Return of Overseas Contract Workers and their Rehabilitation and Development in Kerala (India)

A Critical Account of Policies, Performance and Prospects

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ABSTRACT

Large-scale emigration of temporary contract workers from Kerala to countries in the Middle East began in the early 1970s. Return migration flows into Kerala assumed large proportions only after the mid-1980s. Returned migrants include repatriated illegal immigrants and immigrants evacuated during times of political upheaval and hostalities.

Since the end of the 1980s there have been several instances of such repatriation. While reliable information on migration-related matters is not available in Kerala, not even on the magnitudes of onward and return flows, the total number of returned migrants in Kerala must be already around 0.5 million.

Returned migrants are, in general, middle-aged persons with low levels of education, skills and experience. After return, about one-half remain unemployed and of the other half, a few retire from active work and the rest enter into self-employment, mostly in the services sector, or get into salaried jobs, or become wage labour in agriculture or fishing.

Returned migrants have received little assistance from the state government or any other institution for rehabilitation and development. The socio-political and economic climate in the state has remained unfriendly to investment, due to a variety of constraints such as scarcity of land, segmentation of the labour market, wage rates much higher than labour productivity, militant trade unionism, political ideology inimical to the

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growth of the private capitalist sector and inadequacy of the energy and transport infrastructure.

Loss-making public capitalist sector enterprises have discouraged returned migrants from entrusting their savings with government and several fake private sector enterprises which lured them into taking shares have cheated them. The inertia on the part of the state government to attend to the problems of the emigrants began to thaw after 1996, when it introduced an accident-cum-life insurance policy for non-resident Keralites. But no specifed scheme for harnessing the development potential of return migrants has as yet emerged.

The novel experiment begun in Kerala for local level development with the active participation of the people, the availability of cooperative credit agencies at all the local levels and the immense possibilities of development of the state, offer a new opportunity for channelling the development potential of the returned migrants into productive investment.

INTRODUCTION

India has a long history of overseas migration. The Indian diaspora lies scattered in all continents and most countries of the globe. The phenomenon of overseas migration of contract workers is, however, of more recent origin. The massive flows of overseas workers began only in the early 1970s when countries in the Persian Gulf region began to invest massive amounts of capital in infrastructure development and construction activities from incomes accruing from petroleum sales following the oil price hike of 1973. These countries experienced shortages in domestic labour supply to man such activities and opened their doors to expatriate labour, mostly from countries of South and South East Asia. In the migration flows which ensued, India held a pioneering position because of the advantages she held as a result of socio-political and trade contacts with the Middle East for several centuries. Kerala held the premier position among the migrant sending states in India because her relations with the Gulf countries were more intense than those of other states, and also because the socio-economic environment in Kerala favoured such exodus of employment seekers.

Although Kerala accounts for only 1.8 per cent of the land area of India and 3.4 per cent of its population, it nonetheless has accounted for 40-60 per cent of Indian emigrant contract workers to the Gulf region during the past quarter of a century (Gulati and Mody, 1985; Nair, 1986; Nair, 1996; Nair, 1997). Overseas contract workers return to the countries of their origin after varying periods abroad. Problems of reabsorbing return migrants did not cause concern to the migrant sending countries so long as the size of the return flows remained small. In the context of Kerala, return migration caught the attention of the

public and the government only in the second half of the 1980s, and lately the state government has awakened to the need to look into questions of repatriation, rehabilitation and welfare of the returnees. The question of mobilizing the development potential of returnees also seems to have gained a place on the agenda of government.

RETURN MIGRATION

Magnitude

Return is the final stage in the migration process for overseas contract workers. The magnitude of return migration depends on several factors, including the volume of onward migration, the type of visa/work permit of the migrant, working and living conditions abroad and socio-political conditions in host countries. Until about the end of the 1970s, immigration to Gulf countries was relatively easy, and once in the host country, finding a job was not difficult. On the loss of job with one employer, the worker could seek employment with another or go to another country in the region. Wage and salary levels were high and competition from workers from other emigrant sending countries in Asia was not fierce. In such circumstances, workers from Kerala and other parts of India returned home after having fulfilled their migration goals in terms of savings and discharging their financial obligations at home.

During the 1970s and the early years of the 1980s, annual return flows were relatively small. But as favourable conditions began to decline after the end of the 1970s (due to such factors as arabization, depletion of petro-dollar stocks, decline in oil prices, increasing competition among expatriates from different countries for work opportunities in the Gulf region, cuts in the wage and salary levels and the tightening of rules relating to immigration and employment of expatriate workers) return flows increased. However, such developments did not, in fact, reduce the volume of the emigration owing to relaxation, in practice, of emigration rules, and growth in the volume of clandestine emigration. Most countries in the Middle East became havens for thousands of illegal immigrants from several countries in Asia, the share of Kerala among such illegal immigrants being especially high. The UAE and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia have sent back thousands of illegal immigrants to countries of origin by granting them amnesty. Hostilities in Kuwait also led to an increased flow of return migration in 1990.

Thus, since the 1980s not only has there been a steady increase in the annual inflow of return migrants after termination of jobs or expiry of visa, there has also been sudden spurts in the flow arising from ad hoc reasons such as sudden war and abrupt decisions by host countries to compulsorily repatriate illegal

immigrants. Among the migrant sending states in India, Kerala has borne the brunt of such forced repatriation.

Non-availability of data on migration and migration-related phenomena is a characteristic feature of most migrant sending countries. However, the situation is perhaps worst in India. In this federal republic, some important aspects of the migration phenomenon, including formulation and implementation of emigration rules, monitoring and follow-up of the living and working conditions of Indians abroad and redressal of migrants' complaints, are vested with the federal (central) government. While foreign exchange arising from remittances accrues to the Central (Reserve) Bank, and the pattern of utilization of foreign exchange accruals is decided by the central government, the immediate impact of the emigration process is experienced by those states to which the migrants belong.

Governments at the centre and the state seldom interfere in the migration process at any stage, apart from the central government framing emigration rules and administering emigration procedures. In order to facilitate smooth emigration of Indians, the central government has increasingly exempted categories of migrants from the emigration clearance requirement. In such a "free market" situation, the government agencies have detailed data only for migrants who belong to the category of the "migration clearance required", which forms only a small and uncertain proportion of the total number of migrants. Nor does India have information on returned migrants. The magnitude of the stock of Indian workers and their dependants in the Gulf region also remains largely unknown. In these circumstances, Kerala does not have any reliable information about the stock of Keralites in the Gulf region, the annual flow of return migration or the stock of its Gulf-returned population.

In an earlier context, we mentioned that the prevailing impression among Labour Ministry (Government of India) officials was that the total number of Indians in the Gulf region would be about 2.8 million, more than 85 per cent of whom would be workers (Nair, 1997). This impression is supported by guesstimates prepared by the Government of Kerala after some verification on the ground (Table 1, page 231). Estimation of return flows and stock of returned migrants in Kerala is also problematic. The Government of Kerala conducted two surveys, one in 1987 and the other in 1992-93 (Government of Kerala, 1988; Government of Kerala, 1994). The 1987 survey estimated that 86,500 persons had returned to Kerala during a 12 year period 1975-1987, and the 1992-93 survey estimated that 124,000 persons had returned from work abroad up to the end of 1992. These are known to be gross under-estimates, the more likely figure today being around 500,000 persons (Nair, 1997).

Characteristics

Little information is available in the characteristics of the returned migrants. The earliest source of such information is the survey of about 700 returned migrants' households conducted by Nair in 1985 (Nair, 1986). Surveys made by the government of Kerala in 1987 and 1992-93 also throw some light on certain characteristics of the returned migrants. Table 2 (page 232 and 233) indicates the socio-economic profile of returned migrants during pre-migration and post-return phases as reported in the 1985 survey. Other surveys do not include information on the pre-migration profile. These surveys show that the majority of returned migrants were in their thirties, married and literate, but did not have high educational achievements. In the post-migration phase, more than half the returned migrants remained unemployed and although none was classified "employer", about 25 per cent were self-employed in service sector activities such as petty stores, vehicle repair shops and small-scale and cottage manufacturing establishments. Less than one-fifth were "employees".

The nature of return flows remained by and large unchanged until the end of the 1980s. In 1990, the Kuwait-Iraq war led to nearly 80,000 persons from Kerala being repatriated from Kuwait in as brief a period as possible. The state administration was concerned that the sudden addition of such a large number of persons to the large pool of employment seekers would cause unrest in the society. Several studies made during the period perceived that the situation had the "potentiality of posing fundamental problems in the region" (Saith, 1992). A sample survey made by the Kerala government in 1992-93 gave a profile of returnees different from the ones observed earlier, in that the proportion of the unemployed was much smaller (20.5 per cent), and the self-employed significantly larger (31.9 per cent).

In more recent years, another type of return migration, known in Kerala as "amnesty return", has occurred. This relates to Asians who entered the Gulf region without valid passports, visas or work permits. The UAE began sending illegal immigrants back after granting them amnesty for illegal stay. About 45,000 persons are supposed to have been compulsorily repatriated to India, among whom were nearly 20-25,000 Keralites. During July-October 1996, the Government of India and the Government of Kerala made arrangements for the passage of the amnesty migrants, the latter government gathering information through questionnaires by the end of 1996 on some aspects of their socio-economic profile. Salient features of amnesty returnees from the UAE, as evidenced from this survey, are summarized below.

Amnesty returnees from UAE. In all, 10,874 amnesty returnees from the UAE (of a possible 25,000) supplied information in the prescribed questionnaire

proforma. This information pertains only to migrants who returned under duress after varying periods of illegal stay and work in the UAE. It therefore reflects the worst scenario of returnees. Women formed only 0.3 per cent. About 55 per cent of the returnees were married and the majority were in their prime working ages (30-40 years). The predominance of Muslims among onward and return migrants was a feature also noticed in earlier studies. In the present case, the proportion of Muslims was 53 per cent (Hindus 42 per cent and Christians 3 per cent). The average size of the returnees' households was seven members compared with less than five for the state as a whole. Three per cent were illiterate and 78 per cent had education of less than matriculation level. Only a few were technically qualified, most having worked in the host country during intermittent periods of their stay (which, on average, was less than 3 years) as unskilled workers (33 per cent), helpers in industrial units (26 per cent) and domestic servants (12 per cent). About 15 per cent were construction workers. They had worked for short periods in the most poorly paid jobs with little job security under hazardous circumstances, constantly in fear of the police and the judiciary. Their average monthly pay was reported to have been around US$150 per month, ranging from US$80 to US$450. The majority reported household income of around US$100 a month during the post-migration phase, which is about one-half the poverty line household income calculated for Kerala.

The remigration prospects of amnesty returnees have not been totally bleak. In fact, the Government of India announced relaxation of rules regarding emigration clearance and emigration check for several categories, and the UAE government declared its willingness to receive back the amnesty returnees provided they obtained valid employment and travel documents (*Indian Express*, January 13, 1997). No information is available about those who have re-migrated.

Amnesty returnees might also have arrived from other Gulf countries since the GCC resolved in December 1997 to allow an amnesty period of six months (which expires on 20th May, 1998) and compulsorily repatriate all illegal immigrants who stay after that date. Thousands more Indian workers therefore are likely to return in the coming months, among whom Keralites would account for about half, thus increasing unemployment levels, reducing household income and consumption standards and exacerbating social unrest. Indeed, a second stream of amnesty returnees arrived in late 1997 from Saudi Arabia. The numbers involved are unknown although newspaper reports claimed about 50,000 Indians, of whom migrants from Kerala would comprise about 60 per cent. These returnees had entered Saudi Arabia through various methods (pilgrims' visas, free visas, or fake passports and visas), and had worked mostly in unskilled and poorly paid jobs as plantation labour, goatherders, domestic servants and washermen. Many had been in jail for illegal stay. The government of India and the Kerala government took some

steps to arrange for their passage back home. No information is available on their present status.

In order to obtain an up-to-date profile of the returned migrants, we conducted a field investigation in December 1997 in one of the migration centres in Kerala with a sample of 300 persons. The salient findings of this survey are presented below.

Profile of returnees, December 1997. The survey was conducted in December 1997 in the Kadinamkulam panchayat (a panchayat being the lowest local self-government unit in rural areas), one of the migration pockets in the coastal belt of the Thiruvananthapuram district in which the capital city of Kerala is situated. The sample area is densely populated, inhabited mainly by fisherfolk, agricultural labourers, workers in the traditional agro-processing industry of coir-processing and petty traders. From the approximately 3,000 households in the area we collected information from 300 which had at least one returned migrant present at the time of interview. The purpose of the survey was to ascertain the present socio-economic profile of returned migrants in Kerala.

Previous surveys of returned migrants in Kerala had found the proportion of women to be negligible. However, we found that women comprised nearly one-sixth of the returnees; all had worked in low-paid manual services, mostly in the household sector, as housemaids. The vast majority had worked in Kuwait for varying periods during the 1970s and the 1980s. A few returned from Saudi Arabia during the 1990s after varying periods of service as housemaids. In general, the women who returned were older, poorer and less educated than their male counterparts.

Respondents had low educational qualifications with more than four-fifths having only school education (Table 3, page 234). They include persons who returned at various periods, a few even prior to the 1970s (Table 4, page 234), although nine-tenths had returned after 1985. The majority of workers returned from three regions; Saudi Arabia (36.1 per cent), UAE (32.6 per cent) and Kuwait (18.1 per cent) (Table 5, page 235). The main reasons given for return were poor working and living conditions, lack of opportunity for extension of stay, breach of contract by employer or forced repatriation. Together, these account for 70 per cent of the returnees. Only six per cent of respondents returned voluntarily. The reasons for return are shown in Table 6 (page 235).

Most returnees had left Kerala because of low incomes and absence of avenues for economic improvement; unemployment as such was a significant push factor for only about one-fifth. While the proportion of unemployed among men had been as low as one-eighth, among women unemployment was about three-fifths. Occupational profile did not undergo much change while abroad, although all but three persons who migrated found employment. A distinct shift

is observed for males from the categories fish/vegetable vendors and petty shop keepers; cooks, waiters and sweepers; and agricultural workers, fishermen and coir workers, to other higher or slightly better occupations. On the other hand, women, irrespective of their occupational status at home, worked as housekeepers, cleaners or sweepers.

After return, half the women remain unemployed; about 14 per cent were over 60 years of age and too old to take up any economic activity outside the home. The remainder were employed in various occupations, including office work and managerial positions, although the majority were employed in low-income activities such as agricultural labourer, coir worker, and fish and vegetable vendor. Unemployment rates for men were lower; only about one-sixth and another one-twelfth are above 60 years and have voluntarily retired. About one-third of the male returned migrants are self-employed whereas the proportion for women is less than one-eighth. The occupational distribution of the returned migrant in the three phases – before migration, during stay abroad and after return – is given in Table 7 (page 236).

The survey also shows that workers are engaged almost entirely in relatively low-income activities. The income of migrants is not significantly higher than at the pre-migration stage (Table 8, page 237). In the case of men, the proportion in the lowest income class of Rs 1,000 (US$27) per month declined from 85 per cent during the pre-migration phase to about 60 per cent during the post-migration phase. Except for this upward shift at the lowest level, not much improvement is observed. The proportion of those who have achieved the high income category of Rs 10,000 (US$270) and above is minuscule. Because income level alone may not be a reliable indicator of economic status, we collected information on savings in cash and kind held by respondents at the time of return (Table 9, page 238). It appears that a large number of returnees have substantial savings, although the information supplied by respondents in field surveys on matters of income and wealth tend to be underestimates. About one-fifth of the respondents said that they had total cash savings of Rs 50,000 and above.

On the whole, returned migrants are not satisfied back home. They complain about the local society and the state government which, according to them, show gross indifference to their problems of rehabilitation, security and development. Many, particularly those who had not been able to accumulate any savings, not even to redeem their debts from overseas migration, and would like to make another attempt, are disheartened by the fact that neither the government nor the banking agencies provide any financial help for the purpose. Table 10 (page 238) shows that about 13 per cent of respondents think that the government could have provided employment if they had developed the state's industrial sector by making use of the large amounts of unutilized bank credit. Another 14 per cent expect only welfare assistance from the government

(such as preferential treatment for admission for their wards in educational institutions, for admission and treatment in government dispensaries and hospitals, for pensions to old returned migrants, etc.). However, the vast majority expect some form of investment assistance from the government and financial institutions. This group, which includes all education and economic sectors, is looking for loan assistance to enable them to begin petty trading or small manufacturing units of the self-employment type. It is interesting that those who plan to begin larger size business units (8 per cent) are cynical of the investment climate in the state.

A question which naturally arises is "why not utilize the skills, work experience and savings of the returned migrants for promoting employment, increasing production and raising the pace of economic development of the state?" To examine this question, it is necessary to look into the state's socio-economic conditions and investment climate.

THE KERALA ECONOMY

The Kerala economy is Janus-faced: forward looking and advanced in its social sectors and backward looking and stagnant in its materially productive sectors. Indeed, the Kerala experience has become legendary and internationally known as a "unique case of spectacular achievement of a region in improving the quality of living of its population through enlightened policies and active public support and participation sustained over long periods of time, in an environment, surprisingly, of low per capita income and relative economic stagnation" (Dreze and Sen, 1995; also, United Nations, 1975; Franke and Chasin, 1992; Ramachandran, 1997; Nair, 1981; Dreze and Sen, 1997). It is often referred to in academic circles as the "Kerala Model". Table 11 (page 239) contains information on some of the important indices relating to this paradoxical situation.

Land and agriculture

Kerala is a land scarce economy. The average size of agricultural holdings is about 0.30 hectares. Almost the entire cultivable area has been brought under cultivation. Even forest lands which once covered about one-third of the land area have been encroached upon for human settlement and cultivation. The proportion of forest lands is now less than 10 per cent. Owing to the ever-increasing demand for land for non-agricultural uses (residential buildings, public offices, private business buildings and public roads), the area under cultivation is steadily declining. Increased demand for land has increased land prices to high levels.

Within agriculture, use of lands has increasingly shifted from annual crops to perennial tree crops (such as coconut, arecanut and cashewnut) and plantation

crops (mainly rubber). A major reason for the shift has been the non-profitability of rice cultivation due to high costs (mostly due to high labour costs) and the relatively low price of rice. Rates of growth of the agricultural sector during the 1970s and 1980s were extremely low and in some periods even negative. Rates have been relatively high since the end of the 1980s, due largely to steeply rising prices of commercial produce, particularly rubber and pepper. The shift from rice cultivation to cultivation of tree and plantation crops has resulted in a steep fall in demand for agricultural labour.

Labour

Kerala is known as a chronic labour surplus economy. All surveys on the labour market have shown that the levels of unemployment in the state, both of the highly educated and the less educated, of men and women, in the rural and the urban areas, and in the primary, secondary and tertiary sectors, are incredibly high and have been increasing continuously for several decades. An estimated one quarter of the labour force is unemployed, the highest rate for any state in India (Mathew, 1997).

While work participation rates were declining and unemployment levels were rising, real wages in all sectors, particularly for agricultural workers, artisans and workers in the unorganized and traditional industrial sectors, have been increasing. Such a paradoxical situation cannot be explained in the neo-classical framework of economic analysis. Its explanation has to be sought in political and institutional factors and in the increasing segmentation of the labour market, a process which gained strength due to the development of the social sectors and rise in progressive socio-political movements which began during the early decades of the present century.

Trade union activities began in Kerala during the 1920s and encompassed agricultural labour and workers in traditional agro-processing industries (such as coir making and cashew processing) and helped raise wage rates from abysmally low levels. Trade union activity and organized labour movements are considered to have performed this socially desirable role until about the 1960s. Since then, union activities have turned to intimidatory tactics: go slow, work-to-rule, short duration wildcat strikes, unofficial strikes and strikes in breach of settlements and agreements, became the order of the day (Nair, K. Ramachandran, 1994). Wage rates of agricultural labourers and artisans and construction workers in Kerala are three to four times higher than in most other states in India.

Capital, technology and entrepreneurship

Industrial investment and capital accumulation are low in Kerala even by Indian standards. During the 1930s, when industrial investment by

entrepreneurs from neighbouring regions was taking place, capitalists in Kerala were unprepared to make investment in industry for several reasons: slender resources, lack of entrepreneurship and unfavourable state policy towards domestic capitalists (Pillai and Shanta, 1997). It has not been the lack of financial resources which in recent times has hindered investments in the state. According to the latest available data, the banking sector in Kerala has a surfeit of deposits compared with demand for industrial credit. The credit-deposit ratio has been steadily in decline for the past several decades; as at September 30, 1997, it stood at 45 per cent, having declined from 63 per cent in 1984-85. The corresponding ratios in most other states in India are much higher. Banks are of the view that an adequate number of "bankable" projects are not received by them from the entrepreneurs in the state. About 40-45 per cent of bank deposits in the state are deposits of non-resident Indians, a major proportion of whom are expatriate contract workers in the Gulf region.

Major problems which bankers encounter in their efforts to raise the credit-deposit ratio include absence of proper industrial infrastructure and adequate power supply; problems in acquiring large areas of land in suitable locations at a reasonable price for setting up medium/large-scale industry; shifting of the traditional industries such as cashew and coir processing to tax and wage haven states in the neighbourhood; sickness of industries (around two-thirds of the 45 state public sector units which the banks have recently reviewed incurred losses and several major private industrial units remain closed with no new industries are coming up); and lack of entrepreneurial initiative in the state (Canara Bank, 1997; Abella, 1990).

In this context, we refer to the views expressed by the Round Table on Creating Climate for Industrial Growth and Employment by one of the Chambers of Commerce and Industry in Kerala. As early as 1988 they had expressed similar views in categorical terms: the major problem was that the state did not have an investment-friendly image; it is known as an area with turbulent industrial relations, wages higher than warranted by labour productivity, severe shortage of power and an irrational bias against modern technology. They pointed out that the state government had to take steps to refurbish the image of Kerala (Cochin Chamber, 1988).

In the absence of adequate demand for industrial finance within the state, funds flow into the rest of India in the form of shares and securities, purchased by people of Kerala, of companies floated elsewhere. Investment in "blade companies", those floated by dubious characters offering share holders highly attractive returns in kind and cash after varying periods of time, have impoverished many a well-to-do returned migrant. The companies avowedly indulge in several types of activities – dairy farming, teak plantations, housing complexes, cinema production, loan financing, etc. Thousands of persons,

among whom returned migrants form a considerable proportion, continue to get duped by such fake endeavours (Abella, 1990).

In more recent decades, industrialists have shifted their investments (in traditional industries such as cashew processing and handloom weaving) to neighbouring states, the major attraction for the shift being lower wages, absence of compulsion for making social security payments and industrial peace. New investments have not occurred in the state to any significant extent. Industrial units which were established were largely in the government sector and their performance has been deplorable due to political interference, pilferage, indifferent management and stagnant technology. Large and medium industries, as well as traditional industries, are remaining inefficient due to technological obsolescence.

Since the 1950s, the state government which came alternatively under the Congress, and the Communist-led coalitions, has followed a policy of effectively thwarting technological improvements in agriculture, industry and service sector activities, by raising the bogey of labour displacement (Kannan, 1997).

A major reason given for industrial backwardness (and the expansion of the tertiary sector) of Kerala is lack of industrial entrepreneurship. The relatively slow development of large and medium-scale industries is attributed to lack of entrepreneurs interested in the state's long-term industrial development. Kerala, it would seem, is still at the stage of capitalist development where projects which promise easy as well as quick money, and even speculative enterprises, seem to have appeal to those who have reasonable amounts of capital (Isaac and Tharakan, 1986). Such an outlook on the part of the entrepreneurial class has its historical roots (Isaac and Tharakan, 1986; Mahadevan, 1991). Pillai and Shanta have observed:

> The retarded development of the local capitalist class implied that the opportunities opened up on the eve of the withdrawal of European capital (in the 1940s) could not be exploited by them. They confined themselves to relatively secure and traditional areas of operation like commercial agriculture. The subsequent stagnation of the industrial sector accordingly can be explained by the drying up of the sources of merchant capital, fiscal crisis of the newly formed state, administrative problems and political instability, and inadequate central public investments, etc.

Infrastructure

Another major reason for the tardy growth of Kerala's industrial sector has been lack of adequate infrastructural facilities such as electricity and transportation network. In recent years, industries have functioned at far less

than full capacity due to cuts in power supply ranging from 30 per cent to 100 per cent. Acute shortage of transportation facilities, particularly the deplorable condition of roadways due to lack of maintenance for want of the requisite government funds to cope with the requirements of a growing industrial sector, has also been a draw back in Kerala.

Industrial policy

The government's attitude towards industrial development has remained lukewarm since the formation of the state in 1956. When the process of national economic planning began (in 1951) the emphasis in India was "growth with social justice". In the case of Kerala, the latter half of this slogan, namely social justice, received greater attention than in the rest of the country. In its fervour to promote social justice, government attention and support was devoted mainly to the amelioration of the working and living conditions of the labour class. Trade union activities and militant wage bargaining were overtly supported by the state. The socialist fervour was so high that private capital was looked upon with great suspicion and private investment was considered undesirable since it represented exploitation of the working class. Investment was promoted almost entirely in the public sector, and investment funds had to come either from the central government or from the state's own revenue sources. The state's fiscal resources were limited and little surplus funds remained for investment in directly productive sectors after financing the social sector activities and the government's other traditionally determined responsibilities. The major refrain of the state's explanation for its industrial backwardness and economic stagnation has been, in consequence, that the central government is not making its due share of investments in this state.

The economic policies of India have undergone a sea change in recent years. Now the slogans raised by policy makers in India are globalization, liberalization and privatization of the economy. Kerala has also fallen in line with this new approach to development, with the state making all-out efforts to attract foreign private investment and investment by non-resident Indians to Kerala. Efforts are also directed to raising investible resources from international agencies such as the Asian Development Bank and the World Bank. The government has also announced various policies designed to attract investors, including simplification of procedures for granting licences. The bogey of a hostile investment climate in Kerala however lingers.

RETURN MIGRATION POLICIES

The massive emigration of contract workers to the Gulf countries received little policy attention by the central government or the government of Kerala state. In 1994, the central government issued directions to state governments to take

care of the rehabilitation of returning migrants by setting up societies to guide and assist them in their rehabilitation through self employment, skill upgradation or wage employment programmes. Employment exchanges were asked by the central government to keep separate registers of returning migrants and provide assistance for placement in jobs (Government of India, 1996). These directions are yet to be implemented.

In Kerala, there is total absence of government policy regarding emigration. Indeed, the question whether or not to encourage the overseas migration of contract workers has not been addressed at all, and the task of monitoring the international migration process remained, until very recently, totally unattended. The government played hardly any role with regard to this process, except perhaps making promises of rehabilitation for the returnees and setting up an institution named Overseas Development and Employment Promotion Consultants. During a decade, this institution has secured foreign jobs for around 5,000 persons, mostly para-medical staff.

In 1996, the government of Kerala began to look into the problems of returning migrants in the context of the repatriation of several thousand amnesty returnees from the UAE. In August 1996, it set up a separate department to look after the problems of non-resident Keralites. The department's major areas of concern were to be the welfare of migrants and investment facilitation for them. The issues listed under welfare were problems relating to visa, accidents or deaths and grievances of non-resident Keralites as well as matters concerning their families back home. Under investment facilitation, the focal point was to be the channelling of remittances of non-resident Keralites into productive sectors in order to promote the state's economic development.

In an approach paper prepared in the context of setting up such a department, the government of Kerala made the following observation:

> There has not been any systematic effort to harness the potential of NOM (Non-Resident Malayalis) remittances for the development of the state. A good part of NOM investment, consequently, are routed into the black market or attracted into dubious investment rackets. As a result, the hard-earned money of these people are either wasted on conspicuous consumption like construction of houses or on unproductive and highly risky ventures. It is time that government took the lead in channelling NOM finances into productive sectors.

The approach paper emphasized action in three areas: welfare, rehabilitation and investment facilitation. Under welfare, the major concerns listed were (i) assistance during cases of accidents or death of workers while abroad, (ii) repatriation of persons in cases in which workers happen to be trapped abroad without valid emigration documents and (iii) assistance to workers' families in educational, medical and health, housing and legal problems.

Rehabilitation referred to provisions for placement in jobs or assistance for self-employment of migrants who return without adequate means of living. Under investment facilitation, the objective was, obviously, to channel migrants' savings into productive sectors: infrastructure and tourism. The importance of investment in other industries, as well as developing entrepreneurship among return migrants, was also emphasized. On the basis of these suggestions, a separate department for Non-Resident Keralites' Affairs (NORKA) was set up in December 1996.

The major achievement of the new department has been the launching of an accident and death insurance scheme for non-resident Keralites. Called the Pravasi Suraksha (Non-Resident Safety) Insurance Scheme, it provides for payment of a lump sum to persons (or their claimants) who meet with accident or death while abroad. The scheme has two components. According to scheme A, a person who enrols has to pay a membership fee of Rs 990 (about US$26) and is entitled to a maximum amount of Rs 50,000 (about US$1,350) in case of death or total disablement; in the other scheme, the membership fee is Rs 650 (about US$17) and the maximum amount of compensation is Rs 250,000 (about US$6,575). A person is entitled to compensation if the accident or death occurs within five years of becoming a member of the scheme. Within a few months of being launched in May 1997, membership was about 50,000. Several persons or their families have already benefited under this scheme (Government of Kerala, 1997a) which extended to the end of March 1998. Apart from this insurance scheme, however, the government has not taken any other action. No step has been initiated for generating employment for returned migrants. Nor has any attempt been made to utilize available migrants' savings for the development of the state's economy when about two-fifths of total bank deposits in Kerala is accounted for by the non-resident external accounts of Keralites (Table 12, page 239).

Thus we find that despite the fact that the government of Kerala has set up a department for looking into the affairs of the non-resident Keralites, it has not formulated any policy regarding migration or return migration. Nor has the government of India made any policy pronouncement with regard to emigration of contract workers, even though the signal contribution that the non-resident Indians make by way of remittances towards easing the country's balance of payments problem has received encomiums from political leaders and administrators.

However, several facilities exist for Non-Resident Indians (NRIs) to make investments in India, including incentives under various repatriable schemes (such as 100 per cent scheme, 40 per cent scheme, revival of sick units scheme, and incentives for investment in Free Trade Zones, Export Processing Zones and Export-Oriented Units, Domestic Mutual Funds, Portfolio investment schemes, and Company Deposits), non-repatriable schemes (such as New

Issues of Shares/Debentures and Proprietary/Partnership Concerns) and other facilities to invest in non-convertible debentures, existing shares and debentures of private companies, mutual funds, banking services and trading houses. NRIs are allowed also to import gold and silver in limited quantities as part of their baggage once in six months. Tax concessions are also permitted. Compared with these facilities, those granted specifically to returning migrants are limited. They are permitted to keep assets abroad and also convert deposits already made in India under non-resident foreign currency accounts into resident foreign currency accounts and repatriate the amount abroad.

Investment facilities offered NRIs have attracted large capital flows to India, even though annual flows have fluctuated widely. The outstanding balance of NRI deposits under various schemes at the end of March 1997 was US$20.5 billion (RBI, 1997). Apart from deposits, annual NRI investments to India account for one-fifth to one-third of the foreign investment flows into the country.

Investment incentives and attractive facilities for bank deposits offered to NRIs should, theoretically speaking, increase savings and homeward remittances. However, this need not be true in the case of overseas contract workers in the Gulf region. No doubt in recent years the proportion of external transfers made by them to India through the proper channel has increased, thanks to these incentives. Since they know that they would not be granted domicile rights in the host countries, and that their job tenure was only for limited periods, they saved to the maximum extent possible and transferred home most of such savings. For the NRIs who are permanent residents in foreign countries, investment incentives may help direct their savings to India for direct or indirect investment or bank deposits. However, Indian experience shows that the number of NRIs domiciled in other countries who opt to return permanently to India has been very small.

IMPACT EVALUATION

Several studies have observed that the impact of migration of contract workers to Gulf countries on the economy of the Kerala state has, by and large, been positive; not only has it raised the standards of living of migrants' households, it has also raised levels of economic activity in construction, trade, transport and personal services in the regions concerned. Nevertheless, its contribution to the state's economic growth in terms of agriculture and industry has been extremely small.

The methodologies used in studies for evaluating the impact of migration (through activities such as remittances as disposition of savings) are however

quite general in so far as they have not been able to isolate migration impacts from other developments in the economy (Nair, 1989). Nevertheless, the studies gain credence in the sense that migration has taken place largely from backward areas, poor communities and less educated groups. An appropriate method of impact evaluation in an already dynamic society and economy remains to be developed.

CRITERIA FOR EVALUATION OF SUCCESS OR FAILURE

The success or failure of migration for an individual has to be evaluated in terms of his/her emigration goals. In the case of a state, success would have to be evaluated in terms of its migration policies. With regard to the latter, it is obvious that the state, whether at the level of central government or government of Kerala, did not have any policy or policy objective for migration of overseas contract labour. The government's role was confined to facilitating the emigration of persons who wanted to go abroad for their own private economic benefit. Though the governments have in recent years acknowledged the signal contribution made by migrant workers to foreign exchange accruals, acquisition of foreign exchange through migrants' remittances was not a policy goal of the government of India at any time. It is therefore not possible to make an evaluation from the macro-economic point of view; what is possible is to observe the impacts of migration on the society and the economy. In this situation, discussion is confined to criteria for evaluation of the relative success or failure from the migrant's (micro) point of view.

Success and failure are multi-dimensional concepts which, besides the basic economic aspect, also include psychological, social, political and cultural aspects. While economic aspects can, to a large extent, be measured in quantitative (including monetary) terms, the others are not easily quantifiable. Some have purely subjective characteristics. One should therefore address directions of change rather than magnitudes of change. But here again problems remain. The directions of change indicated by the different variables may also differ. For instance, while a person has succeeded economically, he may have lost in terms of family relationship and social status. However, in all emigration episodes of temporary contract workers, economic motivation has been observed as the most important. Therefore, it may not be far amiss if, as a shorthand method, success or failure is reckoned in terms of economic variables. An alternative would be to give larger weights to economic variables or to select larger number of economic than non-economic variables keeping the weights the same. It should also be borne in mind that motivations as reported by respondents should lie within the realm of feasibility and rational expectations. Studies have shown that in the case of returned migrants to Kerala, the direction of economic change has been positive only to a very limited extent, and only to a section of the migrants (Nair, 1991).

SUGGESTIONS

Migration from Kerala to the Gulf countries is predominantly by persons in poor economic conditions, with low educational background and little vocational or technical training. Flows, both onward and return, continue unabated. Large numbers go illegally and encounter hardships and humiliation abroad. Cases of cheating, harassment, breach of contract and ill treatment abound. However, migrants save and send remittances home to the maximum extent possible. Hundreds of thousands of returned migrants make do with low-paid, unskilled employment or with no employment at all. Those who have substantial savings and would like to make productive investments find the home climate investment-unfriendly. Small business and self-employment is the dream of a large proportion of returned migrants, but they do not have the required savings and the technical competence to translate their dreams into action. Several government schemes help the small investor, with provisions for concessional loans and technical advice, though none exists for the returned migrant as such. Meanwhile, large amounts languish unutilized in the vaults of banks.

The prevailing impression among policy makers and administrators in Kerala used to be that the returned migrants are a wealthy lot, an impression that only recently has undergone some change. In the approach paper referred to above, it was stated that returned migrants belonged to different categories: the poor and the disabled who needed welfare assistance; the young and the healthy who looked for employment and rehabilitation assistance; and the well off and venturesome who seek investment facilities and encouragement. The respondents in our survey are represented in all these groups. Based on their views and opinions, as well as on the views expressed by government officials, political leaders and other social activists whom we interviewed, we present a set of suggestions relating to maximum utilization of the development potential of returned migrants.

Information base. The most basic requirement for the success of programmes designed to assist returned migrants is a reliable information base. The entire migration process now occurs without monitoring by either the state government or the government of India. It is not difficult, administratively speaking, for the state to keep up-to-date employment exchange registers of persons going abroad as contract workers and persons returning home after various periods of stay and work abroad, with details on education, skills, countries of destination and types of work. Such registers should be prepared at the lowest level self-government agency and consolidated at the higher levels of the district and the state, as may be required for administrative purposes.

Organizational and institutional arrangements. Most returned migrants would, if assisted, establish small production or service units on a self-

employment basis or as small proprietors of firms. While the majority are poor, they constitute a disciplined and hard working group. In order to assist them to establish small business units, there should be agencies functioning at the local levels. In Kerala, the entire planning process, and the institutions of planning, are being reorganized with a view to making planning a people's endeavour. Development plans are prepared at the level of the lowest self-governing agency, namely the Panchayat, as the unit, taking into account resource endowments (men, materials and finance) of the locality, and with various time perspectives of development. In this context it should be possible to take account of the capabilities, needs and aspirations of returned migrants on the one hand,and their employment and entrepreneurial potentials on the other, and to incorporate schemes for their rehabilitation in local development plans. In Kerala, large numbers of cooperative societies are functioning in agricultural marketing, agricultural credit, industrial production and banking. Under the aegis of the local level plan, and within the cooperative framework, returned migrants could be mobilized on cooperative lines for maximizing their development potential. It should be also possible to mobilize their savings for granting loans (for establishing small production and service units) and financing medium and large-scale industry, provided such loans were under-written by an appropriate governmental agency.

Infrastructural development. In Kerala, shortage of electric power has been a serious development bottleneck for about two decades. Cheap, uninterrupted and stable electricity is an essential prerequisite for investment in modern industries. It should be possible for the government to harness the investment potential of the returned migrants for constructing small-scale electricity-generating plants for local level development by providing guarantees to investors of attractive rates of return on capital invested.

Earmarking investments for returned migrants. In Kerala, no scheme exists for the mobilization of savings and the development potential of returned migrants. We suggest that some types of investments be earmarked for returned migrants in specific localities. The major area proposed for preferential treatment is tourism development. Kerala has unlimited potential for attracting tourists. However, tourism infrastructure needs to be developed. Returned migrants are also interested to make investments (with loan finance) in agriculture (e.g., diary, fish and poultry farming, agro-processing, etc.). Several schemes already exist in the state (and in the country) of concessional loans and other encouragement for the small-scale investor, but returned migrants complain that these are paper schemes, hardly ever accessible to them, with the government and the banks turning them away whenever approached for assistance. Such conditions may not be a feature peculiar to Kerala, but common in most developing societies.

Counselling and training. There is near total absence of facilities for counselling returned migrants who aspire to make investments or take up new

employment or engage in unfamiliar economic activities. There is need to take the returnees into confidence, ascertain their requirements and aspirations, give them proper guidance, and render them training wherever requested or needed. At present, the government has little idea as to who the returnees are, where they live, their skills, experience and aspirations, and what type of assistance they are looking for. Nor is there any agency other than the government to help returned migrants in matters of rehabilitation and development.

Creation of an investment-friendly climate. Investments on a significant scale seldom take place in Kerala in its most vital growth-promoting sectors – agriculture, industry and infrastructure, even though the banks are surfeit with funds, educated and talented workforce goes unemployed and entrepreneurs are seeking investment avenues. The problem is prevalence of a "climate" that is hostile to investment. Potential and actual entrepreneurs among returned migrants whom we interviewed were unanimous in their condemnation of the investment climate caused mainly by short-sighted political leadership, irresponsible trade union activities, corrupt officials, unhelpful banks, undisciplined and insincere workers, harassing tax officials and inscrutable rules of procedure. Investors seldom risk capital in such an inhospitable environment. Although claims made by the government that tax rules have been simplified, procedures for licensing have been made transparent (by introduction of measures such as the "single window" scheme), corruption is being weeded out, labour has been asked to realize their duties and also their rights, tax officials have been asked to "behave", and the investment climate remains gloomy and uninviting to investors. While the "climate" has changed to some extent, the image persists. Investors need to be reassured of an orderly and congenial investment atmosphere in the state. In this matter, strong political will is needed.

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TABLE 1

INDIAN AND KERALITE EXPATRIATE POPULATION IN THE VARIOUS COUNTRIES IN THE GULF REGION, 1997
(thousands)

Host Country	Indians	Of which Keralites
Kingdom of Saudi Arabia	1,600	800
United Arab Emirates	500	350
Kuwait	250	125
Bahrain	200	125
Oman	150	100
Qtar	150	100
Total	2,850	1,600

Source: Government of Kerala (1997b).

TABLE 2a

PROFILE OF RETURNED MIGRANTS IN KERALA, 1985
(per cent)

	On the eve of first migration	In the post-return phase
Age		
Less than 20 years	9.2	0.3
20-25 years	31.7	8.3
25-35 years	37.5	40.7
35-45 years	17.4	30.2
45-60 years	4.2	18.7
60 years and above		1.8
Total	100.0	100.0
Marital Status		
Single	50.0	17.0
Married	49.9	81.6
Divorced		0.9
Separated	0.1	0.4
Widowed		0.1
Total	100.0	100.0
General Education		
Illiterate	6.6	6.6
Literates (primary level)	47.6	47.6
Literates (secondary level)	21.7	21.7
Matriculate	18.1	18.1
College educated (with no degree)	3.3	3.3
Degree holders (1st degree)	2.4	2.4
Degree holders (post-graduate)	0.3	0.3
Total	100.0	100.0

Source: Nair, P.R. Gopinathan (1986).

TABLE 2b

PROFILE OF RETURNED MIGRANTS IN KERALA, 1985
(per cent)

	On the eve of first migration	In the post-return phase
Activity Status		
Unemployed	38.1	59.2
Employed	32.6	13.8
Self-employed	27.6	25.1
Student	1.7	0.3
Invalid		0.6
Retired		1.0
Total	100.0	100.0
Household Income (in rupees)		
< 1,000	32.0	30.7
1,000-2,500	11.2	3.7
2,500-5,000	15.1	6.6
5,000-7,500	10.3	12.4
7,500-10,000	6.5	4.9
10,000-20,000	16.3	22.4
20,000-30,000	5.0	7.8
30,000-50,000	2.6	9.1
> 50,000	0.9	2.5
Total	100.0	100.0

Source: Nair, P.R. Gopinathan (1986).

TABLE 3

GENERAL EDUCATIONAL LEVEL BY SEX
(per cent)

Educational level	Male	Female	Total
Illiterate	4.0	11.8	5.3
Literate	96.0	88.2	94.7
of which primary level	20.1	49.0	25.0
of which middle level	17.7	19.6	18.0
of which high level	44.5	17.7	40.0
of which college	13.7	1.9	11.7
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source: Field Survey by the author, December 1997.

TABLE 4

PERIOD OF FINAL RETURN BY SEX
(per cent)

Period	Male	Female	Total
Before 1970	0.8		0.7
1970-1980	2.4	2.0	2.3
1980-1985	9.6	7.8	6.3
1985-1990	16.9	23.5	21.1
1990-1995	26.1	41.2	28.6
1995	8.0		6.7
1996	13.3	13.7	13.3
1997	22.9	11.8	21.0
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source: Field Survey by the author, December 1997.

TABLE 5

RESPONDENTS BY COUNTRIES FROM WHICH RETURNED
(per cent)

Name of country	Respondents
Bahrain	1.4
Kingdom of Saudi Arabia	36.1
Kuwait	18.1
Oman	8.6
Qtar	1.6
United Arab Emirates	32.6
Others	1.6
Total	100.0

Source: Field Survey by the author, December 1997.

TABLE 6

DISTRIBUTION OF RETURN MIGRANTS BY REASONS FOR RETURN
(per cent)

Reasons for return	Male	Female	Total
A. Employment (abroad) related:			
Expiry of visa	9.6	17.7	11.0
Termination of job	0.8		0.7
Poor salary/poor working conditions/harrassment by the employers and officials	22.1	19.6	21.7
Refusal by employer to extend period of visa, job, closure of firms, breach of contract by employer, forced expatriation	41.8	15.7	37.4
Total A	74.3	53.0	70.8
B. Medical reasons	12.8	13.7	13.0
C. Family problems	2.8	7.8	3.7
D. Gulf war (1990)	2.8	21.6	6.0
E. Work opportunity in home country	0.8		0.7
F. Voluntary retirement	6.4	3.9	6.0
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source: Field Survey by the author, December 1997.

TABLE 7

OCCUPATIONAL STATUS OF RETURN MIGRANTS BY SEX
(per cent)

Occupation	Before migration			During stay abroad			After return		
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
1. Traders, technicians, managers, administrators and businessmen	3.6		3.0	8.4		7.0	1.6		1.3
2. Office workers (clerks, typists, accountants etc.)	2.0		1.7	6.4		5.3	1.2	2.0	1.3
3. Tradesmen, sales personnel, fish/vegetable vendors, petty-shopkeepers, etc.	14.8	21.6	16.0	7.6		6.3	10.4	11.8	10.7
4. Cooks, waiters, housekeepers, labourers, sweepers, cleaners	6.8		5.7	11.2	100.0	26.3	13.7	5.9	12.3
5. Small farmers, agricultural workers, fishermen, coir-workers, etc.	22.1	13.7	20.7	13.7		11.3	21.7	7.8	19.3
6. Carpenters, masons, plumbers, electricians, painters, etc.	16.1		13.3	21.7		18.0	8.8		7.3
7. Drivers, stationary equipment/engine operators, defence/police personnel, etc.	3.6		3.0	7.6		6.3	4.0		3.3
8. Unskilled workers	17.3	5.9	15.3	22.1		18.3	13.3	9.8	12.7
9. Retired							8.5	13.7	9.3
10. Unemployed	13.7	58.8	21.3	1.2		1.0	16.8	49.0	22.4
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source: Field survey by the author, December 1997.

TABLE 8

MONTHLY INCOME LEVELS OF RETURNED MIGRANTS BY SEX
(per cent)

Income level (Indian Rupees)	Before migration			During stay abroad			After return		
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
≤ 1,000	84.8	100.0	87.4	7.2	29.4	11.0	59.4	100.0	66.3
1,000-2,500	12.4		10.3	18.5	25.5	19.7	27.7		23.0
2,500-5,000	2.8		2.3	32.9	41.2	34.3	10.4		8.7
5,000-7,500				13.2	2.0	11.3	0.8		0.7
7,500-10,000				10.9		9.0	1.2		1.0
10,000-20,000				10.9		9.0	0.4		0.3
20,000-30,000				3.6		3.0			
30,000-50,000				2.4		2.0			
≥ 50,000				0.4	2.0	0.7			
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source: Field survey by the author, December 1997.

TABLE 9

SAVINGS IN CASH AND KIND OF THE MIGRANTS AT THE TIME OF RETURN
(per cent)

Savings Range (Indian Rupees)	In cash	In Kind
< 5,000	68.0	56.7
5,000-10,000	2.3	0.3
10,000-20,000	2.3	3.0
20,000-30,000	3.7	3.0
30,000-50,000	3.7	1.7
50,000-100,000	6.3	7.0
100,000-500,000	12.0	15.3
> 500,000	1.7	13.0
Total	100.0	100.0

Source: Field Survey by the author, December 1997.

TABLE 10

RETURNED MIGRANTS ACCORDING TO ASSISTANCE EXPECTED FOR REHABILITATION/DEVELOPMENT
(per cent)

Type of assistance expected	Male	Female	Total
1. Employment assistance	12.9	13.7	13.0
2. Welfare programmes	9.2	35.3	13.7
3. Investment assistance:			
a. loans	65.5	43.1	61.7
b. creation of favourable investment climate	9.6		8.0
c. counselling and training	1.2		1.0
4. No expectation	1.6	7.8	2.6
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source: Field Survey by the author, December 1997.

TABLE 11

PHYSICAL, SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC INDICATORS, KERALA AND INDIA

Description	Kerala	India
Geographical area (thousand sq. km)	38.9	3,065.0
Population, 1991 (million)	29.1	846.3
Density of population, 1991 (persons per sq. km)	749	274
Sex ratio, 1991 (females per 1,000 males)	1,036	927
Birth rate, 1993 (per 1,000 population)	17.3	28.5
Death rate, 1993 (per 1,000 population)	6.0	9.2
Infant mortality rate 1993 (per 1,000 live births)	13	74
Expectation of life at birth, 1990 (years)		
Males	68.8	59.0
Females	74.4	59.4
Literacy rate, 1991 of population above 7 years of age (per cent)		
Males	93.6	64.1
Females	86.2	39.3
Per capita income, 1995-96 (Indian rupees)	8,007	9,321
Work participation rate, 1991 (per cent)		
Males	47.6	51.6
Females	15.9	22.3

Source: Government of India (1997) and Government of Kerala (1997c).

TABLE 12

COMMERCIAL BANK DEPOSITS IN KERALA, 1994-1997
(Rs million)

Year	Total deposits	Of which non-resident external (NRE) deposits	NRE deposits as proportion of total deposits
March 1994	149,410	60,146	40.3
March 1995	174,579	68,776	39.4
March 1996	201,713	81,034	40.2
March 1997	233,536	101,781	43.6
September 1997	244,984	109,700	44.8

Source: Canara Bank (1997).

LE RETOUR DES TRAVAILLEURS CONTRACTUELS DE L'OUTRE-MER ET LEUR RÉINSERTION AU KÉRALA (INDE)

Un compte-rendu critique des politiques, des résultats et des perspectives en la matière

L'émigration à grande échelle de travailleurs contractuels temporaires du Kérala vers les pays du Moyen-Orient a commencé au début des années 70. Ce n'est qu'après le milieu des années 80 que les flux migratoires de retour au Kérala ont pris une certaine ampleur. Ceux qui ont ainsi fait le voyage de retour étaient notamment des clandestins rapatriés et des migrants évacués lors de troubles politiques ou d'hostilités.

Depuis la fin des années 80, il y a ainsi eu plusieurs vagues de rapatriements. Si l'on ne dispose pas d'informations fiables sur les questions de migration au Kérala, ni même sur l'ampleur des flux de départ ou de retour, on peut quand même chiffrer le nombre total de migrants revenus au pays à un demi-million environ.

En général, les migrants rentrés au pays sont des personnes d'âge moyen n'ayant que peu d'éducation, de qualifications et d'expérience. Après leur retour, près de la moitié d'entre eux restent sans emploi, tandis que, dans l'autre moitié, un faible pourcentage se retire de la vie active et les autres fondent leur propre petite entreprise, principalement dans le secteur des services, ou se font embaucher comme salariés, ou se font payer à la tâche dans l'agriculture ou la pêche.

Les migrants rentrés au pays n'ont reçu que très peu d'aide du gouvernement de l'Etat ou d'une autre institution en vue de leur réinsertion. Le climat économique et socio-politique du Kérala reste défavorable à l'investissement en raison d'un ensemble de contraintes telles que la rareté des terres, la segmentation du marché du travail, le déséquilibre entre les salaires et la productivité du travail, le syndicalisme militant, l'idéologie politique hostile à la croissance du secteur capitaliste privé, ou encore l'inadéquation des infrastructures en matière d'énergie et de transport.

Les pertes que subissent les entreprises du secteur capitaliste publique ont découragé les migrants rentrés au pays de confier leurs économies au Gouvernement, mais ils ont été abusés par plusieurs entreprises bidon du secteur privé qui les ont convaincus d'acheter des parts. Jusque-là sourd aux problèmes des émigrants, le Gouvernement de l'Etat a commencé à s'en soucier à partir de 1996, lorsqu'il a introduit pour les Kéralites non résidents un système d'assurance-vie et de protection contre les accidents. Toutefois, aucun programme spécifique pour l'exploitation du potentiel de développement qu'offrent les migrants rentrés au pays n'a encore vu le jour.

L'expérience nouvelle de développement au niveau local entreprise au Kérala avec la participation active de la population, l'accès à des coopératives de crédit à tous les niveaux et les possibilités immenses de développement du Kérala offrent une nouvelle opportunité de canalisation du potentiel de développement des migrants rentrés au pays dans un investissement productif.

RETORNO DE LOS TRABAJADORES CON CONTRATO EN ULTRAMAR Y SU REHABILITACIÓN Y DESARROLLO EN KERALA (INDIA)
Un recuento crítico de las políticas, del rendimiento y de las perspectivas

La emigración en gran escala de trabajadores con contratos temporeros de Kerala a países en el Medio Oriente se inició a principios de los años setenta. Las corrientes migratorias de retorno a Kerala cobraron importantes proporciones únicamente después de mediados de los años ochenta. Los migrantes retornantes incluían a inmigrantes ilegales repatriados e inmigrantes evacuados durante épocas de levantamientos políticos y hostilidades.

Desde finales de los años ochenta hubo varias instancias en que se llevó a cabo dicha repatriación. Si bien no se dispone de información fidedigna sobre cuestiones migratorias en Kerala, ni siquiera sobre la magnitud de las corrientes de ida o de vuelta, el número total de migrantes retornados en Kerala ya debe alcanzar el medio millón.

En general, los migrantes de retorno son personas adultas con bajos niveles de educación, pocas competencias y experiencia. Tras el retorno, alrededor de la mitad permaneció sin empleo y de la otra mitad unos cuantos se retiraron de la vida activa mientras que el resto se autoempleó, principalmente en el sector de servicios, u obtuvo empleos asalariados, o pasó a trabajar como jornaleros en el sector agrícola o de la pesca.

Los migrantes que han retornado han recibido poca asistencia del gobierno estatal o de cualquier otra institución para su rehabilitación y desarrollo. El clima sociopolítico y económico en el Estado sigue siendo hostil a la inversión, en razón de diversas restricciones tales como la escasez de tierras, la segmentación del mercado laboral, las tasas salariales superiores a la productividad laboral, el sindicalismo militante, la ideología política en contra del crecimiento del sector capitalista privado y la insuficiencia de infraestructura de energía y transporte.

Las empresas públicas del sector capitalista que registran pérdidas han desalentado a los migrantes de retorno a confiar sus ahorros al gobierno y varias seudoempresas del sector privado, que los atrajeron para que participaran en la

compra de acciones, los han engañado. La inercia demostrada por el gobierno estatal para responder a los problemas de los emigrantes comenzó a cambiar después de 1996, cuando introdujo una política de seguros de accidentes y vida para los residentes no keralitas. Pero hasta la fecha no se cuenta con un mecanismo específico para encarar el potencial de desarrollo de los migrantes que retornan.

Se ha iniciado una nueva experiencia en Kerala de apoyo a nivel local con la activa participación de la gente, y se cuenta con agencias cooperativas de crédito a todos los niveles locales e inmensas posibilidades de desarrollo del Estado que ofrecen una nueva oportunidad para canalizar el potencial de desarrollo de los migrantes que retornan a la inversión productiva.