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CAUSES FOR MIGRATION IN KERALA

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Abstract

Migration is not a new phenomenon in any region. Even before the 19th century, human resources flowed to other continents for their survival. When it comes to South Asia, particularly in India it has been seen that in the southern part of the country, the state of Kerala has over 2,300 years of exposure to different cultures through maritime trade. With the emergence of an oil-related economy in the Middle East countries Kerala's human resources became attracted to these areas. The economic stagnation and severe poverty during the early 19th century forced the people to migrate to an unknown place. Emigration and remittances have played a predominant role in enabling households in Kerala to meet their basic needs and to invest in assets. Migrants use over 40% of their remittances on purchasing land, construction, and repayment of housing mortgages. One in every five households in Kerala has a migrant. Among religious groups, one in three households is Muslim, one in five households is Christian, and one in 10 households is Hindu. However, the economic boom that was created by this migration during the early century is shifting downwards. It is said that the UAE's contribution to remittances to Kerala has decreased from 26.9% in 2016 to around 18% more recently. Recent migration towards other European countries is increasing. The youth are mainly focusing not only on economic aspects but also on social, and political conditions. Thus this paper mainly focuses on identifying the current economic, and social-political conditions leading to the youth's permanent settlement in other countries, especially Canada, Germany, the United Kingdom, and the United States. It is to understand the social system, family structure, and political ideologies of the home place that was once considered and called "God's own country," making this generation move out of the state.

Keywords: migration, social, economic, political nature.

INTRODUCTION

While India's GDP in the fiscal year 2022-23 was 7.0, it rose to 8.2 in 2023-24. However, there is a downhill in the GDP rate in 2024-2025 which is 6.5. There has been a shift in the Foreign Direct Investment, that is while the Net FDI increased from \$ 3.26 Billion to \$ 6.62 billion in 2024, the Gross Inward FDI increased to 36.1 billion from 27.74 billion last year. The Indian population working abroad as per the official report is 13 million including laborers, professionals, and experts. According to NORKA Roots, a Kerala government agency, Keralites work in almost 93% of countries worldwide. According to the Kerala Migration Survey report in the year 2023, the estimated number of Keralites working outside is 2.2 million and also they have found an increase in student migration. As per the report, student emigrants increased from 129,763 in 2018 to about 250,000 in 2023.

In Kerala, the main revenue is generated through tourism as it is a coastal land and has multiple geophysical features like the north covered with a high mountain range, the western ghats, and the middle Kerala which is covered with 44 mainstream lakes, backwaters and islands in Kollam district. Then in the low land where the seashore and mountain cliffs raise its beauty. It is known for its tourist attraction sectors such as coir, Ayurveda, Kerala model of panchayat system.

According to the Economic Review Report 2023 by the State Planning Board, Kerala has performed the best among the States of India to the NITI Aayog's Multidimensional Poverty Index, 2023 (the score was 0.002 percent). Kerala has continually ranked first in the last three editions of NITI Aayog's Sustainable Development Goals Index. Kerala has the highest rank in India on the Human Development Index (HDI), with 7.5 points, which is the same as a developed country. According to the India Skill Report 2024, Kerala's youth aged 18 to 21 are the second most employable in the country, with Trivandrum, Ernakulam, and Kozhikode ranking among the top ten cities for talent. Kerala is known for its educational, socio-economic, and cultural advancement compared to the other states in India.

However, Recent studies done by almost all institutions state that Kerala is going through a demographic transition phase, but its effects are negative.[Dr. Shaniba M. H,2024; Sulaiman KM,2023; KMS,2023; Joseph, Jo,2022] A BRAIN DRAIN is happening; Thus this paper analyzes the conditions and checks upon the youth and their aspirations for choosing other lands.

This paper uses descriptive research with a mixed approach. 80 responses were collected with open-ended qualitative and quantitative questions. No real names are used to keep the confidentiality of the respondents. Here, the socio-economic, political, and other factors are

discussed in a deeper perspective to understand the real problems, where they lie, and what possible solutions can be taken for them.

1. A POLITICAL TURBULENCE

Kerala follows a multiparty system with LDF, and UDF being major parties. For the past 10 years, Kerala has been ruled by The Left Democratic Front(LDF), also known as the Left Front, an alliance of left-wing political parties in Kerala. The government is led by the Communist Party Of India (Marxist). It has always been at the forefront of introducing better governance for its people. During the COVID-19 period, the “ THE KERALA MODEL” of health management, was appreciated by many other governments. It has always been in advance in introducing institutions and schemes for development.

Lately, there has been a change in the political nature of Kerala. Which can be attributed to the ideological and perspective revoke among the young population. The youth populations find the current governance a chaotic struggle between certain selected people. An elite democracy is functioning in the state. Although several initiatives have been introduced in every sector, the current youth population finds it difficult to get the best out of the governance. Many are suggesting that one reason for their migration is also due to political instability in the state. They say the political body is not addressing the unemployment rate and quality of education. And the pay for the jobs is much less, compared to the living costs. It is also not citizen-oriented. According to Joe Joseph (2022), The quintessential Keralite doesn't believe that it is the responsibility of the government to attract investors to provide jobs to the people. Subjected to systematic brainwashing by the left groups, the Keralites think it's the norm to go to other states or foreign lands and find a job there.

The political history of Kerala raises a perception that the youth generation always found political alliances as a spirit and a channel for creating a sense of belonging to the place. From the early 20th century, they saw a spirit of nationalism among themselves and have always fought for the development of their community. The formation of the state of Kerala on 1 November 1956 can be attributed to the then-spirited brains who saw the development of the community rather than a household. They gained knowledge for making a change in the community they lived. However, ideologies and perceptions evolved according to the perspectives after every 5 years of tenure depending on who is being elected. Most of the youth who get into politics are below 18

years old and they consider formal education as a waste of time. They tend to utilize their time being a local politician without having proper educational training or degrees and find unorganized sectoral jobs to sustain.

But it is not the problem of migration rather it is how the local population is treated by their higher authorities that is creating an aversion towards the government in Kerala from the young population. The youth population these days is pulled into politics before completing their education and it is for the party's political gain rather than for socio-economic wellbeing.

1.2 The BackDoor Appointments

The backdoor appointments are well known in Kerala for the past decades and have been an important issue. Influential people are given government jobs through money and power, whereas the common man is made to wait through rigid exam formats. There have been protests and cases in the high court filed by public union service (PSC) students for the lack of government services and for delaying the recruitment processes. While influential people are looking for jobs through money and power, the common man is left to wander.

Most of the responses state that the political nature in Kerala nowadays is very poor and politics and politicians are only favorable to rich men and they don't ensure equality and safety among the people.

The political games in Kerala have always been a hot topic. The murders of young people due to political involvement have always jeopardized the young generation. Young party members have been the victims of political dramas. There are several cases in which comrades were murdered for political advantage. These comrades were considered martyrs but in fact, they are only celebrated for one or two months after which their names are gone under the soil and the big politicians will get away from all of this, and in the end, it will always be their families at loss. Sometimes even the government authorities turn their backs on these families.

Almost everyone is mortality tired of the current political nature of Kerala, especially the current youth population. This is reflected in the increasing migration and the permanent settlement plans the youth has been making.

1.3 The Rule of Separation is Not Applicable;

There is a rule that states a clear separation of church and state, and in India, it follows a mixed approach where if the situation demands the state can interfere in church matters. However, In Kerala, it is consistently visible that the government uses religious concepts to keep its power in politics. There is more to it, political parties consider religion as a card to get into power that is by making religion a free card to get votes to form the government. The power struggle is still based on caste and class in Kerala. The coalition of the Indian Union Muslim League then, with the Kerala Congress, and now with the communist party of India (Marxist) can be taken as a prime example.

Along with that, there is a high amount of corruption at all levels of governance. Corruption from the root level, all the way to the top has slowed down the immense potential for progress in Kerala.

The current news reports about the involvement of ministers in corruption including the Chief Minister's daughter, who is under investigation for money laundering are serious exemplifications. The system of secularism and social commitment upheld by each Keralite has somehow gone into thin air and has become a threshold for social and economic benefits. And the youngsters see migration as the only process to fight for their well-being and human rights.

Many believe that Kerala is not a safe place to be settled, although they say it is better than other states in India still it is not safe due to political turbulence and increasing murders and theft in the community.

Thus it is now becoming clear that The party whose ideology was for community development has now turned into the hub of autocrats. The bourgeois form of leadership is still exciting. Although Kerala is known for its educational advancements, victimization and favoritism happen in every sector based on caste, class, gender, and color.

1.2 The Growing Unemployment Condition;

Unemployment can be considered as a nexus factor for migration. Lack of employment is the frequent expression that has been found throughout the survey. As per the reports In 2018, 1,29,763 emigrated to other states and the number has doubled to about 2.5 lakhs in 2023, around a 100% increase in the post-pandemic period.(Hindu-2024)

According to the Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) for 2023-2024, the unemployment rate in Kerala for people aged 15–29 is 27.7%. This is much higher than the national average of 16.8%.

Kerala is among the top states in India for youth unemployment, along with Jammu and Kashmir, Odisha, Nagaland, and Manipur.

It can be seen in a change in the behavioral patterns among the people in Kerala. Many small-scale jobs are available in Kerala but many are too lethargic to do work. A lack of motivation can be attributed to this situation. While a Keralite is ready to do unorganized work in the Gulf regions or Middle East regions like being a driver or house helper they find it difficult to do the same in their hometown because they are considered unlucky and jobless fellows and it is also found shameful. They are also considered an embarrassment for the family. According to Sulaiman KM, “in Kerala people and households have a strong expectation of having formal employment and living a middle-class lifestyle.”

The government does not address the demographic change and the need for a structural change, rather it is focused on keeping the political powers. Kerala governance has become more authoritative rather than service-oriented during these periods. It is looting its resources for personal upliftment rather than socio-economic development.

1.2 Gap Between Employment and Education

There is a gap in skill development through education and employment opportunities. Most respondents think they cannot find proper employment due to the qualifications they have achieved. Due to that, they either have a high pay-grade qualification or low skills for the right employment. The middlemen's involvement in jobs can be taken as a serious issue. There are many cases where agencies come in and through various measures they will be taking half of the money the employee needs to sustain. Although there are serious recruitment rules they are bent accordingly for the employer's benefit.

There are many cases where recruiters are found taking more money in order to select employees even after they cleared all qualifications.

According to Micheal, “the only industry that has decent opportunities in Kerala is the information technology sector. No other industries provide a decent living wage. And there are many trade unions and political interference that make it difficult for investors to set things up in other sectors”.

The lack of proper infrastructure is vividly seen in Kerala, and the cases related to corruption can be the other cause. There are always land mafias with the involvement of ruling party members contributing to the situation, as even the government officials are kept silent by the governing party members. Then Transport Minister Thomas Chandy's land encroachment case filed by the district collector Anupama in 2017 is a prime example.

The Kerala High Court while exploring this situation recently attributed the reason behind the trend of youngsters leaving the native place for better prospects to the lack of infrastructure and aesthetic appeal in Kerala's cities in general. The bifocality created by the Western world for the youngsters here in Kerala and the increased decision for an early migration thus can be taken as an indication of the resentment in the overall core concepts following in the state of Kerala.

2. CHANGING LIFESTYLES AFFECT THE ECONOMY

Kerala is one of the states in the country experiencing a high rate of international migration. According to the Inward Remittance Surveys conducted by the Reserve Bank of India, Kerala accounts for about 19 percent of the inward remittances coming to India. India is the largest remittance-receiving country in the world, and Kerala is indeed the largest remittance-receiving state in India (KMS,2023).

In the earlier days, migration toward the Middle Eastern countries benefited Kerala with inward remittance. Kerala in the 20th century was indeed built with the hard-earned money of early migrants.

Middle Eastern regions were most favorable to Malayalees to work and live to achieve their dreams, they saw the land of opportunity in arab countries. According to a Keralite, Kuwait was like a dreamland, he went there on a job visa because his family was suffering from poverty, and the job he had as a driver helped his family come out of the misery. He was able to help his other two friends find a job in Kuwait which also helped their family sustain. It is like he was able to live for himself and his family. Whatever money he got he sent it to the family back in his hometown.

Here, taxation for staying is comparatively low with many advantages for business-related economies. The oil-related economy boom in the late 19th century helped many Malayalees find

a root to become self-sufficient and independent. It also helped their families who were settled back in Kerala. It was not only their family but also the community. Most people who migrated to the Gulf regions had an empty stomach in their hometowns. It was for survival, for getting out of their family from poverty and hardship, a step like migration was chosen.

According to the report of the Inward Remittance Surveys conducted by the Reserve Bank of India, Kerala accounts for about 19 percent of the inward remittances coming to India. India is the largest remittance-receiving country in the world and Kerala is indeed the largest remittance-receiving state in India. Kerala governments did build a resilient state for socio-economic development in the state.

However, the current wave of migration toward European countries is a hit back for Kerala's economy as well as for its development. The rules and laws that are changing are affecting the economic scenario.

The young generation which has to deal with extreme competition and surveillance in Kerala is having difficulty finding a job that is suitable for their qualification. Thus they are taking the steps to migrate to Western countries for better prospects. Most of them think that the economic and employment conditions of Kerala are very poor compared to other countries. Even the pensioners here do not get their grants on time. The medic is not functioning properly. One has to go for multiple areas to get even the chemotherapy done. The patient is not considered seriously and the authorities make serious mistakes while handling them.

Kerala's young population now chooses European lands for migration that too at the early age of 17. This shift has been affecting the entire economy. The economic crises the state now faces are visible in numbers. The percentage of inward remittance has shifted. Although adult Keralities find the European lifestyle more suitable there are many disadvantages. In European Countries, states have a high control over an individual's life. The governance is developed and the concept of development administration is completely organized there unlike in developing countries. European countries like Germany, Austria, and other countries like the United Kingdom and the United States have a taxation system where most of the individual's money is returned to their economy.

And, this generation finds it appealing for their family planning. Misha says the main reason for her migration is to *"improve the standard of living"*

In Germany, one needs to pay church tax to enter into the church. Other beneficial incentive systems include if two young adults get married they receive monetary consideration. Most of the current young generation working in Germany as a nursing assistant and other peculiar jobs find it worthy since there is an individualistic consideration for them by the government. This is the same for every other developed country.

The current wave of migration toward European countries is helping most middle-class families sustain their hopes, but the reality is quite harsh. In a middle-class family when one individual plans to go abroad, the family takes every action and goes into the hands of loan sharks where debt is created. Sara, who wishes to go to Germany for nursing studies is still struggling because She has already paid a bunch of money to agencies and taken a loan from a bank. Now she is finding it difficult to meet the end needs.

This is the story of most middle-class families.

The Canadian government's policy for immigration is quite simple. The immigrant should have a certain amount in their bank account to keep it at the time of arrival. So, the immigrant would not face any economic crisis while in Canada. The government wants to make sure that their basic needs are met properly. However, for a middle-class family in Kerala, attaining the amount they need to show in the bank account is a big challenge. With the nature of facing challenges seen in every Malayalee, they are ready to lose their land or keep their land for a loan application for immigration.

Gopika is a master's student from another state university in India, who took a year gap to go to the United Kingdom. Although she applied for a loan in a cooperative bank. She couldn't make it up to the required amount. The bank considered her house an inefficient asset and they could not provide a loan. This condition is faced by almost every middle-class young generation who continues to become the breadwinner of their families. It is the eagerness to be something in the society they have brought up.

3. THE SOCIAL DILEMMA

The Indian social structure is completely complex. In each part of the region, they follow a unique culture and social customs. In Kerala, although in the outer course, they seem well advanced in every sector, they are conservative in the inner layer. They have established a Social

commitment where each one of them believes that it is important to get involved in others matters. This conservativeness is visible in every matter, whether it is about marriage, caste, race, or religion, a Keralite is reserved and will take it as a major consideration in their respective lives. Most of the young population think that the social condition has become terrible in Kerala.

Nithya, who has now joined nursing in Austria, discusses the social dilemma she faces in Kerala. *“Here[in Kerala] people don’t respect each other or have any boundaries or kind ... and I hope it is good in Austria. And I want to know more people and the culture of Europeans”*

There has been a lot of news through social media and the youth population of the past decade agrees with this viewpoint. Moral policing is what the youth population disapproves of. Recently, a surprise police inspection at Marine Drive in Kochi sparked controversy, when some college students were having food together. While the police argued that “it was because they were receiving many complaints about students cutting classes and roaming around here.” Other millennials also justified the police action, by declaring that they were concerned about the young generation’s actions which to them seemed disrespectful; which is that the millennial generation is not being respected enough; where the reasons for judging the young students are based on caste, class, color, religion, and work. Specifically, here without proof, those other adults argued that those students might be on drugs. If a man has long hair then a social presumption is that he is a drug addict.

The social pattern in Kerala is like they have registered in their mind that they are entitled to get into the matters of an individual's personal life. They also have a mindset where, when a woman and man are sitting for casual talk, it is considered derogatory or a shame for the others. Thus here in this society, there is no line between personal and public life. Most of the adults suggest that the condition is terrible and no one can lead their life as they like to live. Society is very much judgemental and is also not a safe place to walk alone in late evenings or late nights.

Arunima further, discusses the reason for migrating to Canada. *“Freedom to do any job to make money. Work-life balance is given the utmost importance in Canada and I'm currently enjoying this perk here. There are several opportunities to explore and learn different activities and this is not a gender-biased country. I am given equal opportunity to do things when compared to a male.”*

This society is known for its egalitarian entitlement. It is one with a high literacy rate in India. However, discrimination is still reflected based on caste, race, gender, and ideology, and through every single channel in the best way possible.

Nidhi when asked about her reason to migrate says *“In my opinion, the social condition is a lot better in Canada as everyone is respected and treated as equals. They are hardly discriminated against based on their gender, race, religion, color, beliefs or career. It is a breath of fresh air. Although it is getting better in Kerala, we still have a long way to go.”*

Whenever an individual tries to bring up a change that is transformative and common for their community and is beneficial, the elastic-minded will consider it as barbaric, and with the power it vanishes in the air. Here, the Murder of RMP leader T.P Chandrasekharan is a prime example. T.P Chandrashekhar was hacked to death by a gang on May 4, 2012, at Vallikad near Onchiyam.

Along with it, the upper-class and lower-class discrimination specifically based on the caste system is part of almost every community. A person is still judged in this profound society, by color, caste, and religion.

According to Misha *“Compared to Kerala, other countries have better societies. Here we are independent. There is no person to judge our life, we have the right to wear what we like.”* Thus it is clear that over-interference and lack of social security are the other causes for the migration.

3.1 The growing importance of self well-being

Physical and Mental health illness is considered a curse for a person. A person with minor mental health is considered unfit for society in Kerala, and they are chased away from his or her own house. Marrying an individual with mental illness is also considered the greatest sin. The conservativeness in these minds is still there as fresh as blood and sweat.

The institution of marriage is another tormented concept in Kerala. Dowry is still a dream-killer in Kerala. (Hindu) In February 2024 a young Postgraduate doctor passed away by taking her own life. The reason for her suicide was that her fiance and his family had demanded a high amount of assets as dowry and she was unable to find it. Well, this is only one example. The state has received around 13,678 dowry-related harassment cases from 2016 to 2020, and shockingly conviction was reported in only 245 cases.

The traditional concept of marriage in Kerala simply won't allow women to get a divorce even if their husband is found doing adultery activities. They say “Women should adjust to all suffering, then only a marriage will work.” Meanwhile, women are encouraged to be educated, but there are problems with the education sector.

Education is a process that should be focused on to provide employment and a better way of looking at life. In other words, it paves the way for improving life. However, here education is considered a document to show off and raise a social status. The curriculums focus on creating unhealthy competition rather than a healthy one. A child from its childhood is compared to others even from their family based on various realms. These comparisons create behavioral changes in a person with low self-esteem and a feeling of self-doubt about whether they are fit for society.

In 2023, 14 colleges affiliated with Mahatma Gandhi University were forced to shut down due to low enrollment and financial constraints. The reasons found were that students prefer aided colleges especially after COVID-19 hit, and are looking forward to advanced job-related courses.

However, this is something that the government has to look into. The younger generation after COVID-19 has been exposed to social media and other lifestyles at a higher grade level and are psychologically drawn to an unexpected level of reality without understanding the socioeconomic and political conditions of the state. They expect the same level of lifestyles as they see in developed countries. However, it is by far a long step for a state like Kerala which has a population of 3 crore and has a different system in terms of cultures and traditions.

The cultural identity of Keralites is seen in their behavior. However, the state is known for cultural modification in terms of the upgradation of class and caste. But the conscience of a Keralite is utterly foolish. Status-quo is what a keralite looks for even when a marriage is fixed; the question about the woman or man's life will be the following: How much salary does the groom have, is the bride as bright as the groom, and how much gold did her family give her? If it occurs to the in-laws she or he may unlike then verbal abuse and domestic violence are like a piece of extra baggage for their marriage life.

From 2018 to the present the crime bureau has recorded a 45% rise in the number of cases registered under crimes against women. However, the conviction rate declined from 7.63% to 5.27% and has been claimed due to procedural difficulties and societal pressures. The societal pressure includes the families of victims also because a divorced person is a shame for the family.

A woman is trained to bear all the difficulties in this culture, she has to be the one who should Adjust to torture and it is considered a woman's family's fault if she is not adjusting. A divorced woman is regarded as a shame for the family's status.

The adults now find this form of the norms as barbaric. They are looking for better social conditions where individual freedom and efficiency in all realms are kept well. An individualistic and selfless approach is what the Kerala government should prioritize now. It cannot create an old age home in the state with more people migrating and settling in other countries. They are looking for a better economic prospect abroad despite Kerala's strong infrastructure. The reason can be derived as due to thinking mentality. Keralites' behavior towards their neighborhood can be taken into account. If one person or family acquires an asset. The tendency of their neighbors to acquire more assets than them is high. Even they count how many types of clothing one person has and about their lifestyles. There is unhealthy competition among the Keralites in terms of class and status. And that is passed over to the next generation. The contempt between every single person among the Keralites is truly fearful.

CONCLUSION

Social and cultural integrity in Kerala impedes the young generational development. The notion of how men and women should behave and make good choices in their lives has changed according to the current adults. It is important to develop a cosmopolitan culture in Kerala, especially among the millennial generation. The young generation's aspiration should meet up with the customs and traditions of the state. It has become crucial for overall development in the administration of socio-economic and political affairs. The core elements of change should include creating a culture of adaptability to the new environment, especially with the technophobic nature that is seen in Kerala. More customized learning systems should be adopted to improve the skills necessary for sustainable livelihood. Awareness should be developed in using the resources at hand efficiently and effectively. Social Science field opportunities should be encouraged as there is an aversion to social studies subjects generally among Keralites. To attract the youth back to their hometown, governance should evolve and a better standard of living conditions should be adopted. Otherwise, Kerala will become an "Old age state" without youngsters in Kerala streets or houses, in Kerala you will see big houses but no one lives there.

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