



Forced Migration of Muslims from Kerala to Gulf Countries

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INTRODUCTION

Historically, the Indian subcontinent has been well linked with the present Gulf region. However, until 1970s, this region never experienced large-scale migration. Migration from India to Persian Gulf started during mid-1970s and peaked in the early of 1980s and though later it marked a declining trend, the migration still continues; Indian emigrants were coming from all the states, but south Indian states were dominant in terms of the number of migrants. Indian emigrants to Gulf were employed in the construction projects, dry dock facilities, roads, airports, office buildings, industries, supermarkets, houses and so on. A year-wise analysis of the migration of Indians to Gulf countries shows that the figure, though small—42,000 in 1976—increased quite rapidly through the late 1970s and reached a peak level of more than 272,000 in 1981 after which, it declined slowly until 1986. Towards the end of 1970s (1976–1980), on an average annually around 107,000 people migrated; in the beginning of 1980s (1980–1985) the outflow was 214,600 and between 1985 and 1987 it was 115,500. Between late 1970s and late

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1980s the available data indicates that nearly 40 per cent of Indian workers who emigrated were unskilled and 50 per cent of the emigrants constituted both semi-skilled and skilled workers. Surprisingly, less than 5 per cent of Indian workers constituted both white-collar and highly skilled categories (Naidu 1991) here. It is evident that comparatively the higher number of migrants are the ones who are unskilled and semi-skilled. During 1970s and 1980s, large volume of workers emigrated from South India, more specifically from Kerala (Venier 2007). In 1990s, the Gulf region observed large number of workers due to large-scale demand in various sectors, mainly for their infrastructure development projects. Therefore, Indians who emigrated to the Gulf region worked in different sectors. Migration of labour from India to Gulf was a post-1970s phenomenon, within which some interesting patterns are observed. Some of the estimation shows that nearly 19 per cent of non-resident Indians (NRIs) and persons of Indian origin (PIOs) residing away from India are living in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries (Khadria 2006). Emigration to the Gulf from India attracted workers from the Southern states of India like Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka. From these four states nearly 50 per cent emigration clearance for work was granted by the Indian government (ICOE 2009). However, the dominance of the migrant workers from the state of Kerala still continues. In the last four decades, among the leading emigrants-sending states, Kerala tops the list. Due to large-scale emigration, Kerala has acquired economic gains and it also has significant impact on the state economy. The first ever Kerala Migration Survey (KMS) which took place in 1998 estimated around 1.5 million Keralites reside overseas and through remittances the state received 4000 million from the non-resident Keralites (Zachariah et al. 1999, 2000, 2001, 2003). The latest KMS 2018 showed a decline in the number of Keralites living abroad and it is mainly due to the demographic feature of the state. Series of KMS data highlighted the huge stock of Keralites residing in the Gulf region and this trend also reflected in the latest KMS 2018 data (Zachariah and Rajan 2007, 2016). Also, emigration from Kerala has been dominated by males.

GULF MIGRATION AS FORCED MIGRATION

It has been about more than five decades now since the massive labour migration started from the state. However, Gulf migration is not considered as an actual forced migration in the literature, hence it is important to look at the theoretical framework in which migration is looked at. First

of all, distinction has to be made between voluntary and forced migration. The differences between voluntary migration (hereafter VM) and forced migration (hereafter FM) are apparent: in the latter one, a person is forced to migrate due to several reasons, and it is completely opposite in VM, where people tend to migrate out of one's own choice (Düvell 2006). In VM, people incline to migrate for better job opportunities or for educational purposes. But in FM, people tend to migrate because of persecution and violence. As Saskia Koppenberg argues, FM is defined by international law as "entitles those who have a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion to a set of rights and to international protection" (Koppenberg 2012). While we look closer, the forms of VM and FM are unclear. In case of FM, apart from refugees, asylum seekers and internally displaced persons (IDPs) are also included. But sadly, status of last two categories of FM is not clearly defined as refugees. Additionally, migration is driven by multiple factors and reasons. For example, if a person takes own decision to migrate for attaining better education, it is quite different from migration decision because of persecution which is considered as FM. UNHCR also distinguished FM from other types of migration, and refugees are protected by the 1951 UN Refugee Convention that says, "human mobility is growing in scale, scope and complexity while stressing that people are prompted to leave their own country by a combination of fears, uncertainties, hopes and aspirations which can be very difficult to unravel". The interconnection between VM and FM has been gradually recognised and considered as a part of migratory movement phenomenon. The same phenomena may contain people seeking job or educational opportunities, reunification with family members or people facing persecution/conflict or violence in their homeland (UNHCR 2004). Thus, UNHCR indeed maintains its position that it is possible and necessary to identify refugees as a special category of people protected under international law but has, at the same time, become engaged in the broader migration discourse, arguing that often there is no clear distinction between forms of VM and FM when refugees and other migrants move alongside each other (Crisp 2008). In case a migrant is motivated for better economic opportunities, here comes a vital question: can the person's economic situation be treated as a forced circumstance for him/her to migrate? As pointed by Turton (2003), if we look closely, this can also be considered as FM, in which external factors motivate the people to take decisions. With this backdrop, this study examines how the vulnerability of the migrants forces

them to emigrate for better economic opportunities. More specifically, in this study Muslims in Kerala are considered as vulnerable from the research viewpoint, as they are a deprived social group and opportunities are denied to them because of their religious affiliation.

DATA AND METHODOLOGY

Data for this chapter has been collected from various sources; a village was selected from the Malappuram district which has the largest number of migrants as well as return migrants from Gulf Countries, and the district with highest Muslim population. The village was selected on the basis of its high prevalence of migration to Gulf countries, its backwardness and Muslim population concentration. A households survey was conducted in 128 households from the village, which included around 137 migrants. There were households where either one member is currently working in any of the Gulf countries, or is currently on leave and staying at home, or at least one member had lived and worked in any Gulf country for at least more than two years. In-depth interviews with different sets of people like early migrants, current migrants, people who are on leave, returnees from different Gulf countries, women who are left behind, their family members, old people from the village, social and political figures and local representatives, school teachers, women and other groups' representatives, local bank officials. Interviews with village and Gram Panchayat officials were also helped to get more dynamics of the migration to Gulf countries and data was also collected from Kerala Migration Surveys of Center for Development Studies, Thiruvananthapuram, Economic and Statistic Department of the State Government.

CAUSES FOR MIGRATION

Migration takes place primarily because of the fluctuations in social, economic, political and various other fabrics at home as well as the destination to where people migrate. However, there can also be other reasons which contribute to the migration of people from one place to another. As far as migration is concerned, a single reason or only a set of reasons cannot be seen in isolation. There are layers of factors that contribute in different levels for a person or a group of people to migrate from one place to the other. There could be individual reasons, family reasons, community causes and national and international factors which also contribute. The literature that dealt with the reasons or the factors that have contributed to the huge

migration of people from Kerala to Gulf countries have suggested some of the dominant reasons. Migration of Muslims from Kerala to Gulf countries has different meanings and reasons throughout the history. The literature has also acknowledged the historical connections that Muslims of this part of the world had with the Arab lands. However, the socioeconomic and political fabrics changes throughout the periods in which migration process have started, accelerated and slowed down are also extremely important. In the literature, there are some broad arguments that are given as to why Muslims outnumbered the others in terms of migration to Gulf countries. What have come out from the literature mainly as causes for migration from Kerala are the historical, ethnic and religious connections of Malabar Coast to Arabia (Joseph 2001). Apart from this glorified religious, ethnic and maritime relation with Arab countries, there is nothing much available to answer the question as to why Muslims outnumbered among the migrants to Gulf (Khan 2014, 2015). However, it has also clearly mentioned that, among the factors that are associated with migration, community is one of the strong ones, where Muslims from the state have a high probability to migrate to Gulf countries rather than any other country. If one is a Muslim from the state of Kerala, the chances of emigration are 2.2 (49 per cent) times the general average (22 per cent). On the other hand, their chance of out-migration¹ (6.3 per cent) is only 0.55 times the general average (11.5 per cent) (Zachariah et al. 2003).² The reasons why Muslims hold such high probability for migrating to Gulf and the reality behind the reasons that studies have pointed out need to be analysed further. Direct reasons provided by migration returnees in the village are diverse: higher wages than home, unemployment, better job prospects, family, community and other networks.

Table 9.1 gives a picture of the individual reasons of migration. Looking at the individual-level factors of why people have migrated, 40.1 per cent have responded that it was their aspiration that migrating to the Gulf countries will pay them more wages, since there is more value for the currency in the Gulf countries, which will enable them to fulfil their diverse needs. However, there are 33.6 per cent of the people who were unemployed or not engaged in any activity that would help them financially or

¹ Migration within India.

² Working paper on the results of the project, "Migration from Kerala: Social, Economic and Demographic Consequences". The Centre for Development Studies sponsored the research, and the Indian Council of Social Science Research, New Delhi.

Table 9.1 Reason for migration

| <i>Reasons</i> | <i>Migration status</i> | | | <i>Total</i> | <i>Count</i> |
|-----------------------|--------------------------|-----------------|-----------------|--------------|--------------|
| | <i>Currently in Gulf</i> | <i>On leave</i> | <i>Returnee</i> | | |
| Higher wage than home | 27.00% | 10.90% | 2.20% | 40.10% | 55 |
| Unemployment | 25.50% | 5.10% | 2.90% | 33.60% | 46 |
| Better job prospects | 15.30% | 4.40% | 2.20% | 21.90% | 30 |
| Family networks | 0.70% | 0.00% | 0.00% | 0.70% | 1 |
| Community networks | 0.00% | 0.70% | 0.00% | 0.70% | 1 |

Source: Field survey, 2013

otherwise. Unemployment has been a reason for migration always; it was a reason in the initial years of migration from the village and it is still one of the dominant reasons why people go to Gulf countries for work. It may not make sense for someone who is looking from the outside, and will be wondering as to when people are unemployed at home how they can migrate to some foreign countries. The answer is, migrating to the Gulf is a simple and viable option for the Muslim youth than anything else in this part of the country, and it is not that they are assured of gaining full employment in the destination countries, but they migrate in search of that. For 21.9 per cent, better job prospects at the destination country was the reason they migrated. Why one aspires for better job prospects and higher wages than one's home country by getting a good job in the gulf countries is indeed for economic reasons. This has to be understood in the context of socioeconomic and political forces that contributed. A remaining 3 per cent responded that their reasons for migration was attributed to the family, community networks and other reasons like, their friends had sent visa to migrate or they had gone in Umrah visa first and then got settled in a better job and then were caught by the police and then deported and again went in other visa because the job was comparatively attractive. However, looking at the individual reasons might not give the real picture of the reasons of migration. If migrants had money and educational qualifications, they could have migrated to other countries rather than the Gulf region, but here the migrants are largely going to Saudi Arabia alone; they constitute 81 per cent of the total migrants. Is it merely a religious reason why people migrated to Kingdom of Saudi Arabia? Or is it something else? This question takes us to the provision of cheapest and convenient Umrah visa in which 32.1 per cent of the emigrants have migrated from the village.

UMRAH AND FREE VISA PROVISIONS TO SAUDI ARABIA

Studies have not really shown the visa details of the migrants to Gulf countries from the state. The kind of visa the migrants used to go to the Gulf countries can provide information regarding the reality of the migrant's condition. Table 9.2 shows the kind of visa in which people migrated: 39.4 per cent of the migrants have gone to Gulf countries with free visa. Free visas are issued without mentioning the type or category of job the migrant has to do. These visas are not generally monitored like other employment visas. About 32.1 per cent migrated with Umrah visa, which is issued by the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia for Muslims across the globe to come to the Kingdom and perform the Umrah ritual.

Umrah and free visa have been a huge lifeline for the people in the village; a large number of people from the village went with Umrah visa, worked for a while and then acquired a permanent work permit or employment visa. People were able to go for Umrah visa for a long time where people went for the short-term visa and during the short span they have to carry out the Umrah ritual and come back home, but it was a practice until the 2009 people who went in the Umrah visa were staying illegally and working in Saudi Arabia, mostly people worked as petty workers and small jobs and earned money; if once get caught in between they were deported to their home state or the national capital free of cost. This was prevalent among the migrants of the village; about 32.1 per cent of the total migrants have migrated to Saudi Arabia on this particular visa. Now, this can be considered as religious connection for the people in the village; however, we have to further inquire why they used Umrah visa and not employment visa. First of all, the Umrah visa is very cheap as compared to any other visa which ensures travel permit to Saudi Arabia. Secondly, one has to be professionally and

Table 9.2 Kind of visa with which the person went to the Gulf countries

| <i>Kind of visa</i> | <i>Migration status</i> | | | <i>Total</i> | <i>Count</i> |
|---------------------|--------------------------|-----------------|-----------------|--------------|--------------|
| | <i>Currently in Gulf</i> | <i>On leave</i> | <i>Returnee</i> | | |
| Free visa | 27.00% | 9.50% | 2.90% | 39.40% | 54 |
| Umrah visa | 22.60% | 6.60% | 2.90% | 32.10% | 44 |
| Employment visa | 21.90% | 5.10% | 1.50% | 28.50% | 39 |
| Total | 71.50% | 21.20% | 7.30% | 100.00% | 137 |

Source: Field survey, 2013

educationally qualified to gain an employment visa. So, the dependency on the Umrah visa is not because of religious reasons but economic reasons as it has facilitated the migration of a huge percentage of the migrants to Saudi Arabia from the village.

At first, people use to go from here to Saudi Arabia in Umrah visa, those days people who were working in employment visa was very rare. It's not that people really want to do Umrah ritual or religious but going to work there as illegal emigrant. I went in Umrah visa and have been working for more than six years, by the time my brother also came in Umrah visa only. Then I could manage to get an employment visa and work there. The life of an Umrah emigrant is extremely difficult, he has to hide from the police always, there were people who were living in rooms for years without not even going out months from the room to hide from the police, once they get caught, it's not that can be sent to home very soon, there are extremely difficult life of prison which can be delayed for long depending on the number of inmates. People did all of these, only because of poverty at home and for a better life, to marry off their sisters or to construct a home of their own. (*An early migrant from the village*)

Another option for the migrants from the village who went to Saudi Arabia was free visa. Free visa allows migrants to come to Saudi Arabia not with very strict rules or requirements; for example, one need not declare their profession during emigration. People who work with these visas generally work in establishments, companies or houses as helpers, salesmen or drivers and other supporting jobs. This is different from tightly monitored visas which are used only for bringing workers for own use. In comparison with an employment visa, free visa is also less costly and not very difficult to acquire as education and skills are not a criteria. This is the reason why people get free visa and migrate. Around 39.4 per cent of the migrants have migrated with free visa, and after the Government of Saudi Arabia introduced the Nitaqat law,³ there is a huge fear, chaos and uncertainty

³ *Nitaqat* was introduced in 2009. Saudi Arabian government has categorised the companies and business organisations in those lines. Various sectors where emigrants were employed were further categorised into 41 types. According to the types of jobs, a particular number of Saudi citizens have to be employed in the organisation. Employers who followed this rule were given blue and green cards and were also given other benefits in recruitments. Organisations which did not follow this were given red cards and were reminded of rules and consequences. Meanwhile, the government has also increasingly started to trace out people who have emigrated to work with free visa and are working illegally, against the rules of the Saudi government. Emigrants who are working with this free visa were caught and sent back to their home countries.

among the families and migrants in the village that the emigrants who are working on free visa will have to come back. In total, 71.5 per cent of the emigrants have migrated from the village with Umrah and free visas. It clearly shows the reality of migration in the village. They had to go for these two categories of visas because both are cheaper, convenient and do not require educational or professional details. These two visa provisions have helped the migrants from the village more than anything else to go and work at their destination countries.

POVERTY AND UNEMPLOYMENT

Poverty among the Muslims, especially during late 1970s and early 1980s in Kerala, has not come out as one of the reasons for migration in any of the studies that was done on migration to Gulf countries from the state of Kerala. Sachar committee⁴ observed that while there is only 24.7 per cent of the total Muslim population, Muslims constitute 30.7 per cent of the total poor (below poverty line—BPL) in Kerala (Sachar et al. 2006). The report published by the planning commission (1993) pointed out the decline in the population identified as BPL category from 57 per cent in 1977–1978 to 32 per cent in 1987–1988; this is same period of acceleration of the migration and the remittances. But the full credit of this should not also be given to the migration to Gulf countries and remittance (Prakash 1998); considerable decline (at 6 per cent) among the Kerala Muslim population from BPL category is visible, but among the Ezhavas community⁵ relatively high percentage of population moved out of BPL category. Importantly, this community is considered as most migratory in Kerala, but among the Muslim population the poverty level is high. So it's established that, migration to the Gulf has contributed to bring down the number of people who lived below the poverty line in general, where the state has had a considerable decline in the general level of poverty, and interestingly Muslims constitute as one of the communities in which the drastic decline in poverty has been observed in this particular period. Indeed, one has to see the contribution of Gulf migration in this regard

⁴ Sachar committee, which was appointed in 2005 by the Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, was commissioned to prepare a report on the latest social, economic and educational conditions of the Muslim community of India under Justice Rajinder Sachar.

⁵ Ezhava is a caste-based community or a group of castes among Hindus in Kerala.

and the money remitted by the migrants. Therefore, an inquiry in this line will give an analysis of how poverty worked as a reason for the people to migrate to Gulf. Extreme poverty was one of the phenomena that existed during the 1960s and 1970s in the village, and while some people left for different cities like Mumbai, Madras and Calcutta in search of work, others struggled in the village without a job or a source for their livelihood. Migrants to other cities are the people who went to Gulf countries for work from the village. Those who were in Bombay went by ship to the Gulf Coast, and the first migrant who went to Gulf from the village migrated in this way while he was working in a hotel in Mumbai. It can be interpreted that extreme poverty and hunger had existed during the early days of 1970s in the village. Though some of the Muslim families had land and other resources, the condition of the huge majority of Dalits and Muslims was worse. So when an opportunity of going to the Gulf opened up, they arranged money for the visa (Umrah and other) by taking debts, loan or selling gold of their wives and mothers and went to the Gulf countries without knowing anything. Migration to Gulf countries is a costly affair as far as a common migrant from the village is concerned; they have to bear the cost of flight ticket, visa expense, expenses for work permit and other expenses.

Table 9.3 gives a picture of the sources from which the migrants raised their expenses during the departure. Sources of finance for the migration-related expenses for migrants to migrate from the village to different countries are through the loans from banks, borrowings from different sources like friends and relatives, selling gold and landed property. About 33.6 per cent of the migrants raised their expense for the migration from

Table 9.3 Sources of finance for the migration expenses

| <i>Sources</i> | <i>Migration status</i> | | | <i>Total</i> | <i>Count</i> |
|-------------------------|--------------------------|-----------------|-----------------|--------------|--------------|
| | <i>Currently in Gulf</i> | <i>On leave</i> | <i>Returnee</i> | | |
| Loan | 10.90% | 3.60% | 1.50% | 16.10% | 22 |
| Self-finance | 22.60% | 8.00% | 2.90% | 33.60% | 46 |
| Borrowings from source | 18.20% | 5.10% | 0.70% | 24.10% | 33 |
| Selling gold | 18.20% | 3.60% | 1.50% | 23.40% | 32 |
| Selling landed property | 2.20% | 0.70% | 0.00% | 2.90% | 4 |
| Total | 72.30% | 21.20% | 6.60% | 100.00% | 137 |

Source: Field survey, 2013

their own pocket or from their immediate family; about 16.1 per cent of the people had taken loan to finance their expenses and another 24.1 per cent of the migrants had to borrow money from different sources. While 23.4 per cent of the migrants sold gold, 2.9 per cent had to sell their landed properties to finance their migration expenses.

The situation of the people in the village was miserable; people have lived in extreme poverty and hunger. Even when families that has about ten members to work in the fields, they were not given proper wages and the households didn't have food to eat two times in a day in the village. Now situation has changed, you would not get a single household who don't have food to eat here in the village, to reach this situation migration of youth from the village to Gulf have contributed substantially, they had no option other than going somewhere else to find a way out to live and that made them to reach into Gulf Countries. (An elder from the village)

Only 33.6 per cent of the migrants were able to finance their expenses themselves and rest of the migrants had to depend on other sources like taking loan from nearby banks for interests, borrowing from the friends, relative or others, selling gold ornaments of the female family members, mostly of mother or wife, and even selling the landed property that one has. It reflects the stark reality that migrants even take big risks to finance their expenses for the migration. Since the migrants do not have anything substantial to finance them, they depend on whatever they have with them, even selling the land that they have. Migrants hope that they will have a better life as they migrate, a better job, better pay and then they can recover or repay whatever they spent for the migration and related expenses. That strong hope has led the migrants to take big financial risks to finance their expense. Poverty has directly and indirectly caused the migration of Muslims to Gulf countries from this part of the state of Kerala. On this background, poverty has decreased tremendously from the village and the remittances have to be counted as one of the important reasons why poverty has seen a huge decline in the post-Gulf migration era. So, it has to be argued that poverty was also a reason why people migrated from the village. As far as unemployment is concerned, it has been a reason for 33.6 per cent of the migrants to grab a visa of any kind and migrate to the Gulf countries. However, the percentage of migrants who were unemployed or not engaged in any jobs which will enable them to gain anything as wage during the time of their emigration was 38 per cent. So, lack of availability of employment opportunities at home during

migration has been a strong reason why people migrated from the village to the Gulf countries. So, it has to be argued that poverty and unemployment among the Muslims of the village were the core reasons why people migrated to Gulf countries, especially to Saudi Arabia: a country into which the migration was easier, cheaper and convenient. This has to be seen as a core reason when one talks about the reason of migration from the village to Gulf countries.

DOWRY AND EXPENSIVE MARRIAGES

Dowry is payment in cash or in kind that is given to the bridegroom's family along with the bride during the marriage. Dowry is not only cash but it can be jewellery, landed property, vehicles, electrical equipment or any other household item. Dowry was rampant among the Muslims until very recently in the state of Kerala, though it is in a decreasing trend now in the village. Dowry is an integral part of the wedding of a daughter, a sister or any other female member in the family and costs of the wedding have been one of the reasons why a section of people migrated and stayed for a long time in the destination country, especially the people who had more number of females at home. It was a practice that the bride's family had to hugely pay for the bride as dowry in cash during the Nikah (wedding). Dowry was also given in the form of other materials such as vehicles and landed property. Apart from the dowry, the expense for the gold which was to be given with the bride on the day of the wedding was huge. About 12.4 per cent of the emigrants spent their remittances considerably for the payment of dowry and marriage expenses. People from the village also went to the Gulf because of over-expenditure in marriage expenses, including dowry. Most of the first-generation migrants had in their mind that they have to marry off either their sisters or daughter and construct a good house out of their earnings from migration.

If there is girl child, parents are worried that she will have to be married off with a huge dowry and the marriage expenses, it will be very expensive. They have to find money for that anyhow for gold, people who are migrated to Gulf who have many number of sisters to marry off, their life has been so difficult where they have to find finance for their sisters to marry off, even after many years after the marriages they have to stay at Gulf to pay off debts that family is in because of the dowry and other

expenses. There are many parents after marrying off their daughters they cannot come back because of the debt and they are staying for years. (Migrant from the village)

It is again the matter of money that is needed for the marriage of sister or the daughter of the migrant, including dowry, gold and other expenses, that had to be made anyhow; a huge percentage of the remittances goes for paying dowry, marriage expenses and even paying off the debts which were made because of the expensive marriages. It has to be argued here that dowry and expensive marriages among the Muslims of the region and the village have also been one of the crucial reasons why a section of youth has migrated to the Gulf countries and for another section why they have not been able to stop working in the Gulf countries even when they are old or even not physically well.

THE DREAM OF THE YOUTHS: GULF DESTINATIONS

In the early 1970s the dream of an average Muslim youth of Kerala was to go to Dubai. Dubai was not just a country in their imagination, rather a dream of a better life which was free from difficulties, poverty and sufferings—from the village to a prosperous life. It was a hope for the people who were struggling and for those who did not have much to live their lives. The narrations from the migrants make it clearer.

There was no other way out, the situation was such that no one can even live here and that is the time people, especially youth getting such opportunity to dream about a world. That was Gulf and that was the lot! As far as people in the village are concerned, in the midst of poverty, misery and unemployment they started perusing their Gulf dream, their journey from sufferings to hoping that they will have a prosperous life. Gulf was indeed a dream, the dream of nice perfumes, of good and big concrete houses, of vehicles and better lives; it was dream for the poor who have nothing to live here in their villages during those times. After they got visa and migrated to Gulf, we all could understand that it's not the dream that we saw from the villages, the reality is different here and there after it's the story of struggles to meet the two ends. What left after the expenses at the Gulf has to be sent at homes every month, otherwise things will be in great difficulty as they are fully depended on us, then it's about living the full life of an individual without any substantial savings and only to meet the daily expenses of the family, if the migrant don't have any debt he is lucky then. This is the life of an average men who is living in Gulf countries from Malabar. (A migrant from the village)

This is about aspirations and the desire to get out from the everyday struggles of life and what Gulf dream is about and that is why people sell whatever they have at home, like gold, or take loan and borrow money from wherever it is available and migrate to Gulf countries. It is also aspirations of getting children educated, having a home of their own or getting daughters and sisters married off, or buy a piece of land; these are the aspirations and dreams that an emigrant has in the village that make them migrate to the Gulf countries. These are the reasons why people migrate or why a huge workforce of the village is not able to come back. This has to be seen as entirely different from what is known as “American dream”; for someone to see an American dream he or she has to be rich enough, but the Gulf dream is about getting out of something at home and soon coming back with what they have to have a better life, not to settle or to be a permanent resident of that country to which people migrate.

CONCLUSION

The evidences from the village suggest that the socioeconomic situation that existed during 1960s, 1970s and 1980s and also the prevalence of poverty and unemployment level among the Kerala Muslims triggered them to emigrate to the Gulf countries, mainly to Saudi Arabia. Youth from Malappuram incurred their emigration cost by mortgaging their family members’ jewellery and their small lands and in some cases they borrowed money for interest from money lenders to meet the emigration cost. Due to their low educational level and low skill level they could manage to work as unskilled or semi-skilled workers in difficult working conditions in the Gulf countries. Poverty, joblessness, availability of Umrah and free visa to fly to Saudi Arabia, prevailing dowry system and the practice of luxurious marriage culture existed in the village. Coupled with one or more factors mentioned above, the dream and aspiration to work in the Gulf to enhance their standard of living motivated them to emigrate abroad. Importantly, their religious belief or affiliation has no role to play in their decision to migrate to the Gulf. Thus, it has to be argued that, migration from Kerala to the Gulf countries has been generally considered as voluntary economic migration; however, the evidences from one of the socio-economically backward communities such as Muslim migration from the village shows that the migration from the village is an involuntary migration, which has a socioeconomic forced elements to it.

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