would depress fertility.

Fourth, a large family is burdensome to a migrant couple in many respects -- cost of accommodation and increased cost of education of children, food, travel, etc. As a result, migrants' desired family size could be, on the average, smaller than that of non-migrants.

Fifth, migrants are exposed to information on family planning services and family size norms at their destinations most likely to be different from those at their places of origin. The result could be lower desired family size and better control of fertility.

Sixth, migrant family's economic conditions would have improved through migration and such improvements could have their effect on fertility. They could lead to lowering of the age at marriage for girls in the migrant households and higher or lower fertility depending on several other socioeconomic factors.

Finally, migrants would be a selective group with respect to fertility. The mere fact that a group of low fertility women (for example) has moved out of the state or a district would have increased the average fertility of the residual population.

On balance, although migration could result in higher birth rate due to structural changes, it is expected to reduce fertility at the place of origin due to behavioural factors.

The observed relationships between migration and fertility showed some conflicting patterns. The child-women ratios (CWR) of the various districts in Kerala are, in general, higher among women in households with emigrants than in households without emigrants ( 439 compared with 331 for Kerala as a whole). These CWR for Kerala correspond

approximately to birthrates of 20 and 17 respectively for emigrant and non-emigrant households.

The birth rates for Malappuram show the same pattern. The estimated birth rates for 1993-98 and 1997-98 are higher among households with emigrants than in households without emigrants. The same type of relationship holds for a few other fertility indices such as average parity (all women), desired family size, and parity progression ratio from first birth to second birth, etc.

On the other hand, age-sex-controlled fertility rates were lower in emigrant households than in non-emigrant households. The standardized average parity among married women was lower in emigrant households (2.34) than among non-emigrant households (2.55). The Total Fertility Rate was lower among emigrant households (3.3) than among non-emigrant households (3.6). The proportion of pregnant women (among the non-sterilized) was lower among the emigrant households. Birth interval was higher among the emigrant households. Thus standardized measures of fertility where age and sex characteristics are controlled, were lower among the emigrant households. *Migration has, on the whole, a negative impact on fertility.*

The average age at marriage of women (marriages which took place after 1990) was lower in emigrant families (18.3 years) than in non-emigrant families (19.8 years). This does not support a negative relationship between migration and fertility. There are other intermediate factors affecting migration and age at marriage. Increase in the employment rate among young adults, in wealth, etc, favours increase in the marriage rate. Thus, the lower average age at marriage among the emigrant households is a logical outcome of emigration. On this account emigration should increase fertility and not decrease it.

The second proximate determinant is family planning. Here the difference between emigrant and non-emigrant families is very large

indeed. The proportion of women in emigrant families who have ever-used family planning methods - who have been sterilized, who are currently using a conventional family planning method - is much lower than women in non-emigrant families. For example, while 58 percent of women in non-emigrant households have ever used a family planning method, only 28 percent of the women in emigrant households have done so. Similarly, while 44 percent of women in non-emigrant families have been sterilized, the corresponding proportion in emigrant households is only 19 percent. Logically, the lower rate of contraceptive use should lead to higher fertility among women in emigrant households. Thus, both the proximate determinants were conducive to higher fertility among women in emigrant households. Yet, our conclusion is different. The anomaly could be explained if we take in to consideration an uncommon "proximate determinant".

Migration is a very effective temporary contraceptive. The husbands of about 24 percent of married women in Malappuram live outside India. This factor - separation of husbands- is equivalent to the use of an effective temporary contraceptive. If we add this percentage to the current contraceptive practitioners, the current use of contraception in Malappuram would be 55 percent among non-emigrant households and 77 percent among emigrant households. Thus, the lower contraceptive use among women in emigrant household is only apparent. Once corrections are made for the absence of husbands from the households, the effective "contraceptive rate" among women in emigrant households would become far larger than that among non-emigrant households.

Thus, the principal factors affecting the fertility of women in emigrant households *versus* that in non-emigrant households in Malappuram district were structural in character (age- sex, marital status composition) which affected the crude measures of fertility (such as birth

rate and child-women ratio) and husband-wife separation through migration which affects age-sex standardized fertility measures.

The difference in crude measures could be explained in terms of structural factors, and that in standardized measures could be attributed to the separation of husbands from wives due to emigration.

*No evidence of any behavioural effect through migration on fertility in Malappuram is observed.*

### **Migration and Mortality**

Migration could affect mortality the same way it affects fertility - through structural changes as well as through behavioural changes. Migration of persons in working ages tends to increase the crude death rate, as mortality rates are higher at the very young and the very old ages. But the overall effect is relatively small.

Migration could affect mortality through behavioural changes as well. Migration brings in remittances, which result in increase in wealth of the family and consequent improvement in education and nutrition of the members of the household and greater use of hospital facilities during times of illness of the members of the family. Thus, behavioural changes tend to decrease mortality.

Some evidence of the mortality decline associated with emigration is provided by the Malappuram data. The crude death rate is higher among households without emigrants (14.0 compared with a rate of 10.6 in households with emigrants). The IMR in households with emigrants was 14.5 compared to 19.0 in households without emigrants. Sixty-five percent of women in households with emigrants used private hospitals for child birth compared to only 23 percent among women in households without emigrants. Thus, emigration has a clear negative impact on mortality.

## II THE ELDERLY POPULATION

Nineteen ninety-nine was the year of the elderly. During the year the problems of the elderly received considerable attention in the Government circles, among social workers and the academics and in the newspapers, news magazines, television, radio and other news media. The accepted wisdom about these problems is not always based on hard facts. Some of them were mere speculations, or generalizations based on a few cases known to the authors concerned. This study has come up with considerable insights into the problems of the elderly. While confirming several aspects of the accepted wisdom about the elderly, it has come up with the conclusion that several other aspects of the accepted wisdom were erroneous or only partially true.

### **The Demography of the Elderly**

The Kerala Migration Study confirmed the common wisdom about the demography of the elderly population of Kerala. The elderly of today or as a matter of fact, that of any year till 2060, are already born. Therefore, the degree of reliability of estimates of the future size and growth rate of the elderly is only a matter of the degree of reliability of migration affecting the state. *The study supports the conclusion that the elderly population of Kerala is large and is growing at a very rapid rate.*

- The elderly population of Kerala (age 60 and above) today (1998) was about 3.4 million and the rate of growth during 1991-98 was more than 3 percent per year. The proportion of the elderly was 9.0 percent in 1991 but had grown to 10.0 percent in 1998. For the districts of Pathanamthitta and Kottayam, the corresponding rates were 16 percent and 12 percent respectively.

- The study also confirmed that among the elderly, females outnumber males (an excess of 75 females per 1000 males). While the majority of elderly males were married (87 percent), the majority of the elderly females were widowed, divorced, separated or unmarried (62 percent).

### **The Elderly and Economic Security**

The common concept of an elderly person in Kerala is that he/she is retired from all gainful occupations and that he/she depends on his/her children or own pension or savings for a living. Many are said to be having problems in meeting their day to day expenses. The findings of the KMS gave a mixed picture. On the one hand:

- About 40 percent of the elderly males and 7 percent of the elderly females worked outside home in gainful occupation;
- For about 16 percent of the elderly, the means living was income from own current work;
- About 28 percent of the elderly depended on own income (wages and salaries from current work, pension, interest from bank deposits, etc), for a living;
- In Pathanamthitta and Kottayam districts more than 80 percent of the elderly males and about 40 percent of the elderly females had a plot of land each in their own names;
- About 77 percent of the elderly males and 28 percent of the elderly females had a house each in their names;
- More than 10 percent of the elderly had a bank account each and 28 percent had regular incomes also to meet their living expenses.

*Thus, not all elderly live at the expense of their children. Many of the elderly in Kerala have a high degree of economic security; their dependence on children for economic security is much less than is generally made out to be.*

On the other hand:

- About 13 percent of the elderly males and nearly half the number of elderly females do not have either land, or house, or bank account or regular means of income; and
- More than 70 percent of the elderly depended on their children or other relatives for a living.

*Thus, while about 30 percent of the elderly (about 1 million) earn their living, the balance 70 percent (about 2.4 million persons) depend on their children or other relatives or charity for survival.*

### **The Elderly and their Children.**

The common wisdom is generally critical of children for their harsh treatment of their elderly parents. In the changed economic set up in the state in which both husband and wife go to work, parents have to give a liberal part of their time and income for the health and education of their children, and working men and women have to move away from home, to places outside Kerala or even to countries outside India and live away from their parents. The young men and women of today have no time, nor economic resources nor even opportunities to live with and care for their elderly parents.

*This study, on the whole, does not support the view that young men and women of Kerala are callous in their treatment of their parents.*



- In Kerala as a whole, the elderly who live alone in a household, constitutes only 6.8 percent of the total number. (In Pathanamthitta and Kottayam the corresponding proportions were even lower, only 5.9 percent.). This means that more than 93 percent of the elderly live with at least one other person in the household. Of them, nearly a quarter share their households with four other persons. Two-thirds of the elderly live with their spouse, children and grand children. This is not a picture of the Kerala elderly living a lonely life away from their kith and kin.
- In cases in which the children do not stay with their parents, the children visit them often. Nearly 90 percent of the elderly admitted that their children, who do not stay with them, do visit them regularly.
- Nearly 55 percent of the elderly depend on their children for living;
- Even today, about 95 percent of the elderly feel that the children, especially sons, are the best support in their old age; and
- More than three-fourths of the elderly who were sick got help from their children for medical consultations and treatments of diseases.

*At the same time, it is a fact that in 1998, 6.8 percent of the elderly in Kerala, or about 231,000 persons were living alone without anybody else to share their lives with. The reasons for their isolation could be several; however, the negative attitude of their children (if any) need not necessarily be the major reason.*

## **The Elderly and Health**

As years pass by, the life span of the population of Kerala is getting extended. An inevitable consequence of the increasing longevity is the rise in the numbers of very old persons. At any given point of time, a large number of the very old persons would be found to be seriously ill. The accepted wisdom is that a large proportion of the elderly suffers from one sickness or the other, and that even those who are not really sick often tend to complain of sickness. It is alleged that the sickly elderly are often left alone to take care of their sickness themselves, as their children would be in the Gulf countries or in some other place far away from home.

The findings of this study give partial support to these general impressions, but not in all respects.

- For about 47 percent of the elderly, poor health is their number one problem;
- Nearly 50 percent of the elderly were suffering from arthritis, a-third were suffering from hypertension; one-fourth were suffering from high cholesterol levels; one-fifth suffered from diabetes and one-tenth were victims of heart diseases;
- Various types of physical handicap are quite common among the elderly. Nearly half of them have problem in travelling without assistance; 16 percent have hearing problems; 13 percent have problems with eyesight; and 6 percent have problems in walking.
- Two out of every 10 elderly persons were under continuous medication.

- Nearly one-third of the elderly had taken ill at least once during the 30 days prior to the survey. Most of those who had fallen ill consulted a doctor; and most of them received help from children and other persons for medical consultations and treatment of diseases.
- Lack of money to see a doctor or to buy medicines was a problem in only a minority of cases; and
- Almost all the elderly had good appetite; were satisfied with the food they were served and seemed to be getting the required levels of nutrition.

*Thus, the general feeling that a significant proportion of the elderly are suffering from chronic diseases is mostly supported by the findings of the study. But the study does not support the oft-repeated contention that the sick among the elderly do not get proper medical attention due to non-availability of persons to take them to a doctor, or lack money to pay for the doctor's fees or buy medicines. Only a small minority of the elderly had these problems.*

### **The Elderly and Loneliness**

Loneliness is said to be a major problem of the elderly in Kerala. Children live away from home and others around don't have either the time or the inclination to provide them companionship. Several findings of the study indicate that loneliness should not be major problem for the majority.

- About 93 percent of the elderly shared their households with at least one other person. Nearly one-fourth lived with their spouses, children and grand children;
- Nearly 90 percent of the elderly mentioned that, children who did not stay with them, visit them regularly;

- More than half the number of the elderly were heads of households;
- More than a quarter of the elderly were engaged in gainful economic activity; and
- About 13 percent were engaged in community work, 11 percent in social work and 19 percent in religious activities.

At the same time, some other findings lead to the opposite conclusion.

- Nearly 60 percent of the elderly women were widows, and therefore, were living without their life-long companion;
- About 15 percent reported that they suffered from constant anxiety;
- About 47 percent felt that one of their major problems was fear of burglary and theft; and
- About 28 percent of the elderly females and 8 percent of the elderly males felt lonely and left out by their children.

*Thus, for a vast majority of the elderly in Kerala, judged on the basis of their living arrangements, economic activity, relationship with children, community and religious activities, etc, there is no need to be lonely and anxious about the future. But for a minority, loneliness is a reality. If we accept their answer on face value, for about 18 percent of the elderly, loneliness is a reality in their lives. If this percentage is applied to the total elderly in the two districts of Pathanamthitta and Kottayam, the number of elderly persons who felt lonely is about 75 thousand. If the same percentage is applied to the state as whole, the total number of*

*the elderly who are lonely comes to about 620 thousand (135 thousand males and 485 thousand females).*

### **The Elderly and Old Age Homes**

Nobody really likes old age homes; neither the persons who run them nor the persons who live in them. Yet, there is an element of inevitability about moving to an old age home for many of the elderly in Kerala. Being the most advanced state in India, demographically speaking, Kerala has the largest number of old age homes for a state in India. Pathanamthitta and Kottayam have advanced more than the other districts of the state in their demographic transition. These two districts have, naturally, more old age homes than the other districts of the state. In these districts, Christians are one of most advanced communities; and they ran almost all the old age homes. There is a sort of inevitability for some of the elderly of Kerala to move into one of the old age homes in the state.

Do the elderly in Kerala really like to live in old age homes? The accepted wisdom is that most don't. The following are some of the observations of our survey.

- Most (two-thirds) elderly in Kerala have heard about old age homes, but only about 22 percent have actually visited one;
- About 5 percent of the elderly were willing to move into an old age home, but only 1.4 percent would consider old age homes as the best place for the elderly to spend their twilight years; and
- Almost the entire population agrees that children, especially sons, should take care of the parents in their old age.

It is evident that old age homes are still far from the calculations of most of the elderly in Kerala. Less than 5 percent of the elderly are

willing to move into an old age home. This works out to about 9,200 persons in Pathanamthitta district and 11,800 persons in Kottayam district (or a total of 21 thousand persons for the two districts together). As against this number, the number of inmates in the old age homes of Pathanamthitta and Kottayam districts came to only 1,070 persons or 5 percent of the potential requirement.

*The unmet need for old age home accommodation in Pathanamthitta and Kottayam districts is thus for 19,900 persons.*

If the same ratio is applied to Kerala state as a whole, the number of the elderly willing to move into old age homes come to about 167 thousand. The number of inmates of the old age homes in the state was 5,076 or only 3 percent of the potential requirement.

*The unmet need for old age homes in the state as a whole is accommodation for about 162 thousand persons.*

Who are the people who actually live in old age homes? Are they there because they have nowhere else to go, or nobody to take care of them? Why is the unmet need for old age homes so large?

- A high proportion (60 percent) of the residents of old age homes are there because they felt that there was nobody to take care of them anywhere else. Sixty percent of them had no living children, neither sons nor daughters;
- Forty percent had at least one living son or daughter. And all but 5 percent of them were living within India;
- Eighty percent of the residents of old age homes were either never married or widowed, divorced, separated;
- Very few of the inmates (5 percent) owned land or house; and

- More than 90 percent of the residents did not pay for their expenses in the homes; they were met by the old age homes themselves. About 5 percent of the residents met their own expenses; and for 3.6 percent of them, the expenses were met by their children or other relatives.

*Thus, a place in the old age homes of Pathanamthitta or Kottayam is actually for the elderly who have nowhere else to go, or nobody else to take care of them, and more importantly, for those who have no other means of living.*

*The capacity of old age homes to meet the expenses of all the elderly who would like to live there, is limited. This fact explains why the unmet need is as high as 97 percent. There are about 162 thousand elderly persons who would like to live in old age homes, if only their expenses could be met by the institutions.*

### **The Elderly and Migration**

Migration is supposed to have affected the elderly in many ways; in depriving them of the care from their children, in increasing loneliness and anxiety among them; in improving their economic and financial security; in enhancing their ability to seek expert medical help, etc. This study throws considerable light on some of these hypotheses.

- Emigration and out-migration have reduced the number of the elderly in the state while return emigration and return out-migration have increased it. The net change amounted to an increase of 4.5 percent in the number of the elderly in the state. Thus migration has increased the old-age dependency in the state by increasing the number of the elderly persons and simultaneously decreasing the number of the working age population.

- Migration has increased loneliness among the elderly. It has increased the proportion of the elderly persons living alone without any younger persons sharing their household from 4.6 percent before migration to 6.9 percent after migration. *Thus, migration has increased loneliness of the elderly by 50 percent. Had there been no emigration or out migration, the number of elderly without any younger person living with them would have been only about 155 thousand instead of the actual of 231 thousand.*
- Elderly persons in emigrant and out-migrant households felt loneliness as a problem more than the elderly in non-migrant or return migrant households. Thus, migration has indeed contributed to the loneliness of the elderly.
- Surprisingly, a larger proportion of the elderly in non-migrant households complained of infrequent visits of children than the elderly in migrant households.
- More of the elderly in non-migrant households were afraid of burglary or theft than the elderly in migrant households.
- Anxiety is a problem among 15 percent of the elderly; the rate is much higher among the elderly women, especially those women living in migrant households. Anxiety of the elderly is associated with migration from the household.
- Only a small difference is observed between the proportion of the elderly living in migrant households and that living in non-migrant households who possess land, house, bank account, or regular income. There is, however, a significant difference in the level of economic dependence of the elderly



on their children. It is larger among the elderly living in households with migrants than those living in households without migrants. Their children took care of more than 60 percent of the elderly in households with migrants. Among non-migrant households, children look after the needs of only 51 percent of the elderly. The proportion of the elderly living on income from own work is much larger among the non-migrant households. Thus migration from a household is a factor in the provision of livelihood to the elderly; however, children living abroad provide subsistence to only 8 percent of them.

- Surprisingly, fewer of the elderly in non-migrant households reported ill health as a problem. Among females, the largest proportion of the elderly with health problems was in return emigrant households (67.7 percent), and the lowest was in non-migrant households. Among males, the largest proportion was among emigrant households; and
- Migration is associated with the health of the elderly. While 53 percent of the elderly in migrant households thought that they were unhealthy, only 43 percent in non-migrant households thought so.

### **III ECONOMIC CONSEQUENCES**

#### **(i) STATE LEVEL ANALYSIS**

Most of the consequences, especially those taking place in the households of migrants, are brought about through remittances and their utilisation. Socioeconomic and demographic factors lead to emigration and out-migration; emigration and out-migration lead, in turn to remittances; remittances cause social and economic changes; and these

changes, in the next move, become factors promoting migration. The process goes on in cycles. Remittance, in this sense, is an intermediate determinant of the consequences.

**Remittances from abroad.** The Kerala Migration Study collected information on remittances- in cash and in kind - received by households through private or through public channels such as banks. It did not include remittances made to institutions. The remittances which households receive need not be exclusively from members of the household who are away; they could as well contain a part received from others such as friends or relatives.

*An estimate of the total cash remittances received by Kerala households during a 12- month period in 1998 was Rs 35,304 million. \**

The average remittance was about Rs 25 thousand per emigrant, (Rs 5,500 per household and Rs 1,105 per capita). Cash remittances constituted about 9.3 percent of the State Domestic Product. If the remittances were added to the SDP, the per capita SDP would have been Rs 13,041 instead of the actual Rs 11,936. The annual remittances received by the Kerala households were 2.55 times higher than what Kerala Government received from the Central Government, by way of budget support. It was more than the export earnings from the state's sea food industries (about Rs 10 thousand million) or the export earnings from the state's spices industry (Rs 5,700 million)

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\* It is possible that this is an underestimate for two reasons: (1) households could under report remittances, (2) total remittances include institutional and other non-household remittances. However, estimates from alternate sources do not enable one to carry out the type of in-depth analysis that is carried out in the study. (See the detailed foot note on remittances in the Chapter on Economic consequences of Migration in the CDS-IDPAD Working Paper II for greater details). Not all households which had emigrants reported having received remittances. Altogether only 18 percent of all sample households (or 80 percent of the households with emigrants) reported having received remittances during 1998.

Besides cash, households received several items in kind - clothing, ornaments and jewellery, and electric and electronic gadgets; the total value of goods received was Rs 5,413 million. Thus, total remittances (cash plus goods) came to Rs. 40,717 million or 10.7 percent of GDP.

Inter-community variations in total remittances show the same pattern as inter- community differentials in the number of emigrants. Malappuram received 17 percent of the total remittances. Thrissur was next with 14 percent and Ernakulam stood third with 13 percent. The southern districts, Thiruvananthapuram to Alappuzha, received remittances in the range of 6-10 percent.

Muslims received 47 percent of the total remittances. Ezhavas and Syrian Christians each received about 13 percent. Latin Christians received 11 percent and Nairs about 9 percent. However, it was not Muslim households, which received the highest per emigrant remittances. An average Latin Christian emigrant sent Rs 33 thousand per year and an average Syrian Christian emigrant Rs 27 thousand. In contrast, the average remittance per Muslim emigrant was Rs 24 thousand only.

Remittances per emigrant varied according to educational levels. The remittances of an average degree holding emigrant was Rs 37 thousand while that of an illiterate emigrant was Rs 20 thousand. The inter-community differences in remittances per emigrant were mostly due to differences in educational level.

The major end use of remittances is reported to be household consumption; 86 percent of the households mentioned living expenses as the main expenditure item met out of remittances. The other important uses were education (36 percent), repayment of debt (27 percent), construction and repairs of buildings (11 percent), and bank deposits (8 percent).

**Migration and Housing.** One of the priority items of disposition of an emigrant's savings was improvement of the quality of his housing.

The consequences of migration on housing are examined in two ways. First the value of the house of migrants is compared with that of non-migrants. An index of the value of the house of a typical emigrant was 7.05 compared to an index of 6.44 of a return emigrant, 5.02 of an out-migrant, 4.86 of a return out-migrant and 4.30 of a non-migrant. The index thus, increases steadily from non-migrants through out-migrants to emigrants.

A second measure is the quality of the house as assessed by the investigators. Taking as an index of the quality of housing, the proportion of houses which are characterized as "luxurious" or "very good", it was found that the index was 24.9 for emigrants, 24.4 for return emigrants, 15.9 for return out-migrants 13.9 for out-migrants and 10.6 for non-migrants. Similarly, among the emigrants, the quality index was 38.7 among those who emigrated prior to 1991, 24.0 among those who emigrated between 1991 and 1995, and only 18.6 among those who emigrated after 1995. Thus, the quality of houses is better for those who have been away for longer periods. The duration of emigration is thus positively associated with the quality of housing.

A similar pattern of relationship was observed among out-migrants too.

A three-way analysis of variance, in which the index of housing quality was the dependent variable, and community, and migration status were the independent variables, indicated that migration status has a strong statistically significant relationship with the quality of housing. The effect of migration status on housing quality was independent of the places of origin of the migrants or their community.

**Household Amenities.** Nearly three-fourths of all the houses in Kerala were electrified. At the same time, among the emigrants and return-emigrants, the corresponding percentage was 87. Among the non-migrant households, however, the proportion is low- only 66 percent. The houses of internal migrants have a slightly lower level than those of emigrants; but the levels are higher than those of non-migrants' households.

A higher proportion of houses of migrant households has flush-out toilets than non-migrant households have. The difference is maintained in all the communities.

In Kerala, about 19 per cent of the households use LPG for cooking, varying from 39 percent among Syrian Christians to only 2.7 percent among Scheduled Castes. Among all the communities taken together, the proportion of households which use LPG is lower among non-migrants than among migrants. Emigrants' households are higher in proportion than households of out-migrants. There is, however, not much of a difference between households of emigrants and of return emigrants in this respect. The highest proportion of households using LPG for cooking was among emigrants belonging to the Syrian Christian community (73 per cent).

**Possession of Consumer Durables.** Conspicuous consumption is a hallmark of an emigrant, especially a Kerala emigrant. Emigrants become accustomed to the use of many new durable consumer goods while abroad. Since many of these goods used to be unavailable locally they brought them on return home. Most of these goods are now locally available, and the higher purchasing power of migrant households enables them to acquire these goods more frequently and effortlessly than non-migrants could.

Possession of 23 different household consumer durable items (HCDs) was analyzed to see where the migrant households stood vis-a-vis non-migrant households. For easy comparison, an index of the possession of HCDs was calculated for each migrant group and for the emigrants by duration of emigration (the index could vary between 0 and 100). The index was 32 for emigrants and return emigrants, 27 for return out-migrants and 22 for out-migrants. For the non-migrant household, the index was only 15. The comparison indicates that migration has a positive influence on ownership of consumer durables. International migrants have a higher propensity to acquire HCDs than internal migrants have; and internal migrant households have a higher propensity than non-migrant households have.

About 54 percent of the emigrant households, as against 34 percent of non-migrant households, had a television set each. About 40 percent of the emigrant households owned refrigerators, but only 13 percent of the non-migrant households did.

Analysis of the percentage of households possessing specific consumer durables by duration of emigration, leads to an identical conclusion: the longer the duration of emigration, the higher is the proportion of households possessing a car, a television, a telephone or all of them.

A three-way analysis of variance in which the index of the possession of consumer goods was the dependent variable, and community and migration status the independent variables, gave a very strong statistically significant degree of association between the consumer index and migration status. The relationship was independent of community as shown by the statically insignificant interaction effect in which one of the factors is migration.

**Education and Occupation.** Although a large number of emigrant households used a significant part of the remittances they received for education of their children, not much difference is observed in this respect between emigrant and non-emigrant households. The average number of years of schooling of the members of the non-migrant households was found to be, in fact, higher than that of the emigrant households. But, out-migrant families have slightly higher average years of schooling than non-migrants. However, return migrants, both internal and external, have higher proportions of persons among them with higher education (secondary level or degree) than the out-migrants, both internal and external, have. The overall conclusion that emerges is that migration is highly selective. The observed difference between migrants and non-migrants is a *mixture of selectivity and consequence*. It is not possible to differentiate between the two.

This is, however, not the case with occupation. A major motive behind migration, both internal and external, is improvement of economic conditions through occupational mobility. A comparison between the occupational composition of migrants prior to and after migration indicates that, in fact, there was considerable upward occupational mobility due to migration.

About 62 percent of the emigrants and 55 percent of the out-migrants changed their occupations after migration, all to "better" occupations. The proportion of migrants without a regular occupation (unemployed, students, unpaid family workers) decreased by 19 percentage points among the external migrants and 48 percentage points among the internal migrants. The proportion of migrants in high status occupations (government service, semi-government service, private sector, and self-employment) increased by 16 percentage points among emigrants and 48 percentage points among the out-migrants. However,

after migrants' return to Kerala, the improvements achieved during migration in the occupational status could not be maintained. The increase in the proportion of high status occupations after return was only 14 percentage points (16 percentage points before return) among the international migrants and 18 percentage points (48 percentage points before return) among the internal migrants.

The improvement in employment status was much more marked among the internal migrants than among the external migrants. The change was not uniform among the communities, being much larger, among Syrian Christians and Nairs than among other communities.

### **Employment Rate**

Migration tends to increase the employment rate in the residual population as the emigrants and out-migrants tend to have a higher proportion of the unemployed. The difference is significant only among the males, as the number unemployed was larger among them.

Among the emigrant males, the Work Participation Rate (WPR) was not very much different from that of the general population, but among the females, employment rate was much higher among emigrants than among the general population. The opposite is the case among return emigrants. Employment among return emigrant males was higher than that among the general population, but lower among the female return emigrants. Employment rate was lowest among the out-migrants as they included a very high proportion of the unemployed.

### **Unemployment**

A major consequence of migration has been a reduction in unemployment. The Kerala Employment Exchanges reported an



unemployment level of 37 lakhs in 1998. The KMS estimated an unemployment level (those not working and seeking work) of only 12.68 lakh or roughly one-third of the estimate given by the Employment Exchanges.

This gives an unemployment rate of 11 percent. The number of unemployed males (651 thousand) was not very much different from that among females (617 thousand). However the unemployment rate gives a different picture. Female unemployment rate was 23 percent compared with a rate of only 7.5 percent among males.

Unemployment rate was more severe

- in Kannur, Ernakulam, Alappuzha and Malappuram districts,
- among persons below 30 years,
- among unmarried males and females,
- among married females,
- among the Nair and Syrian Christian communities, and
- among the educated.

About 70 percent of the unemployed were educated (those with secondary school certificate or a degree)

Migration has considerably eased the unemployment problem in the state. As a result of migration, the number unemployed has declined by 32 percent and the unemployment rate has declined by about 3 percentage points. Unemployment rates are higher among those with a secondary certificate or a degree. They are relatively very low among those who have primary education or less. This pattern holds true among males as well as females. Among females with a degree or secondary school certificate, the unemployment rate was more than 60 percent.

The impact of migration on unemployment was greater among persons with less than secondary education (37 per cent decline) than among those with secondary certificate or a degree (28 per cent decline).

### **Self-employment**

While about 13 lakh persons were unemployed, as much as 31 lakh persons were self-employed.

The overall percentage of self-employed persons was 27 among the labour force taken as a whole, but it was as high as 46 percent among the return emigrants and 29 percent among the return out-migrants. Before migration the proportion of the self-employed was only 15 percent among emigrants and 6 percent among out-migrants. Thus, migration is clearly associated with an increase in the proportion of the labour force in self-employment. *Self-employment has been thus a means by which many of Kerala's unemployed were able to become engaged in gainful occupations. It is an avenue that the Government could pursue in reducing unemployment in the state. It was the only occupational category that increased its relative strength as a result of migration, internal and external.*

### **Poverty**

Migration has had a very significant impact on the proportion of population below the poverty line. The proportion declined by over 3 percentage points as a result of remittances received by the Kerala households from their kith and kin abroad. If poverty level is about 29 percent, the decline in poverty level is about 12 percent.

The decline in poverty was the largest among Muslims (6 percentage points). It was relatively high among the Ezhavas and the Latin Christians, but relatively low among Syrian Christians and Nairs.

## **(ii) SPECIAL STUDY OF ALAPPUZHA AND KASARAGOD DISTRICTS**

Several aspects of the economic consequences of migration could not be analyzed at the state level because the needed data were not collected for all the districts. Some of these areas were covered in the special survey conducted in Alappuzha and Kasaragod districts. The results of the analysis of these data are included in this section.

The economic impact of migration in Alappuzha and Kasaragod districts was analyzed by comparing the behaviour of emigrant and out-migrant households with that of the non-migrant households. Emigrant households include return emigrant households. Similarly, out-migrant households include return out-migrant households. It is important to bear in mind that the differences between the three groups of households are partly the outcome of socio-cultural factors and hence cannot entirely be attributed to the migration status of the households.

### **Employment and Unemployment**

The most conspicuous economic outcome of migration is that it provides an outlet to persons who would otherwise remain unemployed or have only inadequate employment. This outflow of manpower may in turn, bring in remittances to the concerned households and thus serve to sustain a higher standard of living. But what is the impact of migration on the employment/unemployment situation in the sending region? The sample survey has shown that worker-population ratio (WPR) has been much higher for non-migrant households (55%) compared to emigrant households (31.6%). The low WPR of emigrant households may be due to the fact that work seekers from emigrant households are more selective with regard to employment. In terms of the status of employment, emigrant households depend more on self-employment (48%) than non-migrant households (45.3%). As regards pattern of employment, while

storage, trade, hotels and restaurants provide substantial employment to workers from emigrant households in both Kasaragod and Alappuzha, the dominant place goes to traditional industries like beedi and coir for non-migrant households.

The rate of unemployment is the highest (20.8%) for emigrant households and the lowest (8.12%) for non-migrant households - a logical outcome of the relative economic status of the two groups of households. Because the unemployed belonging to the emigrant households enjoy financial support of the emigrant members, they are obviously not in any great hurry to get employed.

### **Impact on Agricultural Development**

Emigrant and out-migrant household are better placed than non-migrants with respect to possession of land

- In Kerala as a whole out-migrant households have on an average 87 cents per household, but non-migrant household had only 57 cents. The emigrant households come in between with 64 cents;
- In Alappuzha, emigrant households owned more land than non-migrant households did, but in Kasaragod, non-migrant households owned larger holdings;
- During the five-year period preceding the survey, a larger proportion of emigration household had bought land than non-migrant households in both Alappuzha and Kasaragod districts;
- Compared to the number of households which bought land during the preceding 5 years, the number of households which sold land were fewer in each category.

- The average expenditure per household on land improvements was the highest for non-migrant households in Kasaragod, but it was the lowest for non-migrant households in Alappuzha. Rice cultivation being unprofitable, farmers in Alappuzha seem to be reluctant to make further investments on land. On the other hand, in the absence of financial support from members working outside the state or abroad, non-migrant households in Kasaragod seem to be paying more attention to land improvement;
- Emigrant households were found to be lagging behind non-migrant households in installing any farm machinery, especially the relatively expensive ones like pump sets;
- As far as diversion of farm land for non-farm uses (for residential purposes) is concerned, it was confined mostly to non-migrant households in Alappuzha ;
- No distinct pattern of fallowing practices is observed as between emigrant, out-migrant and non-migrant households or as between Alappuzha and Kasaragod districts;
- The survey data on livestock farming practices indicate that in relative terms emigrant households in Alappuzha were ahead of other categories in the sale of cattle and that non-migrant households in the same district led the rest in the sale of goats. The disposal of livestock was chiefly due to exorbitant maintenance costs. Also, non-migrant households in Alappuzha had made more purchases of livestock in both absolute and relative terms, the motive in most cases being meeting the milk requirements of the households concerned. Emigrant households were least concerned with this purpose.

In general, migrant, especially emigrant, households do not play any significant role in the agricultural development of the two districts.

We have already noted that self-employment accounted for the maximum employment for workers from emigrant and out-migrant households. Emigrant households almost entirely accounted for forms of self-employment like taxi/lorry service which involve substantial investment. Judged by the average amount raised by the households in financing self-employment enterprises, it was observed that emigrant households depended on own resources to a much greater extent than others.

### **Scarcity of Labour**

On the basis of the response of the sample households, indices were constructed of the relative scarcity of different types of labour. While migrant households, emigrant as well as out-migrant, experienced maximum difficulty in hiring domestic help, coconut pluckers, plumbers and electricians, non-migrant households found plumbers, carpenters and masons most scarce. Surprisingly, however, there was no correlation between the relative scarcity of labour and the wage rate in most cases.

### **Education of Children**

Education is another sphere where migration has exercised tremendous influence. At the school level there has been a strong preference on the part of the emigrant households, and of out-migrant households to a lesser degree, for English-medium schools compared to non-migrant households. Besides, preference for unaided private schools was the highest among emigrant households and the lowest among non-migrant households. However, as between Kasaragod and Alappuzha, non-migrant households in Kasaragod have a stronger preference for

English medium and private unaided schools than their counterparts in Alappuzha. Costs of education, of course, vary with the type of management and the medium of instruction. Migrant households spend, on average, more on tuition fees and private tuition compared to non-migrant households irrespective of the type of school. The proliferation of English-medium schools in the private sector in Kerala may largely be attributed to Gulf migration.

At the college level, emigrant households rely on private aided colleges to a greater extent than out-migrant and non-migrant households. As for professional colleges, out-migrant households account for the highest enrolment. However, Alappuzha has been ahead of Kasaragod regardless of the migration status of the households. A sizeable proportion (37%) of the enrolment in professional colleges is accounted for by self-financing institutions. Emigrant households in Alappuzha and non-migrant households in Kasaragod had recourse to self-financing colleges to a greater extent than others.

### **Food Consumption**

Indices constructed for levels of food consumption and hygiene and sanitation have shown that migrant households maintain higher living standard in terms of food consumption and that, with the sole exception of non-migrant households in Kasaragod, they maintain higher standards than others in the use of articles of personal hygiene and sanitation. Alappuzha is ahead of Kasaragod in respect of both.

### **Health and Sanitation**

As far as health care practices are concerned, the vast majority of the sample households depend on the allopathic system of medical care. Wherever allopathic treatment was preferred, migrant households depended on private hospitals to a greater extent than non-migrant households. The degree of dependence on private hospitals was higher

in Alappuzha. However, private consultation played a major role among migrant as well as non-migrant households in Kasaragod. This may be due to the fact that there is a large Muslim population in that district.

#### **IV THE GENDER ISSUES IN MIGRATION FEMALE Versus MALE MIGRANTS**

When we speak about the consequences of migration on Kerala society, what comes immediately to mind are the huge size of remittances which emigrants send back home, the enormous NRI deposits in Kerala banks, the palatial houses which many migrants have built all over the Kerala rural landscape, and the sophisticated household gadgets and electronic equipment which the migrant households keep in their kitchens and living rooms. *Few among us would think about the enormous transformation that has taken place to Kerala women and its potential impact on Kerala society.*

Migration has consequences for both men and women. In the case of men, the consequences come about mostly because of their own migration. In the case of women, however, consequences can come about, not only because of their own migration, but also because of the migration of their husbands. This section deals with the consequences of migration on females because of their own migration. Consequences of husbands' migration on married women are dealt with in the next section. It deals with a group of women in Kerala who were neither emigrants nor return emigrants, but were deeply involved in the migration process.

#### **Women and Migration: The Dimensions**

Women follow men in migration from Kerala; men follow women in return migration to the state. Women are the last to migrate out, but they are the first to return home. More of the female migrants are married



at the time of migration than male migrants. Female migrants are better qualified than male migrants, but fewer of them are gainfully employed. Migration causes separation of wives from husbands. Their numbers are the same. But women migrating without the husbands are infrequent, but men migrating without wives are more the rule than the exception. Few married men are left behind by migrating women, but many married women are left behind by their migrating husbands. Both men and women have their own separate gains and losses arising from migration, but women are less equipped to handle them alone without help from their spouses. They have greater problems in dealing with the trauma arising from separation. For many, the trauma was worth the trouble, for, at the end of the day, they came out like gold in a crucible well equipped to face the world on their own.

Emigration from Kerala is essentially a male affair. In 1998, female emigrants numbered 126 thousand out of a total of 1,362 thousand (9.3 per cent). A similar pattern was observed among return emigrants also; females were only 81 thousand out of a total of 739 thousand (10.9 per cent). Thus, whether it is emigration or return-emigration only 1 out of every 10 was a woman.

However, the proportion of women was relatively large among the internal migrants. Among the out-migrants from Kerala to the other states in India 1 in 4 was a woman. The figures were 167 thousand females and 525 thousand males. The number of female return out-migrants was 280 thousand compared to 679 thousand males.

Women were better represented among the return out-migrants. The number of female return out-migrants exceeded the number of female out-migrants by 113 thousand. Corresponding to every 100 female emigrants there were only 64 female return-emigrants; corresponding to every 100 female out-migrant there were 167 female return out-migrants.

Among the various communities in the state, the highest proportion of female emigrants was among Syrian Christians (27 per cent). Together with Latin Christians, the Christian community contributed nearly half the number of female emigrants. Nairs have a relatively low proportion of females among emigrants. Muslims have the lowest proportion.

Muslims contributed nearly 50 per cent of the emigrants, but their contribution to the female emigrants was less than 25 per cent. About a-fifth of the emigrants from the Christian Community were females. On the other hand, less than 5 per cent of the Muslim emigrants were females. The proportion of females among emigrants of the Nair community was not very much different from that of Muslims (5.7 per cent).

The number of emigrants has been increasing steadily from year to year in recent years, but the increase in the number of female emigrants has been much smaller than that of males. Between 1983-87 and 1993-97 the number of female emigrants increased only by 250 per cent, but among the male emigrants the increase was by 400 per cent.

Female emigrants were better educated than male emigrants. Among those who reported their educational attainment 28 percent of the female emigrants had a degree, but only 9 percent of the male emigrants were degree holders. About 38 percent of the female emigrants had passed the secondary level of education, but only 29 percent of the male emigrants had secondary education. Among emigrants 7.4 percent were females, but among degree holding emigrants as much as 20 percent were females.

As expected the economic activity rate is lower among females than among males. The same relationship holds at all stages of the process: before migration in Kerala, after migration at the destinations, and after return to Kerala. The differential is the largest among the return migrants.

Females tend to drop out of economic activity after a stint at emigration or out-migration. The differential among the emigrants is only 45.3 percent before emigration but is as much as 76.3 percent after return to Kerala. Similarly, the differential among the out-migrants is only 31.3 percent before out-migration but is as much as 64.8 percent after returning to Kerala. Thus emigration and out migration tend to increase labour force participation of females. However, their return is associated with lowering of economic activity and labour force participation rates.

Nearly half (46 percent) the number of the economically active female emigrants were "job seekers" before emigration. The corresponding percentage among males was only 27 percent. The percentages were much lower at the destination, but the differentials persist: 5.6 percent among females and 0.5 among males. Among the return emigrants, the level of unemployment was higher, but the pattern of differentials persist: 21.1 percent among females and 7.6 percent among males.

In the State as a whole, the number of married men in the sample was 10,712 and the number of married women 12,253, an excess of 1,541 married females over the number of married men. The difference, as proportion of the number of married women (the HWSR), was 12.6 percent. Thus, a minimum of 12.6 percent of the married women in Kerala were living away from their husbands due to migration. Applying the ratio to the total number of married females of the State, we find that nearly a million (981 thousand) married women in Kerala are living away from their husbands.

In about 15 percent of the households, the number of married females is more than the number of married males. The percentage varies considerably from district to district and from community to community. The highest Husband-Wife Separation Ratio (HWSR) was in

Malappuram district (28 percent), and the lowest in Idukki district (1.7 percent). The separation ratio was more than 30 percent among Muslims while it was only 4.4 percent among the scheduled castes.

In 1.8 percent of the Kerala households (183 households in the sample), the number of married males was larger than the number of married females. The proportion of excess married males was relatively small in all the districts and in all the communities. The highest was in Idukki district (3.5 percent) and among the Latin Christians (2.1 percent). In 17 of the 183 households (9.3 percent), the excess could be attributed to female emigration, but in the majority of cases, other explanations would be needed. Mis-reporting by the respondent and misclassification by the enumerators could not be altogether ruled out. Unwilling to let others know of their marital problems, some of the respondents could have reported their marital status as married when in fact they would be separated. In any case, the total in this category comes to less than 2 percent.

## V THE GULF WIVES

Apart from emigrants, return-emigrants, out-migrants or return out-migrants there is another group of women, who although not migrants themselves, nevertheless, are deeply affected by migration. They are the women in Kerala whose husbands are emigrants or are return-emigrants. They are referred to as *Gulf wives* in this study.

The absence of husband causes several hardships for wives; but at the same it brings in several benefits also. For example, it could give the Gulf wives an opportunity to develop their talents, expertise, status, independence, etc, to their full potential. In that respect the initial handicaps could be turned into a blessing for the family and the society in general.

## Problems of Gulf Wives

In the opinion of the Gulf wives, the principal problems arising from their husbands' emigration were, in the order of importance, the following.

- (1) Loneliness
- (2) Added responsibilities
- (3) Adverse effect on children's education
- (4) Debt incurred to finance emigration
- (5) Increased anxiety, and
- (6) Financial gains not up to expectation.

**Loneliness.** As a problem among the Gulf wives, loneliness was more serious than anything else. More than half the number of young wives considered loneliness as their number one problem arising from their husbands' emigration.

Loneliness was measured quantitatively by (1) the length of the period of separation and (2) the frequency of communication between the Gulf wife and her husband. The longer the average period of separation, the higher would be the degree of loneliness. Similarly, the less frequent the communication between the husband and wife, the higher would be degree of loneliness.

In the case of about 2.4 percent of the Gulf wives (about 24 thousand women), their husbands had left for the Gulf within days after marriage; almost a-third left within 3 months from marriage, and about 45 percent left during the first year of marriage. Thus, separation from husbands soon after marriage is indeed a real problem among the Gulf wives. The situation is much worse among the younger wives, about 2.7 percent, whose husbands had left for Gulf immediately after marriage.

The problem is partly ameliorated by frequent communication between husband and wife over the 'phone and through letters. Almost all Gulf wives (99 percent) communicate with their husbands in one form or another. Nearly 70 percent communicated through letters and 'phone, and 30 percent communicated through letters alone. Nearly half the number of Gulf wives communicated once in two weeks. The majority of those who wrote letters also communicated over the 'phone. Such frequent communication ameliorated the problem of loneliness to a large extent. The ability to communicate whenever needed was a great help for the wives to carry on the load of added responsibilities, especially responsibilities related to financial management.

### **Added Responsibilities**

Taking care of children's education is a major added responsibility. Most of the Gulf wives had children. More than 75 percent of those with children had one child or more in school. As the father is not in station, the mother is responsible to get them admission in school, to arrange for their transport to school, to find tuition master, to arrange for transport to the tuition place, and to help the children at home with their school work. Only a few of the Gulf wives actually take their children to school, but about 8 percent take them to the tuition master, and 75 percent of them help them in their school work.

Migration results in considerable increase in family finances. Management of the old and new family assets and income is a major added responsibility of the Gulf wives. Their husbands were unaccustomed to such responsibilities as there was little money in the house at the time they left home. So there were not many precedents to follow. The problem is particularly difficult, as they don't have the full freedom to spend the money the way they like. They have to follow the husbands' directions to a great extent and keep the in-laws in good humor.

In many families, emigration brought much debt at the time of emigration and this had to be liquidated. In some cases the remittances were not sufficient to meet all the expenses.

After the husbands' emigration, the responsibility of taking care of sickness in the family fell on the shoulders of the Gulf wives. About 30 percent of the Gulf wives reported that if any member in the households needed medical care, it was they who arranged for consultation with physicians and took care of the medical treatment.

Keeping the communication line open with the emigrant husbands and keeping the in-laws in good humour could themselves be major responsibilities, especially if the households were without a 'phone connection and/or if the women concerned were illiterate.

Other adverse consequences arising from the husbands' emigration were *increased anxiety, problems with in-laws, and misunderstanding with the husbands abroad*. More than one-fourth of the Gulf wives had problems with in-laws, mostly related to financial matters, but cases of mental problems and misunderstanding with husbands were not frequent. There seems to be an exaggeration of these problems in the news media. Otherwise, it could be that the Gulf wives were reluctant to reveal their full story to strangers.

### **Benefits from Migration**

Problems arising from emigration should be balanced against benefits from it. Economic gains arising from remittances are the principal benefits of migration. Almost all Gulf wives stressed the economic benefits in one form or another as the principal gains from their husbands' emigration (56 percent mentioned financial gains, 28 percent mentioned

ability to own a good house, and 6 percent mentioned ability to pay back debt). Basically, the source of all benefits was remittances.

Almost all emigrants (97 percent) sent home remittances and 80 percent of them sent them in their wives' names. As a result, the status and the authority of the Gulf wives in their households have risen considerably. On an average the remittance was about Rs 35 thousand per year or about Rs. 3 thousand per month.

The receipt of large remittances in their own names and entrusting them with the responsibility of managing the finances were major factors which have raised the status of the Gulf wives and improved their autonomy, independence and expertise in managing their affairs.

Half the number of the Gulf wives had houses or lands in their names; 4 out of 10 had their own income which they kept under their control; 7 out of 10 keep bank accounts, but most of them spend money according to directions from husbands. But in the matter of daily household expenses, personal requirements, children's needs, etc, women spend money at their discretion. These are important indicators of the autonomy and economic independence of the Gulf wives.

### **The Balance Sheet.**

There are positive as well as negative consequences of migration of their husbands for the Gulf wives. On balance, what is the consequence? The responses of the Gulf wives to the two questions we asked are stated below.

*First* we asked:

" Would that not be nice if your husband leaves the Gulf job and returns home?"



Surprisingly, nearly 60 percent of Gulf wives replied that they really wished their husbands back home. For them, the added responsibilities and the loneliness weighed too much on them. But for the other 40 percent, the economic benefits out-weighed the costs.

*Second*, all the Gulf wives were asked another question:

"If you have a daughter of marriageable age, whom do you like her to marry? Someone working in Kerala, someone working in another state in India, or someone working in the Gulf countries?"

None (less than three percent) of the Gulf wives wanted a man working in another state in India as her son-in law. Had the same question been asked 30 years ago, the answer would have been overwhelmingly in favour of persons working in a metropolis in India, such as Bombay or Bangalore. But today the situation seems to be totally different.

Only about 14 percent preferred persons working in the Gulf countries.

*An overwhelming 83 percent preferred a person working in Kerala as their son-in-law!*

Having gone through the experience of a Gulf wife, they seem to have second thoughts about their husbands' emigration. It is all right from the economic point of view, but not so if all factors are taken into consideration.

Those who have gone through the trauma of separation would prefer jobs in Kerala, if they could. For them, all that glitter in the Arabian sands is not gold. There is considerable sacrifice involved on their part at the destination and on the part of their wives and children back in Kerala.

There is still another side to the whole question of the balance sheet. What is described above is the short-term point of the individual Gulf wives. The picture is different if we take the long-term perspective and the point of the society in general. More important than the visible economic benefits to the Gulf wives, but partly as a result of them, are the subtle changes in the women's self-confidence and in their ability to get things done in the man's world. Loneliness yes, mental strains yes, hard work yes, minor problems with in-laws and children yes, but at the end of the day, they would have developed an inner capacity to get things done, not only within households but also in the community. The ISD and the internet cafes in every corner of the state have come handy to prevent the problems of loneliness from getting out of hand. The husband is physically away, but his helping hand is close by just, at the other end of the communication line. The husbands' absence, increased economic resources at their disposal, and the ability to communicate with their men whenever needed all have become instrumental in transforming the shy dependent girls into self confident autonomous managers with status that is equal to those of any men in the neighbourhood. They get a larger vision of the world around them. The subtle transformation that has taken place among the Gulf wives would have a more lasting imprint on the Kerala society than any material changes which migration has brought about.

## **VI MIGRATION POLICIES**

*On the basis of the findings of the Kerala Migration Study, four areas are identified for development of policies and follow-up actions.*

*First, Policies to Ensure Continuation of Migration From the State.* The critical follow-up actions are development of (1) education and training programmes, and (2) a migration monitoring system

Migration is an unconventional path to development. Migration could be cited as an example of what the IDPAD people call "*Alternatives in Development*", which the last two letters of IDPAD represent. Unconventional or not, as far as Kerala is concerned, migration is undoubtedly its most productive "industry", "employing" nearly 2 million persons directly and 7-8 million family members indirectly. Its spin-off effects extend to every facet of life in Kerala, and even outside Kerala to the producers of consumer goods and construction materials all over India. It is the least capital-intensive of undertakings with a minimum of environmental hazards but subject to a very high degree of international competition. Migrants' remittance in 1998 was about Rs 40 thousand million, about 10 percent of the state's GDP, and 3 times what the state had received by way of budget support from the Central Government. It was about four times the export earnings from the state's seafood industries (Rs 1000 crore approximately) and 7 times that from export of spices from the state (Rs 570 crore approximately), the two most acclaimed export sectors in Kerala. Like most other industries in the state, migration is facing problems. Migration deserves as much, if not more, nurture than any other industrial sector in the state. It requires continuous technical up-gradation as all other industries do.

In the past decade, Kerala has become so much dependent on migration and the remittances it brings that any sudden break in the trend could be disastrous for the economic and social life in the state. Policies to ensure a continuation of migration, at least until the demographic transition has had time to work through the labour force ages and investments from past remittances gather a critical momentum, should form an essential part of the planning process in the state.

*Migration from Kerala has reached a stage at which there is great risk of the carpet being pulled from under our feet unless appropriate*

*policies are formulated and programmes implemented. There is enough evidence to suggest that emigration is in a declining phase, return emigration is in an increasing mode and remittances from the emigrants is on a downward slope.*

The principal obstacles in the way of continued smooth migration in the coming years would be:

- the structural changes in the economy of the Gulf countries. The construction phase of the Gulf development is largely over. Most of the Kerala emigrants used to be unskilled labour in the construction industry. The demand for the Kerala unskilled labour has almost entirely vanished;
- failure to upgrade the technical skill of the Kerala workers in tune with the changing times. Kerala workers have not kept abreast with acquisitions of the types and levels of technical skills needed for employment in the changing economic organization in the receiving countries;
- the improved supply of local workers within the Gulf countries; and
- the competition from workers from other Asian countries who are better trained than Kerala workers.

In the present context in Kerala, a two-fold approach is suggested to meet the increasing competition from within the Gulf region and from other South and South East Asian countries: one with a long-term perspective and the other with a short-term perspective. In the short-run, the need is to improve the skills of the prospective emigrant workers. In the long run, the need is globalisation of the educational system in Kerala, to restructure it taking into consideration the demand for workers

not only in Kerala but also in the potential destination countries such as the Gulf countries, Singapore, Malaysia, the USA and other developed countries.

There is a high probability that the same way internal migration from Kerala to the other states in India declined considerably, external migration to the Gulf countries would also decline. That does not and should not mean an end to emigration from the State. There is a vast market for the Kerala emigrants in the USA and other developed countries provided our skills are upgraded taking into consideration the state of demand for manpower of the destination countries. Future Kerala emigrants need not all be unskilled construction workers in the Gulf countries, but could as well be highly skilled software engineers in the developed countries.

Consider the following findings from KMS.

- About 16 percent of the emigrants from Kerala had just primary or less than primary school education. Emigrants came from households headed by very poorly educated persons; nearly 60 percent (double the general average) of the heads of the households had only primary or below primary level of education;
- Kerala emigrants have a very low level of technical education. Nearly 80 percent have no formal training at all, and only 20 percent have a certificate, diploma or degree in a technical subject. In the early construction phase in the Gulf countries, lack of technical training was not much of a handicap;
- Remittance per emigrant was positively associated with the educational attainment of the emigrants: from Rs14 thousand per emigrant who was "literate without schooling" to Rs 47

thousand per emigrant with a degree. Improving the educational attainment of the emigrants could increase remittances to the State;

- Nearly 51 percent of the emigrants were from Muslim households; and Muslim households had received nearly 50 percent of the remittances from abroad. At the same time, Muslims have the highest illiteracy rate, and the lowest proportion of persons with secondary school certificates.
- Malappuram District sent out the largest number of emigrants (270 thousand); and it had received the largest amount (Rs.6, 295 million) as remittance from abroad. Of all the districts of Kerala, Malappuram has the highest birthrate, the highest rate of population growth, the highest average family size, the highest proportion of illiterates, and the lowest proportion of persons with secondary school certificates or degrees.

These facts establish a very strong case for the development of public policies, which would enhance this educationally backward population to use part of the remittances they receive for the improvement of the educational levels of its people.

One way to do this would be to allow this backward community, or this educationally backward district, to establish what has now come to be known as *self-financing educational institutions* of their own, starting with general high schools, technical schools, general education colleges and colleges for technical education all financed and managed by themselves.

What is mentioned above about self-financing educational institutions could be said also about self-financing hospitals, health centres, etc.

The short-term training programme should be directed to the would- be migrants catering to the needs of the Gulf market or other destination countries. The development of the training programme would require knowledge about the demand for and supply of workers in these countries. Ideally we should develop a statistical profile of the technical competence of the work force in the destination countries at present, a projection of their occupational profile and the needed educational and training background five years from now. This is not available now and research is needed to fill the gap. Once the needed information becomes available *ad hoc* training facilities could be set up at different centres in the state.

*Second, policies to rehabilitate the return migrants. Programmes facilitating self-employment seems to be the best option. This means, improving the investment climate in the state by removing known bottlenecks in starting new establishments and enterprises.*

A unique contribution of KMS was the information it brought together about the return emigrants. Consider the following results from KMS.

- In 1998, the number of return emigrants was 739 thousand, which is projected to increase to about 1.25 million by the year 2000 and to 1.75 million by the year 2002. Return emigrants were on an average 34 years old when they returned and mostly married (89 percent of males and 78 percent of females). A large proportion of them had only primary or even lower levels of education (30 percent).
- A very critical information needed for formulating policies for their rehabilitation was provided by KMS. The study has indicated that 38 percent of the return emigrants were "self-

employed" and 26 percent were working as "labourers in the non-agricultural sector". Compared to their pre-emigration occupational profiles, the proportion of the return emigrants seeking employment was less by 20 percentage points, by 8 percentage points in the "labourers in non-agriculture" category and by 10 percentage points in the "private sector employment" category of occupations. On the other side, a huge increase (24 percentage points) has taken place in the proportion of return emigrants pursuing "self-employment" as an occupation.

Based on these statistics, it is apparent that self-employment is the best avenue by which return migrants could be rehabilitated, and provided the necessary conditions in which they could help themselves with their own resources. The principal obstacles are the Kerala Model of work culture, the Kerala Model of trade union militancy and the Kerala Model of political interference in all economic activities in the State. Policies to make real changes in these areas are the need of the day.

KMS was not focussed on the question of rehabilitation of return migrants. More focussed studies would be needed to develop concrete policies for their rehabilitation. The problem is urgent as all indications point towards an increasing trend in return migration and decreasing trend in workers' remittances.

*Third, policies to optimize the utilization of the vast amount of remittances which the emigrants are sending home each year and the expertise in diverse sectors which the return migrants are bringing back with them. Follow-up actions are needed on institutional- development fronts to direct the resources, financial and work experience, to nation - building activities.*



Optimum utilization of workers' remittances is tied up with the proposal to upgrade educational standards through self-financing institutions, and the creation of proper work culture so that the emigrants and return migrants may be able to help themselves through self-employment (items 1 and 2 mentioned above).

It is Kerala Government's policy to develop information technology at a rapid pace in the State. Among the return migrants, there could be many who have acquired expertise in this field while working outside the state. It is worthwhile surveying the expertise in this area among the return emigrants and providing them with incentives to use their expertise for developing Kerala's information technology infrastructure. Here again research is needed to assess the quality and quantity of the return migrants.

*Fourth, policies to provide support to families adversely affected by emigration.*

Migration has changed the family composition in many households.

- It has increased the number of single-member households by 33 percent, 2-member households by 43 percent and 3-member households by 25 percent.
- Migration has increased the number of female-headed households. The overall proportion of female-headed households was 25 percent. Among female-headed households, emigration rate is 38 percent compared with only 15 percent among male-headed households. This is a clear indication that emigration was a major factor in the increase in the proportion of female-headed households.
- Migration has increased the number of married women living away from their husbands working in other states or in other

countries. The number of married men enumerated in the 10,000 households was less than the number of married women by 12 percent. The number of married men under 35 years was less than the number of married women under 30 years by as much as 35 percent. This means that large numbers of young spouses are living away from each other.

These families - those which became single- or two-member, or woman-headed, or with young wives removed from their husbands - are no doubt serving their self-interests; but there is also a considerable spin-off effect which serves the interests of the State. They bring in remittances, expertise, contacts with the outside economy, etc. They have a right to receive help from the community when they need it. The panchayats and the other local government organisations should be sensitised about these problems. They should develop local level policies and programmes to deal with them.

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