



Youth Migration from Kerala to the Global North: Exploring the Evolving Migration Patterns

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Abstract

The trend of people leaving Kerala in search of better employment opportunities abroad has been on the rise. This migration has had a significant impact on Kerala's economy and society. Historically, the most popular destination for Kerala migrants has been the Persian Gulf countries, and the remittances they have sent back have contributed significantly to the State's financial well-being. However, in recent years, there has been a decline in the trend of Gulf migration, and there has been a corresponding increase in the number of young people migrating to countries in the global north despite Kerala having the highest literacy rate in India. Unlike earlier Gulf migration, migration to the global north is with the intention of settling there. This paper examines the shift in migration patterns, including the brain drain caused by skilled migration and its social and economic impacts in Kerala.

Keywords: Kerala migration; Gulf migration; Globalization; Permanent residency; COVID

skilled and unskilled labor migrating to Gulf countries, alongside a surge of highly qualified professionals-including doctors, engineers, and academics-relocating to various destinations in the global north.

Currently, Kerala is experiencing a third wave of migration, marked by a significant surge in student migration to the developed world. This evolving migration landscape underscores Keralites' shifting aspirations and preferences, as evidenced by recent surveys highlighting changing migration trends [1]. There is a discernible trend of more Keralites migrating to countries in the global north. This new wave of migration represents a departure from Kerala's previous migration experiences, as individuals now have the opportunity to obtain permanent residency or citizenship in their destination countries, contrasting with the limited-term residency typically offered in Gulf countries. Consequently, this shift in migration patterns poses new social and economic challenges for Kerala, necessitating an analysis of the underlying reasons for this movement and its potential implications for the state's future.

Historical background

Until the 1940's, Kerala was predominantly characterized by a net influx of migrants from other regions, a phenomenon that rendered it a net in-migration state. However, following the integration of states post-independence, Kerala underwent a transformative shift, transitioning into a net out-migration state [2]. Since independence, individuals from Kerala have migrated to various countries, even in small numbers, reflecting a noticeable trend towards international mobility. Until the 1970's, international migration from Kerala held significance not primarily due to its statistical impact but for its symbolic demonstration effect as a pathway for upward social mobility, particularly among the middle class. It was only in the 1970's, coinciding with the oil boom in the Middle East, that large-scale emigration from Kerala commenced. Subsequently, Arab countries became the primary destination for approximately 95% of Kerala's emigrants, with Saudi Arabia alone accommodating nearly 40% of the total migrant population. Outside the Arab world, the United States emerged as the principal destination for Kerala emigrants, albeit representing a smaller proportion of the total migrant population. This period

Introduction

Kerala, a state in southern India, has gained international recognition for its distinctive development model, characterized by noteworthy accomplishments in education, healthcare, gender equality, and social justice. Despite Kerala's significant progress in terms of human development, the state still faces several persistent challenges, such as high unemployment rates and a continuous trend of outmigration. Kerala relies heavily on remittances from its diaspora, particularly from the Persian Gulf countries. This highlights the intricate relationship between migration and development in the state.

Kerala witnessed its first wave of significant international migration in the 1970's, triggered by the Gulf boom ignited by the discovery of crude oil. Subsequently, in the early 1990's, a second wave of migration emerged, driven by aspirations for a higher standard of living, leading many to seek permanent settlements in Global north countries. It was a notable shift in migration patterns, marked by a continuous influx of semi-

of Gulf migration has been recognized for its significant contribution to poverty alleviation in Kerala, surpassing other developmental factors such as agrarian reforms, trade union activities, and social welfare legislation. Remittances from migrants, commonly known as "Gulf Money," become an essential means of earning money for households across Kerala, particularly in light of agricultural stagnation, industrial underdevelopment, and widespread unemployment among educated youth.

The migration survey conducted by the department of economics and statistics in 1992-93 provided insights into the magnitude and dynamics of Kerala's migration phenomenon. It estimated that over 6 lakh migrants from Kerala were in Gulf countries, and approximately 27,480 were in other foreign nations [3]. The impact of migration reverberates across Kerala's economy and society, with remittances from Gulf countries serving as a cornerstone of the state's financial stability. Despite boasting the highest literacy rate in India, Kerala's socio-economic landscape has been profoundly shaped by migration, underscoring its far-reaching implications beyond its borders.

Evolution of migration trends in Kerala

Migration patterns in Kerala have undergone significant shifts over time, driven primarily by economic factors and educational aspirations. Unlike earlier perceptions, where education was not considered a major determinant of migration, recent trends indicate a strong correlation between education and migration, particularly among youth. Seeking high-quality education as a pathway to better employment opportunities and improved living standards has emerged as a top priority for this demographic, leading them to consider domestic and international migration [4].

The allure of countries in the global north, with their advanced educational systems and opportunities for social and economic advancement, has attracted many Indian students, including those from Kerala. Factors such as university rankings, course offerings, and personal preferences influence students' decisions to pursue higher education abroad. However, this trend is also fueled by the limited availability of seats for master's and doctoral studies in Indian universities, making admission highly competitive.

Many of the students seeking higher education abroad view overseas study as a pathway to permanent residency within a country. These students typically settle in nations with more advanced educational systems than their own, as higher education has become a significant international export good. This trend has led to the rapid growth of education abroad and the emergence of nations that take advantage of domestic shortages to attract international students. Over the past 14 years, the number of Indian students studying abroad has increased fourfold, making India the second-largest exporter of students globally after China. This large-scale student mobility has become a significant source of wealth for India but also leads to brain drain. Meanwhile, developed nations benefit significantly from this trend by boosting their economies. A huge per cent of Indian students choose to study abroad, with five countries receiving most of them. The United States is the top

destination for Indian students, followed by Australia and the United Kingdom [5].

Education, intertwined with employment prospects, primarily influences migration among middle-class, aspirational young individuals. The desire for a respectable profession and the long-term investment in children's education further motivate migration decisions. Economic factors, including low income, unemployment, and underdevelopment, continue to drive migration from developing to developed countries, where better job opportunities and living standards are perceived.

Various factors, including lower travel costs, improved communication technologies, and changes in immigration and visa regulations, facilitate the increasing mobility of students. While studying abroad offers opportunities for personal and professional growth, it also poses challenges such as cultural adaptation and brain drain, which can negatively impact the economy of sending nations.

Kerala, known for its high literacy rates and emphasis on education, has witnessed a surge in student migration to countries in the global north. In his 2023 budget statement, the state's finance minister acknowledged the need to retain its youth by providing job opportunities and enhancing facilities, recognizing the importance of addressing the underlying factors driving migration. The Kerala high court has identified the absence of adequate infrastructure and the lack of aesthetic appeal in Kerala's cities as the reasons behind young people relocating. That is, the evolving migration patterns in Kerala underscore the complex interplay of economic, educational, and social factors [6].

Literature Review

In contemporary society, the blending of values, beliefs, and behaviors from different cultures has led to the hybridization of modern civilizations. This phenomenon is deeply intertwined with globalization, which author Roland Robertson asserts lies at the core of modern culture, with cultural practices reciprocally influencing globalization. The proliferation of media and travel has notably expanded individuals' capacity to imagine themselves in diverse contexts and locations. The accessibility of the internet has further facilitated this process by providing easy access to previously inaccessible information. Media forms such as movies and online platforms offer avenues for individuals to gain insights into life abroad and explore diverse cultural perspectives [7].

International students face distinct challenges, primarily centered around financial constraints. These underscore the financial difficulties many international students encounter, including high tuition fees, exchange rate fluctuations, and limited access to financial aid. These challenges often hinder their ability to meet financial obligations, impacting their overall academic experience and well-being [8].

Despite these obstacles, studying abroad can offer international students valuable personal and academic growth opportunities. Moores emphasizes the positive learning experiences and personal development observed among

international students during their transition. These experiences equip them with resilience and coping skills, fostering a sense of belonging and contributing to their academic success [9].

In regions like Kerala, migration plays a significant role in shaping both the economy and society. Paul highlights the substantial impact of skilled workers migrating to regions such as North America, and Western Europe. Moreover, the increasing trend of young people from Kerala pursuing higher education abroad reflects the globalization of education. The influence of social networks, including friends and family, further encourages cross-border education among international students, underscoring the role of interpersonal relationships in shaping educational decisions. According to the Migration Survey 2007, about 20% of households in Thiruvananthapuram, Kochi, and Kozhikode corporations are made up of emigrants.

There has been a significant rise in the number of Indian students who choose to pursue higher education abroad, despite a temporary drop in enrollment due to the 2021 pandemic and subsequent lockdowns. This trend is particularly noticeable among young individuals from Kerala, with various factors playing a role in their decision to study overseas. A few recent surveys and data are studied. A study conducted by the central development studies indicates that approximately 1.5 million individuals from Kerala are currently engaged in work or higher education overseas, with a notable preference for destinations such as the US and UK. In 2019 alone, more than 30,000 students from Kerala ventured abroad for educational purposes, although unofficial estimates suggest that this annual figure surpasses 35,000 and continues to rise. However, the cost associated with studying abroad is considerable, with students typically requiring around ₹20 lakhs annually to fund their education in developed countries [10].

Cultural considerations play a significant role in motivating student migration from Kerala. The younger generation, particularly those aged between 15 and 25 years, is increasingly exposed to international culture through various social media platforms. This exposure has led to a discernible cultural gap, especially among different age groups, resulting in tensions and conflicts. Additionally, there has been a noticeable shift in parental attitudes towards migration, with many now more receptive to the idea of their children studying abroad. Even middle-class families can now afford to facilitate their children's migration, further contributing to the upward trend in student mobility. Although the spread of COVID-19 temporarily slowed down the migration process, success stories of those who have already migrated continue to serve as motivating factors for others. Both parents and students view migration to the western world as a matter of prestige, further fueling the desire to pursue education abroad. Moreover, changes in family structures towards increased individualism have also played a role in driving migration trends.

On the employment front, market research conducted by NoRKA roots and IIM Kozhikode suggests a shifting trend in migration patterns due to emerging job opportunities in the global north. Nursing emerges as the most popular employment choice among respondents, followed by accounting, pharmacy, plumbing, and other sectors. Preferred destination countries for

migration include the USA, Canada, UK, Ireland, Europe, and the Middle East. The primary motivation behind migration is the prospect of securing high-paying jobs. Several countries, including Canada, Germany, Australia, New Zealand, Singapore, Scandinavian nations, and Ireland, offer programs facilitating temporary labor migration and avenues for permanent settlement. Notably, Germany has recruited 1,100 nurses from Kerala under its triple win program [11].

Discussion

Globalization of migration

Migration operates within a multifaceted framework shaped by various theories and perspectives, particularly in the context of globalization. At its core, the push-pull theory elucidates the fundamental forces driving migration. This theory suggests that individuals are compelled to migrate due to adverse conditions in their home countries (push factors), such as economic hardships or political instability, while simultaneously being attracted to opportunities in destination countries (pull factors). Complementing the push-pull theory, the human capital theory emphasizes the role of education and skills in motivating migration. Individuals seek to enhance their economic prospects by acquiring knowledge and expertise, often through international study or work experiences. In a globalized economy where employers value international experience, migration becomes a strategic pathway for career advancement and economic success.

Furthermore, migration systems theory offers a broader perspective by conceptualizing migration as part of larger systems of exchange and interconnectedness [12]. This theory highlights the complex network of interactions between origin and destination countries, encompassing not only migration but also trade, investment, and communication. Within these systems, migration is shaped by many factors, including economic disparities, demographic trends, and social networks, all of which contribute to the dynamic flow of people across borders.

In the context of globalization, migration is not just a unidirectional movement but a dynamic process embedded within global exchange networks. Advancements in technology and communication have facilitated transnational ties and networks, fostering greater mobility and interconnectedness. Furthermore, global economic trends, such as neoliberal globalization and demographic changes, have profound implications for migration patterns, influencing both push and pull factors.

Understanding migration within this theoretical framework is essential for grasping its complexities and implications in the era of globalization. It underscores the need to consider migration as part of broader social transformation processes, heavily influenced by neoliberal globalization, demographic changes, and increasing disparities within and between societies [13]. By examining migration through these lenses, from individual motivations to global exchange processes, more profound insights can be gained into the intricate mechanisms driving contemporary migration flows.

In understanding the dynamics of global migration, it is imperative to delve into its impacts on rural communities, particularly in regions like Kerala, India, where international migration significantly influences social change. The 'Kerala Model' development, often lauded for its positive outcomes, owes much to the role of international migration. This underscores the necessity of contextualizing rural Kerala's evolving social landscape within the globalization framework [14].

The concept of social transformation denotes a fundamental shift in social relationships that reverberates across all spheres of interaction and communities. In recent years, there has been a noticeable change in the pattern of migration across the globe. Migrants from various non-European countries are increasingly moving to a few select countries, leading to an uneven distribution of migration across the world. This trend highlights the inherent inequalities in the process of globalization. Since the 1960's, the number of immigrants from non-European countries moving to developed countries in the northern hemisphere has increased significantly. As a result, the national and ethnic backgrounds of immigrant populations in these countries have become more diverse.

Globalization operates as both a technological and political force. Technological advancements, particularly in travel and communication, have substantially reduced the barriers to mobility, fostering transnational ties and augmenting migration aspirations through enhanced access to information and communication technologies. Labor migration patterns mirror the globalization of the world economy, with an increasing number of countries participating in global migration systems. Castles and Miller argued that there has been a 'globalization of migration', which is the tendency for more and more countries to be crucially affected by migratory movements at the same time. This globalization of migration has diversified immigrant populations, resulting in a broad spectrum of economic, social, and cultural backgrounds in host countries.

Moreover, globalization has not only accelerated migration but has also made it more complex, evident in the proliferation of diverse migratory pathways and heightened migratory interconnectivity in both directions. This is based on the migration systems theory. Development processes, marked by improved infrastructure, education, and living standards, have facilitated migration transitions in many developing countries, leading to heightened migration aspirations and capabilities. However, the paradox of global migration lies in the concentration of migrants in a shrinking number of prime destination countries, challenging conventional hypotheses of migration globalization. This skewed migration pattern underscores the asymmetrical nature of contemporary globalization processes, which favor certain regions and social groups while marginalizing others. In essence, globalization has not flattened the world as often envisioned. However, it has instead perpetuated geographical disparities and accentuated global economic 'spikes,' primarily benefiting select metropolitan areas within a few countries. Thus, migration globalization emerges not as a natural consequence of

technological progress but as a product of complex political-economic shifts.

Student migration as a public concern of the state

The significant surge in youth migrating abroad for education, is prompting concerns about its societal and economic implications in the state. A news report from November 2023 revealed that 5,706 seats remained unfilled after admissions for first-year degree courses at Mahatma Gandhi University, Kerala. This trend reflects the increasing number of Kerala's youth opting to study abroad in countries like the UK, Canada, Germany, USA, and Australia. Family influence plays a significant role, with many seeking better social and economic conditions overseas. The report emphasizes the importance of individuals considering their goals and finances before making migration decisions, while also urging the state to assess the impact of migration on economic health and societal dynamics [15].

Traditionally, Kerala's youth migrated to Gulf countries for unskilled labor, but there has been a notable shift towards seeking education in western countries. This change is driven by the west's preference for educated migrants and the high success rate of study loans in Kerala. Education consultancies facilitate this process by arranging admissions and part-time work abroad. The state government often remains unaware of the scale of student migration until crises occur, such as during the COVID outbreak in Wuhan and the Ukraine-Russia war. Despite concerns over resource stress in host countries and political power loss in source countries, two-thirds of Kerala's youth aspire to migrate abroad for jobs, considering it a key life goal. This migration trend, coupled with domestic migration from other Indian states, impacts Kerala's demographic landscape, local economy, and social structure [16].

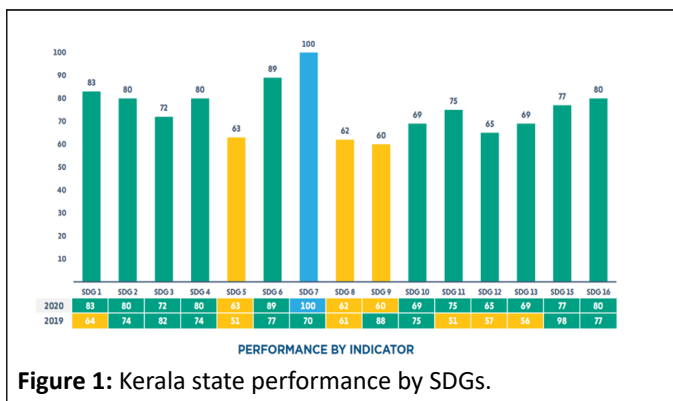
The trend of Malayali's migrating to North America, Europe, and other developed regions for better living standards and education is on the rise. A significant portion of Indian students abroad are from Kerala, with numbers expected to increase from 40 lakhs in 2012 to 75 lakh in 2025. Education migration serves as a common pathway to Permanent Residency (PR) or citizenship in these countries. However, it leads to substantial financial outflows from Kerala, unlike remittances from the Middle East, which benefit the state's economy. Factors driving this migration include the pursuit of personal freedom, better living standards, social security, and work respect, alongside dissatisfaction with local salaries and educational inefficiency [17].

In response to these trends, the issue of student migration from Kerala to the Global North has become a significant and contentious topic. It raises concerns about financial and brain drain, negative population growth, and the deskilling of Indian students abroad. Prominent figures, including Finance Minister K.N. Balagopal, have voiced concerns about the emigration of youngsters and the need to create more job opportunities to retain them. The upcoming Kerala Migration Survey (KMS) is expected to provide valuable insights into various aspects of migration within Kerala, including student migration, migrant health, and the impact on families left behind. Initial trends suggest a doubling of student migration, both domestically and

internationally, posing serious challenges to the state's economy, society, and youth population [18].

Findings and recommendations

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) index by NITI Aayog ranks Kerala first among Indian states with a score of 75. Kerala excels in hunger eradication, poverty reduction, quality education, climate action, and clean energy access [19]. Despite these successes, it struggles with maintaining economic growth and developing industry, innovation, and infrastructure. Kerala faces a high unemployment rate, about 10% in 2019-2020, exceeding the national average. Educated unemployment is particularly high at 16.7%, with youth unemployment rates in rural and urban areas reaching 36.9% and 33.9%, respectively. Female youth unemployment is notably high at 58.3%. As of August 31, 2021, Kerala had 3.83 million job seekers registered in employment exchanges (Figure 1) [20].



A significant number of graduates are opting to pursue their postgraduate studies overseas rather than in their native country. Among them, a majority come from families with incomes ranging between 1 to 5 lakhs. While most students depend on a combination of educational loans and familial assistance to finance their education abroad, only a small fraction have been fortunate enough to secure scholarships.

As per the presented findings, there are several recommendations to address the challenges and opportunities associated with the trend of students pursuing postgraduate studies abroad:

Financial assistance programs such as scholarships and grants should be expanded to support students from low-income families who aspire to study abroad. This can help alleviate the financial burden associated with education loans and ensure equitable access to educational opportunities.

Financial literacy programs targeted at students planning to study abroad can help them make informed decisions about managing educational loans and budgeting effectively during their studies.

Encouraging students to consider higher studies offered by institutions in the state can help retain talent within the country while addressing the issue of brain drain. Highlighting the quality and diversity of programs available domestically can attract

students who may otherwise choose to study abroad. It would be beneficial to update course offerings to align with current job market demands.

Conclusion

Enhancing the employment prospects across a diverse range of sectors can mitigate the issue of student underemployment, a notable challenge confronting the state. These recommendations can create a favorable environment for postgraduate students pursuing international education, while also tackling the challenges and opportunities associated with migration. In conclusion, student migration is a complex and multifaceted issue that requires careful consideration and preparation. It can provide numerous benefits, but it also entails challenges that should not be overlooked. By making an informed decision and taking the necessary steps to prepare, students can have a positive and rewarding migration experience.

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