

## IMPACT OF GULF MIGRATION ON SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT OF MUSLIM COMMUNITY IN KERALA

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### Introduction

Kerala the southernmost State of India has been characterized by its unique developmental model in several developmental literature for the last many decades. Some of its essential developmental indicators were even elevated to compare with the developed countries. Beyond the emergence of agricultural or industrial sources, human resources are the basic strength of Kerala's development. Kerala has so far exported a good portion of its population into different parts of the world and a substantial population has been surviving on their remittances. Although Keralites have been immigrant to many countries, the migration to Arabian peninsula, which started in 1960's and reached in its peak in 1990's is remarkable.

### Gulf and development of Kerala

The term Gulf is a complex that includes geographically, politically and socially diverse countries, the seven Arab countries which border the Persian Gulf, namely Bahrain, Iraq, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates (UAE). About 10% of Kerala's 31 million population lives abroad, and the remittances they send home make up almost a third of its net state domestic product. The remittances have played a big role in the state's unusually high rankings on human development indices, which are on par with developed nations despite its considerable unemployment and a negligible industrial base.

The door opened by the Gulf countries by offering high wages caused a drastic change in all walks of the life of Keralites. The role of the Gulf money in the development map of Kerala is huge. After the formation of the state, the gulf migration has been considered as the most influential factor just after the land reform. This can be understood through a simple comparison between the economies of Kerala in 1957 and the present. In 1957 the per capita income of the state was very lower than the national

average, but now the position of Kerala is above the National average.

According to available data, the number of Gulf emigrants from Kerala is more than 24 lakhs. It is equal to half of the total emigrants from India to gulf countries. Around half portion of the Kerala emigrants to gulf countries belong to Muslim community.

Thus the influence of Gulf migration is most evident in the Muslim community.

This paper focuses at the contributions of gulf migration in shaping the social development of Muslim community in Kerala.

### Categorization of Gulf Migrants

Gulf Malayalees can be categorized mainly into four, based on their work, income and living conditions. The first group belongs to the unskilled section that comes a major share of emigrants from Kerala. They belong to low socio-economic background.

They are less educated and having no special training. Normally they have to work at least fourteen hours per day and getting a low income. They live in jail similar conditions in labour camps. This group is mostly from the Muslim community.

The second category can be called as the lower middle class. They are employed as office assistants, shop assistants, clerks, mobile technicians, and supervisory jobs in construction companies. This category includes the bachelors who live by sharing their rooms and also the married people who live with their family.

The third group consists of small traders, managers, and professionals. Comparatively their income and living conditions are better. Many of them have their families with them.

The fourth group belongs to the millionaires. This is a small section of the NRK among the emigrants. They share only .5 percentage of the total Malayali emigrants in gulf countries.

Around Ninety five per cent of Malayalis in the Gulf sector is in the first two groups. And the third group shares 4% of the NRK's in Gulf sector.

### Emigrants by Destination

The major countries of destination of Kerala emigrants have remained more or less unchanged over last many years. Nearly 40% of Kerala's emigrants live in the UAE and 25% in Saudi Arabia. Other countries share the rest. The latest policy changes in Saudi Arabia may result in drastic decline in the number of Malayali emigrants working over there.

**Table 1 Kerala emigrants in Gulf countries**

Sl.No	Destination country	umber (In lakh)
1	UAE	8.99
2	Saudi Arabia	5.22
3	Oman	1.89
4	Kuwait	1.83
5	Bahrain	1.50
6	Qatar	1.06
7	Other west Asian countries	0.21
<b>Total</b>		<b>20.70</b>

Zachariah & Irudaya Rajan (2015)

**Table 2 Malayali emigrants in other countries**

Sl.No	Destination country	umber (In lakh)
1	U.S.A	0.7
2	Canada	0.11
3	UK	0.38
4	Other European countries	0.19
5	Africa	0.15
6	Singapore	0.09
7	Malidweep	0.03
8	Other East Asian countries	0.54
9	Australia/Newziland	0.39
10	Other countries	0.63
<b>Total</b>		<b>3.30</b>

Zachariah & Irudaya Rajan (2015)

### Muslim Community and Gulf Migration

State of Kerala accounts for the one fourth of Muslims as one of the major population concentration among the Indian states after the state of Assam. Muslims of Kerala have utterly different narrative of history and development than Muslims anywhere in India. The Malabar region (North Kerala) had trade contacts with the Arab lands even previous to 3000 BC. Arabs came for trade, settled and married the women of the region and sermonized Islam in the coastal regions of Malabar. Most of the untouchables

were involved to the religion as there was unbridled caste system. This was the beginning of the Muslim civilization in this division of the country.

Despite many studies on the impact of Gulf migration in the financial sector of Kerala, religious wise studies are very few . According to available studies and observations, the Muslim community is the most affected group of Gulf migration. More than forty percentage of the Kerala migrants are Musims. This may be because of the religious similarities in the Gulf countries .Or maybe the poverty that prevailed among the Kerala Muslims. .

The expatriate Christians are the highest earners per capita. Surveys have shown that in recent years, migrant laborers are becoming more active among Hindus.

According to the first migration review of Kerala, Muslims placed first (47 %) of the total transmittal, Ezahaws and Syrian Christians each had second rank (13%), Latin Christians placed third (11%) and Nairs ranked last (9%). However, one of the most critical aspects to note is that the Muslim family did not receive the uppermost per emigrant remittances. An average Latin Christian expatriate sent back Rs 33 thousand per year, Syrian Christian emigrant Rs 27 thousand but the contrary, the average remittance per Muslim emigrant was Rs 24 thousand only. This is a significant indicator to charge the low level of education, unskilled nature of job or the less wage jobs taken by the Muslim migrants.

**Table 3 Percent Distribution of Emigrants According to Religion**

Religion	Percentage of Total Population	Percent Distribution		Emigrants per households	
		2008	2016	2008	2016
Hindu	56.2	31.2	37.7	14.6	18.7
Christian	19.0	35.1	21.2	31.4	29.9
Muslim	24.7	43.7	41.1	61.1	56.4

**Source:** Kerala migration survey, Center for Development Studies 2016.

The level of poverty among Muslims was certainly higher than other communities of Kerala. The Gulf migration played an important role in bringing change in this situation, especially after 1980's. Gulf remittance was major change agent not only in economic arena of Kerala Muslims but its impact is very significant in the history of Kerala Muslims , especially of Malabar Muslims for the last

two or three decades. Some studies had pointed out that gulf boom had an adverse impact on the educational aspirations of Muslim youth. There was a period where the minimum agenda of the Muslim male youth was narrowed in to getting a 'gulf visa'. Obviously this affected on their higher studies. Since the completion of the tenth class and the completion certificate was enough to get the Indian passport a good portion of the Muslim youth became migrants even before the age of 20 years. This also affected the higher studies of Muslim girls, they were got married in the early ages.

There was a remarkable change in the educational situation that existed a few years ago. Over a thousand Private English medium schools are now functioning under various Muslim organizations in Kerala. More than 90 per cent of the students in these schools belong to gulf families. Majority of these institutions are running under orthodox Muslim segments. This change has also been found in higher education sector too.

Many unaided colleges established in the last few years in Malabar area have been initiated or invested by Malayali Muslim entrepreneurs or committees in the Gulf. The number and facilities of religious institutes like Arabic colleges, shar-i-ath colleges, Da-a-wa colleges, charity institutes, Quran learning centers have increased greatly. Most of the religious institutions are completely dependent on the gulf revenue.

The main source of income for most Muslim organizations is Gulf Committees of those organizations. Celebrations and functions in families, marriages, house construction, clothing and food habits have been substantially changed by the Gulf factor. The 'pardha' culture which has got a wide spread acceptance and became a fashion among Muslim women and the face covering 'pardha' which is also spreading recently are also the after effects of gulf phenomenon.

There have been a lot of changes in the diet and taste of Malayali. This is most evident in the Muslim majority areas. In the evenings, It is the same smell and taste for almost all towns in Malabar. Arabian dishes such as 'mandhi', 'kabab', 'Kubboos', 'al faham', 'shawai', 'shawarma' have become inevitable in celebrations of Muslim households.

## Conclusion

The influx of Gulf migration is maintained during the peak time of Kerala development model. That is when Kerala was far ahead in social life while economically backward when compared to other states in the country. The 'Gulf door' was opened to people who have suffered a lot of financial difficulties. This was a great flow of immigration. This is more evident in the Muslim community

of Kerala. Gulf migration is a major factor in the creation of the present social position of Kerala Muslims. As a community the influence of the Gulf can be measured by some general criteria, but the impact of Gulf is not similar for all migrants. Some became very rich. Some got only the name as a gulf migrant (*gulfukaran*) and the majority of the migrants got somewhat elevated in their social life. Even though the present status of Muslim community is not at all equal to the other communities in Kerala in terms of education, employment, the gulf boom has helped to reduce the '*real gulf*'. At the same time some planned interventions have to be made to convert the financial growth to the comparable social growth.

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