

# External migration from Kerala: An analysis before -19 pandemic

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**Abstract-** This paper tries to analyse the trends of external migration from Kerala before the covid-19 pandemic. The study uses only secondary data from various sources like Economic Review, journals, books, various study reports and CDS working papers. The study found that the number of emigrants increased significantly, though there is a rapid decline in the number from 2011, which can be attributed to global economic recession. The number of emigrants decreased to 2.12 million in 2018. This shows that rate of increase in external migration from Kerala shows a negative trend. Regarding the destination of migrants, the study shows that in 1998, about 94 percent of the Kerala emigrants went to the Gulf countries but this came down to 89 percent in 2018. Changes can be observed in the destination of emigrants in the Gulf region. Saudi Arabia, the principal destination of Malayalees in 1998 was replaced by the UAE from 2003 onwards. India is the largest remittance receiving country in the world and Kerala is the largest remittance receiving state in India

**Index Terms-** Migration, Remittance, construction..

## I. INTRODUCTION

The movement of people in exploration of better economic conditions and a safer environment is as old as human history. Such movements not only affect the lives of the migrants profoundly, but also lead to noteworthy economic and social change in the regions of origin and destination of the migrants (Prakash, 1998; Zachariah et al., 2003). Migration has become inevitable element of the economic and social life of vast section of population. Migration is considered as the barometer of the varying socio-economic and political background at the national and international altitude and also an indicator of disparities in the circumstances between the origin and destination (Sundari, 2005). The vital motive for migration is economic. In addition to this, people migrate to pick up their educational or skill level, to escape social and cultural imprisonment in homogenous rural areas, to escape political instability and to join family and friends who have previously migrated to urban areas. Migration causes changes in the distribution of jobs, income and economic resources in both sending and receiving region and thus structural transformation of rural and urban economy (Taylor, 2006). As people move, their cultural traits and ideas diffuse along with them, creating and modifying cultural landscape.

On the basis of nature, migration can be categorized as internal or international. Internal migration refers to migration from one place to another place within a country, whereas external migration or international migration refers to migration from one country to another country. Migration of persons within the national borders is far greater magnitude than migration across international borders and has enormous potential to contribute economic prosperity, social cohesion and urban diversity. India is the largest recipient of international remittances in the world of which about 50 percent are classified as remittances towards family maintenance. Kerala accounts for about 25 to 30 percent of the Indian household remittances (World Bank, 2015). Kerala along with Punjab and Goa reports the high international migration.

## II. DATA SOURCES

The study is based on secondary data. Most important sources of secondary data are the Census data, NSSO Reports, various issues of Kerala Economic Review, Kerala Migration Surveys. For data on migration the study used Census of India 1971-2011 data (D Series). For data on Kerala economy the study used various issues of Economic Review (1970-2019) and Kerala Migration Survey Reports by Centre for Development Studies (1998, 2003, 2008, 2011, 2014 & 2018).

III. DISCUSSION & FINDINGS

**Population Mobility in Kerala**

Kerala is one among the well performing states in India with a high Human Development Index. It has been identified as one of the most out-migrating states in the country. Keralites have been migrating to other states of India and to other countries for several decades in search of employment. Kerala was a net in-migrating state till 1940s as it attracted labour force and traders in large numbers from the neighbouring area, mainly the Madras Presidency. It turned to be a net out-migrating state during the Second World War when a large number of youth were recruited from the state for war related jobs and sent to other parts of the country and even to foreign countries like Burma, Malaya and Singapore. This stream dominated mostly by members of the backward castes and communities along with the coastal belt and pockets in South India (Joseph, 1988). During 1970s, the state witnessed large scale emigration to Gulf countries. It is estimated that 2.4 million Keralites have migrated to other countries and 0.7 million people to other parts of India in 2014 (KMS, 2014).

Kerala enumerated about 31.8 million persons in the 2001 census. Among them, about 9.2 million were migrants in the sense that they had lived elsewhere before moving into the place of enumeration in the state at the time of the Census. As their place of last residence (POLR) was different from the place of enumeration, they were considered to be migrants. Such people constituted about 29 percent of the total population of the state. Table 1 shows the population mobility in Kerala.

**Table 1**  
**Population Mobility in Kerala\***

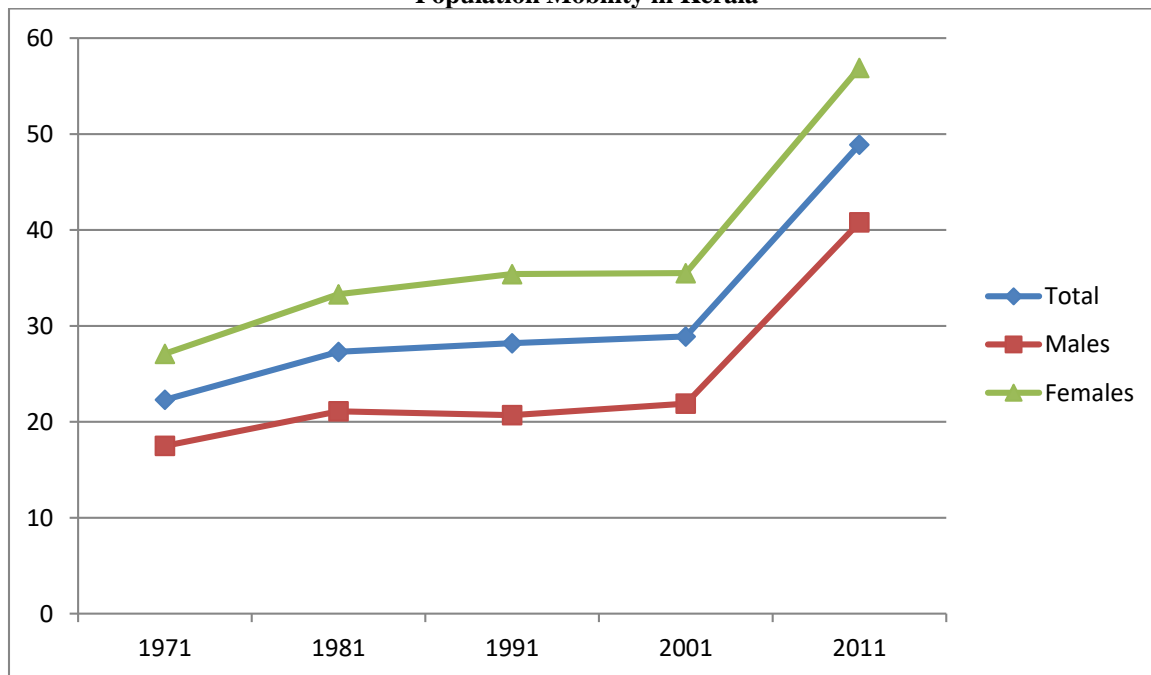
Year	Total	Males	Females
1971	22.3	17.5	27.1
1981	27.3	21.1	33.3
1991	28.2	20.7	35.4
2001	28.9	21.9	35.5
2011	48.9	40.8	56.9

Source: Census of India 1971- 2011

Note\*Migrants as percent of total population

The population mobility in Kerala is given in the following Figure 1.

**Figure 1**  
**Population Mobility in Kerala**



Source: Census of India 1971- 2011

Between 1971 and 2011, there was considerable increase in the population mobility in Kerala, but much of the increase occurred between 2001 and 2011. The increase in population mobility in Kerala was marginal during 1981 to 2001. Population mobility was always larger among females than males. The differential was maintained in all the decades. We know that Kerala is becoming too much dependence on migration for employment sustenance, housing, household amenities, institution building and many other developmental activities (Zachariah & Kannan, 2002)..

### External Migration from Kerala

Kerala had a long tradition of several centuries of international emigration. The process of migration from Kerala gathered momentum at the time of the Second World War. A significant change in the pattern of migration from Kerala has taken place since 1973 following the oil price hike. The emigration to Gulf countries totally changed the socio-economic conditions of certain regions in Kerala. These changes were in the form of high consumption pattern, investment pattern, life style, religion and education. As a result some parts of Kerala followed the Gulf Countries. Table 2 shows the stock of Indian emigrants in the Gulf region.

**Table 2**  
**Stock of Indian Emigrants in the Gulf Region**

Year	No of Indian Migrants (in lakh)	No of Migrants from Kerala (in lakh)
1975	2.66	1.33
1979	5.31	2.65
1983	9.16	4.58
1987	10.96	5.48
1991	15.05	7.52
1998	3.00	13.61
2003	3.95	18.38
2008	8.18	21.93
2011	6.03	22.80
2014	8.05	24.00
2018	85.46	21.21

Source: 1.GOI (2002), Report on High level Committee on the Indian Diaspora  
2. KMS (2018,) CDS, Thiruvananthapuram

The number of Keralites in the Gulf region increased from 1.33 lakh in 1975 to 2.65 lakh in 1979 and 4.58 lakh in 1983 and 21 lakh in 2018. Among the total migrants from India, the number of Keralites accounted about 50 percent.

The state wide surveys on emigration conducted by Zachariah et al. in 1998, 2003, 2008, 2011, 2014 and 2018 gave reliable indicates about the international migration from Kerala. Compared to previous estimates the survey used clear concepts of migration and better statistical methods to collect data.

**Table 3**  
**Emigrants by District, 1998-2018**

Districts	Number					
	1998	2003	2008	2011	2014	2018
Thiruvananthapuram	130705 (10.1)	168046 (14.1)	308481 (9.1)	229732 (9.6)	241727 (10.07)	137007 (6.45)
Kollam	102977 (4.0)	148457 (5.5)	207516 (7.3)	167446 (7.2)	199933 (8.32)	240527 (11.33)
Pathanamthitta	97505 (4.0)	133720 (5.5)	120990 (7.3)	91381 (7.2)	141343 (5.88)	109836 (5.17)
Alappuzha	62870 (6.3)	75036 (6.0)	131719 (4.1)	144386 (4.6)	93096 (3.87)	136857 (6.44)
Kottayam	35494 (5.2)	106569 (4.1)	89351 (5.8)	117460 (2.6)	107931 (4.49)	166625 (7.85)
Idukki	7390 (0.3)	7880 (0.3)	5792 (0.4)	7690 (0.5)	23967 (0.9)	32893 (1.55)
Ernakulam	103750	121237	120979	136113	191373	53418

	(6.0)	(5.5)	(6.6)	(7.6)	(7.97)	(2.51)
Thrissur	161102 (8.7)	178867 (12.9)	284068 (9.7)	198368 (11.8)	230081 (9.58)	241150 (11.36)
Palakkad	116026 (6.2)	177876 (8.6)	189815 (9.7)	142020 (8.5)	70506 (2.93)	89065 (4.19)
Malappuram	296710 (17.9)	271787 (15.3)	334572 (14.8)	408884 (21.9)	455696 (18.98)	406054 (19.13)
Kozhikode	116026 (9.1)	167436 (9.1)	199163 (9.1)	206719 (8.5)	226499 (9.43)	160691 (7.57)
Wayanad	4552 (1.2)	7704 (0.6)	13996 (0.4)	26874 (0.3)	22568 (0.94)	30650 (1.44)
Kannur	88065 (12.4)	202414 (5.4)	119119 (11.0)	283045 (16.5)	291321 (12.13)	249834 (11.77)
Kasaragod	38747 (5.3)	71449 (3.1)	67851 (3.9)	120425 (2.8)	104334 (4.34)	67281 (3.1)
Kerala	1361919 (100.0)	1838478 (100.0)	2193412 (100.0)	2280543 (100.0)	2400375 (100.0)	2121888 (100.0)

Source : 1) Zachariah & Rajan (2012) 2) KMS (2011& 2014) CDS, Thiruvananthapuram

Note : Figures in bracket show percentage

Table 3 shows that the number of emigrants from Kerala increased from 13.61 lakh in 1998 to 18.3 lakh in 2003 and 21.9 lakh in 2008 to 22.8 lakh in 2011 to 24.0 lakh in 2014 and 21.21 lakh in 2018 . It is clear that total number of emigrants registered only a marginal increase from 2003. A district wise analysis of emigrants from Kerala is shown in the Table 3. Among the districts in Kerala, Malappuram district had the largest number of emigrants from Kerala. Malappuram district was the place of origin of 406054 emigrants or about 19.13 percent of the total number of emigrants from Kerala in 2018. The district next in importance with respect to number of emigrants from the state has been Kannur in the north Kerala with 249834 emigrants. These two districts together constituted 32 percent of emigrants from the state.

¶ **Table 4**  
**Growth in the Number of Emigrants from Kerala, 1998-2018**

Year of survey	Number of Emigrants (in million)	Percentage Increase/ Decrease
1998	1.36	—
2003	1.84	35.29
2008	2.19	19.02
2011	2.28	4.11
2014	2.40	5.26
2018	2.12	-11.6

Source: Compiled from various Kerala Migration Survey Reports, 1998, 2008, 2011, 2014 & 2018.

The Table 4 represents the number of emigrants from Kerala during different periods estimated through different surveys conducted by Center for Development Studies, Thiruvananthapuram. It can be observed that over the years, the number of emigrants increased significantly, though there is a rapid decline in the number from 2011 which can be attributed to global economic recession. The number of emigrants decreased to 2.12 lakhs in 2018.

### Emigrants by Destination of Countries

Initially emigration of Keralites to foreign countries was mainly confined to countries like Ceylon, Malaya, Burma and Singapore. However, after independence Keralites have started migration to other countries also. Their presence is conspicuous in West Asia, the United States and Western Europe. Migration to the Gulf countries also went through a new stream in the 1970s with the modernization in those regions and today the largest numbers of emigrants from Kerala are working in those countries.

It is clear from the Table 5 that, in 1998 about 94 percent of the Kerala emigrants went to the Gulf countries; and the other 2 percent went mainly to the U S. In 2014 the proportion of Kerala emigrants who went to the Gulf region has come down further to 86 percent. Changes can be observed in the distribution of emigrants with in the Gulf region. Saudi Arabia, the principal destination of Malayalees in 1998 was replaced by the UAE from 2003 onwards. In the following three surveys the percentage of emigrants to the Gulf countries remained almost stable at 89 percent. In 2003 and 2008 the percentage of emigrants from Kerala to the United States was almost 5 percent. But in 2011 the percentage of emigrants to the Unites

States declined to 2.9 percent. In 2014 the percentage Kerala emigrants to the United States was only 2.89 percent and it decreased to 2.19 per cent in 2018.

**Table 5**  
**Country of Residence of Emigrants**

Countries	Number						
	1998	2003	2008	2011	2014	2016	2018
UAE	421959 (31.0)	670150 (36.5)	918122 (41.9)	883313 (38.7)	898962 (37.45)	942766 (41.5)	830254 (39.1)
Saudi Arabia	510895 (37.5)	489988 (26.6)	503433 (23.0)	574739 (25.2)	522282 (21.75)	511138 (22.49)	487484 (22.97)
Oman	139571 (10.2)	152865 (8.3)	167628 (7.6)	195300 (8.6)	189224 (7.88)	172651 (7.5)	182168 (8.58)
Kuwait	68163 (5.0)	113967 (6.2)	129282 (5.9)	127782 (5.6)	183329 (7.63)	124945 (5.5)	127120 (5.99)
Bahrain	74654 (5.5)	108507 (5.9)	101344 (4.6)	101556 (4.5)	149729 (6.23)	86326 (3.8)	81153 (3.82)
Qatar	62969 (4.6)	98953 (5.4)	121613 (5.5)	148427 (6.5)	106107 (4.42)	190825 (8.4)	185573
Other West Asia	0 (0.0)	2047 (0.1)	0 (0.0)	6696 (0.3)	21221 (0.88)	6815 (0.29)	0
<b>Sub Total</b>	<b>1278211 (93.8)</b>	<b>1636477 (89.0)</b>	<b>1941422 (88.5)</b>	<b>2037813 (89.4)</b>	<b>2070854 (86.27)</b>	<b>2035466 (89.6)</b>	<b>1893752 (89.24)</b>
USA	29862 (2.2)	98271 (5.3)	102440 (4.7)	68076 (2.9)	69559 (2.89)	86326 (3.8)	46535 (2.19)
Canada	0 (0.0)	4777 (0.3)	13695 (0.6)	9486 (0.4)	11200 (0.46)	27261 (1.2)	15323 (0.72)
UK	0 (0.0)	22520 (1.2)	38894 (1.8)	44640 (1.9)	38316 (1.59)	34076 (1.5)	38023 (1.79)
Other countries	0 (0.0)	76433 (4.2)	96961 (4.42)	120528 (5.3)	210445 (8.76)	88596 (3.89)	128254 (6.04)
<b>Total</b>	<b>1361919 (100.0)</b>	<b>1838478 (100.0)</b>	<b>2193412 (100.0)</b>	<b>2280543 (100.0)</b>	<b>2400375 (100.0)</b>	<b>2271725 (100.0)</b>	<b>2121887 (100.0)</b>

Source : 1) Zachariah & Rajan (2018) 2) KMS (2011& 2014) CDS, Thiruvananthapuram

Note : Figures in bracket show percentages

### Remittances

India stands unbeaten as the largest migrant source country, as well as remittance receiving country in the world. In 2017, there were 16.6 million Indians living abroad (UN, 2017). According to the World Bank Migration and Development Brief, 2018, India received USD 69 billion in remittances. Keralites working abroad constituted 10 percent of the total workforce in Kerala. Taking the total remittance to the country, Kerala alone receives 20 percent remittances. This is a prime reason for the high level of average per capita income.

**Table. 5**  
**No. of Migrants and Remittances**

Year	No of migrants (in million)	Remittances (in crores)
1998	1.36	13652
2003	1.84	18465
2008	2.19	43288
2011	2.28	49695
2013	2.40	71142
2018	2.12	85092

Source: Zachariah & Rajan (2011, 2014 & 2018)

The amount of increase in migrants from Kerala from 1998 to 2013 is 1.04 million. The rate of increase is now decelerating (Table. 5). From 1998 to 2003 the number of migrants registered a 0.48 million increase, the year 2003 to 2008 registered an increase of 0.35 million migrants, from 2008 to 2011 was an increase of 0.09 million and that of 2011 to 2013 was an increase of 0.12 million migrants. Thus, the trend shows a decline in the rate of increase of migrants from Kerala over the years from 1998 to 2018. The remittances also increased where there was an increase of Rs 71440 cores from 1998 to 2018. The destination of majority of the migrants from Kerala to places outside India is the Middle East Countries. The 'Gulf Boom' has changed the entire life style of an average Keralites.

#### IV. CONCLUSION

This paper analyses the trend in international migration from Kerala before the COVID 19 pandemic. The study shows that total number of emigrants from Kerala shows only a marginal increase from 2003. This shows a negative trend in 2018. About 89 per cent of the Malayalees went to Gulf countries and UAE has remained the favorite destination from 2003 onwards. Malappuram district had the destination of sending out the largest number of emigrants from Kerala. Kerala is one of the states in the country which have been experiencing a very high rate of remittances. Kerala accounts for about 19 per cent of the inward remittances coming to India. These remittances were enormously contributed to the growth of Kerala.

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