

International Labour Migration of Women from Kerala: Socio-Economic Impacts and the Push-Pull Factors

A Thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the award of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Population Studies

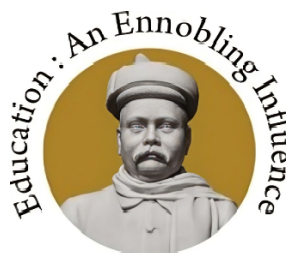
By

JESBIN SKARIAH THOMAS

Under the guidance/ supervision of

Dr. Vini Sivanandan

At



Gopal Krishna Gokhale

Gokhale Institute of Politics and Economics (GIPE)

846, BMCC Rd, Deccan Gymkhana,

Pune, Maharashtra 411004

September 2025



Gokhale Institute of Politics and Economics

(Founded by Rao Bahadur R.R. Kale, Satara)
(Deemed to be University u/s 3 of the UGC Act, 1956)
846, Shivajinagar, B.M.C.C. Road
PUNE - 411 004 (INDIA)

DECLARATION

I, Jesbin Skariah Thomas, hereby declare that the thesis entitled “*International Labour Migration of Women from Kerala: Socio-economic Impacts and the Push-Pull Factors*” submitted to Gokhale Institute of Politics and Economics (GIPE) for the award of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, is the result of original research work carried out by me under the supervision of Dr. Vini Sivanandan.

This thesis has not been submitted previously for the award of any degree, diploma, associateship, or fellowship in any university or institution. To the best of my knowledge and belief, the present work represents an independent and original contribution to the existing body of knowledge on the subject.

Place: Pune, Maharashtra

Date: 17/09/2025

Jesbin Skariah Thomas



Gokhale Institute of Politics and Economics

(Founded by Rao Bahadur R.R. Kale, Satara)
(Deemed to be University u/s 3 of the UGC Act, 1956)
846, Shivajinagar, B.M.C.C. Road
PUNE - 411 004 (INDIA)

CERTIFICATE

(FORM 'A')

CERTIFIED that the work incorporated in this thesis entitled ***“International Labour Migration of Women from Kerala: Socio-economic Impacts and the Push-Pull Factors”*** submitted by Jesbin Skariah Thomas (Reg. No. PhD202014) was carried out by the candidate under my supervision. It is an original contribution and has not been submitted elsewhere for the award of any other degree. Such material as has been obtained from other sources has been duly acknowledged in this thesis. I recommend that the thesis should be considered for the award of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

Dr. Vini Sivanandan
(Research Guide)
Gokhale Institute of Politics and Economics,
Pune – 411004

Pune, Maharashtra
17/09/2025

PLAGIARISM REPORT

Jesbin Thomas

Jesbin_Skariah_Thomas.pdf

 Gokhale Institute Of Politics & Economics, Pune

Document Details

Submission ID

trn:oid::16608:89874822

Submission Date

Apr 6, 2025, 12:50 PM GMT+5:30

Download Date

Apr 6, 2025, 12:58 PM GMT+5:30

File Name

Jesbin_Skariah_Thomas.pdf

File Size

1.3 MB

148 Pages

40,169 Words

231,151 Characters



Page 2 of 153 - Integrity Overview

Submission ID trn:oid::16608:89874822

5% Overall Similarity

The combined total of all matches, including overlapping sources, for each database.

Filtered from the Report

- Bibliography
- Quoted Text
- Cited Text
- Small Matches (less than 14 words)

Match Groups

-  **61 Not Cited or Quoted 5%**
Matches with neither in-text citation nor quotation marks
-  **0 Missing Quotations 0%**
Matches that are still very similar to source material
-  **0 Missing Citation 0%**
Matches that have quotation marks, but no in-text citation
-  **0 Cited and Quoted 0%**
Matches with in-text citation present, but no quotation marks

Top Sources

- 4%  Internet sources
- 2%  Publications
- 2%  Submitted works (Student Papers)

Integrity Flags

1 Integrity Flag for Review

-  **Replaced Characters**
9 suspect characters on 4 pages
Letters are swapped with similar characters from another alphabet.

Our system's algorithms look deeply at a document for any inconsistencies that would set it apart from a normal submission. If we notice something strange, we flag it for you to review.

A Flag is not necessarily an indicator of a problem. However, we'd recommend you focus your attention there for further review.

Dedicated to my family

I dedicate this work to my beloved parents, Thomas Skariah and Valsamma Thomas, whose love, sacrifices, and support have guided me throughout my life. They may not have had many opportunities themselves, but they gave me the values and strength to follow my dreams. This PhD is as much their achievement as it is mine.

To my wife, Silla Varghese, thank you for your constant support, patience, and love. You stood by me through every challenge, and this journey would not have been possible without you.

And to my daughter, Agatha, whose smile gave me hope and joy during the most difficult times. You inspired me in ways you may not yet understand.

This thesis is for all of you — with love and gratitude.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The completion of this PhD thesis marks the culmination of a remarkable five-year journey, one that has been enriched by the support, guidance, and encouragement of many individuals to whom I am deeply grateful.

First and foremost, I would like to express my profound gratitude to my esteemed guides, Dr. Vini Sivanandan. Her unwavering support, insightful guidance, and constant encouragement have been invaluable throughout this research. Their expertise and patience have greatly influenced my academic and personal growth, for which I am truly thankful.

I am also deeply indebted to the Gokhale Institute of Politics and Economics (GIPE). The academic environment, the vast resources of the library, and the support provided through the monthly presentations and expert comments have significantly helped me improve my research. The institute has offered an exceptional platform to pursue my academic interests and achieve my research goals.

My sincere thanks go to the PhD Coordinators, Dr. Rajesh Danane, Dr. Manisha Shinde, and Dr. K.S. Hari, whose efficient management and support have been instrumental in navigating the administrative aspects of my doctoral program. Their commitment to ensuring a smooth and conducive research journey is greatly appreciated.

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to Prof. Ram B Bhagat (GIPE) and Dr. Kailash Chandra Das. (IIPS, Mumbai) for their invaluable expertise and constructive feedback during my synopsis presentation. I am also thankful to the reviewer for their insightful comments, which have greatly enriched the quality of my work.

I extend my heartfelt thanks to the Centre for Development Studies (CDS) for providing access to the KMS data, which has been crucial to my research.

I am fortunate to have had the company of wonderful colleagues and friends, whose camaraderie and intellectual discussions have enriched my research experience. Special thanks to my friends Ravi Durga Prasad, Koustav Ghosh, Bidita Dhar who

have been a constant source of support and encouragement, helping me overcome numerous challenges during this journey.

I am deeply grateful to my family for their unwavering support throughout this journey. To my parents, brother, and in-laws in Kerala — thank you for instilling in me the values of perseverance and a deep respect for learning. This achievement is as much yours as it is mine.

And to my wife — your patience, understanding, and steady support have been my greatest strength. I could not have done this without you by my side.

Place: Pune, Maharashtra
Date: 17th September 2025

Jesbin Skariah Thomas

Table of Content

Chapter 1: Introduction.....	1
1.1 Introduction.....	1
1.2 When women migrates	3
1.3 Emigration Prospects	4
1.3.1 International Migrant (Emigrant)	6
1.3.2 Skilled Emigrant.....	6
1.3.3 Area of Origin (Departure)	7
1.3.4 Area of Destination (Arrival)	7
Chapter 2: Review of Literature	8
2.1 Background.....	8
2.2 Feminization of Migration: Global and Kerala Context.....	10
2.3 Socioeconomic Vulnerabilities and Marginalization.....	11
2.4 Gendered Migration Policies and State Regulations	12
2.5 Economic Impact and Remittance Dependency	13
2.6 Demand of skilled women workers Internationally.....	14
2.7 The characteristics of women emigrant labours from Kerala.....	15
2.8 Labour Market Segmentation	16
2.9 Social and Cultural Impacts.....	17
2.9.1 Return Migration and Reintegration Challenges for Female Migrants	18
2.10 Intersectionality in Migration.....	20
2.10.1 Caste and Class-Based Migration Disparities.....	20
2.10.2 Ethnicity and Migration Restrictions	20
2.11 Psychosocial and Health Impacts.....	21
2.11.1 Pre-Migration Psychological Stress.....	21
2.11.2 Workplace Stress and Mental Health Challenges.....	21
2.11.3 Impact of Family Separation on Mental Well-Being.....	22
2.12 Gender-Based Violence and Exploitation	22
2.12.1 Workplace Exploitation and Harassment of Female Migrants.....	22
2.12.2 Exploitation of Female Migrants in Other Labor Sectors.....	23
2.12.3 Structural Factors Contributing to Gender-Based Violence in	
Migration	23

2.12.4	Lack of Labor Protections for Female Migrants.....	23
2.12.5	Social and Cultural Barriers to Reporting Gender-Based Violence	24
2.12.6	Employer Control Over Migrant Women’s Freedom.....	24
2.13	Special Drivers and Contexts	24
2.13.1	Trafficking of Women for Domestic and Sex Work	24
2.13.2	Trafficking Routes and Methods	25
2.13.3	Lack of Legal Protections for Trafficked Women.....	25
2.13.4	Climate Change as a Driver of Female Migration.....	25
2.13.5	Case Study: Climate Migration in South Asia.....	26
2.14	Push pull factors	27
2.15	Skilled Migration Trends	29
2.16	Synthesis, Research Gaps.....	31
2.16.1	Key Research Gaps.....	33
Chapter 3: Methodology		34
3.1	The Need for the study.....	34
3.2	Problem statement.....	35
3.3	Research Questions:.....	35
3.4	Research Objectives.....	36
3.5	Data Source.....	36
3.6	The Kerala Migration Survey (KMS) 2018.....	37
3.6.1	Data Collection and Survey Design	37
3.6.2	Sampling Methodology	37
3.6.3	Survey Modules and Sessions	38
3.7	Tools and Methods.....	39
3.7.1	Determinants of International labor Migration of Women @ Place of origin	39
3.7.2	Determinants of Working Status of Internationally migrated women from Kerala.....	40
3.7.3	Determinants of Remittance Behavior	41
3.7.4	In Depth Interviews	43
3.8	Organization of the dissertation.....	46
3.9	Conceptual Frame work.....	47
Chapter 4: Individual migration from Kerala to Global: Pattern, trends and gender differentials.....		48

4.1	Overall trend of emigration from Kerala	49
4.2	Emigration trend by gender Differentials	50
4.3	Emigration trend by Age differentials	53
4.4	Trends of Never married Emigrants for two decades	54
4.5	Trends of emigration by secondary education	55
4.6	Emigration trend & Gender differentials at destination Countries	56
4.7	Pattern of Emigration by place of Origin.....	56
4.7.1	Gender Gap of Emigrants at place of destination.....	63
4.8	Trend of Emigration by economic activity at place of Destination.....	66
4.9	Summary	68
Chapter 5: Levels, Patterns and Differentials of International Migration of women labour force from Kerala.		70
5.1	Socio-economic Profile of emigrant women	70
5.2	Level of Education of Emigrant Women	74
5.3	Economic Activity of Emigrants – Pre & Post Migration	77
5.4	Occupation of Emigrant women -Pre Post-migration.....	81
5.5	Occupation Growth Reported from Pre to Post Migration among Emigrant Women	83
5.5.1	Occupational Growth Patterns among Migrant Women	83
5.6	Income Shift- Before – to- After Migration.....	85
5.7	Reasons of emigration	88
5.8	Migration Exposure of Women Labour Migrant from Close Family Members	89
5.9	Solo Female Migration Patterns from Families	90
5.10	Migration Patterns and Economic Activities of Solo Female Migrants ..	92
5.10.1	Economic Activity of Solo Female migrants.....	92
5.10.2	Occupation of Solo female Migrants	93
5.11	Summary	97
Chapter 6: Type of Households sending migrant - women from Kerala and their socio-economic characteristics.....		99
6.1	Relationship of Migrants to the Head of the household	99
6.2	Socio-Economic Profile of Households Sending Women Abroad for Work	
	102	
6.2.1	Household Assets Possession	103

6.3	Shift in Economic Activity of women from place of origin to destination	104
6.4	Remittance by Male and Female emigrants.....	105
6.5	Determinants of International labour Migration of Women at Place of origin	107
6.6	Determinants of Working Status of Internationally migrated women from Kerala	110
6.7	Gender differential of Remittance receiving by Households.....	114
6.8	Determinants of Remittance sent by emigrants	118
6.9	Summary.....	119
Chapter 7: Understanding the process of individual women migration and its contributing factors.....		123
7.1	Introduction.....	123
7.1.1	Key Demographics:	123
7.2	Drivers of Migration / Push Factors	124
7.2.1	Better Income and Standard of Living	124
7.2.2	Individual Freedom	125
7.2.3	Dignity, and Respect	128
7.2.4	Opportunity for Career Advancement	129
7.2.5	Family Unification.....	129
7.2.6	Searching for Job Security.....	130
7.2.7	Gender Inequality and Economic Stagnation in Kerala	131
7.2.8	Language and Culture.....	132
7.2.9	Family Aspirations and Social Status.....	132
7.2.10	Social Pressure	133
7.2.11	Political Instability at Destination Countries	133
7.3	Decision Making on Migration (Migrating Against All the Odds)	134
7.3.1	Who makes this decision?	134
7.3.2	Challenges	135
7.4	Process of Migration (INFRASTRUCTURE).....	135
7.4.1	Casual Networks and Informal Support Systems.....	136
7.4.2	Formal Networks and Recruitment Agencies.....	136
7.4.3	Cost of migration through formal networks	137
7.4.4	Key Services Provided by Recruitment Agencies.....	138

7.5	Migration history (EXPERIENCES & ASPIRATION)	140
7.5.1	Migrate to a better destination	141
7.5.2	Choice to Stay and Raise Children in the destination country	141
7.5.3	Impact of Migration.....	142
7.5.4	Higher demand in marriage Market	142
7.5.5	Changes in Husband's Role in the Family	143
7.5.6	Perceived Value in the Family	144
7.5.7	Occupational Shift	145
7.6	Reasons of Migration.....	145
7.6.1	Migration and potential to migration in the marriage market	146
7.6.2	Higher studies opportunities while working abroad.....	147
7.7	Migrant life at Place of destination.....	148
7.7.1	At Profession	148
7.7.2	Culture at place of destination.....	149
7.7.3	Racism	149
7.7.4	Difficulty in Accessing Health Services.....	150
7.8	Covid 19 effects on migration	151
7.9	Summary	152
Chapter 8: Summary and Conclusion.....		154
8.1	Summary.....	154
8.2	Conclusion	158
8.3	Policy Recommendation	160
8.3.1	Pre-departure Training Tailored to Women	160
8.3.2	Gender-Sensitive Bilateral Agreements	160
8.3.3	Recognition of Skills and Prevention of Occupational Downgrading 160	
8.3.4	Financial Literacy and Remittance Empowerment	161
8.3.5	Gender-Focused Reintegration Schemes.....	161
8.3.6	Embassy-Level Crisis Support	161
8.3.7	Expanding Access for Economically Disadvantaged Women	161
8.3.8	Reforming Recruitment Practices.....	162
8.4	Limitations of the Study	162
BIBLIOGRAPHY		164
ANNEXURE		167

Tables

Table 1: Basic details of the respondents participated in the case study	45
Table 2: Gender Differentials in Emigration trend of two decades.....	50
Table 3: : Percentage of international migrants under 15 years	53
Table 4: Gender Differentials in Gulf Migration	56
Table 5: Distribution of Emigrants by Origin District, 2018 (in percentage)	56
Table 6: Results from bivariate logistic regression model containing Migrant and Non-migrant as the explanatory variables and place of origin	60
Table 7: Gender differentials in Economic activity for Pre-& Post Migration	67
Table 8: Socio-economic profile of emigrant women, 2018	71
Table 9: Female emigration by their Destination Countries	73
Table 10: Education Level & Economic Activity of emigrant women.....	75
Table 11: Economic activity of emigrants by their place of origin and place of destination.....	79
Table 12: Economic activity of emigrant women at destination by economic activity at the origin.....	80
Table 13: Occupation of Emigrant women; Pre-& Post Migration.....	81
Table 14: Average income of different category of occupational women - Before and After Migration.....	85
Table 15: Relationship of Migrants to the Head of the household.....	99
Table 16: Socio economic details of Households sending women migrants abroad	102
Table 17: Shift in economic activity from place of Origin to Destination.....	104
Table 18: Comparison of Mean Income by Gender with t-Test Results.....	106
Table 19: Results from bivariate logistic regression model containing all explanatory variables and the associated independent variables.....	107

Table 20: Results from bivariate logistic regression model containing all explanatory variables and the associated independent variables of working status of Internationally migrated women	112
Table 21: Gender Differentials of Households receiving remittance from International Migrants. (In per cent).....	114
Table 22: Income, amount of remittance & value of goods remitted by migrants by sex of migrants	116
Table 23:Regression Coefficients explaining Economic Assistance of Migrants to Family members living elsewhere.....	122

Table of Figures

Figure 1: 20 years of emigration trend from Kerala & inter survey Growth rate	49
Figure 2:Emigration & Return- migrants per 100 households	50
Figure 3:Trendline for Male and female emigrants from Kerala for the last two decades (In lakhs).....	51
Figure 4: Age Distribution of Male and Female Emigrants from Kerala.....	52
Figure 5: Trend line for average age of male and female emigrants.....	53
Figure 6:Trend of Never married Emigrants from Kerala (%).....	54
Figure 7: Gender Differentials of Emigrants with at least Secondary Education	55
Figure 8: Gender Differentials in emigration rate by districts in Kerala:.....	57
Figure 9: District wise Emigration rate of female population in Kerala	59
Figure 10:Sex ratio among Emigrants (F/M)*1000	63
Figure 11:Place of Destination Pattern of Male & Female Migration	65
Figure 12: Gender gap in terms of share of male & female migrants at different destination.....	65
Figure 13: Trend of Economic activity by gender differential of emigrants at Destination; Govt, semi govt & private sector	66
Figure 14: Distribution of emigrants by (%) age group	72
Figure 15 : Level of Education attained by emigrants in three Religious groups of Kerala (%)	74
Figure 16: Level of Education by Economic activity (N=451).....	76

Figure 17: Economic activities of EMI women at the place of origin	78
Figure 18: EA shift from Place of Origin to Destination (N=258).....	83
Figure 19: Percentage Growth in Occupations Reported by Emigrant Women (N = 258).....	84
Figure 20:Percentage income growth of Occupation; Before & After.....	86
Figure 21:Reasons of Migration.....	88
Figure 22: Exposure of Migration to Migrant & Non-migrant women from Kerala	89
Figure 23: Trend line of solo women migration by year of Migration (%)	90
Figure 24: Never Married among Solo Females @ time of Migration	91
Figure 25: % Women working Before & After Migration by level of Education	94
Figure 26: Relationship of female Migrants to the Head of the household.....	101
Figure 27:Households Assets Possession (%).....	103
Figure 28: Proportion of income remitted by male, female, and all emigrant groups in Kerala	117

List of Acronyms

Abbreviation	Full Form
APL	Above Poverty Line
BA	Bachelor of Arts
BM	Before Migration
BPL	Below Poverty Line
CDS	Centre for Development Studies
CEO	Chief Executive Officer
CI	Confidence Interval
COVID	Coronavirus Disease
EA	Economic Activity
EU	European Union
GCC	Gulf Cooperation Council
HH	Household
IELTS	International English Language Testing System
INR	Indian Rupee
IT	Information Technology
ITI	Industrial Training Institute
KMS	Kerala Migration Survey
LR	Logistic Regression
OECD	Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development
OET	Occupational English Test
OLS	Ordinary Least Squares (Regression)
OR	Odds Ratio
PG	Post Graduate
PR	Permanent Residency (or Public Relations depending on context)
REM	Remittance (contextual guess)
STATA	Statistical Software for Data Science
UAE	United Arab Emirates
UK	United Kingdom
US	United States

Abstract

Background

International migration has emerged as a defining demographic process in Kerala over the last two decades, surpassing both fertility and mortality in its socio-economic impact. While India possesses the world's largest diaspora with 16 million people living abroad, Kerala contributes nearly half of the four million Indian emigrants residing in the Gulf. Historically, this movement was viewed through a male-centric lens, but recent trends indicate a steady feminisation of emigration from the state. Women are no longer merely following men as housewives; they are increasingly migrating with autonomy as skilled professionals in sectors like healthcare and education. Despite this shift, there remains a critical lack of gender-specific data and analysis regarding the motivations, socio-economic profiles, and remittance behaviours of these women. Migration has contributed more to poverty alleviation and reduction in unemployment in Kerala than any other factor, significantly reducing the proportion of the population living below the poverty line. The "Kerala Model of Development" produced high literacy and health indicators, yet the state struggles to generate adequate local employment for its educated youth, making migration a primary vehicle for upward mobility. This research seeks to unveil the female face of international migration by examining the patterns, trends, and gender differentials over a twenty-year period from 1998 to 2018. By exploring the push and pull factors at the place of origin and lifestyle outcomes at the destination, the study provides a comprehensive understanding of how professional women reshape both their households and the state's economy.

Methodology

The methodology of this study employs a mixed-methods approach to capture both statistical breadth and narrative depth. The research was designed to fulfill four primary objectives, which include examining individual migration patterns and gender differentials, understanding the characteristics of the emigrant women's labour force, identifying the types and socio-economic statuses of households sending women abroad, and exploring the specific contributing factors and processes of women's emigration. To achieve these objectives, the study utilized several data sources, primarily the individual and household files of the Kerala Migration Survey (KMS) for the years 1998, 2003, 2008, 2013, and 2018, published by the Centre for Development Studies. It also incorporated estimated population data from the India Migration Report 2018 and primary qualitative data from 35 in-depth interviews with working women across 18 countries including the UK, Canada, and various Gulf nations. The quantitative analysis focused on the KMS 2018, which utilized a stratified multistage random sampling method dividing 14 districts into 28 urban and rural strata. The survey covered 500 localities and 15,000 households, capturing data from approximately 57,000 individuals. Statistical analysis was conducted using SPSS and STATA software, employing Binary Logistic Regression to determine the determinants of migration and Multivariate OLS Regression to analyze remittance behaviour for both male and female migrants. The qualitative component involved purposive sampling of 35 women aged 24 to 45, the majority of whom were skilled workers such as nurses, engineers, and teachers. Interviews were conducted via digital platforms like WhatsApp and Botim due to logistical challenges, and data was processed through iterative thematic analysis until saturation was reached. This robust framework allowed for the substantiation of statistical trends with the lived experiences and personal narratives of Kerala's female diaspora.

Findings

The quantitative analysis of migration trends shows that while total emigration from Kerala peaked in 2013 at 2.4 million and declined to 2.1 million in 2018, the female migrant population remained relatively stable at approximately 15.8% of the total. A significant demographic shift occurred in 2018 when, for the first time, unmarried female migrants (33%) outnumbered unmarried male migrants (25%). Female migrants are consistently younger than their male counterparts, with an average age of 20.5 years compared to 25.5 years for men in 2018. Although the Gulf remains the primary destination for 72.9% of female migrants, women are increasingly diversifying toward Western nations like the UK, USA, and Australia. Socio-economically, migrant women are significantly more educated than men, with 70% holding a degree or higher compared to only 24.6% of males. Religion also plays a defining role, as Christian women constitute 48.1% of international migrant women despite being a minority in the state's population. Occupationally, nursing is the dominant field, representing 46% of the working female migrants, though there is growth in engineering, teaching, and administrative sectors. Households sending women abroad are generally of higher socio-economic standing, with 47.8% holding white ration cards and the majority possessing assets like motorcycles, cars, and modern appliances. The relationship to the household head indicates that 61% of female migrants are daughters-in-law, suggesting that migration is often embedded within the spouse's family structure.

Statistical models identified prior work experience as the strongest predictor of migration, with women who worked before migrating being 11.37 times more likely to move abroad. Education also significantly increases the odds, as graduates are 2.89 times more likely to migrate than those with only schooling. Family networks are

crucial catalysts; having an emigrant in the family increases a woman's likelihood of migrating by 6.87 times. Regarding financial contributions, an independent sample t-test revealed no statistically significant difference in the absolute mean remittance sent by men and women. However, men remit a much higher proportion of their total income (48%) compared to women (28%), often because women's financial decisions are more frequently mediated by household needs or husband's accounts. Women's remittances are more likely directed toward daily household expenses (23.9%) and medical aid, while men prioritize education (45.5%) and long-term investments.

Qualitative interviews revealed that migration serves as a transformative process for individual empowerment and freedom. Women reported gaining the "freedom to sleep whenever they want," freedom of movement without societal judgment, and the freedom to dress in casual or modern attire like shorts, which is often discouraged in Kerala. Dignity and respect within the family increased for 32 out of 35 respondents, who noted that parents and husbands now seek their advice on major household decisions. Furthermore, migration often leads to a reversal of traditional gender roles, with husbands in destination countries taking on domestic chores like cooking, cleaning, and childcare. However, these gains are accompanied by challenges such as racism, long working hours, and extreme difficulty accessing healthcare in Western countries, where wait times can reach almost a month. The COVID-19 pandemic further impacted these trends by accelerating the demand for nurses while increasing their psychological burden and infection risk.

Conclusion

This research confirms that female migration from Kerala has transitioned from a peripheral, family-linked role into an independent and professional pathway. The feminisation of migration is driven by a combination of high educational attainment

among women and the state's inability to provide suitable local employment for skilled graduates. While migration offers significant economic benefits—including a 367% average income growth—and fosters individual autonomy, it also exposes women to systemic vulnerabilities and exploitation in international labour markets. The study highlights that women's remittances are vital for long-term household welfare and human capital development, particularly in education and healthcare. To ensure the safety and empowerment of these migrants, the study proposes several gender-responsive policy actions. These include developing tailored pre-departure training modules on legal rights and mental health, negotiating gender-sensitive bilateral labour agreements to protect those in caregiving sectors, and facilitating the international recognition of Indian degrees to prevent occupational downgrading. Additionally, there is a need for financial literacy programs to enhance women's control over their earnings and reintegration schemes for returnee women to address social stigma and emotional stress. Ultimately, the study challenges prevailing assumptions by placing women's experiences at the centre of the migration narrative, calling for a more equitable and inclusive framework for global labour mobility

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Introduction

The problem of migration has been a hot topic for researchers in recent times to understand the behaviour, characteristics, trends, and problems of migrants all over the world. Migration has become the most important and discussed process of demography in the last two decades by surpassing the other two processes, fertility and mortality. In migration studies, international migration, that is, people's movements across national borders, have assumed crucial significance in recent years because of well-demarcated national boundaries and gross inequalities between developed and developing countries. (Zachariah & Rajan, 2015)

Emigration merely means the exit of a person from their own country to another country for better employment or socio-economic benefits. Though it is an international phenomenon, it typically happens from developing or underdeveloped nations towards developed Nations. India has a long migration history and is one of the major source countries sending millions of citizens to western and middle- Eastern countries. Over a century ago, a significant number of Indian migrants, many of them involuntary, relocated to Africa, the Caribbean, and different parts of the Indian subcontinent. In more recent decades, key destinations for Indian migrants have included Persian Gulf countries, North America, and Europe.

Due to the globalisation of labour markets, international migration has grown to be a significant phenomenon. Process and effects of international migration are very complex both for skilled workers and for the countries involved. Numerous variables, most notably the severe staffing and skill shortages in many countries' labour forces,

have recently intensified long-standing concerns about the impact of international migration on health care. While developed countries aggressively look for competent professionals overseas, particularly healthcare workers as "receiving" countries, to solve the issue of staff shortages, the departure of talented healthcare experts may have a negative impact on the health systems of some "giving" nations.¹ (Bach, 2003)

International migration has acquired a sense of urgency in India in recent years. Emigration flows are growing in volume, and the composition of the emigrants is becoming composite and complex. There is a steady feminisation of emigration, and migration is becoming increasingly political, influencing important changes in the manner in which migrants are received and the circumstances under which they live and work. (Gurucharan, 2013)

Women comprised slightly less than half of all international migrants worldwide with 48 percent in 2015. India has the Largest Diaspora in the world, with 16 million people living outside of the country (United Nations, 2015). Almost half of the four million Indian emigrants to the Gulf are from Kerala. Among them, 16 percent are women, a growing number since they were only 9 percent a few years ago. Among the four million workers from India, half are from Kerala. Almost all families in Kerala are affected by migration in one way or another. A recent survey conducted by the Centre for Development Studies (CDS) puts the figure of Kerala emigrants as 1.8 million in 2004. Some years ago, we thought Kerala's Gulf connection was a passing phase in its history. Today not only has the Gulf emigration become well entrenched, but some of the second-generation emigrants are also settling in the host country permanently,

¹ International migration of health workers: Labour and social issues

and others are spreading their wings to a much broader spectrum of countries. (Zachariah & Rajan, 2004). Migration has contributed more to poverty alleviation and reduction in unemployment in Kerala than any other factor. As a result of migration, the proportion of population below the poverty line has declined drastically. (Zachariah, Mathew, & Rajan, 2000).

1.2 When women migrates

The concerns regarding the well-being and safety of the migrant become even more pronounced when the migrants belong to women. Educational backwardness exposes women to exploitation in the migration process. Furthermore, stricter border controls and restrictions on legal migration channels lead to a rise in irregular migration exposing women to the dangers of exploitation, trafficking and forced Prostitution. Hence, a serious effort is required to explore and unveil the female face of international migration from India to control and limit their exploitation in the migration cycle. As per the KMS report 2013, the estimated number of Kerala emigrants (E.M.I.) residing abroad in 2014 was approximately 24.0 lakhs, showing an increase from 22.8 lakhs in 2011, 21.9 lakhs in 2008, 18.4 lakhs in 2003 and 13.6 lakhs in 1998. (Rajan & Zachariah, 2015). Kerala is distinct from many other states in India because it has a long tradition of female education, nurse training, and migration rooted in the state's history of Christianity. (Aravamudan 1976; Percot and Rajan 2007; Simon 2009 cited by (Rajan S. I., 2013)

The primary destinations of Indian migrants to West Asia during the 1980s were Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates (UAE) Oman and Bahrain. (Prakash, Rajan, & Zachariah, 2002). Migration has provided the single most dynamic factor in the otherwise dismal scenario of Kerala in the last quarter of the 20th century. It is one of the positive outcomes of the Kerala Model of Development. Many Keralans are

looking forward to the end of the millennium with a bit of cheer, thanks to migration and its economic benefits. In Kerala, the movement must have contributed more to poverty alleviation than any other factor, including agrarian reforms, trade union activities and social welfare legislation.

1.3 Emigration Prospects

According to KMS 2018, two key findings were reported: Kerala had 2.1 million emigrants worldwide, with females accounting for 15.8%. However, there was a decline of 300,000 emigrants between 2013 and 2018, representing one-tenth of the 2013 emigrant population. Despite this decline, total remittances to Kerala were estimated at ₹85,092 crores, showing an increase. This rise is attributed to Keralites in the Gulf advancing socially and securing higher wages, enabling them to remit more.

As per KMS 2011, Kerala's long-standing migration to the Gulf appears to be reaching a turning point, shifting from a rising trend to a decline after 2015. Multiple factors led to this conclusion, such as the continuous decline in young working-age population of the state and the diminishing wage disparity between Kerala and the GCC countries.

Although Kerala faced competition from other Indian states in supplying emigrants, there were no significant disruptions in migration patterns, and the overall pace of migration remained largely unaffected. In fact, the number of emigrants in 2014 surpassed that of 2011. Moreover, the rise in emigration between 2011 and 2014 was greater than the increase observed between 2008 and 2011, indicating that the anticipated slowdown did not occur in recent years.

KMS 2014 attributes this unexpected trend to the omission of a key factor in the 2011 analysis—education levels. Higher education is strongly linked to increased migration outflows and more favourable attitudes toward migration. Additionally, improvements in the local training and education system may have helped bridge skill gaps that were previously overlooked. As a result, the evolving educational profile of Kerala's labour force and emigrants has contributed to a greater outflow of migrants, particularly those inclined toward migration. Data from various KMS reports and official sources indicate a continuous rise in the average educational level of both the general population and emigrants. Since 1998, the proportion of emigrants with at least a 10th standard education has significantly increased, with fewer unskilled and less-educated individuals among Kerala's recent migration streams...

Official statistics in Kerala indicate a significant rise in the number of youths completing the 10th and 12th standard each year. Between 2009 and 2012, the number of students passing the 12th standard grew by approximately 25%. Meanwhile, the number of students passing the 10th standard increased by 64% between 1991 and 2014, with a 36% rise recorded between 2004 and 2014.(Zachariah & Rajan, Kerala Migration Study 2014, 2016) The rise in educational attainment in Kerala is unsurprising, as the state has long been a leader in literacy. Currently, the number of educated youths plays a crucial role in migration trends. A key factor driving continued emigration, despite a declining youth population, is Kerala's inability to generate adequate employment opportunities for its growing number of secondary and higher-educated youth. The state struggles to provide sustainable and suitable jobs for this expanding workforce. Before migration, the unemployment rate among emigrants stood at 31.1%, while among out-migrants, it was as high as 58.4%. Unless employment opportunities for educated youth in Kerala improve, more young people

from the state are likely to seek job prospects either abroad or in other parts of India. Considering these structural and systemic factors, a significant decline in emigration is unlikely in the near future. Reports indicate that the number of replacement migrants—workers from other Indian states who come to Kerala for short-term employment—closely matches the number of Keralites migrating abroad. The presence of these replacement migrants helps stabilize wage levels in Kerala, which in turn acts as a driving factor for future emigration trends. (Rajan & Zachariah, 2015)

1.3.1 International Migrant (Emigrant)

International migration is defined as any person who changes his or her country of residence. Temporary travel abroad for recreation, holiday, business, medical treatment, or religious pilgrimage does not entail a change in the country of usual residence. (Bilsborrow et al.1997 (Zachariah & Rajan, 2015)

- Categories relevant to the compilation of international migration statistics are as follows:
- Citizens are departing to study abroad.
- Citizens departing to be trained abroad
- Citizens departing to work abroad
- Citizens departing to work for an international organisation abroad.
- Citizens departing to form a family or join immediate family abroad
- Citizens departing to seek asylum. (Zachariah & Rajan, 2015)

1.3.2 Skilled Emigrant

A skilled worker is an individual who possesses specialized skills, training, knowledge, and expertise in their field. This proficiency may be acquired through education at a college, university, or technical institution.

1.3.3 Area of Origin (Departure)

In migration studies, the location from which an individual move is known as the area of origin. For migrants, this can refer to either (a) their place of residence at the start of the migration period or (b) the last place they lived before their most recent move.

1.3.4 Area of Destination (Arrival)

In migration, the location where a move concludes is known as the area of destination. For migrants, this refers to their place of residence at the end of the migration period.

Chapter 2: Review of Literature

2.1 Background

Monica Boyd, (2003) says that male migrants have been at the centre of migration theories, against female migrants who have been predominantly regarded as dependents and frequently excluded from skilled migration data and analysis. Zachariah, et al., (2000) also shares the same perception by taking the example of Kerala that Emigration to Gulf countries is mainly male-oriented while there are some variations found in different districts. Moreover, further, they said about origin districts of Kerala and emigrant's women from Ernakulum is in leading position and Malappuram in the last.

In addition to this Gulati (1993) & Zachariah et al. (2003) viewing women migration is increasing, as they appear in work foremost as wives and reason as it happens to avoid the painful separation in the marital relationship. However, the same time Sharma, (2011) pointing to the rising movement of women as independent workers and giving the reason as women's participation in employment which has been providing the economic contribution to the families and communities, contrary to the first reason of marriage or family reunification.

Anand (2002) in his study observed that about 50 percent of the emigrants from Kerala are unmarried at the time of their first emigration. Rajan & Zachariah introducing the large increase of unmarried women leaving Kerala for foreign countries as a new phenomenon and the trend portends an acceleration in the as women following their husbands in a familial context, as simple housewives also existing. The number of unmarried emigrants increased considerably during 1999-2004, by 51 percent among

males and 254 percent among females. Kumar & Rajan, (2014) says that most of the emigrants are in age group of 20 to 49 years, in respect of both genders and they are further discussing the median age of migration and pointing that the age has come down to 23 years.

Women generally migrate after men from Kerala, while men tend to return following women. Female migrants are typically more qualified than their male counterparts. Migration often leads to the separation of spouses, with equal numbers of husbands and wives experiencing this. However, while wives rarely migrate without their husbands, it is far more common for husbands to migrate alone, without their wives.

Migration appears to be more common among individuals with higher levels of education. (Docquier and Marfouk, 2006). Moreover, migration patterns have evolved, increasingly involving a higher proportion of women and younger individuals.

The 2018 Kerala Migration Survey recorded women's participation in migration at 15.8%. In the most recent survey, female students accounted for 32% of all respondents. Additionally, a travel agency in Kochi processed visas for 7,236 students traveling to Canada in a single intake in July 2023, with approximately 45% of them being female. This suggests a significant rise in the number of women from Kerala seeking education abroad, according to the study.

Migration can enhance autonomy, human capital, and self-esteem, while also boosting women's authority and value within their families and communities. It offers opportunities for women to access education and economic prospects, leading to a shift in traditional norms. The emergence of more equitable social norms can further improve women's rights and access to resources. Upon returning home, migrant

women often retain their newfound independence and introduce new norms, skills, and knowledge.

2.2 Feminization of Migration: Global and Kerala Context

The feminization of migration has emerged as a significant global trend due to economic globalization and shifting labour demands. Park (2008) highlights that an increasing number of women are migrating independently rather than as dependents, challenging traditional gender norms. The study argues that this transformation is primarily driven by gendered labour markets, particularly in the service sector, which both facilitates and exploits female migration. As more women seek employment abroad, they face greater vulnerability due to the rise in undocumented migration, leading to increased risks of labour exploitation, trafficking, and social marginalization.

Similarly, Gulati (1997) traces the rise in female migration, particularly from Asia, since the early 1980s. Unlike previous migration patterns that were dominated by skilled professionals, the majority of today's female migrants engage in low-skilled sectors, particularly domestic work and entertainment. The author highlights that this shift has been shaped by demand-side factors, such as rising affluence in host countries leading to increased demand for foreign domestic workers, and supply-side factors, such as unemployment and economic distress in sending nations.

Expanding on these perspectives, the Centre for Women's Development Studies (2009) discusses how women's migration is closely linked to economic necessity, social pressures, and gender roles that dictate their movement. Women migrants are disproportionately employed in caregiving, domestic work, and other low-skilled labour sectors, often under precarious conditions with limited rights. The study also

notes that migration policies frequently fail to acknowledge the unique vulnerabilities faced by female migrants, reinforcing their marginalization in host societies.

Sharma (2011) provides a broader perspective on global migration, noting that while women constitute nearly 50% of global migrants, the share of female migrants from India remains lower due to restrictive government policies and socio-cultural constraints. Despite these barriers, economic migration among Indian women is steadily increasing, particularly in sectors such as nursing, teaching, and domestic work. Asis & Piper (2008) support this view by showing how, in countries such as the Philippines, Sri Lanka, and Indonesia, women now outnumber men among officially deployed migrant workers, reflecting a global shift toward gendered labour migration.

2.3 Socioeconomic Vulnerabilities and Marginalization

The feminization of migration has also led to new vulnerabilities for female migrants, particularly in the informal labour market. Park (2008) highlights that economic inequalities, restrictive immigration policies, and gender-based discrimination create conditions that make migrant women highly vulnerable to exploitation and abuse. Many women, particularly those in domestic work and caregiving roles, are subjected to long hours, poor working conditions, and inadequate wages.

Gulati (1997) elaborates on this by discussing how female domestic workers and entertainment industry workers face some of the most exploitative conditions. In countries such as Japan and the Middle East, women migrating for entertainment or hospitality work often encounter unregulated employment contracts, poor living conditions, and high levels of employer control over their personal lives. Similarly, many domestic workers are trapped in exploitative labour arrangements, experiencing long working hours, physical and verbal abuse, and limited freedom of movement.

The Centre for Women's Development Studies (2009) highlights the broader structural inequalities influencing female migration. Many women migrate due to poverty, unemployment, or displacement, only to find themselves in exploitative working conditions in destination countries. Restrictive immigration policies further exacerbate their vulnerabilities by denying them legal protection and social services, leaving them more susceptible to human trafficking and forced labour.

Sharma (2011) focuses specifically on the risks faced by Indian female migrants in the Gulf and Southeast Asia. She argues that government-imposed restrictions on women under 30 migrating for domestic work push many to use informal migration channels, where they are more likely to fall victim to trafficking and forced labour. The study also discusses contract substitution, a practice where migrant workers are promised one job but given a completely different, lower-paying job upon arrival, significantly undermining their economic security and labour rights.

Mahapatro (2013) and Sundari (2005) examine the role of household decision-making power in female migration. Women who have greater control over household finances and decision-making are more likely to migrate independently. However, many migrant women remain dependent on family networks, which can limit their autonomy and bargaining power in labor markets.

2.4 Gendered Migration Policies and State Regulations

Governments have imposed various policy restrictions on female migration, often under the pretext of protecting women from exploitation. However, studies show that these policies often have the opposite effect. Kodoth & Varghese (2012) critique the Indian government's age restrictions on female domestic workers, arguing that these rules force women to migrate illegally, thereby exposing them to greater risks. The

study highlights how the “Kasaragod embassy”, an informal migration network, helps women circumvent legal barriers, but in doing so, exposes them to unregulated labor markets and exploitative intermediaries.

Percot & Rajan (2007) discuss how India takes a contradictory approach to female migration: while nurses are actively encouraged to migrate through government-supported training programs, domestic workers face significant restrictions. This class-based distinction reflects broader patriarchal attitudes toward labor—nurses, due to their professional status, are seen as “respectable” migrants, whereas domestic workers are often viewed as vulnerable to moral corruption.

Sharma (2011) further critiques these gendered policies, arguing that both nurses and domestic workers face exploitation and discrimination, yet only domestic workers are heavily restricted. The study emphasizes the need for gender-sensitive migration policies that recognize the economic contributions of all female migrants while ensuring their protection from exploitation.

2.5 Economic Impact and Remittance Dependency

Female migrants play a crucial role in supporting their families and contributing to national economies through remittances. Panda (2009) highlights that remittances from migrant workers contribute between \$150–200 billion annually to developing nations, with South Asia alone receiving \$40–50 billion. These financial inflows stabilize national economies, reduce poverty, and enhance social mobility.

Prakash (1998) focuses on Kerala, where remittances from Gulf migrants have been transformative. By the mid-1990s, Gulf remittances accounted for 22% of Kerala’s net domestic product, significantly improving household income and living standards. However, he also notes that remittances have contributed to economic disparities

between migrant and non-migrant households. Nayyar (1994) and Scholten (2021) discuss how remittances have a dual effect: while they improve household consumption and education, they also lead to rising land prices, inflation, and social inequalities.

Remittances from migrants play a crucial role in the economies of sending countries, but they also create economic distortions and dependencies. Panda (2009) highlights that remittances globally account for over \$150–200 billion annually, with South Asia receiving \$40–50 billion. These financial inflows support household consumption, education, and healthcare, significantly improving living standards in migrant households.

In the case of Kerala, Prakash (1998) reports that by the mid-1990s, remittances from Gulf migrants accounted for over 22% of Kerala's net domestic product. However, the uneven distribution of remittances has widened economic disparities—while some families benefit enormously, others remain locked in poverty due to a lack of access to migration opportunities. Nayyar (1994) and Scholten (2021) discuss how remittance dependency can create inflationary pressures, distort local labor markets, and increase economic inequality. One major concern is the “Dutch disease” phenomenon, where a surge in foreign currency inflows strengthens the national currency, reducing the competitiveness of exports. Apart from that, remittances have fuelled real estate speculation in Kerala, making housing unaffordable for low-income residents.

2.6 Demand of skilled women workers Internationally

In a significant shift in migration patterns from Kerala, women from the state now hold the highest number of passports issued in the country until 2023. This trend is

closely followed by Maharashtra, Tamilnadu, Punjab, and Gujarat. Kerala boasts the highest total number of passport holders in India, with 98.92 lakh passports issued, encompassing both males and females. However, when it comes to male passport holders, Uttar Pradesh takes the lead with 70.58 lakh. Kerala's female passport holders' number 42.17 lakh, highlighting a noteworthy trend in the state's migration dynamics.

2.7 The characteristics of women emigrant labours from Kerala

Rajan (2013) Says that feminisation of migration allows us to look at the process of globalisation through the gender lens. Women's economic upward mobility brings changes to the local environment and the remittance they send back home make a significant contribution to the upward movement of many families. Prakash, Rajan, & Zachariah, (2002) viewing the future demand of workers in abroad is for categories of skilled workers, technicians, computer workers, heavy equipment operators, electrical workers and professional categories such as doctors, nurses, engineers, teachers, and accountants. Moreover, they observe a positive correlation between levels of education and quality of jobs. The persons who had passed the secondary school or acquired higher educational qualifications were found to be in better employment and drawing monthly salaries. Only very few graduates were found working as daily wage or piece wage earners.

Zachariah & Rajan, (2004) are discussing about the relationship between emigration and economic activity is closely interconnected. Emigration from Kerala, either directly or indirectly, influences economic activity, as well as employment and unemployment levels in the state. Conversely, the state's economic conditions also impact the scale, trends, and characteristics of emigration. Migration often results in

individuals transitioning from being "job seekers" to securing employment in the private and semi-government sectors.

Migration to the Gulf has enabled migrant households to achieve higher income levels, increased consumption, and greater asset accumulation, contributing to a decline in poverty across Kerala. However, Gulf remittances have also led to rising costs for land, construction materials, consumer goods, and essential services like healthcare, education, and transportation. These price increases have negatively impacted non-migrant households, particularly those from poor, middle-class, and fixed-income groups.

2.8 Labour Market Segmentation

The economic opportunities available to female migrants are largely confined to gendered labor markets, where they are concentrated in low-paying, informal jobs with limited legal protections. Gulati (1997) and Sharma (2011) highlight that most women migrants work as domestic workers, caregivers, and in the entertainment industry, which exposes them to poor working conditions, long hours, and workplace exploitation.

In particular, Percot & Rajan (2007) focus on nursing as a dominant migration pathway for Indian women, particularly those from Kerala. They emphasize that 90% of Indian nurses in the Gulf region originate from Kerala, and migration in this sector is deeply rooted in historical Christian missionary training schools. Many nursing students actively prepare for migration by taking courses that align with international certification standards.

While nursing provides a more stable and legally regulated employment option than domestic work, migrant nurses still face challenges. Percot & Rajan (2007) and

Sharma (2011) discuss how female nurses abroad often experience workplace discrimination, hierarchical job structures, and limited career advancement opportunities due to gender biases. Zachariah & Rajan (2001) further note that upon return to India, female migrants struggle to reintegrate into the job market, as local economies offer fewer employment opportunities that match their international experience.

2.9 Social and Cultural Impacts

Migration has profound effects on family structures, gender roles, and household responsibilities, particularly in societies where male migration is dominant. Zachariah & Rajan (2001) and Gulati (1995) explore how male migration leads to increased economic responsibilities for women left behind. Many women become the primary financial managers of the household, a role that both enhances their autonomy and increases their stress levels.

A major social consequence of male-dominated migration is the rise of “Gulf wives”—a term referring to women left behind while their husbands work abroad. Zachariah & Rajan (2001) and Gulati (1983) highlight how these women often face emotional distress, loneliness, and social isolation. In some cases, they gain greater financial decision-making power, but cultural norms continue to restrict their agency, preventing them from fully benefiting from these changes.

On the other hand, female migration has different social implications, particularly when women migrate for work while leaving their children behind. Mahapatro (2013) discusses how female migration reshapes traditional gender norms within households. Women who migrate for work are often seen as transgressing traditional roles, which can lead to social stigma in their home communities.

Osella & Osella (2000) analyse how male migration influences masculinity and social expectations in Kerala. They describe different archetypes of returning migrants, where successful migrants are perceived as ideal marriage partners, while those who fail to accumulate wealth experience social stigma. The study also highlights how money, power, and migration status shape male identity, making migration not only an economic process but also a cultural one.

Chacko (2003) critiques the paradox of women's development in Kerala, noting that despite high literacy rates and strong social indicators, women continue to experience gender-based inequalities. The persistence of dowry, gender-based violence, and women's economic exclusion reflect the contradictions of Kerala's high social development but low female workforce participation.

2.9.1 Return Migration and Reintegration Challenges for Female Migrants

While much attention is given to female migration, return migration and the reintegration of migrant women into their home societies is an underexplored yet critical issue. Zachariah & Rajan (2001) highlight that many returning female migrants, especially those from Kerala, struggle to find stable employment due to the gendered nature of labor markets in India. Unlike men, whose migration experiences often enhance their social and financial status, women often return to limited economic opportunities and traditional gender roles, which can undermine their financial independence.

Percot & Rajan (2007) specifically examine nurses returning to India after working abroad, noting that many experience difficulties re-entering the workforce due to a lack of career advancement opportunities, lower wages, and workplace discrimination. The Indian healthcare system does not always recognize international

experience, which discourages return migrants from seeking employment within India.

Additionally, Osella & Osella (2000) highlight the social stigma faced by female returnees, particularly those who worked in domestic labor or caregiving roles. Unlike men, who are often welcomed back as successful migrants, female returnees may face social alienation, moral scrutiny, and reduced marriage prospects, especially if their migration was associated with low-status jobs or informal labor sectors.

- Job placement services for skilled returnees, such as nurses and caregivers.
- Entrepreneurship support to help returnees start small businesses using their savings.
- Social reintegration programs to reduce stigma and recognize the contributions of female migrants.

While this shift has enhanced female autonomy in decision-making, it also comes with emotional distress, social isolation, and increased workloads. Gulati (1995) found that many wives of Gulf migrants, also called "Gulf wives," experience mental health challenges, loneliness, and anxieties about their husbands' loyalty due to long-term separation.

At the same time, some studies highlight the positive aspects of male migration for women left behind: Osella & Osella (2000) argue that women in migrant households often gain financial literacy, learning to manage remittances, make investment decisions, and participate in business activities. Prakash (1998) notes that remittances enable women to access better healthcare and education for their children, indirectly improving their quality of life.

However, the negative effects outweigh the benefits in many cases. Chacko (2003) critiques the paradox of Kerala's development model, arguing that while migration improves economic indicators, it does not necessarily empower women. Many remain economically dependent on remittances, unable to secure employment themselves.

2.10 Intersectionality in Migration

While gender is a major determinant in migration experiences, it does not operate in isolation. Intersectionality, as proposed by feminist scholars, highlights how class, caste, ethnicity, and religion shape migration patterns and the vulnerabilities faced by female migrants.

2.10.1 Caste and Class-Based Migration Disparities

In India, migration opportunities are significantly influenced by caste and class hierarchies. Kodoth & Varghese (2012) argue that upper-caste and middle-class women primarily migrate for nursing, teaching, or IT-related jobs, which are often state-facilitated and legally regulated. In contrast, lower-caste and working-class women are more likely to engage in domestic work, caregiving, or informal sector jobs that lack legal protections and expose them to greater risks of exploitation.

Gulati (1997) notes that many Dalit and lower-caste women migrate for low-wage jobs in the Gulf and Southeast Asia, often through unofficial and high-risk migration networks. This makes them more vulnerable to contract substitution, non-payment of wages, and workplace abuse.

2.10.2 Ethnicity and Migration Restrictions

Ethnic background also plays a role in shaping migration opportunities. Percot & Rajan (2007) analyse how Christian women from Kerala dominate nursing migration, partly because Christian missionary institutions historically provided them access to education and English-language skills. Conversely, Muslim and Hindu women from

Kerala have historically faced more restrictions on mobility, particularly in male-dominated patriarchal households that discourage female migration.

Similarly, Sharma (2011) argues that migration policies often reinforce ethnic and caste-based exclusions, as governments selectively facilitate migration for skilled workers while restricting lower-caste and informal labor migration.

2.11 Psychosocial and Health Impacts

The mental health of migrant women is an often-overlooked aspect of migration studies. While economic factors drive migration, the psychosocial costs can be significant, leading to stress, anxiety, depression, and social isolation.

2.11.1 Pre-Migration Psychological Stress

Women experience high levels of emotional stress before migration, often due to family pressure, financial insecurity, and uncertainty about living conditions abroad. Mahapatro (2013) finds that many women migrate under economic distress, leaving behind their children and families, which causes severe emotional anxiety.

2.11.2 Workplace Stress and Mental Health Challenges

Once abroad, female migrants, particularly domestic workers and caregivers, often endure long working hours, employer abuse, and social isolation. Park (2008) highlights that live-in domestic workers in Gulf countries experience high levels of workplace stress, as they lack privacy, autonomy, and access to support networks.

Sharma (2011) documents cases of severe mental distress among Indian migrant workers in Southeast Asia and the Gulf, where verbal, physical, and sexual abuse at the hands of employers contributes to high rates of depression and PTSD. Many women have limited access to mental healthcare, as health services are often unavailable or unaffordable for migrant workers.

2.11.3 Impact of Family Separation on Mental Well-Being

For women who migrate without their children or spouses, family separation takes a significant emotional toll. Zachariah & Rajan (2001) found that mothers who leave children behind often suffer from “maternal guilt”, anxiety, and depression. The long-term separation from children weakens family bonds, creating emotional distress for both the migrant and her dependents.

On the other hand, women who remain behind while their husbands migrate also experience mental health issues, including loneliness, anxiety about their spouse’s fidelity, and social isolation (Gulati, 1995).

2.12 Gender-Based Violence and Exploitation

2.12.1 Workplace Exploitation and Harassment of Female Migrants

Domestic Workers (Abuse Under the Kafala System): One of the most at-risk groups for gender-based violence is female domestic workers in the Gulf countries. Percot & Rajan (2007) highlight that nurses and domestic workers from India, particularly Kerala, face exploitative working conditions under employer-controlled sponsorship programs like the Kafala system. Due to isolation in private homes, lack of legal recourse, and dependency on employers, many women experience verbal abuse, sexual harassment, and physical violence but are unable to escape or report these incidents.

Similarly, Kodoth & Varghese (2012) discuss how employer restrictions on migrant domestic workers, including confiscation of passports, lead to conditions of forced labor and abuse. Their research shows that many Malayalee women migrating to the Gulf for domestic work face sexual violence, non-payment of wages, and excessive workloads, but legal restrictions prevent them from switching employers or seeking legal help.

2.12.2 Exploitation of Female Migrants in Other Labor Sectors

Beyond domestic work, female migrants in low-skilled labor markets, such as garment factories and entertainment industries, also face harassment. Gulati (1997) examines the vulnerability of Indian women working in the entertainment and service industries in Southeast Asia, where employers often impose exploitative working conditions and demand sexual favours in exchange for job security. The study also notes that female performers and hospitality workers in Japan and other parts of Asia are frequently subjected to abuse due to their low bargaining power and lack of legal protection.

2.12.3 Structural Factors Contributing to Gender-Based Violence in Migration

Government policies intended to protect female migrants often increase their risk of gender-based violence. Kodoth & Varghese (2012) critique India's age restrictions on female domestic workers (which prohibit women under 30 from migrating for domestic work) for forcing women to use informal migration routes, where they become vulnerable to trafficking and exploitation. Rather than reducing the risks faced by migrant women, such restrictions push them into undocumented labor markets, where they have no legal protections.

2.12.4 Lack of Labor Protections for Female Migrants

Many destination countries fail to extend labor rights and social protections to female migrants, increasing their exposure to abuse. Percot & Rajan (2007) contrast the government support given to nurse migration (which includes skill certification programs and bilateral labor agreements) with the neglect of domestic workers, who remain highly vulnerable to employer abuse due to a lack of government oversight.

Similarly, Sharma (2011) argues that migrant women's vulnerabilities are compounded by their legal status, with many working in unregulated sectors that lack

employment rights, social security, and workplace protections. This leads to exploitation in wages, working hours, and safety conditions, with limited recourse for legal action when abuse occurs.

2.12.5 Social and Cultural Barriers to Reporting Gender-Based Violence

Even when migrant women return to India after experiencing gender-based violence abroad, many do not speak out due to social stigma. Osella & Osella (2000) discuss how returning Malayalee women face scrutiny about their experiences abroad, especially those who worked in domestic service, caregiving, or entertainment industries. In some cases, families avoid discussing cases of abuse to protect the family's social reputation, leaving victims without support or justice.

2.12.6 Employer Control Over Migrant Women's Freedom

Kodoth & Varghese (2012) highlight how Malayalee social networks in the Gulf reinforce gendered restrictions on mobility, preventing female domestic workers from seeking outside support if they experience abuse. Employers and recruitment agents act as gatekeepers, often withholding passports and controlling communications, ensuring that migrant women remain dependent on them despite facing abuse.

2.13 Special Drivers and Contexts

One of the most severe risks associated with female migration is the involvement of human trafficking networks. Many women who migrate voluntarily for employment end up being coerced into exploitative labor, while others are deceived by recruitment agencies that promise legitimate work but place them in forced labor or sex trafficking conditions.

2.13.1 Trafficking of Women for Domestic and Sex Work

Sharma (2011) highlights that a significant proportion of female migrants from South Asia are trafficked into domestic labor, sweatshops, or commercial sex work. She

argues that gendered migration policies often push women into informal and unsafe migration channels, increasing their risk of being trafficked.

Similarly, Gulati (1997) discusses the rise of trafficking networks in Asia, particularly in regions where women migrate for entertainment and hospitality jobs. Many of these women are recruited under false pretences, only to find themselves trapped in exploitative industries with no legal protections.

2.13.2 Trafficking Routes and Methods

According to Kodoth & Varghese (2012), strict migration restrictions on female domestic workers have unintentionally fuelled illegal migration channels. Smugglers use forged documents, unofficial border crossings, and fraudulent work visas to move women across borders.

Common trafficking routes include:

- South Asia → Gulf nations (domestic work, sex trafficking)
- Southeast Asia → Japan and South Korea (entertainment industry trafficking)
- Africa → Europe (forced labor, sex trafficking)

2.13.3 Lack of Legal Protections for Trafficked Women

Sundari (2005) argues that many trafficked women are criminalized rather than protected when caught by law enforcement. Instead of being recognized as victims, they are deported or imprisoned, leaving them with no legal recourse.

2.13.4 Climate Change as a Driver of Female Migration

Recent studies highlight that environmental disasters and climate change have accelerated female migration, particularly in rural and coastal communities. Scholten (2021) argues that climate-related displacement disproportionately affects women, as

they are often responsible for household survival in agrarian economies. Nayyar (1994) and Prakash (1998) identify floods, droughts, and rising sea levels as key factors forcing women to migrate from agricultural regions to urban areas in search of work.

Zachariah & Rajan (2001) show that climate-induced migration often leads to:

- Increased rural-to-urban female migration due to loss of farmland.
- Rising numbers of female-headed households, as men migrate first and women follow later.
- Higher vulnerabilities for migrant women, as they often lack financial resources and social networks in new locations.

2.13.5 Case Study: Climate Migration in South Asia

Climate change has emerged as a significant driver of migration, particularly for women in South Asia whose livelihoods are heavily dependent on climate-sensitive sectors such as agriculture and coastal resource-based economies. Rising sea levels, unpredictable rainfall, and extreme weather events have displaced large populations, often forcing women to migrate in search of alternative livelihoods.

In Bangladesh and India, rising sea levels have led to the displacement of millions from coastal areas, pushing many women into urban centers where they find employment primarily in garment factories and domestic work (Park, 2008). Similarly, in Kerala, increasing unpredictability in monsoon patterns has contributed to agricultural distress, prompting many women to seek overseas employment, particularly in Gulf countries (Sundari, 2005).

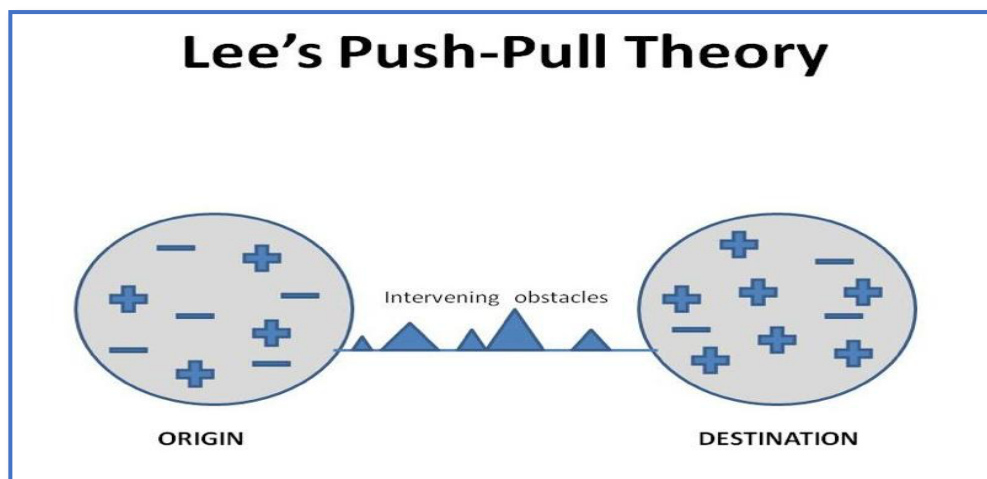
Female climate migrants face multiple, intersecting vulnerabilities in both domestic and international migration contexts. In urban areas, migrant women frequently lack

adequate housing, access to healthcare, and legal protections, leaving them exposed to heightened insecurity (Sharma, 2011). Low levels of formal education further exacerbate their susceptibility to labor exploitation, as poorly educated migrants are more likely to accept exploitative working conditions due to limited employment alternatives (Gulati, 1997).

A further challenge lies in the lack of policy recognition for climate migrants. Governments often fail to categorize climate-induced migration as a distinct form of mobility, thereby excluding affected populations from targeted legal and social protections (Kodoth & Varghese, 2012). This policy gap compounds the precarity of female climate migrants, who are already navigating gender-based disadvantages within migration systems.

2.14 Push pull factors

Lee's (1966) push-pull theory shows possible migration between a place of origin and a place of destination, with positive and negative signs signify pull and push factors, respectively. Flows take place between two places, but there are intervening obstacles to these spatial movements. Although "mountain" shapes represent these obstacles, keep in mind that the obstacles need not be limited to physical barriers. Restrictive immigration laws, for example, can present a formidable barrier to prospective migrants. Note that both the origin and destination have pushes and pulls, reflecting the reality that any migrant must consider both the positives of staying and the negatives of moving, as well as their converses. The logic of the push-pull theory is that if the plusses (pulls) at the destination outweigh the plusses of staying at the origin. (Muniz, Li, & Schleicher, 2011)



Analysing the factors linked to migration, K.C. Zachariah, E.T. Mathew, and S. Irudaya Rajan (2001) highlight four key elements of the Kerala development model that have driven migration from the state. The first is the sharp decline in mortality rates. To the extent that unemployment and low wages are partly a result of rapid population growth, demographic pressure has been a primary factor in migration from Kerala. The rapid decline in mortality created a demographic imbalance, which was rectified first through migration and later through birth control.

Second, stagnation in the agricultural sector in Kerala following wage hikes and agrarian and other reforms of the 1960s introduced without the necessary follow-up reforms such as agricultural mechanisation. This has been especially relevant for internal (out) migration. Land reforms played a catalytic role in changing the attitude of persons towards migration as a viable option to deal with the problem of population pressure. Third, accelerated development in education, especially education at higher levels. Stagnation in the agricultural sector gave a further boost to educational development in the State. With traditional agriculture offering very little scope for upward socio-economic mobility, and rice land declining as an investment option, parents turned to education as the best option for ensuring their children's' future

wellbeing. The gap between supply of educated persons and opportunities available for their placement in the State worsened. It became necessary (and attractive) for educated Kerala youth to seek employment in the fast-developing metropolitan centres in the other states. More educated youths in the midland and the coastal regions opted for migration instead of staking their future in the withering agricultural sector back home. Fourth, the failure of economic organisation in the State to expand employment in the secondary and tertiary sectors. While population pressure, stagnation in agriculture, and educational explosion could no doubt exert a positive impetus to migrate, none alone would have led to migration if other productive sectors— secondary and tertiary – could absorb the growing educated labor force. Failure of state institutions to provide the required support and a favourable milieu for growth of the secondary and the tertiary sectors of the economy was an equally important cause of migration. (Zachariah, Mathew, & Rajan, 2001)

Kodoth & Varghese (2011) connecting emigration of women with their demand in marriage market as discussing about the social position of emigrant nurses in marriage market and states that they had leveraged by their worth on the marriage market, linked to the opportunities they offer for migration of men. Matrimonial advertisements in newspapers and internet sites indicate their preference for nurses, ‘nurse wanted’ or ‘nurse working in the Gulf will be preferred’, appearing frequently (Kodoth & Varghese, 2011)

2.15 Skilled Migration Trends

OECD and UNDESA report in 2010/ 2011, says that roughly every third immigrant in these countries was tertiary educated, and India constituted the largest origin group, with two million highly educated members. Moreover, IOM, OECD, (2014) report on Harnessing Knowledge on the Migration of Highly Skilled Women states that the

number of female migrants with higher education in these countries increased 80 per cent between 2000 and 2011.

Sharma (2011) states that there is also an increasing trend of high-skill female migrants migrating from India as skilled labor and as students for higher education. Nair (1999) strongly said this in her article as women from Kerala in employment in the Arab countries – mostly as nurses and other paramedical personnel – are quite few and have yet to be repatriated. Osella (2010) in her study further discussing particularly about the skilled labor migration and its correlation with religion by illustrating emigration of nurses. According to her Malayali women heavily represented in Gulf hospitals in nursing staff, in the early days are overwhelmingly drawn from the Christian communities, where values of education and female employment are high, Whereas Hindu ideas about ritual pollution and female respectability through religious segregation (practiced by Hindus and Muslims) are less pronounced. The Gulf offered Indian Christian women — a minority at home — chances to use their education, save money and find a stepping stone towards further migration to the United States. The highly skilled Indians have migrated to the developed countries not only through the employment gate, but also through academic gate as growing pools of revolving students (Majumdar, 1994; Abella, 2006).

Binod Khadria (2006) says that, in the developed countries today, the focus on the skilled Indian migration remains in the United States, with up to 80 per cent of skilled Indian migration to all developed countries. It was in the 1970s that the US overtook both the UK and Canada as the prime developed country of their destination. Indian immigration in the US, which constituted a minuscule of less than 1 percent of global immigration from all countries during the 1950s and 1960s, crossed a mark of 7 percent in 2004.

in his paper International migration of health workers: Labour and social issue states quoting study conducted by International council of Nurses that strongest incentive cited by respondents was the availability of learning opportunities. This includes scope to acquire specialist training that may not be available in the home country or similarly the chance to use technologies and other equipment which is not routinely available. And further he says a poor working environment may encourage individuals to seek employment abroad.

2.16 Synthesis, Research Gaps

The reviewed literature reveals a marked shift from dependent to independent female migration in Kerala, mirroring global patterns of rising female labor mobility. While qualitative accounts highlight this transition, the literature lacks quantification of its scale, sectoral distribution, and temporal trends. This gap is particularly notable given that in Kerala, female migration is concentrated in specific sectors such as nursing and domestic work, suggesting both occupational clustering and differential migration outcomes.

Existing studies emphasize that economic necessity remains a primary driver, but socio-cultural acceptance has also evolved to support certain migration pathways—especially skilled migration like nursing—while continuing to stigmatize others. However, the interplay between socio-cultural acceptance and economic drivers over time remains insufficiently examined.

Across the literature, structural inequalities—rooted in gender, caste, and class—combine with the dominance of informal recruitment channels to heighten the vulnerabilities of unskilled female migrants. Policy frameworks further entrench these disparities by treating skilled and unskilled migration differently, often reinforcing

gender hierarchies. While skilled migration is supported through training programs and bilateral agreements, unskilled migration, particularly in domestic work, remains under-regulated and exposed to exploitation. The potential unintended consequences of protective restrictions, such as age-based migration bans, are rarely studied in the Kerala context.

Migration's economic impacts, especially through remittances, are well-documented, with evidence that they improve household welfare. Yet these gains are unevenly distributed, often deepening existing inequalities. The literature pays little attention to how remittance use differs by gender, or how empowerment outcomes can be measured beyond income and material gains.

The literature also captures the dual social impacts of migration: for some women, it fosters empowerment and shifts in gender norms; for others, it results in stigma, isolation, or reinforced patriarchal control. The mechanisms that drive such divergent experiences remain unclear, particularly when intersected with caste, religion, and class. Intersectionality is acknowledged but rarely applied in a quantitative, Kerala-specific framework.

Well-documented are the occupational and sectoral disparities in migration experiences. Nurses and other skilled migrants benefit from better working conditions and legal protections, while unskilled migrants—particularly domestic workers in Gulf countries—face harsh labor conditions, legal exclusion, and gender-based violence. However, few studies offer comparative analyses of outcomes by sector or skill level.

Migration's non-economic consequences, such as mental health burdens, are only sporadically addressed. While reports note the psychological toll of abuse, isolation,

and separation from families, mental health remains absent from migration policy considerations in Kerala.

Finally, literature on gender-based violence in migration is extensive but largely descriptive, with little systematic prevalence data for Kerala's female migrants. The growing influence of climate change and trafficking on migration patterns is acknowledged, but studies rarely integrate these environmental and criminal dimensions into a holistic analysis of female migration.

2.16.1 Key Research Gaps

- Quantitative data on the scale, sectoral distribution, and temporal trends of independent female migration from Kerala.
- Longitudinal analysis of the interaction between socio-cultural acceptance and economic drivers.
- Gender-disaggregated analysis of remittance use and empowerment outcomes beyond economic indicators.
- Comparative outcome studies between skilled and unskilled female migrants.
- Mechanistic understanding of why migration empowers some women but stigmatizes others.
- Quantitative intersectional studies examining caste, religion, and class in migration experiences.
- Integration of mental health into migration policy and research.
- Exploration of emerging female migration streams, such as academic and IT sectors.

Chapter 3: Methodology

3.1 The Need for the study

Although a Focus on Gender differences as a Whole is essential, the purpose of this research is to cover analysis specifically on women and migration. This direction based on the lack of attention and inadequate emphasis on women-specific Data and Issues in the migration field.

Kerala is the most significant migrant-sending state within India, and the most recent survey shows that 14.6 percent of emigrants from Kerala are women (significantly up from 9.3 percent in 1998 but down from 17 percent in 2003), but only about half of them move as workers (Zachariah and Rajan, 2009). Kerala is currently leading with the highest number of emigrants to the Gulf. Among the four million workers from India, half are from Kerala. Almost all families in Kerala are affected by migration in one way or another. This study aims to analyze the pattern and characteristics of Kerala female migrant flow by time and destination. The literature shows the linkage factors of women's emigration as education, destination country, employment, income, and marriage. Though there are many studies done with emigrants with these factors, it is constrained to focus on women.

On one hand, we analyse migration flows and patterns of women mobility, seeking to understand and explain their destination, occupation and socio-economic characteristics. On the other hand, it is important to discuss why they go, what are the reasons, and how they go etc.

3.2 Problem statement

It isn't always that migration from developing countries is a male subject. Women too have a significant business in that. It is not that women alone go behind men as housewives or housemaids, but they also migrate with autonomy. The study mainly deals with the migration of Malayalee women emigrants who are skilled enough to take home a mass amount of remittance.

The desire of women to migrate and their parent's desire to send them abroad is ever-increasing. The growing willingness to migrate is due to various socio-economic factors. The process of women's emigration and their decision to relocate is prepared very early in the case of skilled women. Factors such as higher education, marriage, social and economic security in the destination countries influence women to migrate. The by-product of this female labour migration triggers off a vast amount of remittance to the country. At the same time, many live with persistent homesickness away from all their dear circumstances. The approach here is to understand these socio-economical and motivational factors about migration at the place of origin and the lifestyle outcomes of the place of destination.

This research also will analyse the motivation of migration and life satisfaction to work overseas and identify the channelling process. It is expected to describe the whole process of migration and to find out the push and pull factors of female migrant workers to migrate.

3.3 Research Questions:

- What are the trends and patterns of emigration from Kerala for the last two decades?

- What are the characteristics of the Women labor force from Kerala to abroad?
- What are the background characteristics of international women migration from Kerala?
- Who is these emigrant-sending Households in Kerala?
- What are the reasons behind international women's migration from Kerala?
- Why are women moving, and How does the process take place?

3.4 Research Objectives

1. To examine the individual migration from Kerala to Global: Pattern, trends and gender differentials
2. To understand the characteristics of emigrant women's labor force from Kerala.
3. To understand the type of Households sending migrant - women from Kerala and their socio-economic characteristics
4. To understand the process of women's emigration and its contributing factors.

3.5 Data Source

1. Individual and household files of Kerala Migration Survey, 1998, 2003, 2008, 2013 and 2018, published by Center for Development Studies. Thiruvananthapuram, Kerala
2. Individual file for emigrants of Kerala Migration Survey, 1998, 2003, 2008, 2013 and 2018, published by Center for Development Studies. Thiruvananthapuram, Kerala.

3. The estimated population of emigrants 1998, 2003, 2008, 2013 and 2018, from the overall base population given by Dr. S Irudaya Rajang and Dr. K C Zachariah in India Migration Report, 2018.

3.6 The Kerala Migration Survey (KMS) 2018

The Kerala Migration Survey (KMS) 2018 is the eighth iteration in a series of migration monitoring studies conducted by the Centre for Development Studies (CDS). Since its inception in 1998, KMS has been carried out every five years to assess migration trends, demographic changes, and remittance flows in Kerala. The 2018 survey aimed to estimate the total number of migrants, their demographic and socio-economic characteristics, as well as the overall household remittances to Kerala. The survey was conducted from January 1, 2018, to March 31, 2018, covering an extensive sample of households across the state.

3.6.1 Data Collection and Survey Design

The KMS 2018 survey methodology largely followed the approach of previous surveys but introduced refinements in household selection and coverage. Data collection was executed through structured questionnaires, field visits, and interviews with household members. The survey team included trained enumerators and supervisors responsible for ensuring accuracy and completeness of data. The information gathered included details on emigration, return migration, remittances, and household socio-economic conditions.

3.6.2 Sampling Methodology

The survey employed a stratified multistage random sampling method to ensure representative coverage across all 14 districts of Kerala. The sampling design was structured as follows:

- Stratification – Each district was divided into two strata: urban and rural, resulting in a total of 28 strata.
- Selection of Localities – Within each stratum, localities (villages in rural areas and wards in urban areas) were selected using a proportional sampling method. The number of localities increased from 300 in KMS 2013 to 500 in KMS 2018 to enhance representativeness.
- Household Selection – Systematic random sampling was employed to select households from each locality. In each locality, 30 households were chosen based on a systematic random selection process. If a locality contained 300 households, a systematic sampling interval (e.g., every 10th household) was applied after selecting a random starting point.
- Total Sample Size – The final survey covered 15,000 households, making it one of the largest migration-related surveys conducted in Kerala. These households were carefully selected to ensure a broad and diverse dataset reflective of Kerala’s demographic structure.
- Total Population Covered – The survey captured data from approximately 57,000 individuals, representing various socio-economic and demographic groups across the state.

3.6.3 Survey Modules and Sessions

The survey was divided into different modules to capture various aspects of migration:

- 1) Household Characteristics Module – Collected basic demographic and socio-economic data.
- 2) Emigration Module – Gathered details on current emigrants, including destination, duration, occupation, and reasons for migration.

- 3) Return Migration Module – Focused on individuals who had returned to Kerala after staying abroad for six months or more.
- 4) Remittance Module – Analyzed financial inflows from emigrants and their impact on household income and expenditures.
- 5) Demographic and Economic Trends Module – Examined changes in population size, employment patterns, and economic mobility due to migration.
- 6) Health and Social Impact Module – Investigated the health conditions of return migrants and their families, including any socio-economic challenges faced upon reintegration.

3.7 Tools and Methods

The study is conducted based on Primary and Secondary data. Secondary data collected from Kerala Migration Survey 1998, 2003, 2008, 2013 and 2018 have taken for the first, second and third objectives of the study. The data analyzed by using Statistical software SPSS and STATA. The data on women have focused more compared to men. As the topic suggest the study aims to find out the push – pull factors that impact the decision-making process of women regarding international migration.

3.7.1 Determinants of International labor Migration of Women @ Place of origin

This section analyses the factors influencing international labour migration among women from Kerala at the place of origin. The study employs a Binary Logistic Regression Model to determine the probability of a woman being an emigrant or a non-emigrant based on various socio-economic and demographic factors.

Explanatory Variable

Dependent Variables: Emigrant & Non-Emigrant women (Binary variable: Emigrant = 1, Non-Emigrant = 0).

Independent variable: Age group, religion, Level of Education, Economic activity, marital status, migration exposure to any family members, Type of ration card, Relationship to the head of the households

Binary Logistic regression equation has given below:

$$\ln(p/(1-p)) = \alpha + \beta_1x_1 + \beta_2x_2 + \beta_3x_3 + \dots + \beta_nx_n$$

Where, p: probability of occurrence of event.

(1-p): probability of non-occurrence of event.

(p/(1-p)): odds ratio, which is the probability of non-occurrence of event.

x_1 , x_2 and x_3 are predictor variables.

α : intercept where there is no effect on any independent variable on dependent variable.

β_1 , β_2 , β_3, β_n Regression coefficients representing the effect of each independent variable on the dependent variable.

3.7.2 Determinants of Working Status of Internationally migrated women from Kerala

This regression model factors influencing international labour migration among working women from Kerala. The study employs a Binary Logistic Regression Model to determine the probability of a woman being a working migrant or a non-working migrant based on various socio-economic and demographic factors.

Explanatory Variables

Dependent Variable: Working and Non-working women (Binary variable: Working = 1, Not Working = 0).

Independent Variables: Age group, religion, level of education, working status before migration, marital status, and migration exposure to family members.

Exclusion Criteria: Migrant women aged below 20 years and above 60 years were excluded from the analysis.

Binary Logistic Regression Model

The Binary Logistic Regression model is used to estimate the likelihood of a woman being a working migrant. The logistic regression equation applied for this analysis is:
Where: Probability of a woman being a working migrant. Probability of a woman being a non-working migrant. Odds ratio, representing the likelihood of migration versus non-migration. Intercept term, indicating the baseline log-odds when all predictor variables are zero.: Independent (predictor) variables included in the model. Coefficients representing the effect of each independent variable on the dependent variable.

The model estimates the relationship between each predictor variable and the probability of a woman being a working migrant. A positive coefficient () suggests an increase in the probability of migration, while a negative coefficient indicates a decrease in the likelihood of migration.

The significance of each predictor is assessed using p-values, with a p-value less than 0.05 indicating a statistically significant relationship. The results of this model are interpreted through odds ratios, which indicate how changes in predictor variables influence the probability of being a working migrant.

3.7.3 Determinants of Remittance Behavior

This section examines the determinants of remittances sent by international migrants to their households of origin using a Cross-Sectional Design. A Multivariate OLS

Regression Model is employed to identify the relationship between remittance behaviour and various socio-economic, demographic, and migration-related factors.

The model was developed and tested separately for male and female migrants to capture potential gender-specific differences in remittance determinants.

Dependent Variable: The total annual remittance, defined as the sum of cash and goods sent by migrants to their households of origin, serves as the dependent variable in the regression model.

Independent Variables: The independent variables are grouped into two broad categories

- 1) **Individual Characteristics:** Age, education level, marital status, type of ration card (Above Poverty Line [APL] or Below Poverty Line [BPL]), monthly income, religion, and economic activity.
- 2) **Migration Experience:** Reason for migration, duration of stay at the destination, and migration decision.

Dummy Variables

- Gender (Male = 1, Female =0)
- Marital status (Never married = 1, Married =0)
- Reason for migration (work = 1, Others =0)
- Place of destination (Gulf countries = 1, Other Countries = 0)
- Religion (Hindu = 1, Others=0).

The determinants of remittance behaviour were analysed using an Ordinary Least Squares (OLS) regression model. The general form of the multivariate regression equation is:

$$\text{Remittance} = \beta_0 + \beta_1(\text{Age}) + \beta_2(\text{Education}) + \beta_3(\text{Income}) + \beta_4(\text{Marital Status}) + \beta_5(\text{Economic Activity}) + \beta_6(\text{Place of Destination}) + \beta_7(\text{Religion}) + \beta_8(\text{Migration Experience}) + \epsilon_i$$

Where: Remittance_i is the total annual remittance sent by migrant i .

β_0 is the intercept

$\beta_1, \beta_2, \dots, \beta_8$ represent the coefficients of the independent variables.

ϵ_i is the error term representing unobserved factors.

Gender-Specific Regression Models: Separate regression models were developed for male and female migrants to identify the differences in factors influencing their remittance behaviour:

$$\text{For Male Migrants: Remittance}^{\text{Male}} = \beta_0 + \beta_1(\text{Age}) + \beta_2(\text{Education}) + \beta_3(\text{Income}) + \beta_4(\text{Economic Activity}) + \beta_5(\text{Marital Status}) + \beta_6(\text{Place of Destination}) + \beta_7(\text{Religion}) + \epsilon_i$$

$$\text{For Female Migrants: Remittance}_i^{\text{Female}} = \beta_0 + \beta_1(\text{Age}) + \beta_2(\text{Education}) + \beta_3(\text{Income}) + \beta_4(\text{Marital Status}) + \beta_5(\text{Place of Destination}) + \beta_6(\text{Poverty Level}) + \epsilon_i$$

3.7.4 In Depth Interviews

In addition to the quantitative analysis done with KMS data, the study also incorporated a qualitative component to gain deeper insights into the migration experiences of women and the push-pull factors. A total of 35 in-depth interviews were conducted with emigrant working women. These qualitative interviews aimed to explore the nuances of their migration processes, challenges faced, and personal experiences, providing a comprehensive understanding of the socio-economic dynamics involved in their migration journeys. The respondents were selected through

purposive sampling, as the participants were migrants at their destination. Securing their permission and scheduling interviews at times that suited them posed significant challenges. The majority of these interviews were conducted through WhatsApp or Botim calls due to the practical limitations of in-person meetings. This mixed-methods approach enriched the study by offering both statistical and narrative perspectives on the factors influencing migration and remittance behaviour. Malayalee women in the age group of 24 to 45 were considered for the study. Among the participants, 5 were student migrants, 3 were engaged in domestic labour, and the remaining 27 were skilled workers. Saturation was assessed through an iterative process of reviewing interview transcripts during data collection. New themes continued to emerge during the initial phase of interviews, but as data collection progressed, the narratives began to converge. Subsequent interviews largely reinforced patterns already identified, indicating that no substantially new insights were arising across the occupational categories.

Table 1: Basic details of the respondents participated in the case study

Countries	N	Occupation	N
Bahrain	2	Nurses	16
Kuwait	2	Accountant	2
Qatar	1	Marketing	1
Saudi Arabia	2	Communication	1
UAE	2	Teachers	3
Canada	3	Clerks	1
UK	7	Semiskilled	3
Ireland	3	Pharma	1
Australia	3	Courier	1
Sweden	1	Engineering	4
Maldives	2	Child care	1
Myanmar	1	District	N
USA	1	Kottayam	6
Germany	1	Pathanamthitta	12
Singapore	1	Trivandrum	2
Maldives	1	Alappuzha	4
Netherlands	1	Thrissur	2
Poland	1	Palakkad	7
Marital Status	N	Kollam	2
Married	18	Age group	N
Unmarried	17	20 to 25	4
Religion	35	26 to 30	18
Christian	23	31 to 35	9
Hindu	10	36 to 40	4
Muslim	2		

3.8 Organization of the dissertation

Chapter 1: Introduction

Chapter 2: Review of Literature

Chapter 3: Need of the study, Research questions, Objectives, Data source, methodology

Chapter 4: To examine the individual migration from Kerala to Global

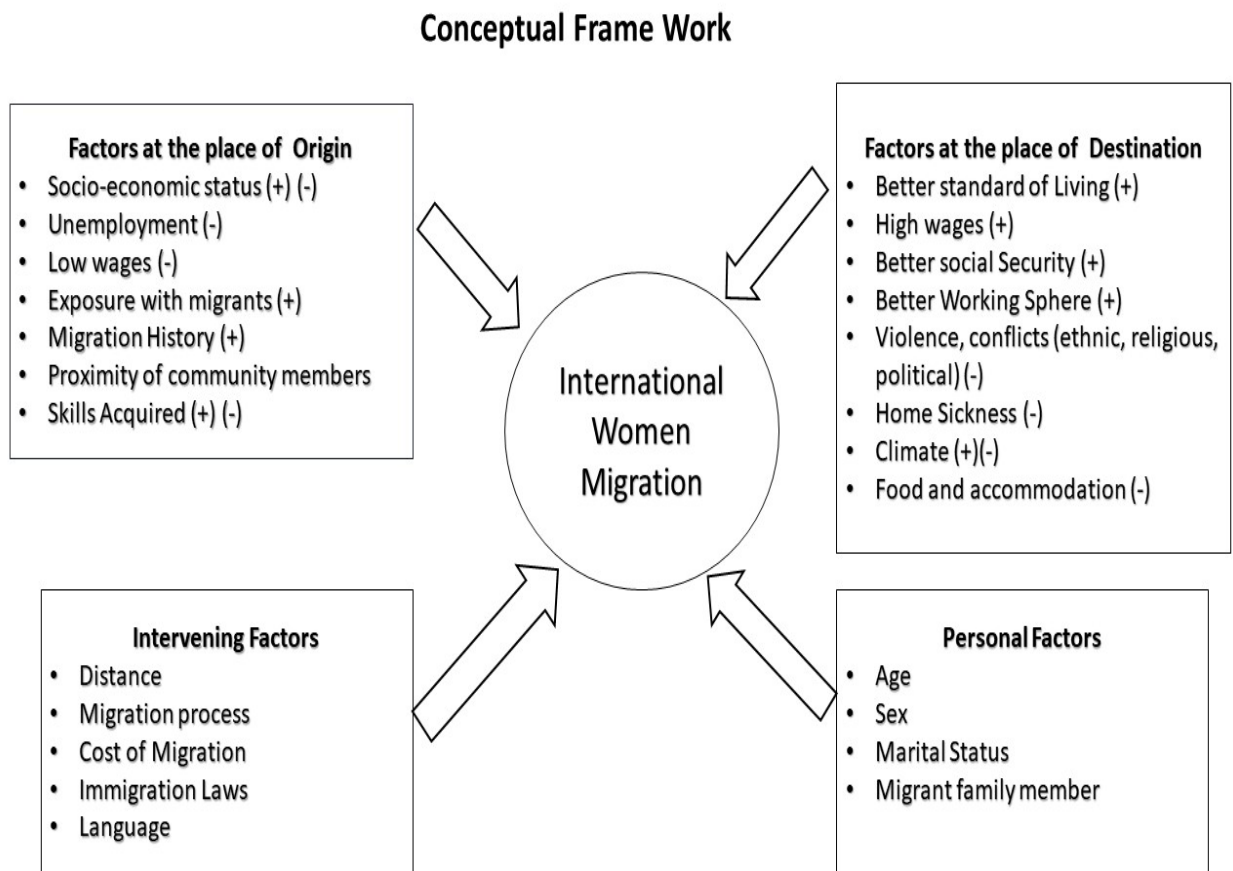
Chapter 5: To understand the characteristics of emigrant women's labour force from Kerala.

Chapter 6: To understand the type of Households sending emigrant women

Chapter 7: To understand the process of individual women migration and its contributing factors

Chapter 8: Conclusion and summary

3.9 Conceptual Frame work



Chapter 4: Individual migration from Kerala to Global: Pattern, trends and gender differentials

Objective 1 discusses overall migration trends, pattern and gender differentials in the study area and their socio-economic characteristics. International migration from Kerala started in the 80s with the oil boom in the Gulf, and here we analyse data since 1998. Since then, the migration trend has continued, and they started going to other parts of the world like Europe, Oceania and America. Kerala migration survey has conducted surveys and produced data on International migration for the last two decades since 1998. As per Kerala Migration Survey 1998, the number of emigrants (EMI) was 13.6 lakhs, and in 2018, it reported 21.2 lakhs despite the large return migration reported in the last decade. In 2018 the survey reported around 13 lakhs of return migrants in the state.

This chapter will discuss overall trends of international migration for two decades but patterns and gender differentials of various socio-economic characteristics in the 2018 survey. Even though the prime focus of this study is on women's labour migration, knowing the background and ground situation on migration from the place of origin is crucial.

4.1 Overall trend of emigration from Kerala

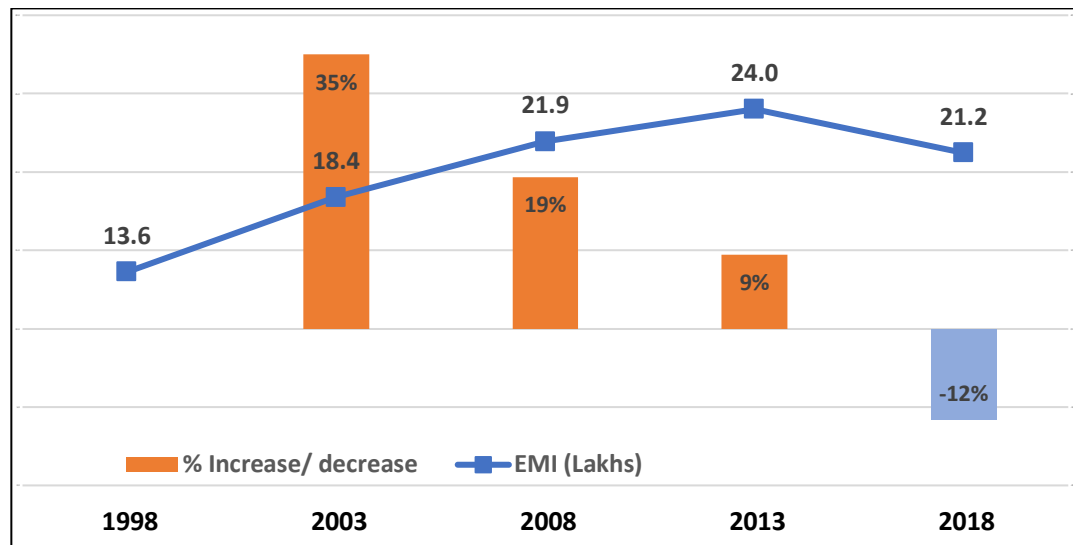


Figure 1: 20 years of emigration trend from Kerala & inter survey Growth rate

Though women's participation in migration is comparatively low, it shows evident diversity across various socio-economic features. As per the Kerala migration survey 2018, only 15% of international migrants are women.

Figure 1 discusses the trend of international migration for the last two decades and the % growth rate between two consecutive surveys. In this, we can see that the emigrant's population was increasing since the first survey till 2013, yet it shows a decline after that. The overall emigrant population came down to 21.2 lakhs in 2018. The percentage growth rate reported between five-year intervals shows a declining trend since 2003; further, it went to a negative (-12%) growth rate at the end. In 2013, the emigration trend peaked, with around 24 lakh people going abroad, 331252 females and 2069123 males. Since then, it began declining; in 2018, it estimated 21 lakh emigrants.

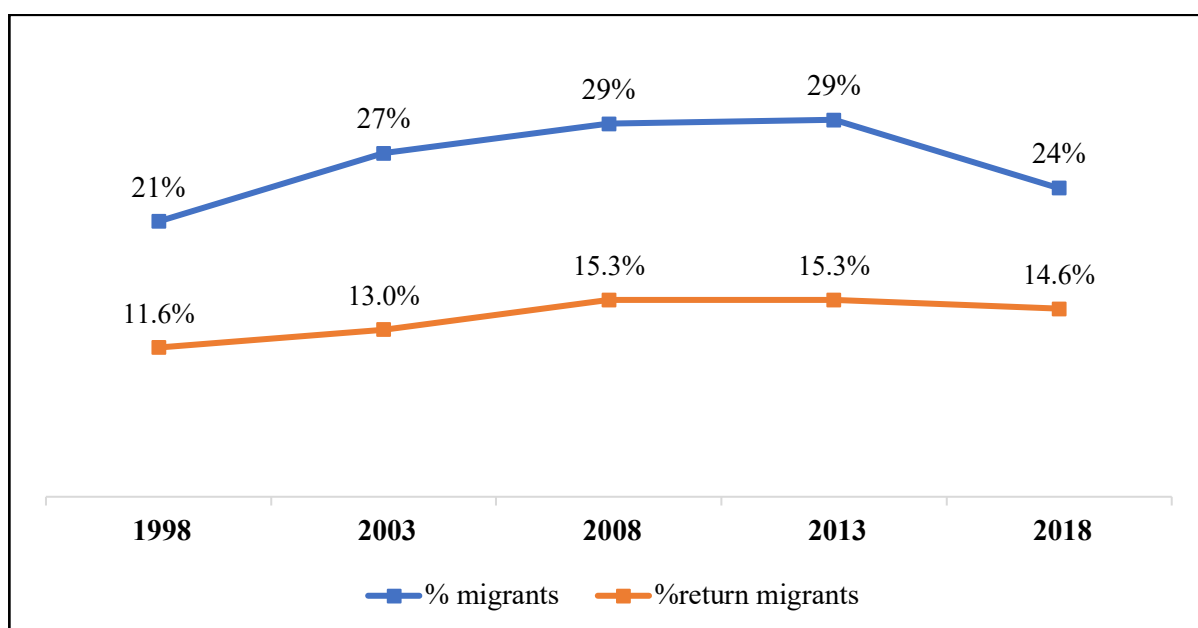


Figure 2: Emigration & Return- migrants per 100 households

Figure 2 shows the rate by household distribution of emigrant population and return migrants. There are 14 out of 100 households in Kerala have return migrants. The emigration trend in Kerala since 1998 shows that it was on the rise until 2013 and has decreased since then. There was a drop of 5% in people during the five years between 2013 and 2018. The trend looks unchanged in the last decade, with around 15% of return migrants in the state.

4.2 Emigration trend by gender Differentials

Table 2: Gender Differentials in Emigration trend of two decades

Year	Emigrants		In Percentage		% Growth	
	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male
1998	126658	1235261	9.3	90.7		
2003	312541	1525937	17.0	83.0	147	24
2008	318045	1875367	14.5	85.5	2	23
2013	331252	2069123	13.8	86.2	4	10
2018	335258	1786629	15.8	84.2	1	-14

Although differences in emigration between male and female emigrants are wider, it shows a decline in the last survey. This decline is due to the increasing female emigration and male return migration. As female emigration grew by 5% between 2008 and 2018, male emigration declined by 5%. However, the gender-wise share of total emigrants remains primarily the same; It was merely 15.8% women in the last survey.

From 1998 to 2018, the **figure 3** above show the trend line of male and female emigrants. Despite the lower percentage share of females, there is a constant positive trend. As per the 2018 survey, Kerala has around 3.35 lakhs female migrants and 17.9 lakhs males living abroad. A reduction in male emigrants was reported during 2013-2018, falling from 20.7 lakhs to 17.9 lakhs. And this is the first time showing a

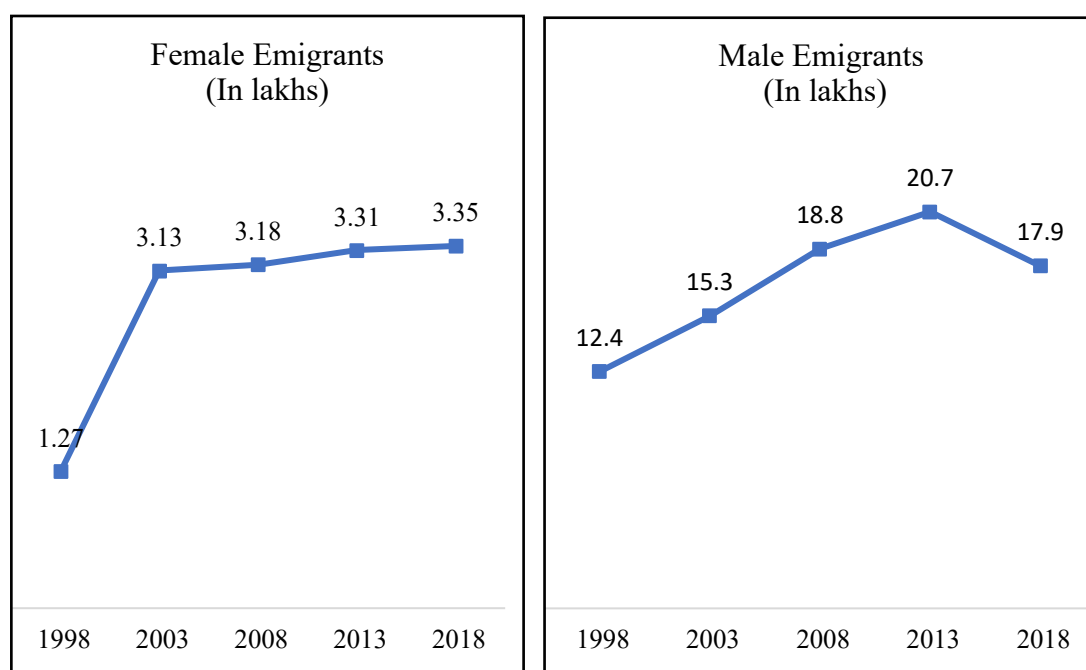


Figure 3: Trendline for Male and female emigrants from Kerala for the last two decades (In lakhs)

declining trend for men, with nearly 14% of falls reported between the last two surveys.

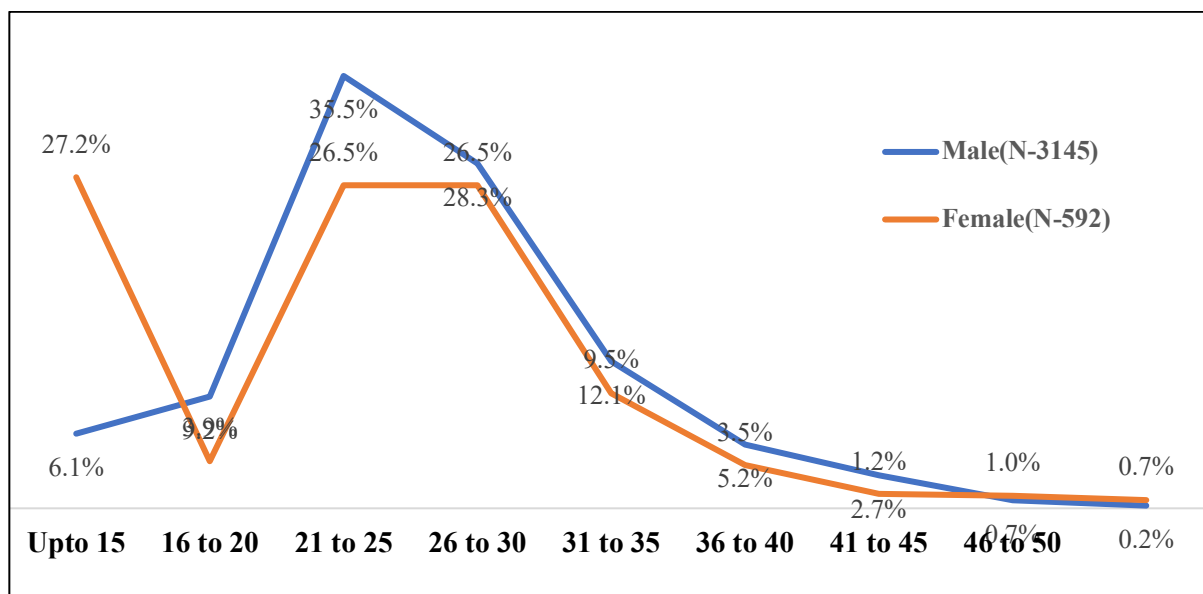


Figure 4: Age Distribution of Male and Female Emigrants from Kerala

Figure 4 discussed gender differentials by age groups from 2018 survey data. The age patterns for males and females are largely similar in nature except for those below 15 years. A large share of male and female emigrants falls between 20 to 30 years. From there, it gradually falls to the following groups. One exception is the significant number of female emigrant children under 15. Emigration of males peaked in the 21 to 25 age group, whereas females peaked in the 26 to 30 group.

4.3 Emigration trend by Age differentials

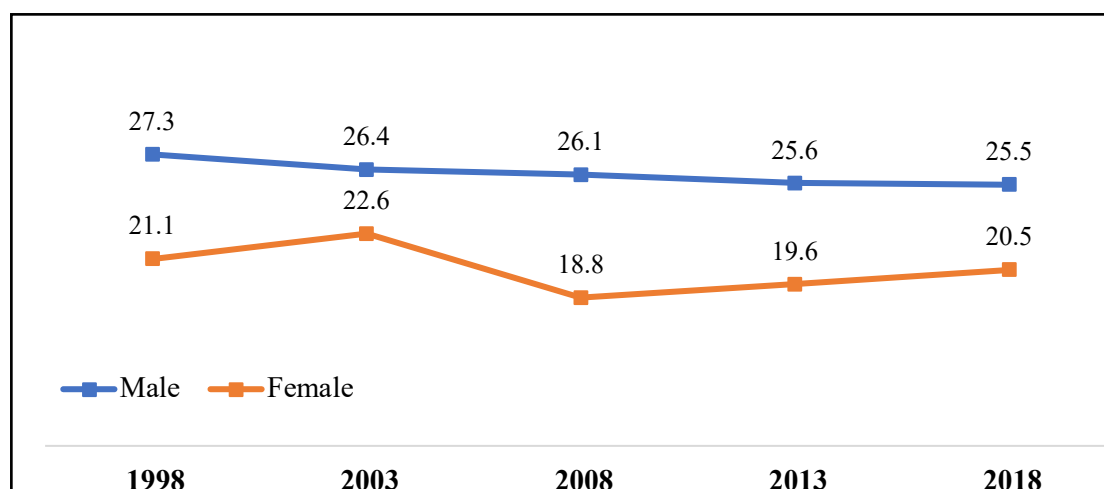


Figure 5: Trend line for average age of male and female emigrants

In figure 5, It is clear that female emigrants are younger than males throughout the surveys. Nearly six years difference is visible between the age of male and female emigrants throughout the trend. The age difference between male and female emigrants was reported least in 2003 and most in 2008, with 3.8 and 7.3, respectively. In 2018 average age of male emigrants were 25.5 years, and for female, it was 20.5 years. The number of females migrating abroad as part of their families caused the average age of females to decrease. From 26.7 years in 1998 to 24.7 years in 2018, the average age of emigrants (male & female) has reduced.

Table 3: : Percentage of international migrants under 15 years

Year	N	Female (%)	Male (%)	Total (%)
1998	2099	26	3	5
2003	2694	17	4	6
2008	4004	31	5	9
2013	4072	26	4	7
2018	3736	27	6	9

The age group of the emigrants also varies for males and females. Children under five make about 9% of Kerala's emigrant population. As a result of family migration, the proportion of children under 15 among emigrants is rising. Table 3 demonstrates that a sizable proportion of female emigrants were children during the trend. Compared to only 6% of men, about one-fourth (27%) of women in 2018 were young, under the age of 15. The highest percentage of male emigrants under 15 was recorded in 2018. International migration of unmarried people is showing a declining trend in the last decade.

4.4 Trends of Never married Emigrants for two decades

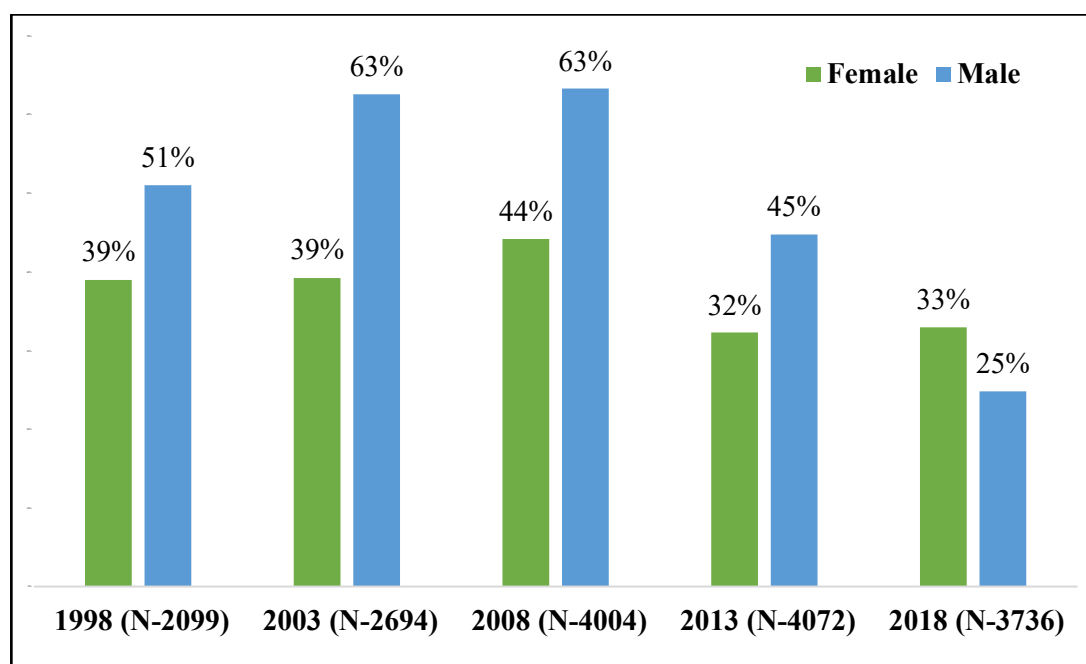


Figure 6: Trend of Never married Emigrants from Kerala (%)

Half of the emigrants in 1998 were unmarried, peaked at 60% in 2008 but dropped drastically to one-fourth (26.1%) in 2018. In 2018, nearly three-fourths (73.1%) were married during migration. Figure 5 shows a declining trend of gender-gap from 1998 to 2018. The difference between the percentage of male and female unmarried emigrants was 23.3% in 2003, has narrowed to -8.2% in 2018. In the last survey, females dominated males in terms of unmarried emigrants for the first time. The

survey shows that one-third (33%) of female migrants and one-fourth (25%) of male migrants are single. A large migration of skilled women and children going as part of their families could be the reason for female dominance. Overall, more than one-fourth (26%) of the emigrant population were single when they went abroad.

4.5 Trends of emigration by secondary education

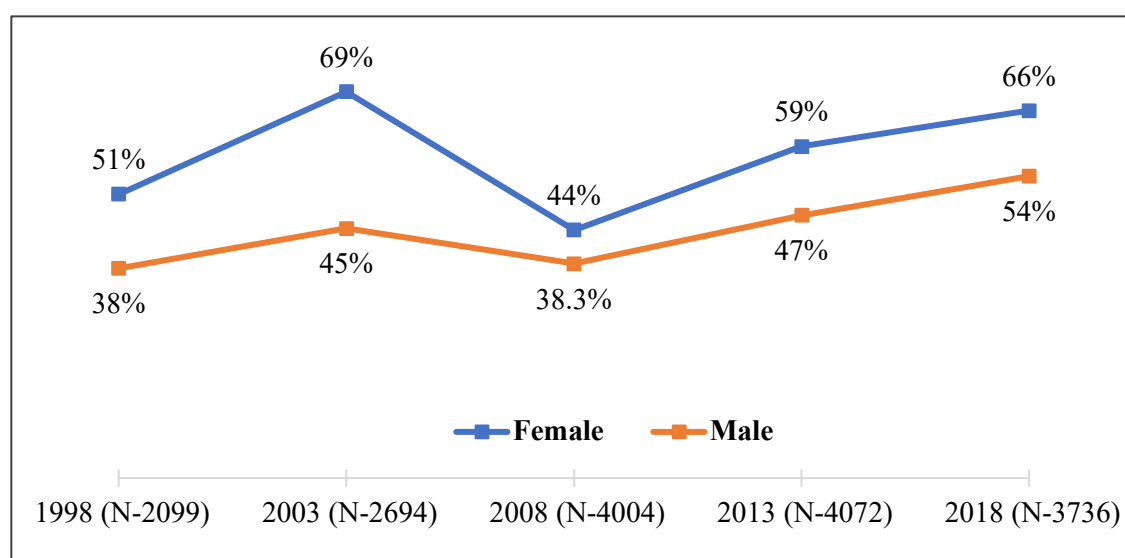


Figure 7: Gender Differentials of Emigrants with at least Secondary Education

Figure 7 shows a trendline for male and female migrant's education status. It is based on achievement of secondary education and higher at the time of migration. Figure undoubtedly gives women an upper hand in their education status throughout the trend. Educational level has improved for males and females since 2008. As per 2018 survey data, around two-thirds (66%) of female emigrants and more than half (54%) of male emigrants have an education level of at least a Plus-two / pre-degree. The samples considered for the analysis included children.

In 2018 nearly one-fourth (24.6%) of the male and more than half (53.1%) of females reported that they are qualified with a degree. Those qualified with a degree were merely 9% and 22% in 1998 for males and females.

4.6 Emigration trend & Gender differentials at destination Countries

Gulf been the major destination for Malayalee's since the oil boom. Table 4 represents the share of gulf migrants by gender. The trend never went less than 85% in the overall share. In the gender comparison, female's share is lesser than males throughout the trend. This gap was 12% in 1998, yet it has reached 18% in 2018. Lower gulf share implies higher migration to other regions like America, Europe and Oceania.

Table 4: Gender Differentials in Gulf Migration

Year	Female (%)	Male (%)	Total (%)
1998	83%	95%	94%
2003	74%	92%	89%
2008	69%	92%	89%
2013	68%	88%	85%
2018	74%	92%	89%

4.7 Pattern of Emigration by place of Origin

Table 5: Distribution of Emigrants by Origin District, 2018 (in percentage)

Districts	Pop of emigrants in Percent			Emigration rate for 1000 Pop		Sex ratio (M/F)*100
	Male (N-3145)	Female (N-592)	All (N-3737)	Male	Female	
Alappuzha	6	8.6	6.4	108	27.2	271
Ernakulam	2.4	3.7	2.6	25	7.2	297
Idukki	1.2	4.2	1.7	37	24.0	641
Kannur	10.3	8.1	10.0	151	19.8	148
Kasaragod	4.1	1.0	3.6	116	4.9	46
Kollam	10.7	10.8	10.8	150	25.2	189
Kottayam	5.3	17.7	7.3	92	55.0	625
Kozhikode	11	7.1	10.4	127	14.2	121

Malappuram	19.7	5.4	17.4	180	8.6	52
Palakkad	4.2	2.0	3.9	57	4.8	91
Pathanamthitta	4.5	9.6	5.3	133	48.0	407
Thiruvananthapuram	8.5	7.1	8.3	91	13.2	157
Thrissur	10.4	12.8	10.8	120	24.6	232
Wayanad	1.6	1.7	1.6	63	12.3	204
Total	100	100.0	100.0	109	18.3	183

Table 5 portrays the pattern of international migration across fourteen districts of Kerala and its gender differentials. The Northern districts and Kollam district are leading them with the maximum number of migrants. Five northern districts, such as Malappuram, Kannur, Thrissur & Kozhikode, contribute nearly half (49%) of the migrants. Other than this, Kollam (10.8%), Thiruvananthapuram (8.3%) and Kottayam (7.3%) have a significant share of international migrants from Kerala. The overall pattern of international migration from Kerala follows the same for district-wise male migrants in gender-wise analysis.

The maximum share of female migrants is from Kottayam (17.7%), followed by Thrissur (12.8%), Kollam (10.8%) and Pathanamthitta (9.6%). The emigration rate of women is vital to see how many women are migrating from the base women population in the respective districts. Kottayam leads with 55 women for 1000

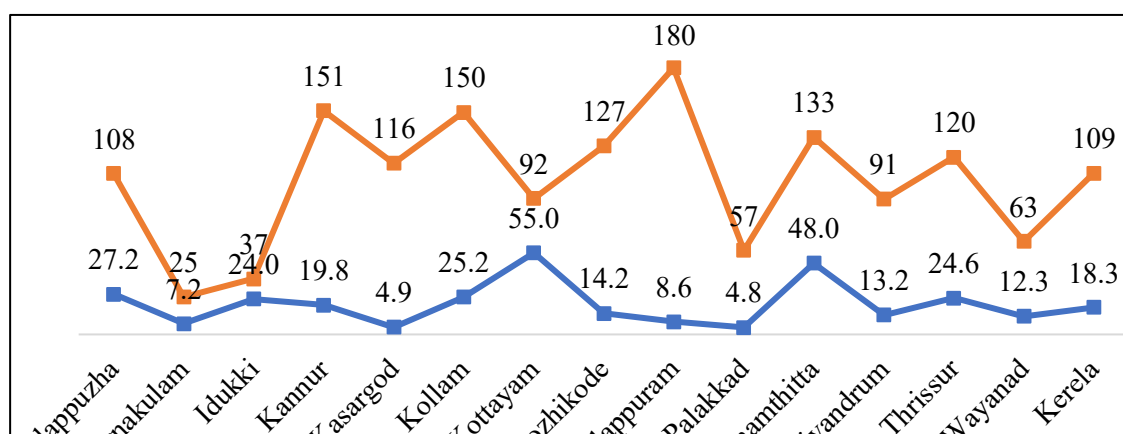


Figure 8: Gender Differentials in emigration rate by districts in Kerala:

women, followed by Pathanamthitta (48) and Alappuzha (27). Though the share of women migrants is lesser in Idukki, their migration rate is significant, with 24 women for 1000 women. Overall, 18 females are migrating internationally for every 1000 females in Kerala; for men, it is six times (109 males for 1000 males) more than their female counterparts. The below graph represents the migration rate for male & female migrants and their gender differentials. Wayanad and Idukki districts have the lowest number of emigrants in Kerala in all three categories. The districts Alappuzha, Ernakulam, Idukki, Kottayam, Pathanamthitta and Thrissur have more female than male emigrant share.

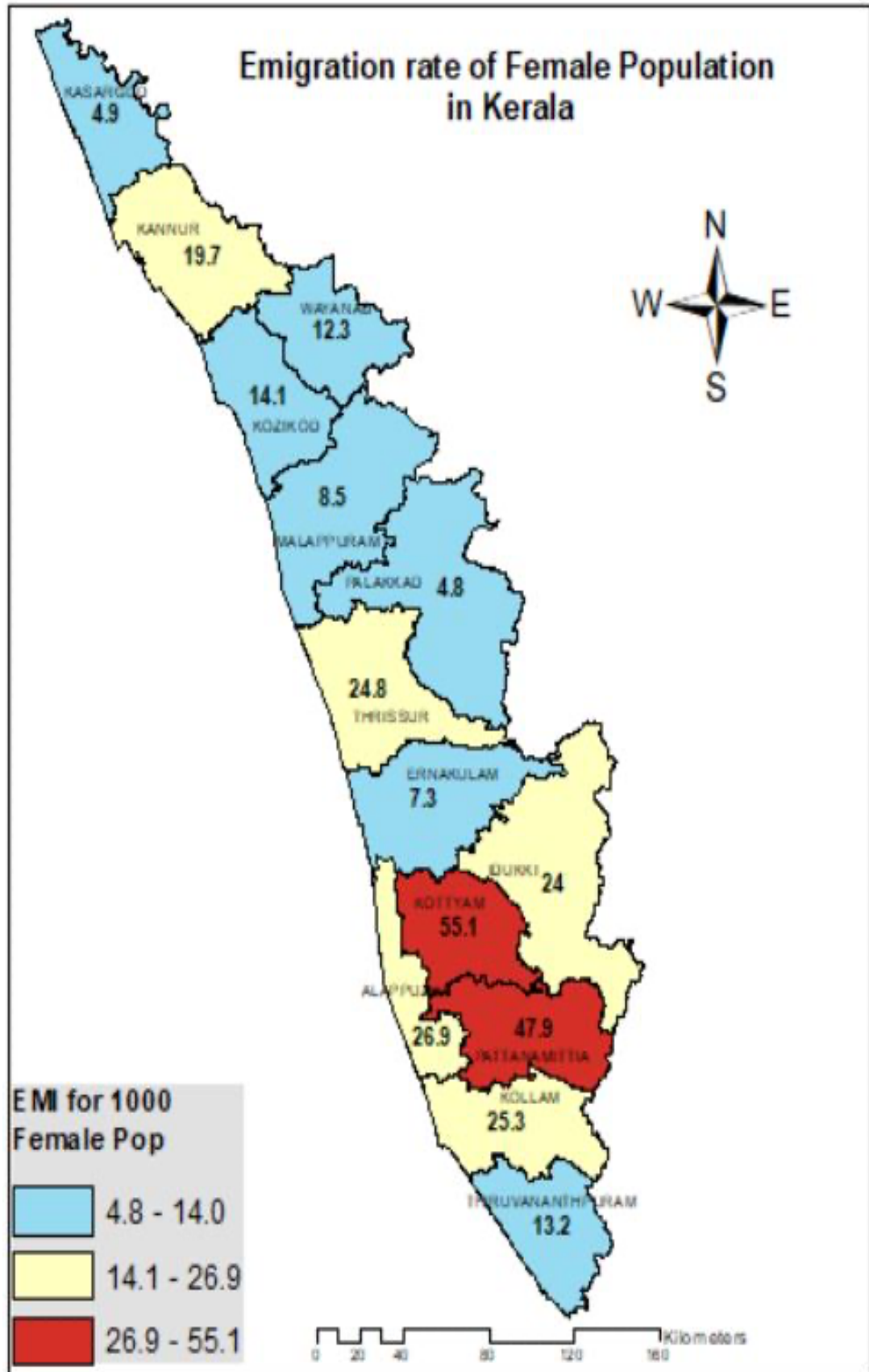


Figure 9: District wise Emigration rate of female population in Kerala

Table 6: Results from bivariate logistic regression model containing Migrant and Non-migrant as the explanatory variables and place of origin

Independent Variable	Odds Ratio	P>z	[95 Conf.	Interval]
Districts				
Trivandrum®				
Kollam	2.226059	0.01	1.214696	4.079489
Pathanamthitta	3.1391	0	1.664767	5.919116
Alappuzha	1.889852	0.052	0.994047	3.592929
Kottayam	6.103806	0	3.47537	10.72014
Idukki	2.196078	0.022	1.122149	4.297791
Ernakulam	0.9851567	0.967	0.489403	1.983096
Thrissur	1.322835	0.428	0.662354	2.641928
Malappuram & Palakkad	0.5294118	0.098	0.2494784	1.123452
Kozhikod & Wayanad	0.6294492	0.254	0.2839339	1.395417
Kannur & Kasargod	0.9816907	0.959	0.4819238	1.999728
Constant	0.0505952	0	0.0310817	0.08236
R2	0.07			
Observation (N)	3327			
LR chi2	125.73			
Log likelihood	-834.5663			

This section examines the influence of different districts in Kerala on women's decision to migrate. The analysis uses **Migrant & Non-Migrant women as the explanatory variable** and **Districts as the independent variable**, aiming to identify districts with a significant impact on women's migration patterns.

The logistic regression results indicate that some districts have a statistically significant effect on women's migration. The districts of Kollam, Pathanamthitta, Kottayam, and Idukki show significant p-values ($p < 0.05$), suggesting that women from these districts are more likely to migrate compared to the reference district, Trivandrum.

- Kollam: Women from Kollam are 2.23 times more likely to migrate compared to those from Trivandrum, with a significant p-value of 0.010.
- Pathanamthitta: This district shows a strong positive association with migration, where women are 3.14 times more likely to migrate ($p = 0.000$).
- Kottayam: Exhibits the highest odds ratio of 6.10, indicating that women from this district are the most likely to migrate compared to Trivandrum ($p = 0.000$).
- Idukki: Women from Idukki are approximately 2.20 times more likely to migrate compared to those from Trivandrum ($p = 0.022$).
- Districts like Ernakulam, Thrissur, Malappuram & Palakkad, Kozhikode & Wayanad, and Kannur & Kasargod do not exhibit significant effects on women's migration decisions, suggesting that geographical and socio-economic factors may influence migration patterns differently across districts.

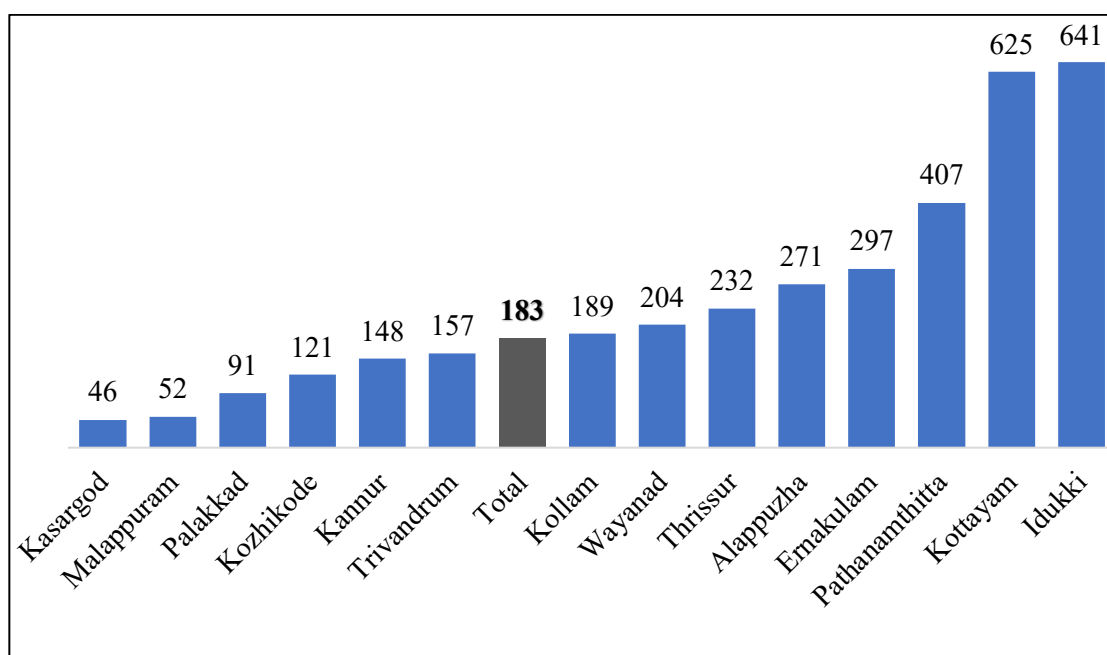
The model's performance is moderate, with an R^2 value of 0.070, indicating that about 7% of the variation in women's migration decisions can be explained by the district-

level differences. The Log-Likelihood (-834.5663) and the LR Chi² value of 125.73 indicate that the model is statistically significant overall.

Additionally, the descriptive statistics reveal that the highest proportion of migrant women comes from Kottayam (23.6%), followed by Pathanamthitta (13.7%) and Kollam (10.1%). This finding is consistent with the logistic regression results, highlighting these districts as prominent sources of female migration.

Overall, the results suggest that geographical origin plays an essential role in influencing women's migration decisions, with certain districts exhibiting stronger tendencies for migration. This variation may be attributed to factors such as socio-economic status, education levels, migration networks, and cultural attitudes towards female migration.

The gender gap in international migration is maximum in Kasaragod and least in Idukki and Kottayam. The global migration rate of men in Kasaragod is 23.5 times more than women. Malappuram is the origin of a large number (17.4%) of international migrants from the state, but their female participation is meagre. Men migrants from the district are 21 times more than their women counterparts.



*Figure 10: Sex ratio among Emigrants (F/M)*1000*

The sex ratio among emigrants is 183 females for 1000 males. As the graph shows, Kasargod has the least, and Idukki has the most sex ratio among international migrants from Kerala. Six districts have a lesser sex ratio, and the other eight have a larger sex ratio than the overall migrant sex ratio from the state. Idukki has the least number of migrant females, showing the maximum sex ratio among fourteen districts of Kerala. Idukki has the leading position with 641 emigrant females for 1000 males, followed by Kottayam(625) and Pathanamthitta (407). The northern districts have poor performance in sex ratio compared to other parts of the state.

4.7.1 Gender Gap of Emigrants at place of destination

Figure 11 compares the destination preferences of male and female migrants. The Gulf region is the most popular destination, attracting 92% of male migrants and 74% of female migrants. This significant gender difference suggests that men are more likely to migrate to the Gulf than women. Women show slightly higher representation in

other regions, including Europe (3%), United States of America (6%), and Others (7%), compared to men.

Figure 12 displays the percentage difference in migration patterns between men and women across different regions. The most notable difference is observed in the Gulf region, where female migration is 18% lower than male migration. In contrast, women are slightly more represented in all other regions, particularly in Europe, the United Kingdom, the USA, Oceania, and Other countries. The modest growth across these regions suggests that women are increasingly seeking migration opportunities beyond the traditional Gulf destinations.

The comparison indicates a shift where female migration is diversifying towards non-Gulf countries. This could be influenced by better educational qualifications, professional opportunities, and changing societal norms encouraging women's independent migration.

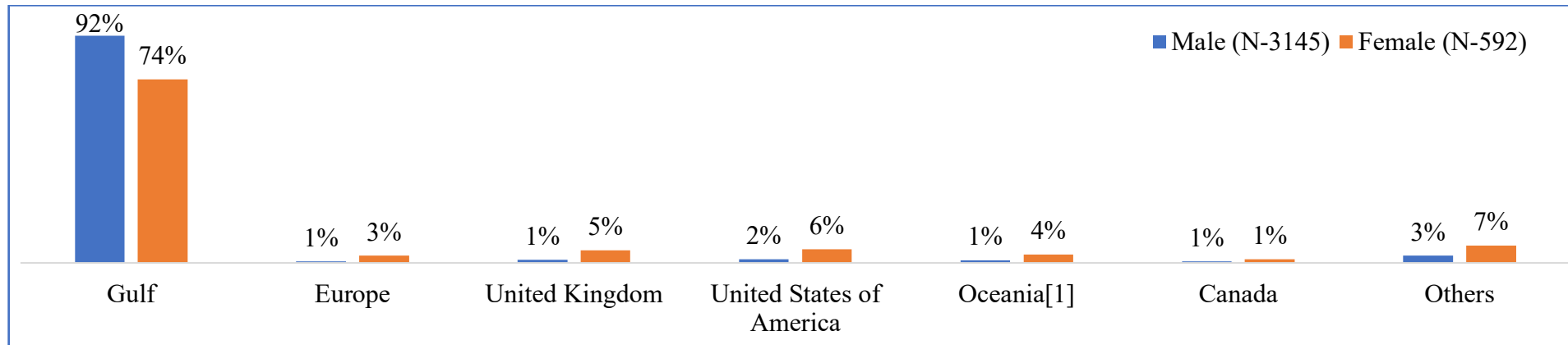


Figure 11: Place of Destination Pattern of Male & Female Migration

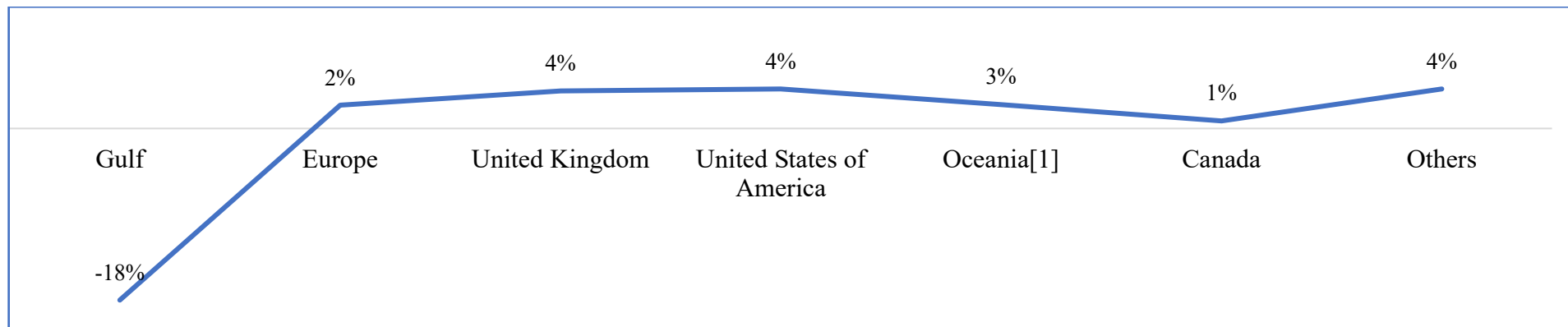


Figure 12: Gender gap in terms of share of male & female migrants at different destination

4.8 Trend of Emigration by economic activity at place of Destination

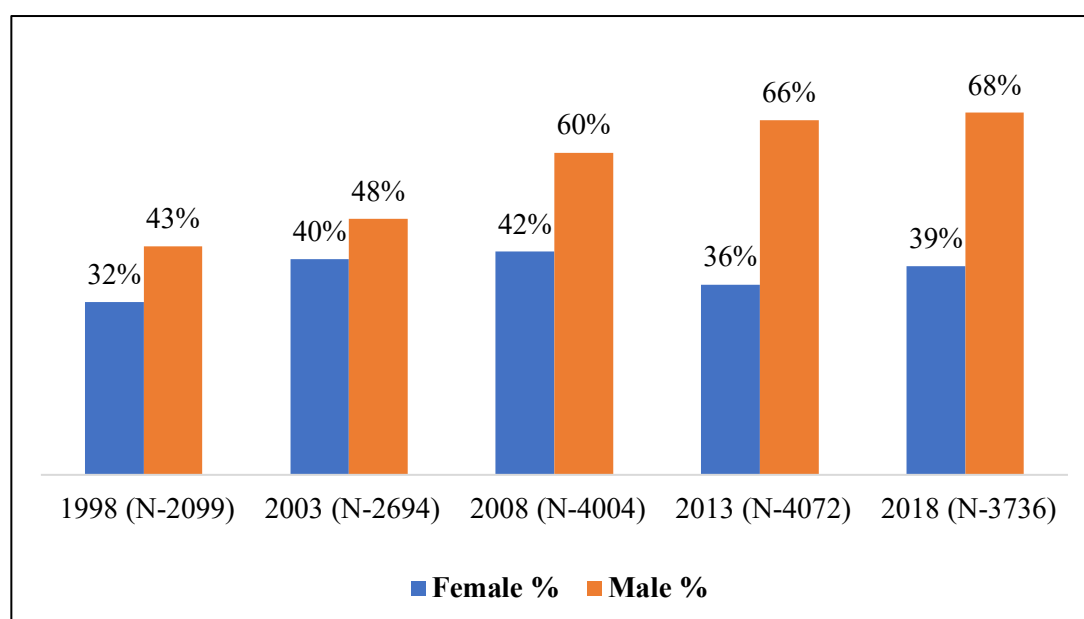


Figure 13: Trend of Economic activity by gender differential of emigrants at Destination; Govt, semi govt & private sector

Analysis in **figure 13** discusses the trend of economic activities of males and females for the last 20 years. Economic activities ²such as 'Employed in State /Central Govt', 'Employed in Semi Govt. Aided school/college, co-operative /local admin bodies, 'Employed in Private sector' compiled shown in the figure. These activities are considered under the formal labour force with a sure monthly salary. The sample for this analysis is for all age groups, so the share of formal employment will not peak beyond certain levels, as a significant share of emigrants are under 18.

The figure shows that participation in the mentioned section has been increasing gradually since the trend began. In 1998 the share of women in formal employment

² **Economic activity:** 'Employed in State /Central Govt', 'Employed in Semi Govt. Aided school/college, co-operative /local admin bodies, 'Employed in Private sector'

was 32%, and for men, it was 43%, whereas, in 2018, it reached 39% and 68%, respectively, for women and men. A wide gender gap in the trend, especially since 2008, is noticeable, and it can imply higher female migration caused by family migration. The share of females in formal employment was the maximum in 2004 with 42% share, yet it declined after that.

Table 7 discussed the pattern of economic activities of males and females for pre – post-migration in 2018. Emigrants from all age groups have been considered in the analysis. Private sector jobs, household work, job seekers and those too young to work contributed to the majority share before migration for females. Same time for males, it was 'Employed in Private sector', 'job seekers' & 'Labourers in non-agric. Sector'. Nearly one-fourth (23.8%) of females reported being too young to work before migration, whereas only a few (5.1%) males said the same.

Table 7: Gender differentials in Economic activity for Pre-& Post Migration

Economic Activity	Female (N-592)		Male (N-3145)	
	<u><i>AM³ (%)</i></u>	<u><i>BM⁴ (%)</i></u>	<i>BM (%)</i>	<i>AM (%)</i>
State /Central Govt	1	6.3	0.7	1.5
Semi Govt. Aided school/college, co-operative /local bodies	1	2	1.1	1.4
Private sector	20.8	30.7	29	64.9
Self-employment	1.7	1.4	11.3	6.1

³ AM: After Migration

⁴ BM: Before Migration

Unpaid family work	0.2	0.3	0.5	0
Agricultural labour	0	0	1.9	0.1
Labourers in non-agric. Sector	1	3	20.2	18.8
Job seekers	13.7	1.9	22.8	0.3
Job not required	0.8	0.2	0.4	0.1
Students	9.1	17.4	6.8	4.3
Household works	26.9	26.2	0.1	0.1
Too young to work	23.8	10.6	5.1	2.3
Total	100	100	100	100

Private sector jobs lead for both males and female's post-migration. Nearly two-thirds (65%) and one-fifth (19%) of male migrants are working abroad in the private sector, and Labourers in non-agric. Sector. Share of Students (17.4%) & Household work (26.2%) is more for females at the destination. Female employment in government and semi-government bodies is significantly higher than male employment, with 6.3% & 2% compared to 15% & 1.4%, respectively.

4.9 Summary

Kerala's migration story since the late 20th century reveals how international mobility has become deeply embedded in the state's socio-economic fabric. Emigration grew steadily from 1998 and peaked in 2013, followed by a decline, even as return migration rose substantially. Across two decades, women have consistently formed a smaller share of migrants—around 15% in 2018—but their profile is distinct: they are generally younger, more educated, and more likely to migrate as part of families or to

destinations beyond the Gulf. The analysis also shows a steady fall in unmarried male emigrants and, for the first time in 2018, a larger proportion of unmarried female migrants. District-level patterns highlight wide variations, with certain districts such as Kottayam, Pathanamthitta, Kollam, and Idukki emerging as prominent sources of female migration. At destinations, men dominate private-sector jobs, while women's migration reflects a combination of labour market entry, household roles, and educational opportunities. Overall, while male migration still dominates numerically, the emerging patterns point to a gradual diversification and narrowing of gender differentials, laying the groundwork for a deeper exploration of women's labour migration in the following chapters.

Chapter 5: Levels, Patterns and Differentials of International Migration of women labour force from Kerala.

This chapter focussed on emigrant women who is in working age group. Here Working age group is considered from 18 to 60. Chapter discusses various characteristics of women who migrate internationally from Kerala. Patterns over socio-economic parameters, shift due to migration in their economic activities, and occupational shift will be presented. The major part of discussion will be on women labour force, its levels and patterns. This chapter also discussed the reason for emigration and how it affected them during the residential shift.

5.1 Socio-economic Profile of emigrant women

Table 8 illustrates the socio-economic characteristics of international migrant women from Kerala. It allows comparison between various categories under each characteristic.

Even though Hinduism is predominant religion and Christians are the smallest group in Kerala, migrant women internationally from Kerala are dominant, with Christians and Hindu women coming only in the second position. Despite Muslims leading in overall international migration, their gender differential is too broad, with the least participation (14%) of women. The proportion of Christian women in international migrants (48%) is more than double that of the base Christian population (18%).

The majority of the international migrant women in Kerala are married, which gives a sense of family migration. Unemployed women accompanying their husbands or skilled women taking their husbands could be a reason for this.

The percentage of women migrants in 10 years age group. As this study focuses on working women, the under-18 age group was removed from the analysis. Half of the women are in the age group of 31 to 40, with a median age of 37. Overall female migrants, one-fourth (25.7%, (N-592)) are under 20, and merely 7.8% are above 50 years of age.

Table 8: Socio-economic profile of emigrant women, 2018

Characteristics	Categories	Percent N-451
Religion	<i>Hindu</i>	37.9
	<i>Christian</i>	48.1
	<i>Muslim</i>	14.0
Age Group	<i>Below 20</i>	2.4
	<i>21 to 30</i>	15.7
	<i>31 to 40</i>	49.9
	<i>41 to 50</i>	21.7
	<i>Above 50</i>	10.2
Marital Status	<i>Never married</i>	12.7
	<i>Married</i>	85.3
	<i>Widow</i>	1.1
	<i>Divorced</i>	0.4
	<i>Separated</i>	0.4
Education Status	<i>Below pre-degree</i>	20.6
	<i>ITI/Diploma</i>	7.8
	<i>Degree</i>	49.7
	<i>Masters</i>	20.2
	<i>Literate</i>	1.6

Economic Activity	<i>Illiterate</i>	0.2
	<i>Employed in State /Central Govt.</i>	8.2
	<i>Employed in Semi Govt. Aided school/college, co-operative /local admin bodies</i>	2.7
	<i>Employed in the Private sector</i>	40.4
	<i>Self-employment.</i>	1.8
	<i>Unpaid family work.</i>	0.4
	<i>Labourers in non-agric. Sector.</i>	4.0
	<i>Job seekers</i>	2.4
	<i>Job not required</i>	0.2
	<i>Students</i>	5.1
	<i>Household works</i>	34.4
	<i>Too young to work</i>	0.4

In terms of education, most women migrants from Kerala are qualified with degrees (50%) or master's degrees (20%). A minimal number of women are illiterate or literate without any formal education. Less than half (40%) of the women are employed in the private sector, and one-third (34%) of women involved in households works.

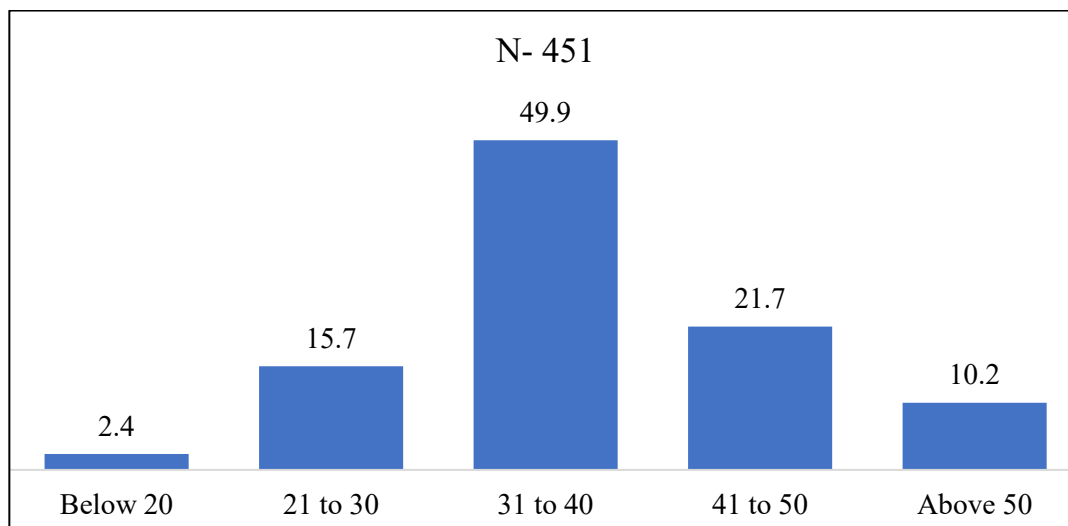


Figure 14: Distribution of emigrants by (%) age group

A large number (40.4%) of women work in the private sector, followed by household work. Additionally, significant shares of women work in government and semi-

government sectors (11%). Due to the fact that the analysis is done for emigrants over 18, a small number of students reported only the part of the analysis. Interestingly, the percentage of job seekers is less, with 2.4% of total women emigrating from Kerala. Very few women in the working-age group were reported in non-economic activities like 'students', 'job not required', too young to work, job not needed etc.

Table 9: Female emigration by their Destination Countries

Destination Countries	% (N-451)
Gulf	72.9
United States of America	6.0
United Kingdom	4.4
Australia	2.9
Canada	1.8
Ireland	1.6
Other countries	10.4

Migration from Kerala majorly towards six gulf countries is a known fact, yet more than one-fourth (27%) of women are going other than gulf countries is noticeable. Second, to Gulf countries, USA, UK, Australia, Canada and Ireland are notable destinations for women. Contrary to women's emigration, only 8% of the men goes to non-Gulf countries. A growing migration of skilled women labourers to Europe, Oceania, and Canada is noticeable.

5.2 Level of Education of Emigrant Women

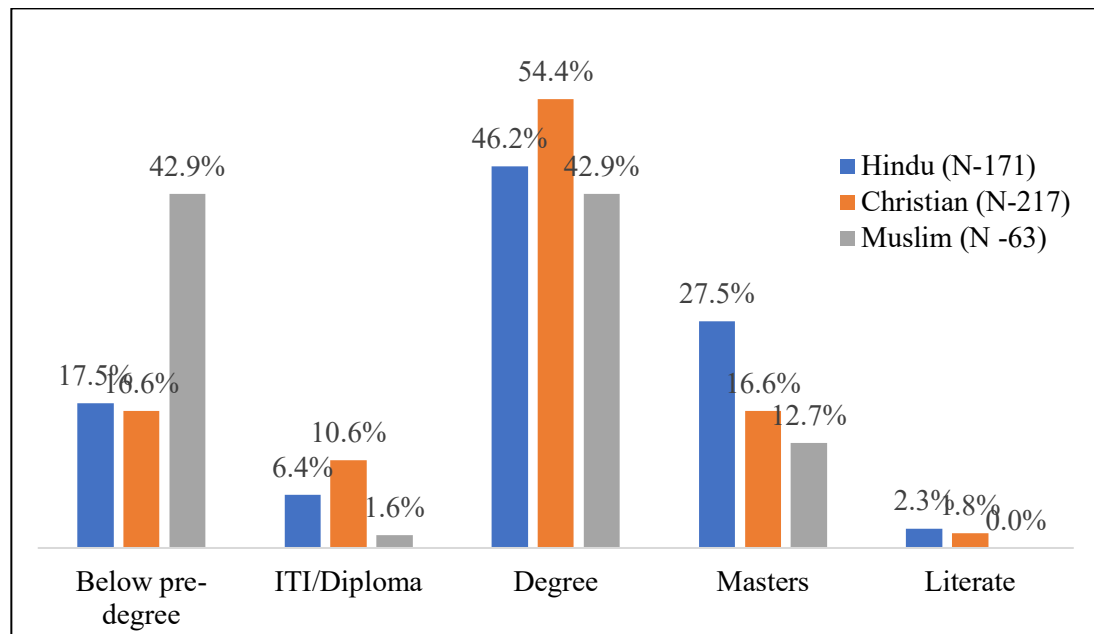


Figure 15 : Level of Education attained by emigrants in three Religious groups of Kerala (%)

Attainment of the level of education varies for different social and religious groups, so it will also reflect on emigrant women. The majority of women emigrant (70%) had a degree or higher, while a fifth (20%) did not have a secondary education. By seeing education by religion Christian and Hindu women have maximum education attainment, and Muslim women are poorly educated. Around half (42.9%) of Muslim women were not educated to the secondary level. Around three-fourths (73.4%) of Hindu women completed either a bachelor's degree or a master's degree, followed by 71% of Christians and 55.6% of Muslims.

Education level is one of the significant factors which affects the economic activity of migrants. We can see how they are interconnected here. While there are migrants

whose economic activity is based on the education they possess, there are also migrants whose economic activity is for education, such as students.⁵

Table 10: Education Level & Economic Activity of emigrant women

Education level	Economic Activity						Total
	<i>Employed in State /Central Govt</i>	<i>Employed in Semi Govt. Aided school/college</i>	<i>Employed in Private sector</i>	<i>Self-Employment and non-Agri work</i>	<i>Job seekers & Unpaid family workers</i>	<i>Job not required & Students</i>	
<i>School education</i>	4	1	18	19	43	16	101
	4%	1%	18%	19%	43%	16%	100%
<i>ITI & diploma</i>	5	2	18	4	5	1	35
	14%	6%	51%	11%	14%	3%	100%
<i>Graduation</i>	26	4	108	0	79	7	224
	12%	2%	48%	0%	35%	3%	100%
<i>Post-Graduation</i>	2	5	38	3	41	2	91
	2%	5%	42%	3%	45%	2%	100%
<i>Total</i>	37	12	182	26	168	26	451
	8%	3%	40%	6%	37%	6%	100%

Table 10 discusses the level of education in their economic activities. Here, levels of education are classified into four categories. Nearly one-fifth (22%) of emigrant women are educated only till the school level. Most (43%) of emigrant women with only a school education (N-101) have no paid occupation but are either seeking a job or being homemakers or unpaid family caregivers. Only 5% of the women in this

⁵ Migrants below 18 were removed from the analysis.

group hold government or semi-government jobs, 19% are self-employed or engaged in non-agricultural activities, and 18% work in the private sector. More than half (53%) of the emigrant women from education level as ITI & diploma (N-35) are employed in the private sector. A total of 48.1% of graduates (N-224) and 41.1% (N-91) of postgraduates work in the private sector, respectively.

When 48.1% of graduates and 41.1% of postgraduates work in the private sector, respectively, 35% and 45% of graduates seek jobs or are homemakers or unpaid caregivers. In total, 11% of emigrant women are working in government, Semi-government sectors, 40% in private industry, and 37% of women are either seeking a job or doing unpaid family roles.

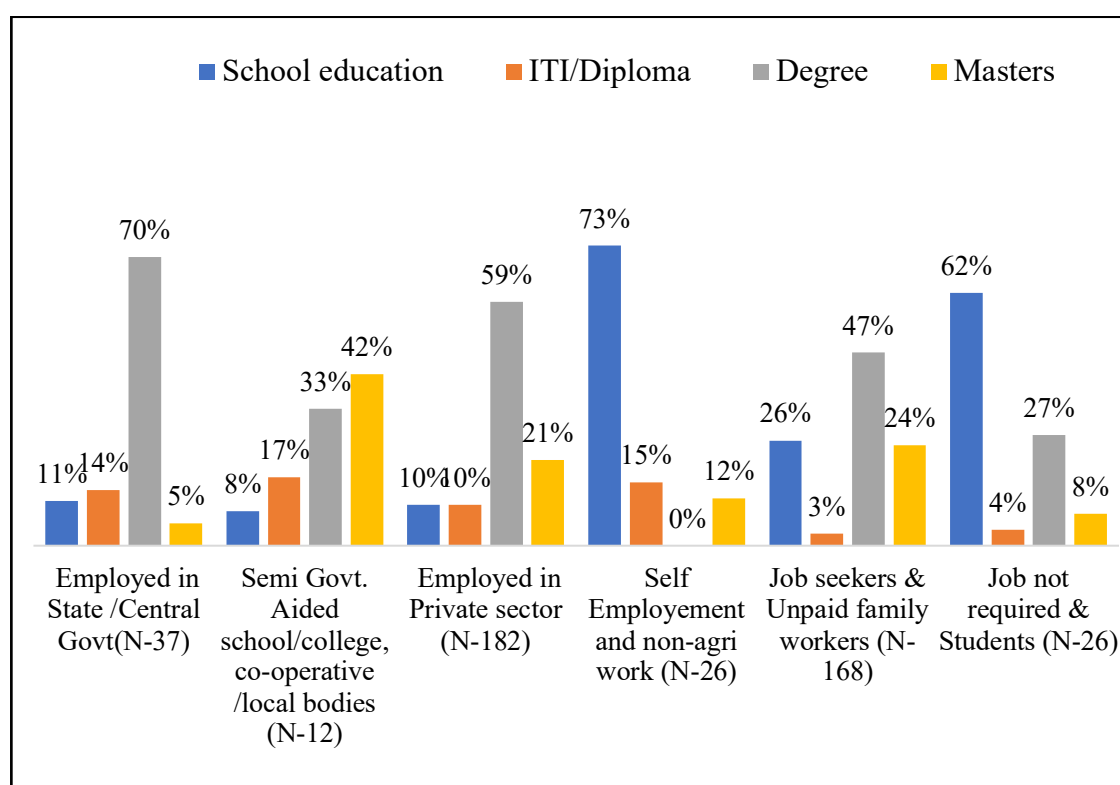


Figure 16: Level of Education by Economic activity (N=451)

A vast majority (75%) of emigrant women working in state/ central government offices are qualified with either graduation or postgraduation. Very few women with

school education are working in the government sector, with 11% and 8%, respectively, for the government (n-37) and semi-government (n-12) institutions. In the private sector (n-182), 80% of women are qualified with a degree or higher, while 71.4% of job seekers/unpaid family workers (n-168) are qualified with a degree or higher.

5.3 Economic Activity of Emigrants – Pre & Post Migration

Figure 17 represents the pre-& post-migration distribution of emigrant women by their economic activities. Women under age of 18 have been removed from the analysis. It is clear from the figure that the share of formal employment is increased due to migration. Migration has resulted in a 4-fold increase in migrants in governmental and semi-governmental employment from 2.7% to 10.9%. A significant rise is reported in migrants working in the private sector and those doing self-employment/working in the non-Agri sector, with 1.5 and 1.6 times, respectively. Prior to migration, household work accounted for the largest share (35.3%), but after migration, private sector jobs took over (40.4%). Share of job seekers/ unpaid family workers is shown a rapid decline from 18.2% to 2.9%, implying the cause of migration. However, the segment of emigrants doing household work remains more or less stable, with around 35% share.

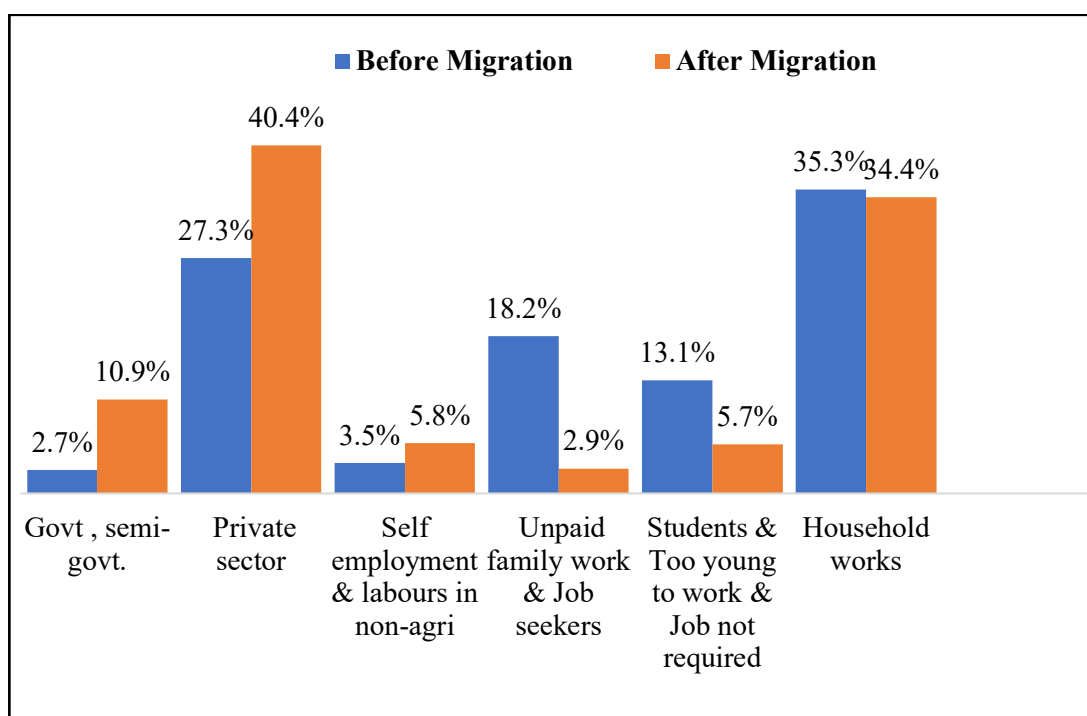


Figure 17: Economic activities of EMI women at the place of origin

Table 11: Economic activity of emigrants by their place of origin and place of destination

Economic activity at place of origin	Economic Activity at place of destination					
	Govt, Semi govt. employees	Private sector	Self-employed / Non-Agri sector	Job seekers & Unpaid family workers	Household workers	Students/Job not required
Govt, Semi govt employees (N-12)	8 67%	3 25%			1 8%	
Private sector employees (N-123)	19 15%	89 72%	3 2%	2 2%	9 7%	1 1%
Self-employed / Labours in the non-Agri sector (N-16)	2 13%	1 6%	13 81%			
Job seekers & Unpaid family workers (N-82)	11 13%	53 65%	2 2%	6 7%	10 12%	
Household workers (N-159)	4 3%	16 10%	8 5%	2 1%	128 81%	1 1%
Students/Job not required (N-59)	5 8%	20 34%		3 5%	7 12%	24 41%
Total (N-451)	49	182	26	13	155	26

Table 11 explains women's economic activity from their place of origin to their destination. Seventeen- categories of economic activities reported in the Kerala migration survey have been compressed to six here.

More than one-third (38%) of the emigrant women (N-451) have shifted their economic activity by migrating abroad. Around one-third (34%) of emigrants in the

category, 'students/job not required category' (n=59), started working in the private sector after migration. The majority (92%) of unemployed women in their origin got employment after migration, with 65% in the private sector, 13% in the government sector and 12% in domestic labour.

Even though most (81%) of household workers (n=159) remained in the same category after migration, a few (18%) got better opportunities by migrating abroad. 9% of private sector employees(n=123) at origin went underemployment after migration. 2% are job seekers/ unpaid family workers, and 7% do households Work.

Table 12: Economic activity of emigrant women at destination by economic activity at the origin

Place of destination	Place of Origin						
		<i>Govt , Semi govern ment</i>	<i>Private sector</i>	<i>Self- employ ed / non- Agri sector</i>	<i>Job seekers/ Unpaid family workers</i>	<i>Househ old workers</i>	<i>Student s/Job not require d</i>
Govt, Semi govt employees (N- 49)	<i>N</i>	8	19	2	11	4	5
	<i>%</i>	16	39	5	22	8	10
Private sector (N-182)	<i>N</i>	3	89	1	53	16	20
	<i>%</i>	2	49	0	29	9	11
Self-employed /Non-Agri sector (N-26)	<i>N</i>		3	13	2	8	
	<i>%</i>		11	50	8	31	
Job seekers & Unpaid family workers (N-13)	<i>N</i>		2		6	2	3
	<i>%</i>		15		46	15	23
Household workers (N- 155)	<i>N</i>	1	9		10	128	7
	<i>%</i>	1	6		6.5	82	5
Students/Job not required (N-26)	<i>N</i>		1			1	24
	<i>%</i>		4			4	92
Total	<i>N</i>	12	123	16	82	159	59

	%	3	27	4	18	35	13
--	---	---	----	---	----	----	----

Table 12 explains the economic activities of emigrants at their place of destination and where they were at their place of origin.

Nearly half (43%) of emigrant women working in the government/ semi-government sector (n=49) at the place of destination were employed in the private sector (38.8%) or were self-employed/labours in the non-agriculture sector (4.1%). Another 40% of women were either seeking a job or doing household work (22.4%); students/jobs were not required (10.2%); household workers (8.2%).

49%, 50%, 46.2%, 82.6%, and 92.3% of emigrants, respectively, from the categories private sector, Self-employed / Labours in the non-Agri sector, Job seekers & Unpaid family workers, Household workers, Students/Job not required were working in the same category before migration also.

30% of job seekers/ unpaid family workers (n=13) at place of destination were working in the private sector (15.4%) and household workers (15.4%) at their place of origin.

5.4 Occupation of Emigrant women -Pre Post-migration

Table 13: Occupation of Emigrant women; Pre-& Post Migration

Occupation	Before Migration		After Migration	
	N	%	N	%
Nurse	88	58%	119	46%
Engineer & Graphic Designer, computer programmer	13	9%	25	10%
Household Worker/Maid & Housekeeper & Child Care Worker	6	4%	24	9%
Cashier/Clerk/Accountant & Banker	6	4%	19	7%
Teacher	11	7%	16	6%

Manager & Hotel Administration	2	1%	8	3%
Doctor	2	1%	5	2%
Peon Office Assistant	2	1%	5	2%
Hair Dresser & Beautician & Tailor	3	2%	3	1.2%
Civil Servant		0%	3	1.2%
Electrician & Fabrication Worker & Crane Operator	1	1%	3	1.2%
CEO		0%	2	1%
Construction Worker/ Labourer	4	3%	2	1%
Lab/X-Ray Technician	1	1%	2	1%
Pharmacist	2	1%	2	1%
Salesman & Shop Keeper	3	2%	2	1%
Others	7	5%	18	7%
	151	100%	258	100%

Table 13 shows the distribution of emigrant working women at their place of origin and place of destination. Though the distribution is given in percentage, the total sample size also needs to be considered. There is a 70% growth in employment visible from pre to post-migration. Table 13 shows that nursing professionals are leading in both pre and post-migration stages with 58% and 46%, respectively. Engineering professional comes second with 9% and 10%, respectively. A larger % growth is visible with ‘Household Worker/Maid & Housekeeper & Child Care Worker’, ‘Cashier/Clerk/Accountant & Banker’, ‘Doctors’ & ‘Manager & Hotel Administration’ etc.

5.5 Occupation Growth Reported from Pre to Post Migration among Emigrant Women

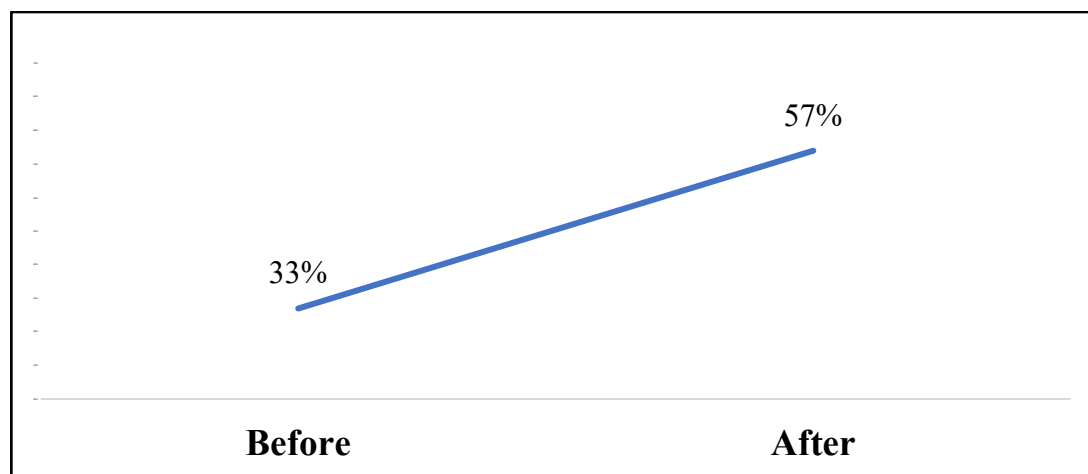


Figure 18: EA shift from Place of Origin to Destination (N=258)

The figure 18 illustrates the shift in Economic Activity (EA) participation among emigrant women from their place of origin to their destination. Before migration, 33% of women were economically active, which significantly increased to 57% after migration. This increase indicates that migration has had a positive impact on women's participation in economic activities. The improvement in employment opportunities at the destination, higher wages, and broader access to various sectors are likely contributing factors to this shift. Additionally, cultural and social norms that may have restricted economic participation at the place of origin could be less restrictive in the destination countries, further encouraging women to engage in the workforce.

5.5.1 Occupational Growth Patterns among Migrant Women

Figure 19 presents the percentage growth in various occupations among female migrants. The occupational growth analysis of migrant women highlights significant variations across different professions. The most substantial growth rates are found among Household Workers, Managers & Hotel Administrators, Civil Servants, and Electricians & Fabrication Workers, each exhibiting a remarkable increase of 300%.

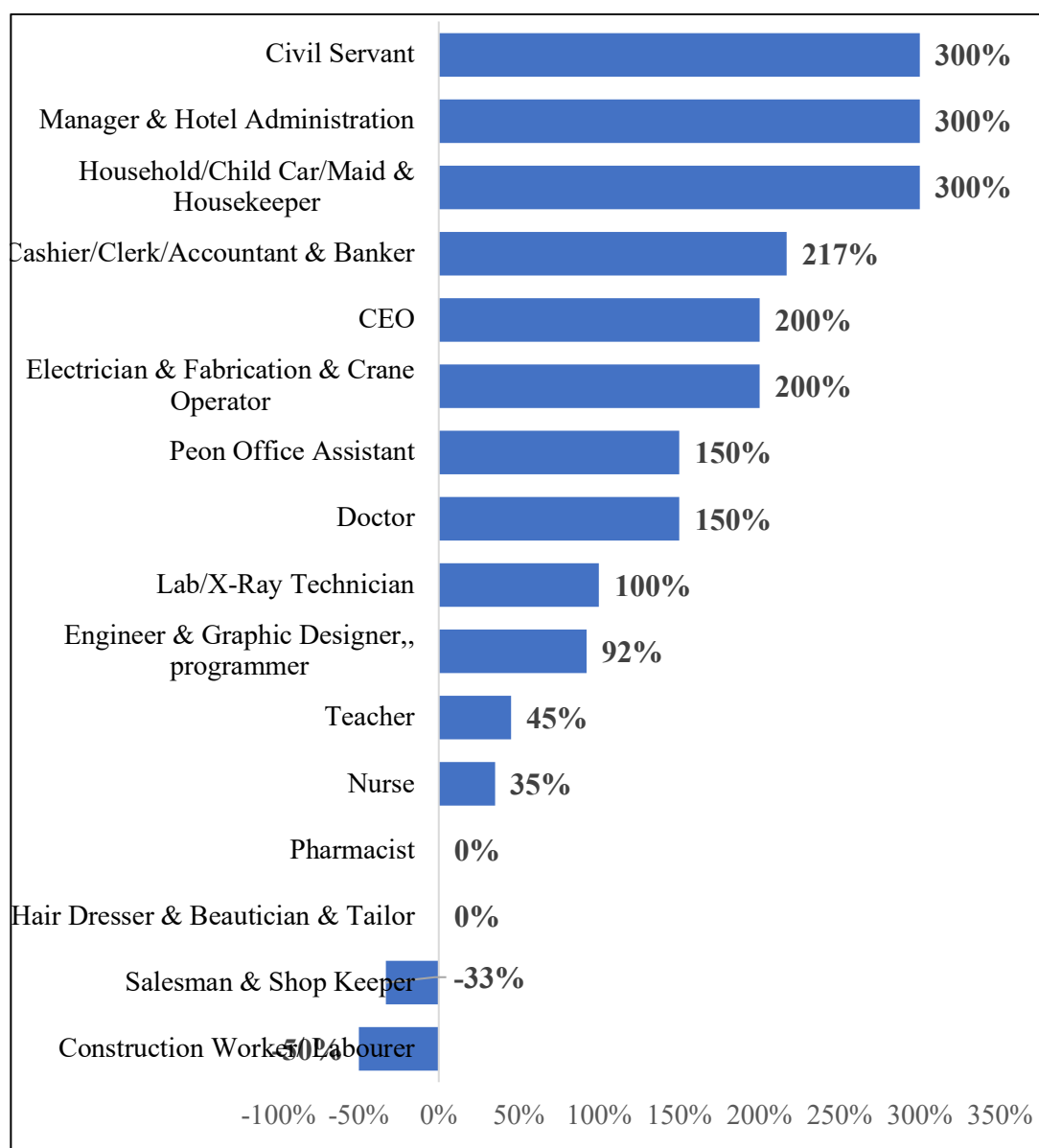


Figure 19: Percentage Growth in Occupations Reported by Emigrant Women (N = 258)

This suggests a rising demand for domestic labor, administrative roles, government jobs, and technical services. Additionally, administrative and financial services have grown significantly, with Clerks, Accountants, and Bankers experiencing a 217% growth rate, reflecting the increasing participation of women in formal employment sectors.

The healthcare sector also remains prominent among migrant women. Professions like Doctors and Peon Office Assistants have grown by 150%, while Nurses show a growth rate of 35%, highlighting sustained demand for skilled healthcare workers. Notably, technically skilled professionals, such as Engineers (92%) and Lab/X-Ray Technicians (100%), have shown promising growth, indicating broader opportunities for qualified women. Moreover, categories like CEOs and Electricians (200%) suggest women's increasing entry into leadership and skilled technical roles.

However, certain occupations, such as Hair Dressers, Beauticians & Tailors, Pharmacists, Salesmen & Shopkeepers, and Construction Workers, show zero or negative growth, with construction work declining by 50%. The declining trends in low-skilled or traditionally male-dominated jobs indicate a gradual shift toward more favorable opportunities aligned with better education and improved socio-economic status.

Overall, the findings reflect the increasing diversification of employment avenues for migrant women, with growing opportunities in skilled, professional, and administrative roles.

5.6 Income Shift- Before – to- After Migration⁶

Table 14: Average income of different category of occupational women - Before and After Migration

Occupation (N-137)	Before migration (Avg. INR)	After Migration (Avg. INR)
Construction worker(N-3)	28,333	66,667
Engineer(N-12)	24083	57,917

⁶ *Women had some income before and after have taken for analysis

Electrician/ X-ray technician/ Fabrication worker (N-3)	23,091	58,636
Cashier/Clerk/ Accountant (N-3)	13,333	39,000
Household worker /Maid (N-8)	8,063	25,375
Managers (N-3)	16,667	60,000
Teacher (N-6)	11,167	57,000
Peon Office assistant (N-3)	6,333	33,333
Nurses(N-84)	11,952	69,049
Overall(N-137)	13,150	61,410

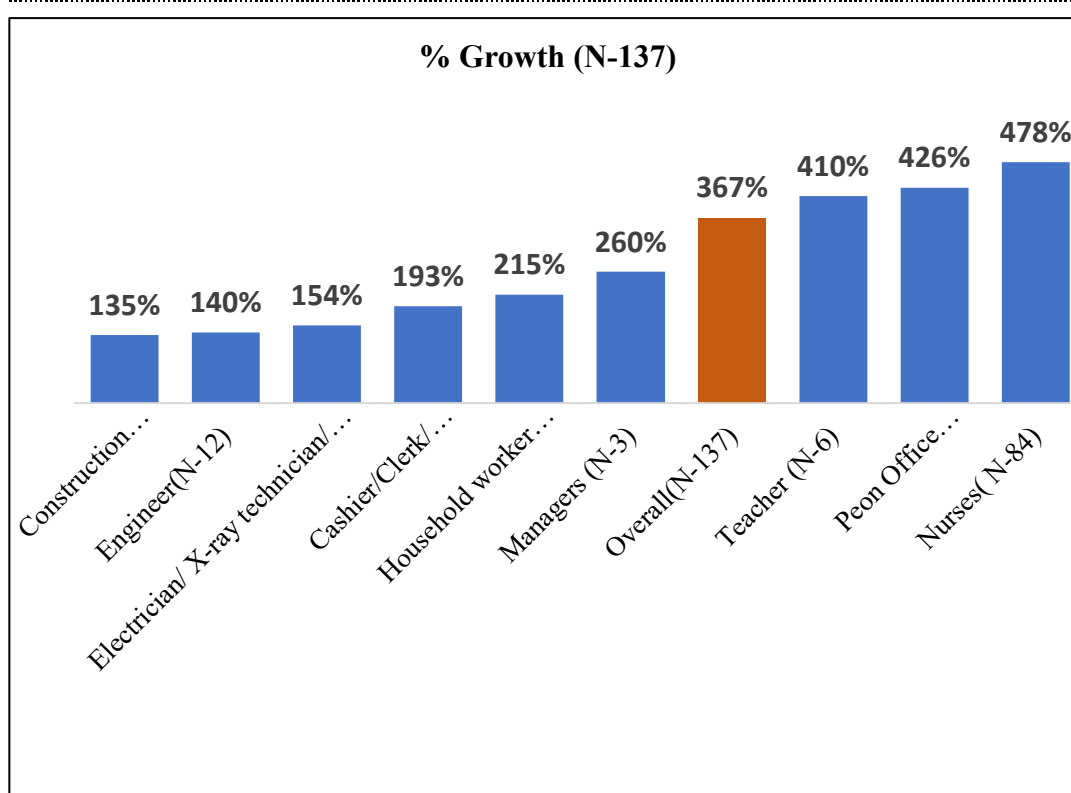


Figure 20:Percentage income growth of Occupation; Before & After

The analysis of income growth from before migration to after migration among various occupational categories reveals significant improvement in earnings for emigrant women. The overall average income across all categories combined increased from INR 13,150 before migration to INR 61,410 after migration, reflecting a remarkable growth rate of 367%. This considerable rise in earnings highlights the

economic benefits associated with migration, especially for women seeking better employment opportunities abroad.

The highest income growth rate is observed among Nurses (478%), whose earnings increased from INR 11,952 to INR 69,049. This finding underscores the strong demand for healthcare professionals, particularly in the Gulf countries where such skills are highly valued. Similarly, other professions such as Peon Office Assistants (426%) and Teachers (410%) have shown substantial growth, indicating better opportunities for women in both administrative and educational sectors post-migration.

Technical and managerial roles also exhibit considerable growth, with Managers (260%), Engineers (140%), and Electricians/X-ray Technicians (154%) showing notable improvements. Moreover, low-skilled occupations such as Household Workers (193%) and Construction Workers (135%) have also benefited from migration, suggesting that even less-skilled categories experience economic gains through international employment.

The findings suggest that migration offers substantial economic benefits for women across various occupational categories. The impressive growth in income levels reflects improved access to higher-paying jobs and better working conditions in the destination countries. Additionally, the data highlights that both skilled and unskilled female workers are positively impacted by migration, contributing to enhanced financial independence and improved economic status.

5.7 Reasons of emigration

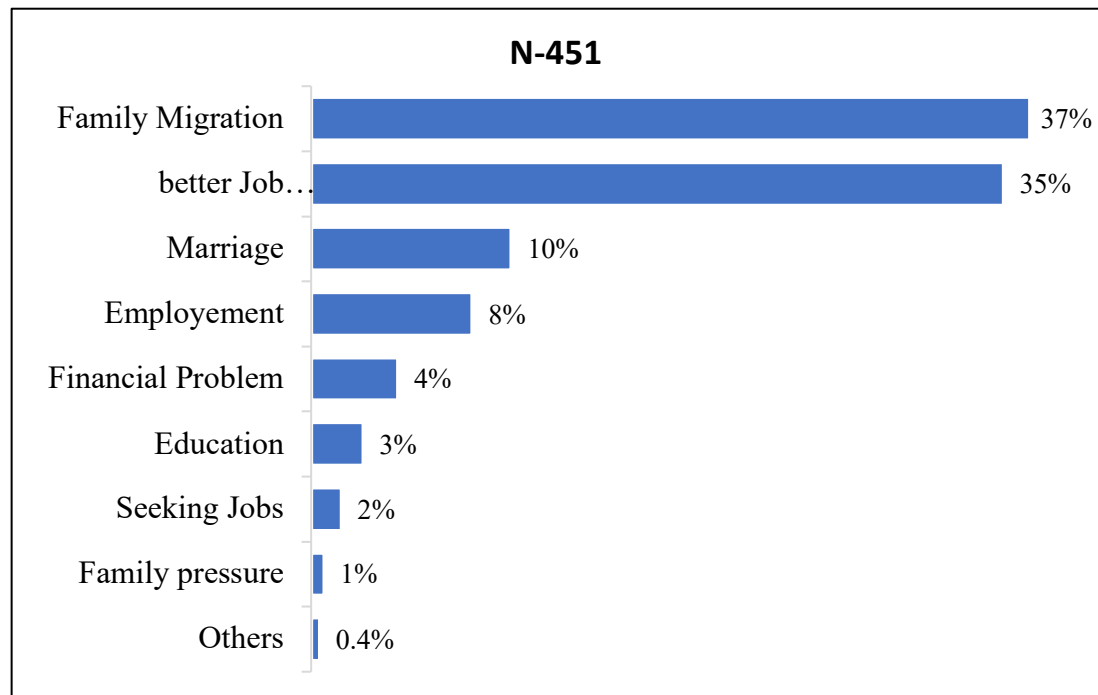


Figure 21: Reasons of Migration

Most women in the working age group reported that family migration was the major reason to migrate abroad, followed by better job opportunities, Marriage, to get employment. Nearly half (45%) of the women migrate for employment prospects, whereas another half (45%) are due to reasons like family migration and marriage. A few of them migrated for education (3%) and to get rid of financial issues (4%). Only 2% of women migrated only to seek a job abroad.

Adding few transcripts based on the key informant interview done with women from Kerala working abroad. They reported the reasons of migration as

“Mainly economic reasons. I completed my nursing degree and couldn't find a well-paying job here. When I got an offer from a hospital in Dubai, I knew it was the right choice. Better salary, better lifestyle.”

Many from my village had moved to abroad, and there's always this comparison. Plus, I wanted to achieve something on my own, be financially independent. There are many from my relatives, church members got job abroad and they are having a better life there

Actually. I got married to someone who was already working in Qatar. After moving there, I also started looking for a job. It wasn't easy, but I eventually found work as a teacher.

5.8 Migration Exposure of Women Labour Migrant from Close Family Members

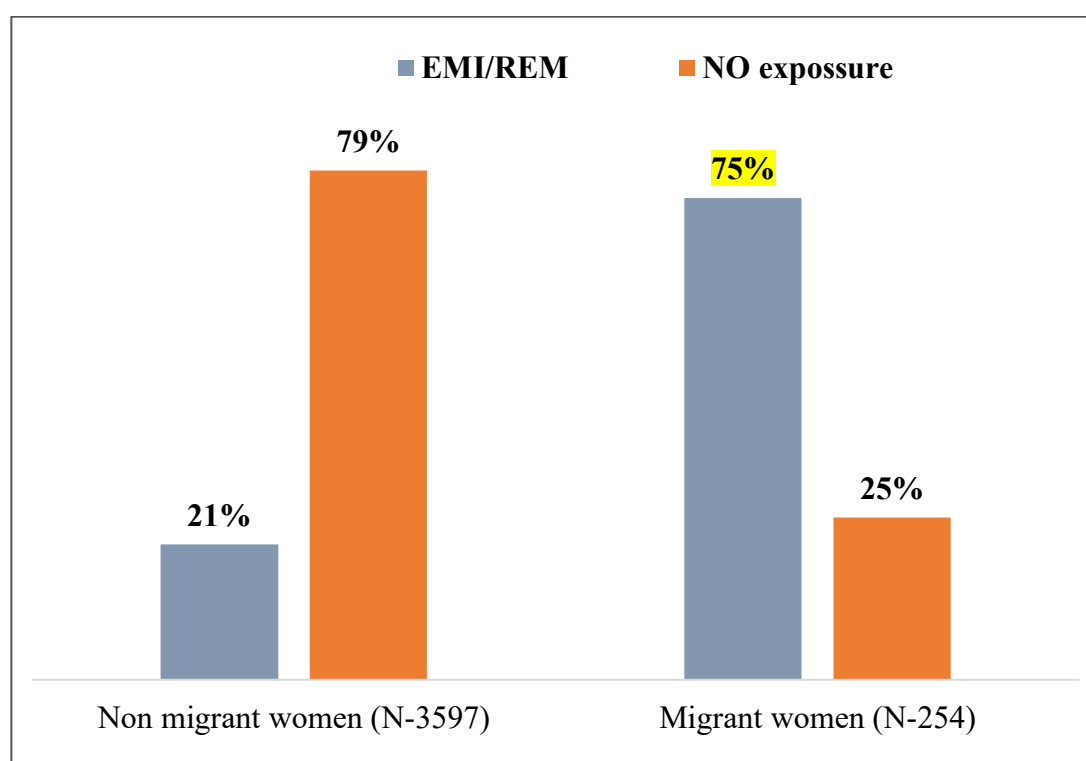


Figure 22: Exposure of Migration to Migrant & Non-migrant women from Kerala

Figure 22 illustrates the relationship between migration exposure and the likelihood of being a migrant among women. It shows that among non-migrant women (N = 3597), a significant majority (79%) have no migration exposure, suggesting limited contact with family members or networks involved in migration. In contrast, only 21%

of non-migrant women have migration exposure (EMI/REM). On the other hand, among migrant women (N = 254), the pattern is reversed, with 75% of them having migration exposure. This indicates that having family members or connections involved in migration plays a significant role in influencing a woman's decision to migrate.

5.9 Solo⁷ Female Migration Patterns from Families

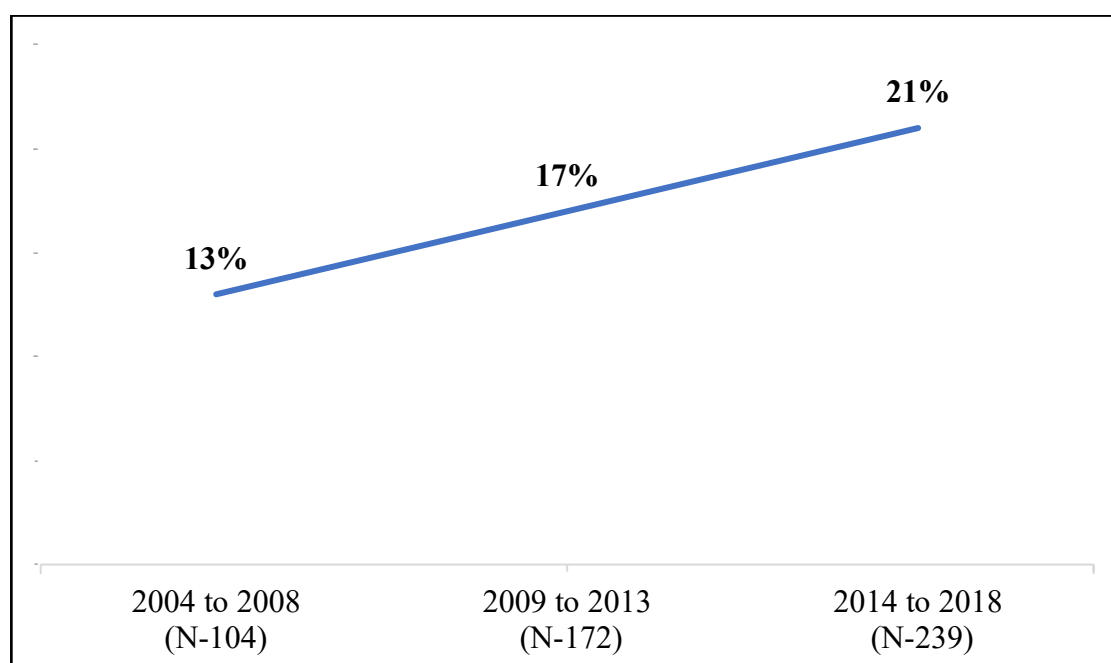


Figure 23: Trend line of solo women migration by year of Migration (%)

Figure 23 illustrates the trend of solo female migration patterns from families over three time periods: 2004 to 2008, 2009 to 2013, and 2014 to 2018. The data reveals a steady increase in the percentage of solo female migrants over time.

Between 2004 to 2008, only 13% of the total female migrants were classified as solo migrants. This figure increased to 17% during the period 2009 to 2013, and further

⁷ Solo migration: Women independently going abroad / No other close family member is an international Migrant/ Women gone abroad first from the family

rose to 21% between 2014 to 2018. This upward trend suggests a gradual shift in the migration pattern, with more women choosing to migrate independently over time.

The increasing percentage of solo female migrants could be attributed to various factors such as improved educational qualifications, increased economic independence, broader acceptance of female mobility, and changing social norms that support women's participation in the labour market. It also indicates that solo female migration is gradually becoming a more prominent feature of the overall migration pattern from Kerala.

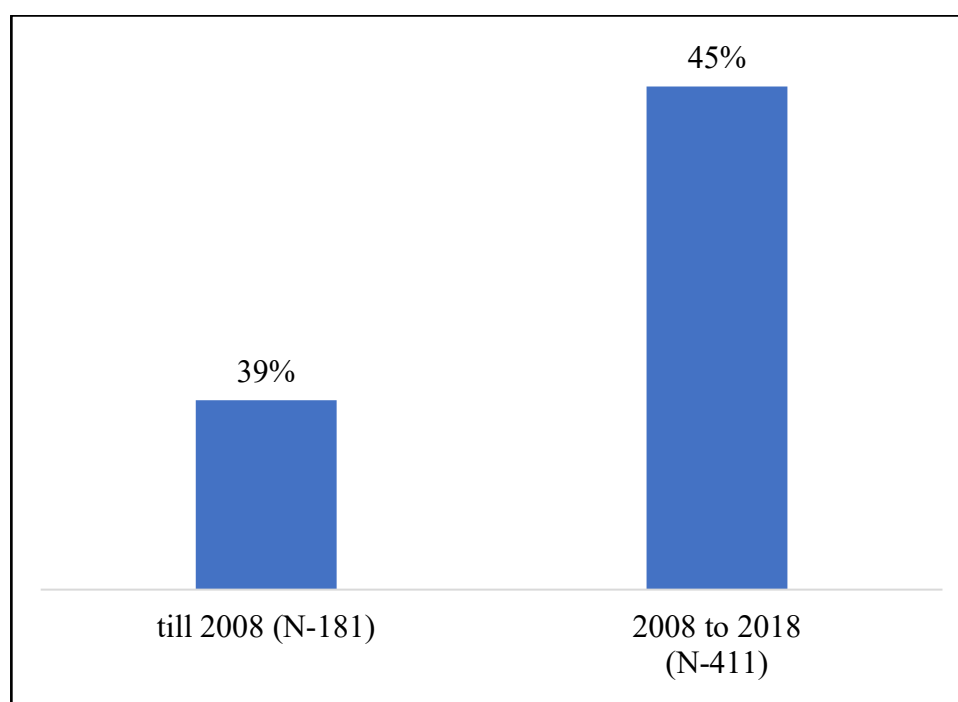


Figure 24: Never Married among Solo Females @ time of Migration

Figure 24 illustrates the increasing trend of never-married solo female migrants over two distinct periods: till 2008 and 2008 to 2018. During the earlier period, 39% of solo female migrants were never married, indicating that most female migrants were likely to be married or migrating with families. However, this percentage rose to 45%

between 2008 and 2018, suggesting a growing acceptance and prevalence of single women migrating independently. This upward trend reflects broader societal changes, including increased educational opportunities, economic independence, evolving social norms, and greater acceptance of women's mobility.

5.10 Migration Patterns and Economic Activities of Solo Female Migrants

The analysis of solo female migration patterns reveals that the majority of female migrants from Kerala are concentrated in the Gulf countries, with approximately 74% of the total migrant population residing in this region. Other destinations include Europe (9%), Canada and the USA (4%), and the United Kingdom (4%), while the remaining 10% are spread across other countries. This pattern highlights the Gulf region as the most preferred destination for female migrants, likely due to historical migration trends, established networks, and accessible employment opportunities.

5.10.1 Economic Activity of Solo Female migrants

In terms of economic activity, the majority of these women are engaged in the private sector, comprising nearly 49% of the total working migrant population. Employment in state and central government sectors accounts for 15%, followed by non-agricultural labor sectors (13%) and household work (10%). Smaller proportions are involved in self-employment (4%), semi-government roles (4%), and studies (5%). This distribution suggests that women predominantly find employment opportunities in the private sector, which may offer more flexible or accessible job opportunities compared to other sectors.

5.10.2 Occupation of Solo female Migrants

Furthermore, examining the occupational categories of solo female migrants indicates a diverse range of professions. A significant proportion of women (42%) are employed as medical professionals, reflecting the high demand for healthcare workers in many destination countries, particularly in the Gulf region. Another 22% are engaged as household workers and cleaners, highlighting the continued reliance on migrant women for domestic labor. Other occupational categories include clerks, accountants, and managers (8%), engineers (5%), salespersons (2%), and teachers (2%). A remaining 19% are classified under various other occupations, reflecting the diverse nature of employment opportunities available to solo female migrants.

The high representation of medical professionals among female migrants underscores the increasing educational attainment and skill levels of women opting for migration. On the other hand, the significant share of domestic workers highlights the continued economic disparities and limited job opportunities for women from lower socio-economic backgrounds. Overall, the economic activities and occupational categories of these migrants suggest a complex interplay of education, skills, and available opportunities shaping the migration choices of women from Kerala.

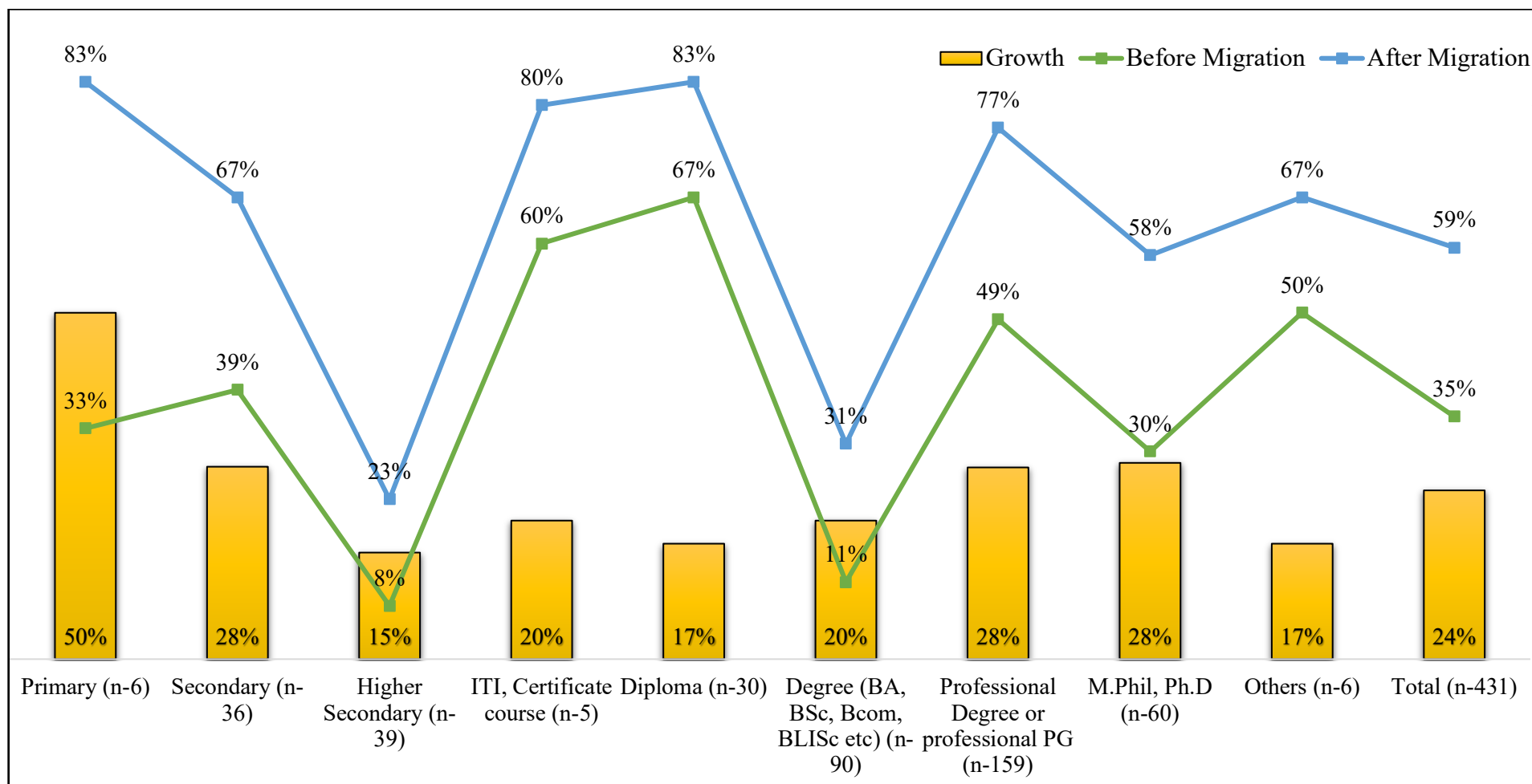


Figure 25: % Women working Before & After Migration by level of Education

Figure 25 presents the percentage of women engaged in economic activities before and after migration, categorized by their level of education. The data reveals a general trend of increased economic activity post-migration across all educational levels, though the extent of improvement varies significantly.

Women with Primary education (n=6) demonstrate the highest growth in employment, increasing from 33% before migration to 83% after migration, reflecting a 50% growth. This suggests that even women with minimal formal education benefit significantly from migration, likely due to low-skilled labor demand in destination countries.

Among those with Secondary education (n=36), the percentage of economically active women rises from 39% to 67%, indicating a growth rate of 28%. Similarly, Professional Degree or Professional PG holders (n=159) experience a substantial increase from 49% before migration to 77% after migration, also reflecting a 28% growth. These groups likely benefit from better job opportunities and higher pay abroad due to their skills and qualifications.

Interestingly, women with Diploma qualifications (n=30) and Other educational categories (n=6) show moderate growth rates of 17% each. Diploma holders increased their economic participation from 67% to 83%, while those classified under 'Others' improved from 50% to 67%.

On the contrary, women with Higher Secondary education (n=39) and Degree holders (n=90) exhibit relatively low growth rates of 15% and 20%, respectively. This suggests that mid-level education may offer limited advantages compared to more specialized or higher qualifications.

Additionally, those with M.Phil. or Ph.D. qualifications (n=60) experience a growth rate of 28%, increasing from 30% to 58%. Despite being highly educated, the improvement is moderate, indicating potential challenges in finding suitable employment corresponding to their qualifications.

Overall, the data highlights that migration generally improves women's economic participation, with higher education levels providing better opportunities. However, even women with lower educational attainment experience significant growth in employment post-migration, underscoring the economic benefits of migration across all educational categories.

The graph presents a comparison of the percentage of women who were working before and after migration across different educational levels. The data highlights a general trend of increased economic activity post-migration, indicating that migration has positively impacted women's participation in the labor force regardless of their educational background.

Significant improvement in employment post-migration is observed among women with Diploma qualifications (n=30) and those with Degrees (BA, BSc, B.Com, etc.) (n=90). For women with Diplomas, the employment rate increased from 17% before migration to 67% after migration. Similarly, women with general degrees experienced an increase from 20% to 77%. These trends suggest that women with higher education are better positioned to secure employment opportunities abroad.

The highest rate of economic activity post-migration is seen among women with Primary education (n=6), increasing from 50% to 83%. This indicates that even women with minimal education find work opportunities post-migration, likely in low-skilled sectors.

Women with ITI/Certificate courses (n=5) and Professional Degrees (n=159) also show considerable growth. Employment rates for ITI/Certificate holders increased from 8% to 60%, while those with Professional Degrees improved from 28% to 49%.

Interestingly, women with M.Phil., Ph.D. qualifications (n=60) show limited growth, with employment increasing from 28% to 58%. This suggests that even highly educated women face challenges in finding suitable employment abroad, possibly due to skill mismatch or limited demand for specialized expertise.

Overall, the graph illustrates that women with diverse educational backgrounds experience enhanced employment opportunities post-migration, although the extent of improvement varies by educational level. While technical and higher education significantly contribute to improved employment prospects, even women with low education levels benefit from migration.

5.11 Summary

The analysis of women's international migration from Kerala reveals a complex but steadily evolving profile. Migrant women are predominantly in their thirties, married, and highly educated, with nearly 70% holding a degree or higher. While Christians are numerically overrepresented compared to their population share, Muslim women remain underrepresented, reflecting wide gender gaps within communities. Most women migrate to the Gulf, yet one-fourth now move to destinations such as the USA, UK, Canada, and Australia—pointing to diversification driven by higher qualifications and professional opportunities.

Migration significantly reshapes women's economic roles. Pre-migration, large shares were engaged in household work or were unemployed. Post-migration, the proportion

in formal employment rises sharply, especially in the private sector, with notable growth in government and semi-government jobs as well. Occupational patterns highlight nursing and healthcare as the most dominant fields, but women are also entering education, finance, administration, and technical professions. Income levels improve dramatically, with average monthly earnings rising more than fourfold, underscoring migration's economic benefits across both skilled and less-skilled categories.

Motivations for migration remain mixed—family migration and marriage continue to be central, but economic aspirations, professional independence, and exposure to migration networks also play a decisive role. The increasing presence of solo women migrants, particularly unmarried ones, marks a significant social shift, reflecting rising educational attainment, financial independence, and changing gender norms.

Overall, women's migration from Kerala is no longer confined to family-accompanied roles or domestic work alone. It reflects a gradual but clear transition toward independent, professional, and diversified mobility. This shift highlights both the opportunities and challenges of women's participation in global labour markets, providing critical context for analysing their remittance behaviour and long-term socio-economic impact in the subsequent chapters.

Chapter 6: Type of Households sending migrant - women from Kerala and their socio-economic characteristics

This chapter focuses on households that send women abroad. We discuss various characteristics of international women migrants, including migration trends, patterns, differentials, and the pre- and post-migration shifts in their economic activities and occupations. Now, we delve deeper into their place of origin, family backgrounds, and socio-economic status.

In particular, when discussing women from Kerala, we observe that they tend to have strong attachments to their families. They are often bound by a patriarchal family mindset, which can make international migration—whether alone or with close relatives—a significant challenge for them.

This chapter also examines the socio-economic status of migrant families and their common characteristics. It explores the determinants of international labor migration among women, as well as the patterns, differentials, and factors influencing remittances. To derive conclusive findings, statistical tests such as the t-test, bivariate analysis, and multivariate regression were conducted.

6.1 Relationship of Migrants to the Head of the household

Table 15: Relationship of Migrants to the Head of the household

Relation to Household	Male (N-2914)	Female (N-257)	Total
Husband/Wife	25%	12%	24%

Unmarried children	18%	12%	17%
Married children	47%	9%	44%
Son-in-law/Daughter in law	7%	61%	11%
Grandchildren	1%	1%	1%
Father/Mother/Mother-in-law	0%	2%	0%
Brother/Sister	2%	0%	1%
Others	1%	3%	1%

In migrant households, the father or mother typically assumes the role of head of the household, indicating that a majority of migrants are second-generation men or women. The table reveals that only a quarter of men and 12% of women are migrants with their spouse as the head of the household. According to the table, 61% of women are daughter-in-law to the head of the households, indicating that they are likely married and residing with their spouse's family. The data also reveals that only 11.6% of women are unmarried children living with their parents, indicating that the majority of women in this group are likely second-generation adults.

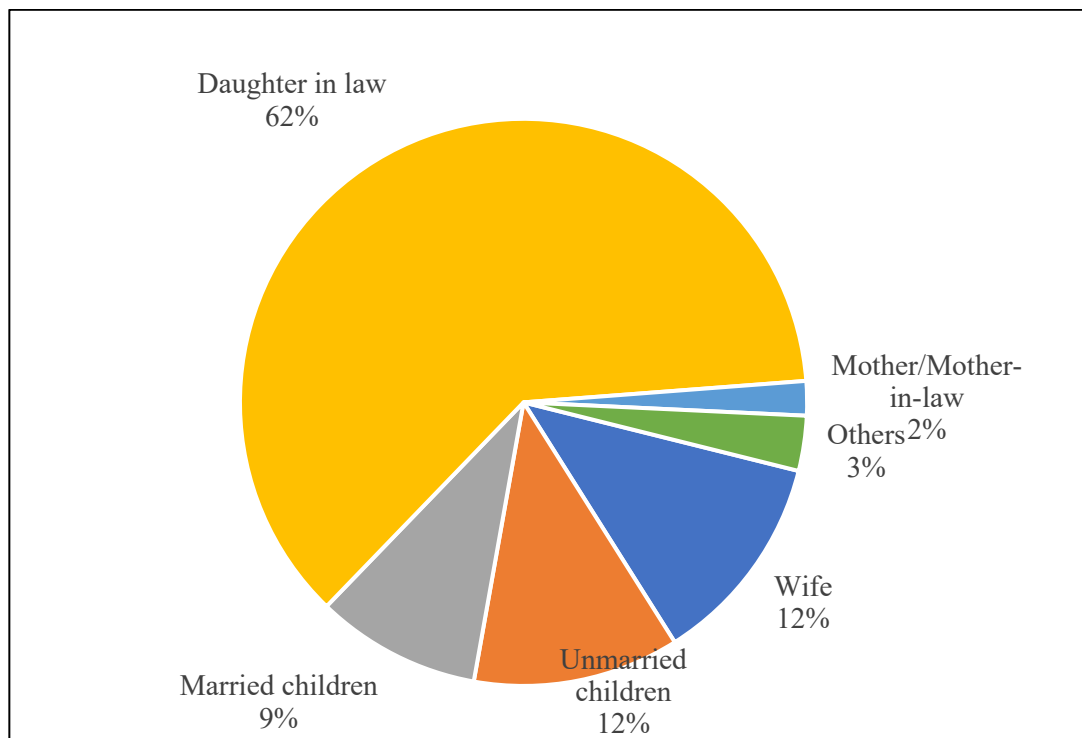


Figure 26: Relationship of female Migrants to the Head of the household

A significant difference is observed in the role of married children. While 47% of male migrants are married sons of the household head, only 9% of female migrants fall into this category. In contrast, 61% of female migrants are daughters-in-law of the household head, compared to only 7% of male migrants as sons-in-law. This suggests that female migrants are more likely to be married and residing with their spouse's family, whereas male migrants are more likely to remain in their parental home even after marriage. *"It played a huge role. In Kerala, when families are looking for marriage alliances, having a degree, especially in nursing or other professional fields, is highly valued. Many proposals I received were from families whose sons were already working abroad or people looking options to migrate abroad."*

"It's almost liked an expectation. If you are qualified, especially in fields like nursing or teaching, you are encouraged to migrate because it's seen as the "ideal" match"

6.2 Socio-Economic Profile of Households Sending Women Abroad for Work

Table 16: Socio economic details of Households sending women migrants abroad

HH Characteristics (N-257)	Categories	%
Do the HH have a ration card?	Yes	95.3
	No	4.7
Colour of the Ration card ? (N-245)	Yellow	2.4
	Pink	11.4
	Blue	38.4
	White	47.8
Type of House which the household is now occupying?	Luxurious	28.4
	Very Good	44.7
	Good	20.2
	Poor & Kutcha	6.6
Ownership of the House?	Own	93
	Rented	5.4
	Others	1.6
Does the HH own the house elsewhere?	Yes	2.8
Does the any member of the HH own land?	Yes	79.4
Did you take any loan from Govt. or Bank/ any other institution to construct or buy your house?	Yes	28.7
What type of fuel is used for cooking?	Wood	14.4
	LPG	71.6
	Others	14.0
Household possessions	Households own a car	56.8
	Taxi/Lorry	6.6
	Motor cycle/scooter	58.1
	Microwave Oven	35.8
	Computer/ laptop	36.1
	Air Conditioner	39.0

	Inverter	39.0
--	----------	------

6.2.1 Household Assets Possession

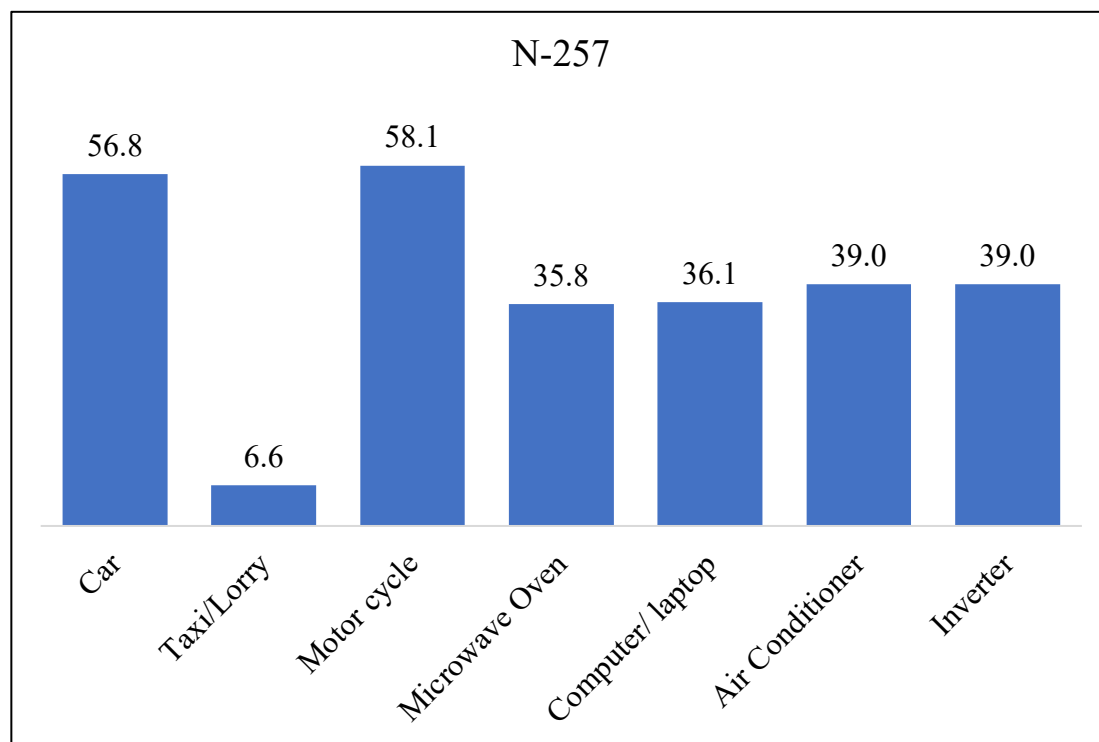


Figure 27:Households Assets Possession (%)

Figure 27 provides insights into household asset ownership among a sample of 257 households. The most commonly owned assets are motorcycles/scooters (58.1%) and cars (56.8%), indicating a high level of personal vehicle ownership. In contrast, only 6.6% of households own a taxi or lorry, suggesting that fewer families possess commercial vehicles for transport or business purposes. When it comes to home appliances and digital devices, ownership is moderate. Microwave ovens (35.8%) and computers/laptops (36.1%) are owned by about a third of the households, showing a balanced adoption of technology. Air conditioners (39%) and inverters (39%) have slightly higher ownership, likely due to climatic conditions and the need for power

backup. Overall, the data suggests that mobility is a priority for these households, while access to modern appliances and digital tools is growing but not yet universal.

6.3 Shift in Economic Activity of women from place of origin to destination

Table 17: Shift in economic activity from place of Origin to Destination

Economic Activity		(N-422⁸)
Number of women economically active at origin (N-151)	N-151	36%
Ousted from Economic -activity due to migration	9%	3%
No changes	91%	33%
Number of women economically in-active at origin (N-271)	N-271	64%
Entered into Economic- activity due to migration	42%	27%
No changes	58%	37%
Number of students at the origin	N-26	6%
Entered into the job market due to migration	69%	4%
Searching job or doing Households work	31%	2%

In Kerala, females constitute 15% of international migrants. Despite their lower participation in the job market, women make a significant contribution to remittances

and have a diverse diaspora. The above table⁹ discussed their shift in economic activity from Kerala to abroad. Of all emigrant women, one-third (33%) were working at both their place of origin and their destination, while another 27% began working after their migration. More specifically, of the women who were economically active in Kerala, 91% continued working abroad. In contrast, of the women who were economically inactive at their place of origin, 42% began working once they arrived abroad.

Likewise, 3% of women were ousted from economic activity, and more than a third (37%) remained economically inactive after migration. Notably, over half (58%) of the women who were economically inactive at their place of origin made no changes after migration. Regarding students at their place of origin, 69% of women who were studying before migration entered the job market after migrating. The remaining women either searched for a job or were engaged in household chores.

6.4 Remittance by Male and Female emigrants

Households in Kerala have been significantly reliant on remittances, which have become the backbone of the state's economy since the 1980s. Migration, particularly to Gulf countries, has provided financial stability to numerous families, shaping the socio-economic landscape of the state. Even though return migration peaked in recent years, overall remittance inflows have not declined. This resilience is largely attributed to the migration of skilled workers who earn better salaries in destination countries. In recent years, a significant number of skilled women have also migrated,

⁹ Female migrants internationally aged above 15 were taken for analysis. Those reported as students/jobs not required in origin and destination were excluded from the analysis. Those migrants reported as 'Job seekers', 'Household work', unpaid family workers & Students were considered economically inactive.

not only to Gulf countries but across the globe, primarily working in the healthcare sector. This trend has led to a substantial increase in Kerala's remittance receipts. Here, we are examining whether there is a significant difference between males and females in sending money to their families.

Hypothesis

H_0 = There is no significant difference between remittance sent by male and female emigrants

H_1 = There is a significant difference between remittance sent by male and female emigrants

Table 18: Comparison of Mean Income by Gender with t-Test Results

Gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	t-value	Remark
Male	2916	212154.56	246101.231	4557.430	0.872	P>0.01
Female	259	208771.81	328171.297	20391.572		

The objective is to compare the average remittance of male and female emigrants. The data were analysed with the help of an independent sample t-test. From the table, it is evident that the t value is 0.872, which is not significant at 0.01 level with df equal to 284. It reflects that remittances sent by male and female migrants did not differ significantly. Hence, the null hypothesis, "There is no significant difference in remittance sent by male and female, is accepted.

6.5 Determinants of International labour Migration of Women at Place of origin

To establish the relationship between international migration for working women and its affecting factors, we apply a Logistic regression model by using STATA-14.

Explanatory Variable: Migrant & Non-Migrant women. **Independent variable:** Age group, religion, Level of Education, Economic Activity, marital status, migration exposure to any family members, Level of Poverty, Relationship to the head of the Households

Exclusion

- Migrant women age less than 20 and above 55
- Women who chose not to work at the place of origin and destination
- Women are reported as heads of the household, where the relationship to the head of the household is self.
- A total of 3324 samples were taken for the analysis, with 254 (8%) samples of migrants and 3073 (92%) samples of non-migrant women.

Table 19: Results from bivariate logistic regression model containing all explanatory variables and the associated independent variables

Independent Variable	Odds	P>z	[95% Conf. Interval]
Economic activity at the place of origin			
Govt/Semi-govt®	1		[1.00 1.00]
Private Sector	3.62	0.000	[.70577 2.3758]
Self-employed & other employed	4.73	0.000	[1.262258 3.046443]
Marital Status			
Unmarried®	1		
Married	0.75	0.450	[-.5984165 1.348075]
Relationship to the head of the HH			
Wife®	1		[1.00 1.00]

Unmarried Daughter	2.87	0.004	[.6033157 3.204138]
Married Daughter	3.33	0.001	[.6067277 2.336859]
Daughter in law	3.17	0.002	[.4446886 1.880663]
Other	2.73	0.006	[.4752533 2.901677]
Age Group			
21 to 30®	1		[1.00 1.00]
31 to 40	0.75	0.452	[-.3349822 .7519832]
41 to 50	1.33	0.185	[-.2129354 1.10378]
Above 50	0.55	0.579	[-.7866931 1.407899]
Religion			
Hindu®	1		[1.00 1.00]
Christian	6.65	0.000	[1.098257 2.016638]
Muslim	-1.51	0.131	[-2.149516 .2785421]
Level of Education			
Schooling®	1		
ITI/Diploma	2.52	0.012	[.2338908 1.86101]
Graduate	2.89	0.004	[.2958997 1.542096]
Post-Graduate	0.99	0.321	[-.3924693 1.19693]
Type of Ration card			
Pink/yellow®	1		[1.00 1.00]
Blue	2.86	0.004	[.286092 1.539016]
White	3.96	0.000	[.6727514 1.988437]
Emigrant/Return emigrant in the family			
No other migrant®	1		[1.00 1.00]
Emigrant or Return migration exposure	6.87	0.000	[1.129735 2.031423]
Constant			-10.87
R2			0.821
Observation (N)			2986
LR chi2			0.000
Log-likelihood			338.77

The logistic regression results help us understand which factors increase or decrease the chances of women migrating. Below are the main findings:

Economic Activity: Women working in the private sector were 3.62 times more likely to migrate than those in government jobs. Similarly, self-employed women or those in other types of jobs were 4.73 times more likely to migrate. This suggests that women in less stable or lower-paying jobs are more likely to seek better opportunities abroad.

Marital Status: Married women were slightly less likely to migrate than unmarried women (odds ratio = 0.75), but this was not statistically significant, meaning marital status may not be a major factor in the decision to migrate.

Relationship to Household Head: Unmarried daughters were 2.87 times more likely to migrate compared to wives, and married daughters were even more likely, with an odds ratio of 3.33. Daughters-in-law also showed a high likelihood of migration (3.17 times more likely than wives). This shows that women with less responsibility in the household (such as daughters) are more likely to move abroad for work.

Age Group: There was no significant difference in migration between age groups, though women aged 41-50 were 1.33 times more likely to migrate than those aged 21-30. Younger women (21-30) were still the most likely to migrate.

Religion: Christian women were 6.65 times more likely to migrate than Hindu women, while Muslim women were less likely to migrate, though this result was not significant. Religion appears to influence migration decisions, with Christians having a higher chance of migrating.

Education Level: Women with technical qualifications (ITI/Diploma) were 2.52 times more likely to migrate compared to those with just schooling. Graduates were 2.89 times more likely to migrate. However, having a postgraduate degree didn't make

much difference. This suggests that education helps women migrate, but higher degrees don't necessarily increase the chances.

Type of Ration Card: Women from wealthier households (indicated by having a white ration card) were 3.96 times more likely to migrate than those with lower-income ration cards. This shows that financial status plays a role in enabling migration.

Family Migration Exposure: If a woman had family members who had migrated or returned from abroad, she was 6.87 times more likely to migrate herself. This emphasizes the importance of family connections in influencing migration decisions, as family members abroad can offer support and advice.

The model explains 82.1% of the differences in migration behaviour among women, meaning it is quite effective in identifying the main factors influencing migration.

6.6 Determinants of Working Status of Internationally migrated women from Kerala

This section aims to analyse the factors influencing international migration among working women from Kerala.

Explanatory Variables

- **Dependent Variable:** Working and Non-working women (Binary variable: Working = 1, Not Working = 0).
- **Independent Variables:** Age group, religion, level of education, working status before migration, marital status, and migration exposure to family members.
- **Exclusion Criteria:** Migrant women aged below 20 years and above 60 years were excluded from the analysis.

Binary Logistic Regression Model

The model is estimated using the following equation: Where:: Probability of a woman being a working migrant.: Probability of a woman being a non-working migrant. Odds ratio indicating the likelihood of migration. Constant term representing the baseline odds when all predictors are zero. Coefficient for each independent variable.

Regression Results

The logistic regression analysis revealed the following findings.

Worked Before Migration: Women who worked before migrating are significantly more likely to migrate compared to those who did not work (Odds Ratio: 11.37; CI: [5.58, 23.19]; $p < 0.01$). This indicates that prior work experience enhances the probability of migration.

Level of Education: Higher educational qualifications are positively associated with migration. ITI/Diploma holders: OR = 2.89 (CI: [0.733, 11.38]) (Not statistically significant). Graduate: OR = 2.75 (CI: [1.18, 6.38]; $p < 0.01$). Post-Graduate: OR = 2.91 (CI: [1.14, 7.44]; $p < 0.01$). Others (e.g., technical qualifications): OR = 3.93 (CI: [0.45, 33.84]) (Not statistically significant).

Marital Status: Married women are significantly less likely to migrate compared to unmarried women (OR = 0.34; CI: [0.17, 0.67]; $p < 0.01$). This suggests that marriage may act as a constraint to migration for women.

Age Group: Women aged 41 to 50 are more likely to migrate compared to the reference group of 21 to 30 years (OR = 3.25; CI: [1.45, 7.29]; $p < 0.01$). Women aged above 50 also exhibit a higher likelihood of migration (OR = 4.11; CI: [1.10, 15.27]; $p < 0.01$).

Religion: Christian women have significantly higher odds of migrating compared to Hindus (OR = 2.69; CI: [1.56, 4.63]; $p < 0.01$). Muslim women have lower odds of migration compared to Hindus (OR = 0.70; CI: [0.31, 1.58]), but the result is not statistically significant.

Migration Exposure in the Family: Having more than one emigrant in the family significantly decreases the likelihood of migration (OR = 0.12; CI: [0.045, 0.35]; $p < 0.01$). This finding suggests that households with established migrants may provide support systems that reduce the need for additional members to migrate.

Table 20: Results from bivariate logistic regression model containing all explanatory variables and the associated independent variables of working status of Internationally migrated women

Predictors	Odds Ratio
Worked before migration	
Not worked®	1[1.00,1.00]
Worked	11.37[5.58, 23.19]***
Level of Education	
Schooling®	1[1.00,1.00]
ITI/Diploma	2.89[.733,11.38]
Graduate	2.75[1.18,6.38]***
Post-Graduate	2.91[1.14,7.44]***
Others	3.93[.45,33.84]
Marital Status	
Unmarried®	1[1.00,1.00]
Married	0.34[0.17,.67] ***
Age Group	
21 to 30®	1[1.00,1.00]

31 to 40	1.36[.75,2.48]
41 to 50	3.25[1.45,7.29]***
Above 50	4.11[1.10,15.27]***
Religion	
Hindu®	1[1.00,1.00]
Christian	2.69[1.56,4.63]***
Muslim	0.70[.31,1.58]
Emigrant/Return emigrant in the family	
Single migrant®	1[1.00,1.00]
More than 1 emigrant	0.12[.045,.35]***
Constant	2.202691
R²	0.3498
Observation (N)	431
LR chi²	0.000
Log likelihood	189.02628

The logistic regression model shows a moderate level of explanatory power, with an R² value of 0.3498 indicating that around 35% of the variation in migration status is explained by the independent variables. The model's high statistical significance, indicated by the LR chi² value of 0.000, confirms that the predictors used are effective in explaining migration decisions. The constant value of 2.202691 suggests a general tendency towards migration even when other factors are absent. The Log Likelihood value of -189.02628 provides an estimate of the model's goodness-of-fit, which can be improved by including additional relevant variables. Overall, the model effectively identifies key predictors of migration among working women, such as prior work experience, education, marital status, age, religion, and family migration exposure.

The logistic regression model identifies several socio-economic and demographic factors that significantly influence the probability of migration among working women. Key findings include the strong positive association of prior work experience, higher education, and certain age groups with migration. Additionally, marital status and migration exposure within the family act as deterrents to migration.

The findings suggest that employment before migration and higher educational qualifications play a critical role in enhancing women's likelihood of migrating. Moreover, the influence of religion and family migration exposure highlights cultural and household dynamics that may either facilitate or hinder migration.

6.7 Gender differential of Remittance receiving by Households

Table 21: Gender Differentials of Households receiving remittance from International Migrants. (In per cent)

Particulars	Male	Female	Total
	(%)	(%)	(%)
% Emigrant Households in Kerala (N-15000)	17	3	18 ¹⁰
Households receiving support (N-15000)	12.8	1.2	16.2
Households which	N-2916	N-259	N-3175
working emigrant HHs receiving remittance	93.3	82.6	92.4
Married	94.6	81.4	93.1
Unmarried	86.2	92.6	89.9
Households receiving remittance for			

¹⁰ [2% of the Households have both male & female migrants](#)

Medical aid	18.7	20.1	18.8
Education	45.5	21.6	43.6
repay Debt	5.4	3.9	5.3
Investment	1.5	1.5	1.5
Day to Day expenditure	8.3	23.9	9.6
To construct house	6.4	5.4	6.4
To buy gold	15.9	13.1	15.7
Donation to religious	24.1	24.3	24.2

Table 21 displays the proportion of households with emigrant men and women and their remittance-receiving patterns. According to the KMS-2018 dataset, 18% of households have at least one international migrant, with 17% of households having male migrants, 3% of households having female migrants, and nearly 2% having both male and female migrants.

The table indicates that 16% of Kerala families receive remittances. Despite the lower number of women migrants compared to men, the average remittance received is approximately the same. Of all migrants, 93.3% of men and 82.6% of women send money back to their homes in Kerala. The joint sending of funds from a husband's account may contribute to the lower proportion of remittance-receiving women households compared to men. Unmarried women have a significantly higher remittance-sending rate (92.6%) than married women (81.4%), indicating that married women are less likely to send money independently and more likely to do so from their husband's bank account. This finding suggests that the gendered nature of

household finances and decision-making may play a role in shaping remittance behaviour among married women.

Coming from a financially struggling family, the ability to earn and send money back home was always a priority. I knew my earnings could support my parents and siblings better than anything I could do from Kerala. On one hand, I feel proud to support my family. On the other, it constantly feels like I'm living to send money back. Sometimes I feel like I'm not living for myself at all.

28-year-old respondent working in Kuwait as an engineer

The table further shows purpose of remittance sending by men and women. Nearly 45.5% of men and 21.6% of women send money to support their children's education. In comparison, women (23.9%) are more likely to send money home for day-to-day expenses than men (8.3%). Gender differences in the utilization of medical aid, education, debt repayment, investment, house construction, gold purchase, and religious donations are not significant.

Table 22: Income, amount of remittance & value of goods remitted by migrants by sex of migrants

Particulars	Male (N-2916)	Female (N-259)	Total (N-3175)
Estimated annual income (INR)	445728	758246	471221
Total Annual remittance (INR)	212155	208772	211879
Percent of total income (INR)	48%	28%	45%
Value of goods sent (INR)	4577	10048	5023
Percent of value of goods (INR)	1.0%	1.3%	1.1%
Number	2916	259	3175

Table 22 presents the amount of money that men and women remit based on their income. Men remit 48% of their annual income, while women remit 28%. Only a small portion of the remitted funds is spent on goods sent to Kerala. When unmarried women remitted 37% of their income married women remitted only 33%. The average remittance for unmarried and married are respectively for 266107 and 255835 INR.

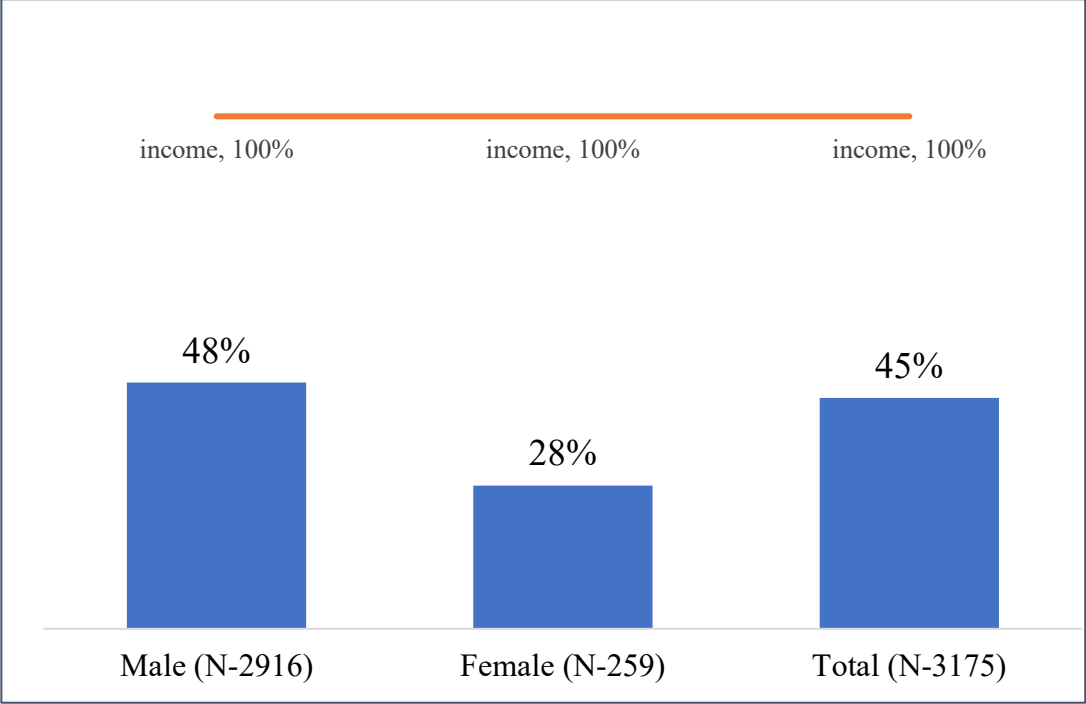


Figure 28: Proportion of income remitted by male, female, and all emigrant groups in Kerala

6.8 Determinants of Remittance sent by emigrants

In order to identify the determinants of economic contribution of international migrants to their households of origin, a multivariate regression model was formulated. The model examines variation of economic contribution that migrants make in relation to a set of explanatory variables. As it aims to reveal particular influences of independent variables, the model was tested separately for male and female migrants.

In order to assess the overall economic contribution of emigrants to households of origin, regardless of mode of assistance, the amount of cash and the value of goods that migrants sent were combined together to construct one variable of the total remittance. The amount of total remittance per annum was used a dependent variable in the regression model. The total remittance was assumed to be dependent upon two sets of group variables: Individual characteristics and migration experiences. Individual dependent characteristics include age of migrants, number of years of education, marital status, income per month etc. Migration experience variables are the reason to move, duration of stay since one migrated to the current place of residence, migration decision,. Dummy variables are used to represent the marital status , gender, the reason to move. etc. Table 20 provides the results of ordinary least square regression (OLS) . The overall model suggests that, once other variables are controlled, there is no significant sex difference in the amount of remittance sent to migrant's household of origin. The variable has the strongest influences on the amount of remittance is the income level of migrants at the destination. Marital status , place of destination, Economic Activity and age of the migrant also positively affected the amount of the total remittance sent to household of origin.

The comparison of Gender specific regression model indicates that the determinants of remittance to households of origin are strikingly different between male and female migrants. For male migrants age and economic activity were positively related to the amount of remittance, controlling of other variables entered in the model. Religion, place of destination and annual income was negatively affected with the amount of remittance.

Compared to other countries, migrant males in Gulf countries are more likely to send remittance. Compared to migrant Muslims/ Christians, males from Hindu religion are less likely to send remittance to their households.

With regards to female migrants' variables such as marital status, Below or above poverty line and place of destination were showed as influential in sending remittance to the households at place of origin. Compared to married women, unmarried women are more likely to send remittance. Women working in non- Gulf countries remitted more money compare to women residing in Gulf. Compared to women holding APL cards reference group BPL card holders are sending more money to their households. All these results show that there are very different mechanisms operating in remittance behaviour between male and female migrants except place of destination. **Table 23** regression coefficients explaining economic assistance of migrants to family members living elsewhere

6.9 Summary

This chapter highlights how women's international migration from Kerala is embedded within household structures and socio-economic contexts. Female migrants are most often linked to households as daughters-in-law, reflecting the dominance of marital migration pathways, while relatively few are unmarried daughters living with

their parents. The socio-economic profile of migrant households suggests relatively stable conditions: most own their homes, rely on LPG for cooking, and possess key assets such as vehicles and consumer durables, though dependence on loans for housing and migration remains visible.

Migration significantly alters women's economic participation. While many women were economically inactive before migration, more than two-fifths entered the workforce abroad, with especially strong gains among those previously unemployed or students. This shift underscores migration's role in expanding women's labour force participation. In terms of remittances, the analysis finds no statistically significant difference between male and female migrants in average amounts remitted. However, women tend to send a smaller proportion of their income home, with notable differences by marital status—unmarried women remit more consistently and independently than married women, whose remittances are often mediated by their husbands.

The regression models further reveal the key determinants of women's migration. Prior work experience, higher education, being a daughter or daughter-in-law, and exposure to family migration networks strongly increase the likelihood of migration. Christian women are significantly more likely to migrate than Hindus, while Muslim women remain underrepresented. Wealthier households (with white ration cards) are better positioned to send women abroad, while family migration exposure amplifies opportunities. For working women, migration likelihood is especially shaped by pre-migration employment, educational attainment, and marital status—with marriage acting as a constraint.

Finally, the gendered patterns of remittance behaviour highlight how socio-economic roles and family dynamics shape financial contributions. While men and women remit similar absolute amounts, women's remittances are more likely directed toward household consumption and day-to-day needs, whereas men allocate larger shares to education and long-term investments. Overall, women's migration both reflects and reshapes household dynamics: it emerges from family strategies, socio-economic positioning, and cultural expectations, while simultaneously altering labour participation, household well-being, and gendered financial flows.

Table 23: Regression Coefficients explaining Economic Assistance of Migrants to Family members living elsewhere

Independent variables	Overall (N-3175)			Male (N-2916)			Female (N-259)		
	b	S.E	Beta	b	S.E	Beta	b	S.E	Beta
Individual Characteristics									
Age in years	1.066612*	0.6526886	1.63	1.136153**	0.594439	1.91	-1.390318	4.534076	-0.31
Education in years	1.605254	1.232224	1.3	1.250628	1.141951	1.1	4.904193	7.039738	0.7
Type of ration card (APL-1)	-8.254384	8.392803	-0.98	-1.529132	7.501968	-0.2	-135.1683**	68.77205	-1.97
Place of Destination (Gulf-1)	-78.44543 ***	14.30754	-5.48	-69.3983***	14.38867	-4.82	-111.9522**	56.64405	-1.98
Religion (Hindu-1)	-24.17113***	7.795657	-3.1	-19.44604***	7.066657	-2.75	-82.15047	54.95938	-1.49
Economic Activity (Working-1)	18.0712**	8.071199	2.24	15.78812**	7.304763	2.16	49.06715	58.14659	0.84
Marital Status (Never Married-1)	22.73628**	10.62652	2.14	14.2749	9.55313	1.49	163.0654**	80.14074	2.03
Migration Experiences									
Duration of Stay in the place of destination	-0.3254203	0.6566026	-0.5	-0.382985	0.5965137	-0.64	-1.708411	4.634967	-0.37
Reason for Migration (Work-1)	0.4563531	21.43799	0.02	0.2438171	24.29321	0.01	-28.57837	68.67765	-0.42
Annual income	-0.0000444***	6.53E-06	-6.81	-0.000044***	6.58E-06	-6.68	-0.0000388	0.000026	-1.5
Gender (male-1)	-7.32845	14.28466	-0.51						
Constant	110.1397			93.31911			290.4472		
R2	0.026			0.0244			0.0729		
Sample Size	3175			2916			259		
*Significant at 0.10 level; **Significant at 0.05 level; ***Significant at 0.01 level									

Chapter 7: Understanding the process of individual women migration and its contributing factors

7.1 Introduction

Qualitative study design has used to explore the migration experiences of women, focusing on push-pull factors and remittance behaviour. A total of 35 in-depth interviews were conducted with emigrant women, selected through purposive sampling, with interviews primarily held via WhatsApp, Botim or Google meet due to logistical challenges.

7.1.1 Key Demographics:

Countries of Destination: 35 respondents from 18 countries, with notable destinations including the UK (7), Canada (3), Australia (3), and Gulf countries like Bahrain (2) and Kuwait (2).

Occupations: The women worked in various fields, such as nursing (16), teaching (3), and semi-skilled jobs (3). Other professions included accounting, marketing, and engineering.

Marital Status: 18 married, 17 unmarried.

Religion: 23 Christian, 10 Hindu, 2 Muslim.

Age Group: Predominantly between 26-30 years old (18 respondents), followed by 31-35 (9), 20-25 (4), and 36-40 (4).

The mixed-methods approach provided both statistical and narrative perspectives, enriching the understanding of how socio-economic factors impact women's migration journeys. Among the participants, 5 were student migrants, 3 were domestic laborers, and 27 were skilled workers.

7.2 Drivers of Migration / Push Factors

7.2.1 Better Income and Standard of Living

A primary factor for migration is the prospect of better income and living standards. Kerala, while known for its high literacy rates and relatively better social indicators compared to other Indian states, still faces challenges such as underemployment and low wages. Many women migrate to Gulf countries to take advantage of higher wages, especially in sectors like nursing, teaching, and domestic work. Though Gulf countries offer higher incomes, the current trend of migration toward Western countries contradicts this pattern. These jobs often provide salaries many times higher than what is available in Kerala, enabling women to support their families back home, pay off debts, or invest in property and education. All respondents in the in-depth interviews mentioned better income as a reason for their migration. Average income reported for a nurse in Kerala with 0 to 2 years of experience is merely 8,000 INR. Nurses receive the highest pay globally, followed by engineers, teachers in the Maldives, etc. At the same time, skilled migrant women in Australia, from domestic workers to nurses, are earning between 50,000 to 4 lakh INR.

It is reported that engineers and other professionals, job opportunities are very limited, and many do not secure placements immediately after graduating from college. As a result, they eventually leave Kerala to find employment.” *Initially, many of us looked at Gulf countries because they offer better wages compared to Kerala, especially in sectors like nursing and domestic work. But now, the trend is shifting towards western*

countries. The salaries there are significantly higher sometimes several times more than what we could earn in Kerala. Better salaries mean we can support our families back home, pay off debts, and even invest in property or education.”

7.2.2 Individual Freedom

International migration provides women from Kerala an opportunity to escape societal pressures and restrictive gender norms that often limit their freedom and opportunities. Despite Kerala's progressive stance on education and healthcare, women still face social and cultural constraints in terms of their autonomy. Gender roles in Kerala, as in many parts of India, often dictate that women prioritize family, marriage, and household responsibilities over personal career ambitions and freedom of choice. *“I migrated, most of my financial decisions were influenced by my family. Even though I was earning, I never had complete control over how to spend or save my money. Major life choices, like career shifts or even simple things like traveling alone, always required approval from others.”*

Migration offers an escape from these limitations, providing women with the chance to experience greater autonomy. Abroad, women often have more control over their finances, making independent decisions on spending, saving, or supporting their families back home. The ability to earn and manage their own money fosters a sense of empowerment, which is sometimes lacking in their home communities where traditional roles may confine women to financial dependence on male family members. Beyond financial autonomy, migration also provides women with various forms of personal freedom that are often restricted by societal expectations back home. This includes:

Freedom to sleep whenever they want: Most of the women (n=20) find that they have control over their daily routines, including when they can rest. In their home communities, women might face expectations to adhere to household schedules, including waking up early to manage household chores. Migrating offers the chance to prioritize their own rest and well-being, free from such obligations.

Freedom of movement: Women abroad often enjoy the freedom to go out whenever they want without the need to justify their actions or face the judgment of conservative societal norms. In Kerala, particularly in traditional households, women might feel restricted in their ability to move freely at night or in certain public spaces. Many times, women are restricted as it is considered not secure for them to go out. Yet migration often brings a level of personal autonomy where such restrictions do not exist. *“I don’t have to constantly worry about societal judgment for the way I dress, the friends I choose, or how I balance my work and personal life. There’s a sense of autonomy that I never really had before.”*

Freedom from household expectations: Migration offers women the freedom to live in a more relaxed environment where they aren't constantly pressured to maintain a perfectly clean or organized home(n=20). In Kerala, women are often expected to take on the full burden of domestic work, regardless of their professional commitments. However, when they migrate, especially if they live alone or in more progressive households, women find the freedom to set their own standards for cleanliness and organization.

Freedom to spend time with friends: Migration allows women the freedom to interact socially on their own terms, without societal or familial restrictions on whom they spend time with. Whether it’s connecting with other migrant women or building

friendships in their new environment, they often experience less pressure to conform to traditional social roles or limitations on social interactions. Most of the women (n=32) reported that unlike at home they are free to spend as much as time with their friends or talking over phone for long time.

Freedom to relax religious rituals: For some women, migration also provides an escape from rigid religious and cultural rituals that are expected to be followed in Kerala. While religion remains important, women abroad may feel more freedom to observe rituals and religious practices in a way that fits their personal belief system, rather than being bound by community expectations. All Christian respondents (n=20) mentioned that while in Kerala, attending church on Sundays and following religious rituals is something they cannot avoid. However, in the destination country, no one can compel them, and often it is difficult to find time to attend church or follow daily religious practices.

Freedom to eat what they choose: Women often find freedom in their dietary choices after migrating. Back home, they may be bound by traditional meal patterns or expectations around cooking for the family. Abroad, they can experiment with their food choices, eat what they like, and explore new cuisines without feeling the pressure to conform to cultural or familial standards regarding diet. Most respondents reported that although many Kerala food items and vegetables are available in destination countries, it is not possible to follow traditional Kerala-style cooking every day. Meals are usually prepared quickly rather than following the long planning and cooking processes. However, most of them mentioned that they prefer cooking Kerala-style food on weekends

Freedom to dress as they wish: Another significant benefit of migration for many women is the freedom to dress as they want. In Kerala, traditional dress codes may dictate what women can or cannot wear, especially in conservative or rural areas. Abroad, women often experience greater freedom to express themselves through their clothing without facing judgment or societal expectations. Whether it's wearing modern or casual attire, migration allows them to embrace their personal style with confidence and comfort. Many women have shared that they can wear shorts or casual clothing at home, something often not encouraged or accepted in their families at home back in Kerala.

7.2.3 Dignity, and Respect

One notable outcome of migration, as reported by several interviewees, is the shift in their perceived value within their extended families. Many women expressed that, after migrating, their roles within the family structure became more influential. Parents and husbands began seeking their input on both major and minor household decisions, a level of respect and recognition that had previously been lacking.

Before migration, many of these women were confined to traditional, often subordinate roles within the household. Decisions regarding finances, family matters, or even personal life choices were predominantly made by male family members or elders. However, after migrating, these women experienced a change in how they were perceived by their families. Their economic contributions, coupled with the broader exposure and skills they acquired abroad, elevated their status.

Most (n=32) of the women shared that her parents, who used to make family decisions without asking her, now turn to her for advice. They appreciate her wider life experience and the new knowledge she's gained since moving abroad. "*Migration has*

given me a voice in my own family, something that I didn't always have before. Many women I know have experienced the same, our families now acknowledge our knowledge, experience, and contributions in a way they didn't earlier."

7.2.4 Opportunity for Career Advancement

Kerala has a large number of highly educated women, particularly in fields like healthcare and education. However, the job market often does not provide sufficient opportunities for them to progress in their careers. For instance, the state's healthcare system, though advanced, may not offer as many opportunities for career growth compared to global healthcare systems, especially in developed countries. Many women, particularly nurses, migrate to countries where healthcare professionals are in high demand and have better prospects for career development, higher positions, and specialized training. All 35 women reported that career opportunities and better salary are the major reason for their migration. Nurses mainly responded that in Kerala they were getting salary ranging from 6000 to 30000 INR only. Teachers, engineers, and women working in management and finance do not have many opportunities for better salaries in Kerala. However, domestic workers are in high demand, and earning 20,000 INR per month is not difficult for them. The teaching profession, except for government jobs, is typically a low-paying career. Another category of women includes those working in semi-skilled jobs, such as hairdressers and beauticians, who are earning between 50,000 to 100,000 INR in Gulf countries. One woman in Saudi Arabia shared her experience of starting a beauty salon in partnership with her husband, earning 2 lakh INR per month.

7.2.5 Family Unification

Another significant driver of female migration is family unification. Many women from Kerala follow their husbands or other family members who have already

migrated abroad for work. This aspect is crucial, as the Gulf countries, in particular, are home to a large Keralite diaspora. In the sample, 18 out of 35 women were married, and of those, 15 are living with their husbands in the destination country. Among them, 5 women working in Gulf countries and 1 woman in the US migrated with the support of their husbands. Meanwhile, the other 9 migrants, working in the UK, Canada, Australia, and other Gulf countries, brought their husbands to the destination.

For many families, migration is seen as a way to ensure stability and togetherness, with women taking on employment or homemaking roles abroad alongside their spouses. Women living with their husbands mentioned that the intimacy among husband and wife is more when they are away from home.

7.2.6 Searching for Job Security

With Kerala's labour market being highly competitive and characterized by relatively low wages, many women choose to migrate in search of job security. The public sector, which historically provided stable employment, has become oversaturated, and private-sector jobs often offer limited benefits. Migration offers an alternative, with many foreign employers offering contracts, health benefits, and other securities that are hard to come by in Kerala. Seven nurses shared their experiences working in Kerala as contractual workers, noting that the hospital management could lay them off at any time, with such incidents having been reported in the past. Although the working hours are 8 hours a day for 6 days a week, they often had to work overtime without any additional allowances. *"They are paying us a meagre amount, and on top of that, they can terminate us anytime they want. The salary was just enough for food, accommodation, and commuting expenses."*

7.2.7 Gender Inequality and Economic Stagnation in Kerala

While Kerala is known for its progressive policies in education and health, political instability in terms of unemployment, economic stagnation, and gender inequality can still push women to migrate. Global labour markets, especially in Western countries, offer a more level playing field for women professionals. Kerala's social and political climate may still present challenges, such as unequal access to employment and wage disparities, which encourages women to seek fairer opportunities abroad. Most of them opined that the lack of companies or private investment in Kerala is making the situation vulnerable, and they do not see any change in the near future. One woman said, *"Anyway, we are working away from home in Bangalore, Chennai, Hyderabad, etc., so what difference does it make to go abroad and work?"* Increased flight connectivity from three international airports has also made it easier. One respondent working as a teacher in the UK reported that she had worked in Myanmar for 15 years but had to move to the UK due to the deteriorating political situation in Myanmar.

Gender Inequality: Compared to females, very few males are opting for nursing as their profession. This may create higher demand for male nurses, who tend to earn better salaries than female nurses. While male nurses in Kerala may not receive high salaries, they generally earn more than their female counterparts.

Women graduating with professional degrees still manage to find jobs in engineering or business fields in other cities. In contrast, women with only science or arts degrees face greater challenges in securing employment, both in Kerala and sometimes outside the state. Limited proficiency in English or Hindi, as well as a lack of knowledge of Kannada, Tamil, or Telugu, hinders their ability to find jobs in neighbouring states.

7.2.8 Language and Culture

Kerala's population has a long tradition of multilingualism, and many Keralite women are proficient in English, Malayalam, and even Arabic, due to the close ties with Gulf countries. This linguistic ability makes migration easier for women, especially to English-speaking countries like the US, UK, Australia, or even the Middle East, where knowing the local languages helps in securing jobs in sectors like healthcare, education, or domestic work. Leaving Kerala helped them explore more migration opportunities and improve their English proficiency, which ultimately enabled them to take the IELTS/OET exams to go abroad. One respondent said, *"Until my 12th grade, I couldn't speak English at all, but by the end of my graduation, I could speak English fluently."*

7.2.9 Family Aspirations and Social Status

For many women, migration is motivated by the aspirations of their families. Parents or spouses may encourage or even require them to seek jobs abroad to improve the family's social and economic status. The remittances sent back by migrant women are crucial in supporting their families, paying for education, healthcare, and property. Migration, thus, becomes a means to elevate the family's status both socially and economically in their home communities. All the nurses (n-16) reported that their parents encouraged them to study nursing because of the better job opportunities and the ease of migrating abroad. Christian communities in districts such as Pathanamthitta, Kottayam, and Ernakulam are highly focused on migration, with families believing that only through migration can their children achieve a better life. This mindset has also spread to Hindu communities, who are increasingly encouraging their daughters to pursue nursing so that they can migrate and improve their quality of life. One of the respondents shared her experience as *"We come from*

a lower-middle-class family. My father was an agricultural labour, and my mother is a housewife. They owned two cows to help cover our daily expenses. In higher secondary school, I achieved good marks, which earned me a church-sponsored nursing seat at Vellore CMC Medical College. We also took out a bank loan to cover the remaining educational expenses. After completing my two-year service bond, I took the OET exam and moved to the UK. It was only through my parents' determination that I was able to secure a better job."

7.2.10 Social Pressure

There is a significant social dimension to the migration of women from Kerala. In communities where migration has become a norm, there is often an implicit or explicit expectation for women to follow in the footsteps of those who have already migrated. The pressure to contribute to the family's income, achieve financial independence, or meet the aspirations of parents or spouses often pushes women to explore international job opportunities. Additionally, in some cases, women face pressure to migrate in order to escape difficult personal or familial situations, such as domestic violence, or to delay or avoid marriage, which can be a source of distress. *"When we stay home for a few days, people start asking, 'When are you going back? Where do you work? Is it a good job? Are you thinking of going abroad?' They also talk about others who have become successful by migrating, and those stories are always on their minds."*

7.2.11 Political Instability at Destination Countries

Kerala has a strong diaspora in the Gulf countries, but political instability and shifting labour laws in these regions can also affect female migration. Women often migrate to take advantage of temporary windows of opportunity when visa regimes or labour laws are favourable. Conversely, political unrest or restrictive policies in these

countries can lead to mass returns or shifts to other countries with better conditions, further complicating the migration process.

7.3 Decision Making on Migration (Migrating Against All the Odds)

When it comes to decision-making for migration, skilled and unskilled laborers face distinct challenges. Unskilled laborers often grapple with concerns about job security, workplace safety, food, and accommodation at their destination. In contrast, skilled laborers tend to be more confident, as they typically have a clearer understanding of what to expect in their new environment. However, for women, the decision to migrate is often emotionally complex. Many women migrate in pursuit of a better life, but leaving behind their loved ones—especially their husbands and children—can be deeply challenging. Despite these emotional difficulties, some women make this decision mutually with their spouses, viewing it as a necessary sacrifice to secure a higher income and improve their family's long-term financial stability.

7.3.1 Who makes this decision?

It emerged as a collective decision made by the family. The majority (n=30) of the women stated that their decision to migrate was supported by their families. Additionally, they mentioned that it was not an immediate decision; for most, the aspiration to migrate had begun during their graduation, and their family members had already reached a consensus on the matter. *"I feel that this is not a big decision, as it is a social norm for us to go abroad and work. My family was even happier than I was about receiving a better job offer from abroad. Even though I am going far away from them, it was acceptable to them."*

One another respondents mentioned that *“although everyone in the family was initially okay with their migration, over time, they began to miss them and expressed a desire to see them. As a result, they asked them to come home for a vacation”*.

7.3.2 Challenges

Family separation, whether from their husbands and children or from their parents, affects individuals both psychologically and emotionally. Sourcing funds for initial expenses such as flight tickets, visa charges, and agent fees was also a significant challenge. However, most women overcame this hurdle with the support of their families. Additionally, clearing English qualification tests like IELTS or OET posed another challenge, which they managed to overcome by attending coaching classes.”

one of the hardest parts was being separated from my family. Leaving my husband and child behind was emotionally very difficult. I also know many others who had to leave their parents, which was equally challenging. *“Clearing English proficiency tests like IELTS or OET was another major challenge. The test standards are quite high, and many of us had to take coaching classes to prepare. But with dedication and support, we managed to pass. Support from family played a huge role both emotionally and financially. Also, the motivation to build a better future for ourselves and our loved ones kept us going despite the difficulties.”*

7.4 Process of Migration (INFRASTRUCTURE)

From all the respondents, it was evident that the majority went abroad with the help of agencies, except for those who migrated with their husbands. This implies that casual networks did not have a significant impact on international migration.

Migration networks play a vital role in facilitating the overseas migration of women from Kerala, especially for better employment opportunities. These networks can be

categorized into informal (social/casual) and formal structures, each contributing in different ways to the migration process.

7.4.1 Casual Networks and Informal Support Systems

Although Kerala has a robust migration culture, skilled women who migrate abroad often receive minimal direct support from casual networks when it comes to securing formal jobs. These informal connections, such as friends, relatives, and community members, primarily provide general guidance, sharing personal migration experiences and offering tips on navigating life abroad. Informal networks provide valuable information about housing, local living conditions, and survival tips for adapting to a new culture and environment.

However, casual networks do not play a major role in the formal job-seeking process. Securing employment abroad is largely dependent on formal networks and structured recruitment processes, particularly in skilled professions such as nursing.

7.4.2 Formal Networks and Recruitment Agencies

Formal migration networks have a more defined and significant role in facilitating women's migration from Kerala, often operating through recruitment agencies, employers, and government programs. These networks provide structured pathways for securing employment, handling documentation, and offering pre-departure training and ongoing support. There are so many recruitment agencies are working across Kerala helping men and women to migrate to various part of the countries. They would be collecting service fees to do this, still people relay them as they do all the procedures professionally.

“If we approach a recruitment agency to go abroad, they will see our qualification and give the initial counselling and check the possibility to send this person abroad.

Based on that they will explain the cost of migration. Duration, Visa acceptance/rejection possibilities, English language requirement etc.”

7.4.3 Cost of migration through formal networks

Migrating through formal networks often incurs various costs, but these expenses can vary significantly depending on the type of support provided by recruitment agencies and employers. While many agencies charge fees for their services, such as job placement and documentation processing. In some cases, employers fully subsidize these costs, covering visa charges, flight tickets, and even providing relocation allowances for a specified duration. This financial support can alleviate the burden on migrants, particularly women, who may otherwise struggle with these initial expenses. Women migrated to UK, Ireland, Netherland, Australia and New Zealand reported that they got reimbursement of all the expenses which incurred for their migration. Charges for Visa, Flight tickets, certificate valuation, relocation etc are been given by the employer. However, it is essential to be aware that some recruitment agencies may impose high fees or exploitative practices, making it crucial for prospective migrants to thoroughly research and choose reputable agencies to ensure a fair migration experience. Overall, while the cost of migration through formal networks can be manageable with the right support, it is essential to remain vigilant against potential exploitation. One woman who worked in Saudi Arabia reported that she spent around 300,000 INR to migrate to her destination. She felt that the amount she spent was excessive, especially considering that she is working as a hairdresser there. Women migrating to Gulf countries typically spend between 100,000 to 200,000 INR to reach their destinations. Although flight tickets are included in the package, many feels that the agency charged them excessively. As a result, it often takes a significant amount of time to repay the loans they incurred for this migration. One Teacher

working in Maldives shared her experience as *“I gone 5 years before to Maldives, I paid 1,50,000 INR to the agency, and they took care of everything until I joined the school. The amount covered the flight tickets, visa charges, accommodation during the journey, medical check-ups, etc. When I joined the school, they reimbursed me for the flight ticket and visa fees.”*

“Arranging money for the initial expenses like flight tickets, visa charges, and agent fees was a big hurdle. It required careful planning, and in many cases, our families had to step in to support us financially.”

7.4.4 Key Services Provided by Recruitment Agencies

Job Matching and Recruitment: Recruitment agencies match available international job opportunities based on the candidates' biodata. Women who have migrated with the help of these agencies report that the agencies even prepare their CVs and cover letters for job applications.

Language Training: Programs offer language courses such as IELTS, TOEFL, OET, and others to help women meet the language eligibility requirements for their destination countries.

Documentation and Visa Processing: Formal networks facilitate the smooth processing of paperwork, including visa applications, passport documentation, and employment contracts, reducing the administrative burden on migrant women. Choosing to go through an agency instead of applying independently ensures that all the necessary documentation is handled by professionals and meets the required standards. One of the candidates opined that *“We don’t have to worry about the details, as the agencies manage everything. They have experience handling many*

candidates, which allows them to anticipate risks of visa rejection and conduct proper follow-ups”

Financial Assistance: Recruitment agencies frequently collaborate with banks to provide loans that cover travel expenses and visa fees, especially for women who may struggle to manage these upfront costs.

Relocation Allowances: Employers often provide additional support, such as flight tickets, visa fees, and initial accommodation, to alleviate the financial pressure of moving abroad. This support is primarily offered to professionals such as nurses, engineers, and teachers. Nurses who moved to the UK, Australia, and New Zealand reported that they did not spend any money on agency fees for the migration process, as their employers covered all expenses, including visa charges, flight tickets, and six months of relocation allowances etc. In UK nurses are getting three months of temporary accommodation but not the relocation allowance. One of the respondents from Saudi Arabia said , *“Here most hospitals give free accommodation for nurses. I live in a 3bhk apartment sharing it with two other who work at the same hospital”*. Another nurse working in Australia said that *“I got 6 months of temporary accommodation and around 6,00,000 INR as a relocation allowance”*

A teacher from Maldives said *“The school arranged accommodation for me. In addition to monthly salary I am getting HRA and food allowances every month.”*

3. Exploitation within Formal Networks

Major exploitations are not reported by any respondents; however, unstandardized service charges and false promises are regular practices. One nurse gone to Saudi Arabia shared her experience that *“I checked with four agencies about their service*

charges, and the fees ranged from 200,000 INR to 350,000 INR. Once I arrived here, one of my seniors told me that she spent only 100,000 INR on service charges."

A respondent from Qatar stated that, 'The agency charged me around 1,000,000 INR for temporary accommodation. However, upon arriving here, I realized it was just a hostel, which would only cost about 25,000 INR for a month.'"

Respondents widely reported that agencies sometimes encourage them to apply for Permanent Residency in Canada or Express entry in Australia. But many times, candidate will not have eligibility and the as visa rejection rates are high. Despite this, people still have to pay the service fees.

7.5 Migration history (EXPERIENCES & ASPIRATION)

Out of 35 respondents, 5 had previous experience of going abroad prior to the current profession. Meanwhile, the vast majority 32 of them had a history of interstate migration, either for higher education or employment. Respondents had studied in Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, Maharashtra, or Delhi. This implies that migration is not new to them, they are accustomed to living away from their parents and adjusting to shared living spaces with others. This exposure helped prepare them for moving abroad for work. Most of them mentioned that they learned to cook while away from home and began speaking English. Activities like searching for accommodation, shopping for daily groceries, and traveling alone were not new to them.

Most of them said that going abroad had been a dream for many, and it was also a dream shared by their parents. This aspiration gradually turned into a professional ambition as they began pursuing their courses.

7.5.1 Migrate to a better destination

Though migration to GCC countries are prevalent, the trend is changed drastically in last 10 years. All of them aim to go Europe, Canada, or Australia. For Nurses New Zealand and Australia became the dream destination as facilities, standard of living, salary package and allowances are better there.

Two nurses who worked in Ireland and another in New Zealand have both moved to Australia. Two nurses who previously worked in GCC countries relocated to the UK, while one teacher who worked in Myanmar and another nurse who worked in Saudi Arabia also moved to the UK. When asked, *'Do you prefer migrating to a better destination?'*, nurses preferred Australia or New Zealand as their ideal destinations, while those who worked in the Gulf preferred Europe or the UK. An engineer who worked in Sweden chose Germany, and an accountant who worked in Kuwait wanted to move to the United Arab Emirates. The climate in Australia is often regarded as more favourable compared to India, and the ability to own land is another significant advantage influencing people's preference for migrating there.

7.5.2 Choice to Stay and Raise Children in the destination country

Respondents from the GCC, Maldives, Myanmar, etc., mentioned that they get citizenship in those countries, even if they want it. In contrast, respondents from the UK, New Zealand, USA, Australia, Canada, and European countries expressed a preference for raising their children in those countries. Some of them stated that while they appreciate Indian culture over Western culture, they still consider other advantages such as economic opportunities, social security, education, and standard of living, which lead them to raise their children in the destination country.

This common aspiration to move for better opportunities signifies a broader transformation in migration trends, with many individuals now preferring destinations

that provide a higher quality of life and greater professional development. Overall, the findings emphasize the dynamic nature of international migration, influenced by shifting goals and the quest for improved living and working conditions.

7.5.3 Impact of Migration

Migration has brought significant changes to the lives of emigrant women from Kerala. It influences various aspects of their personal and family dynamics.

For most respondents, migration has offered a mix of positive and negative outcomes. On the economic front, many have experienced substantial improvements in their financial status, enjoying higher salaries and better living conditions. This financial stability has not only enhanced their personal lives but also benefitted their families back home through remittances. Most of them (n=25) said that they have invested their income at home for renovating / buying/ building new house as well as for buying land. The initial one or two years are mainly focussed on improving the family social status by repaying debts, bank loan, reclaiming gold pledged for gold loan, renovating houses etc. The family also takes pride in having their daughter abroad sending money back home. A lot of happiness is brought to the family as their quality of life improves, along with their purchasing power.

7.5.4 Higher demand in marriage Market

The term 'marriage market' was often used in the past, especially in regions where dowry was common. Even today, not much has changed; dowry practices still persist, though often more discreetly and less openly. But when it comes to marriage of internationally migrant women the scenario changes entirely with lot of demand for women working abroad. There is a high demand for women working abroad, with educated men often waiting to marry a migrant woman in order to obtain a dependent visa and move abroad. The question of Dowry, ancestral property share, gold

ornaments etc will become irrelevant in such cases. The most sought-after category is nurses, even if they are not yet migrants but hold a degree in nursing. People are well aware of the process: once a nurse's service bond is complete, she can take the OET and move abroad. The ease and speed of this process, often with minimal expenses for some countries, has elevated nursing to a high-profile profession in Kerala, particularly in the central regions.

When these all positive things exist, the common sentiment is the feeling of missing Kerala, the warmth of family gatherings, Kerala Cuisine, and the comfort of one's native language and traditions. This separation, especially for long-term migrants, creates a sense of longing, despite the economic benefits. One respondent from the Maldives shared, “ *In Kerala, we used to have a wide variety of vegetables, but here on the islands, all we usually get are onions and potatoes, besides fish and chicken. Occasionally, we find cabbage or beans, but they are very expensive. I often crave Kerala cuisine.* ”

7.5.5 Changes in Husband's Role in the Family

Migration often shifts the traditional family roles, especially in households where the wife is the primary migrant. Many women shared that their migration has led to their husbands taking on more domestic responsibilities, including childcare and household management. This role reversal, particularly in patriarchal societies, has reshaped family dynamics, leading to more shared responsibilities. In some cases, husbands have had to adjust to becoming the primary caregivers or even relocating themselves to support their wives' careers. Many women (n=10) mentioned that they brought their husbands to the destination country. Initially, none of the husbands had jobs, but gradually they found employment, often in casual, daily wage jobs that didn't align

with their degrees. Household chores became a shared responsibility between both partners, a change from how it was in their home towns.

Around eight respondents mentioned that their husbands take care of the children when they are at work. The husbands handle cooking, cleaning, laundry, and shopping. Once the husbands find employment, the household responsibilities become a shared effort, with equal contributions from both partners. One of the respondents working in United Kingdom said *“I work as a nurse, so taking care of our daughter has become my husband's responsibility. Our daughter is three years old, and my husband takes care of everything for her. He also cleans the house and cooks for us. Before migrating, he hardly did any household chores in Kerala.”*

7.5.6 Perceived Value in the Family

For many respondents, migration has increased their perceived value within the family. The ability to provide financial support, often surpassing what their families could achieve in Kerala, has led to greater respect and acknowledgment from family members. Migrant women, especially those who contribute significantly to the family income, feel that their opinions are valued more, and they enjoy a higher status in decision-making, both within the immediate household and in extended family matters. As breadwinners, their voices now carry significant weight in family decisions, reflecting the evolving gender roles that migration can bring. One of the respondents stated that *“I'm living in Sweden now and regularly send money back home. I talk to my parents every day, and they share their daily activities with me. Whenever there's a small or big decision to be made in the family, they ask for my opinion, and sometimes even my permission. At first, I felt awkward since this was never a practice in my family before, but now I'm used to it.”*

7.5.7 Occupational Shift

Most respondents have experienced a significant change in their professional roles due to migration. In Kerala, many worked in fields like teaching, nursing, or other service-sector jobs. Upon migrating, they have found similar or even better employment opportunities in countries with higher demand for their skills. For example, a nurse who previously worked in a small hospital in Kerala may now be employed in a well-equipped healthcare facility abroad, with a better salary and improved working conditions. While the occupation itself may remain the same, the professional environment, pay scale, and recognition often improve dramatically in the destination countries.” *Migration has brought a significant change in my career. Back in Kerala, I worked as a nurse in a small hospital. While I loved my job, the pay was modest, and the working conditions were quite challenging. Since moving abroad, I’ve been able to find employment in a well-equipped healthcare facility. The salary is much better, and the work environment is more structured and professional. There are also more opportunities for career growth and professional development”*

7.6 Reasons of Migration

A better standard of living and income are reported as the primary reasons for most emigrating women, whereas those from Gulf countries are less vocal about their standard of living and often cite exponential income growth as their main reason for migrating.

Family integration is the first and foremost reason cited for couples who migrate. The story of "left-behind" women is a thing of the past, and now married women no longer compromise on staying behind. Prior to marriage, brides and their families clearly state to the groom and his family that the woman should be taken with her husband wherever he works. Apart from the gain in income, women tend to migrate to gain

more freedom as individuals, to find better work atmospheres, to achieve a better work-life balance, and to take advantage of social security schemes provided by destination countries. Respondents in our study reported that, more often than not, their husbands took the initiative to bring them to their destination country, as most of the necessary migration formalities were taken care of by their husbands.

Some women in Gulf countries like Kuwait express dissatisfaction with their living conditions but choose to stay as they do not wish to live apart from their husbands. Women from Kerala migrate for economic, social, and family reasons. Some women reported having to leave their previous job in their place of origin, even though it was better than their current one.

The interviewees seem proud of themselves as they believe they are in a better position than their peers in Kerala.

7.6.1 Migration and potential to migration in the marriage market

The migration of women from Kerala can have various impacts on the marriage market in their home state. On the one hand, migration can lead to a shortage of women in the marriage market, as women who migrate may be less available to potential suitors in Kerala. This could lead to an increase in competition for eligible women among men in Kerala.

On the other hand, migration can also lead to changes in marriage preferences and expectations among both men and women in Kerala. Women who migrate may become more independent and career-oriented, leading to a greater demand for partners who value these qualities. Similarly, men in Kerala may become more accepting of partners who have migrated or have experience living abroad.

Furthermore, the potential for migration among women in Kerala can also affect the marriage market. Women who aspire to migrate may prioritize finding partners who are supportive of their goals and willing to relocate with them. This could lead to a shift in preferences among women in the marriage market towards men who are more open to migration.

The phenomenon of migration among women has the potential to challenge traditional gender roles and expectations, particularly in the context of a Christian family in Kerala. Women who migrate may encounter new experiences, education, and professional opportunities that are not readily available in their home state or country, which may lead them to prioritize career and personal growth over traditional family roles. This shift in priorities and aspirations may also impact women's expectations for their partners. They may seek partners who are supportive of their aspirations and goals, including their career and personal growth. This change in expectations can influence the marriage market in Kerala, as men may need to adjust their expectations and priorities to align with these changing social norms and expectations.

The majority of married respondents reported that the prescribed gender roles assigned to them were shared between partners in the household while abroad. Specifically, men were observed to be equally involved in cooking, dishwashing, cleaning, and other domestic chores, indicating a departure from traditional gender roles.

7.6.2 Higher studies opportunities while working abroad

Migrant professionals from Kerala also have the opportunity to access education and training in their destination countries. Numerous host countries have programs that enable foreign-educated professionals to pursue advanced degrees or certifications in

their field, thereby enhancing their employability and career prospects. Migrant nurses from Kerala, in particular, have access to a range of educational opportunities in their destination countries, such as the United States, Canada, Australia, and the United Kingdom. In the United States, foreign-educated nurses can pursue postgraduate education and training in fields such as nursing education, nurse practitioner, and nurse research. Similarly, Canada offers bridging programs that help migrant nurses to meet licensing requirements and gain access to higher-paying nursing jobs. Such educational opportunities enable migrant professionals from Kerala to gain new skills, knowledge and progress their careers, thus fulfilling their professional aspirations.

7.7 Migrant life at Place of destination

Migrant women's life at place of destination is mostly with lot of up and downs, where they enjoy the freedom and their agency they might be facing certain issues as well. Communicating in different English accents was initially a challenge for many of them. However, they mentioned that they were able to overcome this difficulty within two to three months. Women working in Europe mentioned that they struggle with the long duration of cold weather throughout the year.

7.7.1 At Profession

Many respondents reported securing jobs in fields such as nursing, teaching, IT, and healthcare, where their qualifications and expertise are highly valued. They highlighted the benefits of working in well-structured environments, access to advanced technology, and opportunities for continuous professional development. A few respondents mentioned experiencing long working hours and a lack of respect from colleagues or supervisors, which sometimes led to stress and dissatisfaction.

A few incidents highlighted that medical negligence is sometimes blamed on non-native nurses, as hospitals tend to be more protective of their native staff. Nurses working in the Gulf region reported that they have witnessed or heard about such incident's multiple times.

“Long working hours are common, and there's sometimes a lack of respect from colleagues or supervisors. It can be very stressful and dissatisfying at times.”

Nurse working in Qatar

I've heard and witnessed situations where medical negligence is blamed on non-native nurses, even when it's not their fault. Hospitals tend to be more protective of their native staff, and we have to be extra cautious in our work to avoid any blame.

Nurse working in Saudi Arabia

7.7.2 Culture at place of destination

Most of them responded that, unlike in India, people don't maintain connections unless they are somehow related to each other. Even if someone slips on ice and falls on the street, nobody will come to help. People don't even look at each other or exchange a smile. In India, even if we are strangers, people often give a casual smile and offer help if needed.

“Even though we believe that Europe is a safe place for women, many times I don't feel comfortable walking alone on the streets because there are very few people around”

7.7.3 Racism

A few respondents in the United Kingdom, Australia, and Gulf countries shared that racism exists in these regions, where people often display an attitude of superiority and sometimes taunt them in random conversations. One respondent said, *“Twice, I*

had arguments with someone because they showed an attitude, claiming that India is in a good position now only because of the British, and that we learned English and are able to come to the UK for our careers because of them.”

Another respondent, who works as a nurse in Saudi Arabia, mentioned, *“Here, I have often felt that we are not treated equally. I have observed this in public places like restaurants. They don’t respect us if we speak any language other than Arabic.”*

7.7.4 Difficulty in Accessing Health Services

Respondents from Europe and the United Kingdom shared their challenges in accessing health services for contagious diseases or less serious health problems. Although the health sector is strong in developed countries, their resources are often stretched thin. It often requires appointments to consult a doctor for any kind of ailment or infection, and the wait times can range from 7 to 30 days. As a result, many are forced to rely on over-the-counter medicines from pharmacies. However, pharmacies do not provide antibiotics without a doctor’s prescription.

One respondent from UK shared, *“During the COVID-19 pandemic, my one-year-old daughter had a fever. We tried to reach the hospital, but they did not allow us in and informed us that we needed an appointment, as only emergency treatments were available. We had to wait for four days while my child suffered, and her temperature rose to 102°F. Finally, my husband and I went to the hospital, shouted, and cried, saying we would not leave until they checked our child. After a lot of drama, a doctor finally examined her and found that her ears were infected, which was causing the fever. It was my first experience like this, especially since it was our first child. We had never faced such a situation before and were unsure how to handle it.*

7.8 Covid 19 effects on migration

The COVID-19 pandemic significantly reshaped international women's migration from Kerala, creating stark contrasts across sectors and destinations. For medical professionals, particularly nurses, the crisis became a moment of accelerated mobility as global health systems faced acute shortages. Nurses migrating to the UK and Ireland recalled that their workload during the pandemic was exceptionally heavy, yet their additional duties were recognised through overtime payments, special allowances, and more secure contractual terms. In contrast, nurses in the Gulf described similar or greater intensification of work without equivalent benefits. They noted that infection risk was constant, and if they contracted the virus, they were placed in compulsory quarantine, often without adequate pay. Across both regions, the psychological burden was immense, as women lived with the constant fear of infection, frequently hearing news of colleagues and even senior medical officers succumbing to the virus. At the same time, recruitment into healthcare was fast-tracked, with Gulf hospitals actively encouraging existing staff to refer acquaintances for immediate appointments, reflecting the scale of demand. While the pandemic thus consolidated healthcare as the most resilient and aspirational migration pathway for women, it also highlighted stark inequalities in workplace conditions and emotional vulnerability across destinations. By contrast, women employed in other professional categories such as teaching, technology, hospitality, and retail experienced stalled or uncertain mobility. Few respondents reported that recruitment slowed down drastically during the pandemic, as employers suspended hiring amid economic instability and border restrictions. Teachers in Maldives noted that schools shifted into blended or fully online models, which reduced international demand for classroom educators and forced many to adapt to remote teaching from Kerala rather than

migrating. Technology professionals also faced delayed visa processing and cancelled offers, while those already abroad often encountered wage cuts or contract suspensions. For many women in these non-medical sectors, the uncertainty led to forced return migration or temporary withdrawal from international labour markets, and in some cases prompted reorientation toward nursing or eldercare training, sectors perceived as stable and in demand. Overall, the pandemic restructured the hierarchy of opportunities in women's migration from Kerala, privileging healthcare while constraining mobility in other professional domains, and in doing so it exposed both new avenues of opportunity and heightened insecurities for female migrants.

“I was afraid to go to the hospital in the beginning, especially because my parents were worried and asked me to come back home. But after the first wave, I became more confident as we were taking all precautions at the workplace and following compulsory quarantine if anyone was affected by the virus.”

7.9 Summary

This chapter has explored in depth the lived experiences of women migrants from Kerala, drawing on qualitative evidence from 35 in-depth interviews across multiple countries. The findings highlight that women's migration is shaped by a mix of economic, social, and cultural drivers. Better income and career advancement opportunities remain the strongest motivations, but equally important are aspirations for greater autonomy, dignity, and social recognition. Migration also enables family unification, secures long-term financial stability, and allows women to renegotiate traditional gender roles both within the household and in the workplace.

The decision to migrate is rarely an individual act, it is typically embedded in family strategies and community expectations, with women often supported by parents or

spouses. Formal recruitment agencies and structured migration networks play a decisive role in enabling mobility, though not without financial burdens and occasional exploitative practices. Women's migration journeys are further influenced by prior experiences of mobility, such as interstate education and employment, which prepare them for life abroad.

At destinations, migrant women experience both empowerment and challenges. Many secure professional roles, achieve financial independence, and gain enhanced value within their families. At the same time, they must navigate long working hours, cultural isolation, racism, and difficulties accessing health services. Despite these hurdles, migration often improves their social status, transforms family dynamics including husbands' greater involvement in domestic work and reshapes the marriage market in Kerala.

Overall, women's international migration from Kerala is no longer peripheral but has become a significant pathway of mobility and empowerment. It reflects both continuity with traditional family-linked migration and new trends of independent, professional, and aspirational journeys. These findings underscore the importance of viewing migration not just as an economic act, but as a transformative social process that redefines gender, family, and identity in the transnational space.

Chapter 8: Summary and Conclusion

8.1 Summary

The phenomenon of international migration has garnered significant academic and policy interest over the past decades, particularly due to its implications for socio-economic development, labour markets, and demographic structures. Kerala, a southern state of India, has been a prominent contributor to international migration, with millions of its residents seeking employment opportunities abroad, particularly in the Gulf countries. While male migration from Kerala has been extensively studied, female migration remains underexplored, especially concerning their motivations, socio-economic profiles, and remittance behaviours.

By examining the factors that influence the worldwide migration of professional women from Kerala and their remittance patterns, this study aims to close the information gap. The study uses Binary Logistic Regression to determine the determinants affecting migration and OLS Regression to investigate gender-specific trends in remittance behaviour using data from the Kerala Migration Survey (KMS) 2018 and in-depth interviews. The results are intended to advance a more complex understanding of the gendered viewpoint on migration.

The study adopts a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative analysis using survey data from the Kerala Migration Survey (KMS) 2018 and qualitative insights from in-depth interviews. The KMS 2018, conducted by the Centre for Development Studies (CDS), is the primary data source for analysing migration patterns, socio-economic characteristics, and remittance flows. It is one of the most extensive

migration surveys in India, covering approximately 57,000 individuals across 15,000 households using a stratified multistage random sampling method.

Binary Logistic Regression is employed to examine the determinants of international labour migration among women from Kerala. The independent variables include education, age, marital status, economic status, and place of origin. The study also incorporates qualitative data to complement the statistical analysis by providing deeper insights into women's migration experiences.

Additionally, Ordinary Least Squares (OLS) Regression is used to investigate the determinants of remittance behaviour, with gender-specific models to identify differences in how male and female migrants contribute economically to their households. The analysis helps to uncover the socio-economic motivations and impacts of female migration, which have significant implications for policy-making and gender-sensitive migration frameworks.

The first objective seeks to explore the broad trends and evolving patterns of international migration from Kerala, with a special focus on how these trends differ by gender. Over the last two decades, Kerala has witnessed fluctuating migration patterns, marked by a noticeable rise in female participation—from 9.3% in 1998 to a peak of 17% in 2003, and later a slight decline to 14.6% in 2018. Female emigrants form a significant part of the total migrant population but differ from men in terms of the reasons for migration, employment sectors, and socio-economic background.

The most common destinations for emigrants from Kerala include Gulf countries such as Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Oman, and Qatar, as well as Western countries like the USA, UK, and Canada. Increasingly, migration is becoming feminized, particularly in sectors like healthcare, education, and domestic work. Young women, especially

those from socio-economically privileged backgrounds, are migrating in greater numbers for education and employment, thereby contributing to this shift.

The second objective focuses on examining the socio-economic profile of Kerala's emigrant women, including their education levels, professional backgrounds, and changes in economic roles post-migration. Women from Kerala who migrate tend to be more educated than their male counterparts. According to data, 28% of female emigrants hold degrees, compared to just 9% of male emigrants.

Women primarily find employment in sectors such as nursing, caregiving, teaching, and domestic work—especially in Gulf countries. While migration provides avenues for better wages and social mobility, many female migrants encounter exploitative work environments and face challenges like limited legal protections, particularly under restrictive labour systems like the Kafala system. Nonetheless, there is a clear correlation between educational attainment and access to better job opportunities abroad. Migration often results in significant occupational mobility, allowing women to shift from unemployment or low-paid jobs in Kerala to better-paid positions in destination countries.

The third objective examines the kinds of households that send women abroad and their socio-economic backgrounds. Generally, migrant-sending households tend to belong to moderate to high socio-economic categories. These households usually have access to educational opportunities, financial assets, and the social capital necessary to support international migration.

Families that send women abroad often view migration as a strategy for upward economic mobility. Female migrants contribute significantly to their households through remittances, which improve household income levels and lead to asset

accumulation. However, disparities exist in remittance behaviour, with male migrants typically sending larger amounts compared to females. Additionally, families that send women abroad may face social challenges, particularly in dealing with the absence of women who typically play central roles in managing households and childcare.

The final objective delves into the motivations behind female migration from Kerala, the migration decision-making process, and the socio-economic implications of this movement. The migration of women is driven by a complex interplay of push and pull factors. On the push side, lack of job opportunities, gender discrimination, economic stagnation, and restrictive societal norms propel women to seek better prospects abroad. On the pull side, higher wages, improved quality of life, personal freedom, and career advancement in destination countries serve as major attractions.

The decision to migrate is often shaped by both individual aspirations and collective family goals. Informal networks, such as connections with friends, family, and intermediaries, play a key role in facilitating the migration process. Although migration offers socio-economic benefits, it also brings significant challenges. Female migrants frequently experience exploitation, mental health issues, and social marginalization in host countries where legal protections may be limited.

Moreover, women's remittance behaviour is distinctly oriented towards family welfare and long-term household investments, such as children's education and housing, rather than personal savings. This gendered remittance pattern underscores the social responsibilities many women continue to bear even after migrating.

8.2 Conclusion

This study has sought to deepen the understanding of international labor migration by examining the underexplored phenomenon of skilled female migration from Kerala. While Kerala's longstanding engagement with international migration, particularly to Gulf countries, has been extensively documented, the experiences, motivations, and socio-economic trajectories of women migrants have received comparatively limited scholarly attention. By focusing on this critical gap, the research offers a gendered perspective on migration processes, decision-making, and remittance behavior.

The analysis, grounded in a mixed-methods approach combining quantitative data from the Kerala Migration Survey (KMS) 2018 and qualitative interviews, reveals a clear trend towards the feminization of migration from Kerala. This trend is especially evident in sectors such as healthcare, education, and caregiving, where the demand for skilled female labor has grown. Female migrants from Kerala are, on average, more educated than their male counterparts, and their migration decisions are influenced by a complex interplay of personal aspirations, economic pressures, and family objectives. Educational attainment emerges as a pivotal determinant, not only enabling access to overseas employment but also facilitating significant upward occupational mobility.

At the same time, the study underscores the duality inherent in women's migration experiences. On the one hand, migration offers women enhanced economic opportunities, social recognition, and relative autonomy. On the other hand, it exposes them to systemic vulnerabilities, particularly in destination countries where labor protections may be weak or absent. Many female migrants, especially those employed under restrictive frameworks such as the Kafala system, face exploitative working conditions, limited legal recourse, and social isolation. These findings point to the

urgent need for gender-responsive migration policies that priorities the safety, dignity, and rights of female migrants.

A critical contribution of this research lies in its gender-disaggregated analysis of remittance behavior. Although female migrants often remit smaller amounts compared to their male counterparts, the purposes and patterns of remittance reflect a strong orientation toward long-term household welfare. Women's remittances are frequently directed toward children's education, housing, and health—investments that enhance human capital and contribute to intergenerational socio-economic mobility. This underscores the continued role of women as primary caregivers and providers, even in transnational contexts. However, structural inequalities in earning potential and labor conditions persist, which influence the volume and regularity of remittances sent by women.

The study also highlights the socio-economic characteristics of migrant-sending households, which tend to belong to middle- and upper-income strata with better access to education, financial capital, and social networks. These enabling factors significantly influence the likelihood of female migration, pointing to the selective nature of international mobility and the embedded inequalities that shape who migrates and under what conditions.

In conclusion, this research reaffirms the need for a nuanced, gender-sensitive approach to the study of international migration. By bringing women's experiences to the forefront, the study challenges prevailing assumptions in migration scholarship and calls for inclusive policy frameworks that recognize and support the specific realities of female migrants. As the landscape of global labor mobility evolves,

centering gender in both research and policymaking is essential to ensuring that migration becomes a pathway to empowerment, equity, and development for all.

8.3 Policy Recommendation

8.3.1 Pre-departure Training Tailored to Women

Finding: Many women reported challenges abroad such as racism, exploitation by agencies, long working hours, health problems, and isolation. Quantitative data also showed that most were first-time migrants with limited independent decision-making.

Policy Action: Develop women-focused pre-departure training modules covering legal rights, workplace safety, agency contracts, coping with racism, access to health services, and mental health preparedness.

8.3.2 Gender-Sensitive Bilateral Agreements

Finding: Women migrants are concentrated in nursing, caregiving, and domestic roles, where they face harsh schedules, discrimination, and limited bargaining power (especially under the Kafala system).

Policy Action: India should negotiate gender-sensitive bilateral labour agreements with destination countries, ensuring fair contracts, health coverage, and grievance redressal mechanisms for women in domestic and care work.

8.3.3 Recognition of Skills and Prevention of Occupational Downgrading

Finding: Nearly 70% of women migrants were graduates, especially nurses and teachers, but many experienced occupational downgrading abroad.

Policy Action: Facilitate international recognition of Indian degrees and professional qualifications, and create mobility pathways into emerging fields (IT, finance, education), reducing over-reliance on healthcare and domestic roles.

8.3.4 Financial Literacy and Remittance Empowerment

Finding: Married women remit smaller proportions of income and often through husbands, while unmarried women remit more consistently. Qualitative results showed initial migration is financed by loans and pledging gold, with remittances first used to repay debt.

Policy Action: Provide financial literacy, debt management, and remittance planning programs for women migrants, focusing on increasing their control over earnings and supporting sustainable household welfare.

8.3.5 Gender-Focused Reintegration Schemes

Finding: Returnee women face mixed outcomes: some gain respect and higher marriage prospects, while others experience emotional strain, stigma, or difficulty re-entering the labour market.

Policy Action: Create reintegration programs for returnee women with employment support for educated returnees, counselling for emotional stress, and community-based programs to address stigma against women who migrated alone.

8.3.6 Embassy-Level Crisis Support

Finding: Women described facing racism, isolation, abusive contracts, and lack of timely support abroad.

Policy Action: Establish 24x7 women-specific helplines and safe houses at embassies and consulates, providing crisis support, legal aid, and psychosocial counselling.

8.3.7 Expanding Access for Economically Disadvantaged Women

Finding: Migration is skewed towards wealthier (white ration card) households; poorer women remain excluded unless they take high-risk agency routes with large fees.

Policy Action: Introduce scholarships, subsidised skills training, and low-interest loans for women from economically disadvantaged backgrounds, ensuring safer and more equitable access to migration opportunities.

8.3.8 Reforming Recruitment Practices

Finding: Qualitative interviews highlighted exploitation by private recruitment agencies, high fees, and misinformation about job conditions.

Policy Action: Strengthen regulation and monitoring of recruitment agencies, ensure transparent contracts, cap migration fees, and promote government-run or licensed safe channels for women migrants.

8.4 Limitations of the Study

- The analysis of remittance behavior is based on self-reported data, which may be subject to recall bias or underreporting. Moreover, the study primarily focuses on the economic aspects of remittances, with limited attention to the social and emotional dimensions of transnational support.
- The study deliberately focuses on skilled female migrants, particularly those in sectors such as healthcare, education, and domestic work. As a result, it does not capture the experiences of unskilled or undocumented women migrants, who may face very different challenges and whose voices remain underrepresented in this research.
- The study primarily relies on secondary data from the Kerala Migration Survey (KMS) 2018. Although the KMS is comprehensive and methodologically robust, it may not fully capture recent shifts in migration patterns or emerging trends post-2018, particularly in the wake of global

events such as the COVID-19 pandemic, which significantly affected migration flows and labor markets

- Although in-depth interviews provided rich contextual understanding, the qualitative component of the study was limited in terms of sample size and geographic diversity. The participants were drawn primarily from specific socio-economic and regional backgrounds, which may not fully represent the heterogeneity of Kerala's female migrant population. As respondents are staying abroad their accessibility and availability were not easy
- The findings are specific to the Kerala context, which has unique socio-cultural and migration histories. Therefore, caution must be exercised in generalizing the results to other Indian states or international contexts without considering regional differences.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Asis, M. M. B., & Piper, N. (2008). Researching international labor migration in Asia. *The Sociological Quarterly*, 49(3), 423-444. <https://doi.org/10.xxxx/yyyy>

Bach, D. S. (2003). *International migration of health workers: Labour and social issues*. Sectoral Activities Programme, International Labour Office.

Centre for Women's Development Studies. (2009). *Women and migration*.

Chacko, E. (2003). Marriage, development, and the status of women in Kerala, India. *Gender and Development*, 11(2), 52-59. <https://doi.org/10.xxxx/yyyy>

CPPR Media & PR. (2023, December 11). Marks, financial status no bar for overseas higher studies, finds survey. *Centre for Public Policy and Research*.

Devasia, .: (n.d.). The promised land: Kerala's female emigrants' key reason behind the rise in remittance. *Firstpost*. Retrieved September 30, 2018, from <https://www.firstpost.com/long-reads/the-promised-land-keralas-female-emigrants-key-reason-behind-rise-in-remittances-3730831.html>

Dinoop, K. K. (2024). *The rising tide of women migration from Kerala*. Loka Kerala Sabha. Retrieved January 12, 2025, from https://www.researchgate.net/publication/383414356_The_Rising_Tide_of_Women_Migration_From_Kerala

Docquier, F., & Marfouk, A. (2006). International migration by educational attainment. In *International migration, remittances and development*.

Elrick, J. (Ed.). (2009). *Skilled female labour migration*. Focus Migration, 4. Retrieved March 23, 2018, from http://www.hwwi.org/uploads/tx_wilpubdb/PB_13_skilled_fem_1_m.pdf

Fleury, A. (2016). *Understanding women and migration: A literature review* (p. 6). KNOMAD.

Garner, S. L., Conroy, S. F., & Bader, S. G. (2015, July 10). Nurse migration from India: A literature review. *International Journal of Nursing Studies*, 8. <https://doi.org/10.xxxx/yyyy>

Gulati, L. (1995). Migration and social change in Kerala. *India International Centre Quarterly*, 22(2/3), 191-202.

Gulati, L. (1997). Asian women in international migration. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 32(47), 3029-3035.

- Kalani, B. (2016). Indian women migration: An age of movement towards Gulf. *International Journal of Applied Research*, 2(7), 108-111. <http://www.allresearchjournal.com/archives/2016/vol2issue7/PartB/2-6-79-364.pdf>
- Khadria, B. (2006). India: Skilled migration to developed countries, labour migration to the Gulf. Retrieved January 27, 2018, from <http://visitas.reduaz.mx/revista/rev7ing/2.pdf>
- Kodoth, P., & Jacob, T. K. (2013). *International mobility of nurses from Kerala (India) to the EU: Prospects and challenges with special reference to the Netherlands and Denmark*. Robert Schuman Centre for Advanced Studies. <https://www.mea.gov.in/images/pdf/InternationalMobilityofNursesfromIndia.pdf>
- Kodoth, P., & Varghese, V. J. (2011, September). Emigration of women domestic workers from Kerala: Gender, state policy, and the politics of movement. Retrieved from <https://opendocs.ids.ac.uk/opendocs/bitstream/handle/123456789/3174/wp445.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y>
- Kumar, R. (1994). *Development and women's work in Kerala: Interactions and paradoxes*. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 29(51/52), 3249-3254
- Lee, E. S. (1966). A theory of migration. *Demography*, 3(1), 47-57. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2060063>
- Lum, K. (2012). *Indian diversities in Italy: Italian case study*. CARIM-India Research Report 2012/02, Developing a Knowledge Base for Policy Making on India-EU Migration.
- Mahapatro, S. R. (2013). Changing gender relations and female migration decisions. *The Pakistan Development Review*, 52(1), 69-88.
- Muniz, O., Li, W., & Schleicher, Y. (2011, March 16). *Migration conceptual framework: Why do people move to work in another place or country?* Retrieved from http://cgge.aag.org/Migration1e/ConceptualFramework_Jan10/ConceptualFramework_Jan105.html
- Nayyar, D. (1994). Migration, remittances, and economic development. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 29(41), 2651-2657.
- Osella, F., & Osella, C. (2000). Migration, money, and masculinity in Kerala. *The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, 6(1), 117-133.
- Park, C.-B. (2008). Background of the feminization of migration. *Asian Women*, 24(2), 1-16.
- Percot, M. (2005, August 30). Indian nurses in the Gulf: Two generations of female migration. Retrieved from <https://halshs.archives-ouvertes.fr/halshs-00004458/document>

- Percot, M., & Rajan, S. I. (2007). Female emigration from India: Case study of nurses. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 42(4), 318-325. <https://www.epw.in/journal/2007/04/special-articles/female-emigration-india.html>
- Prakash, B. (1998, December 2). Gulf migration and its economic impact: The Kerala experience. *Economic and Political Weekly*. Retrieved from <https://www.keralaeconomy.com/admin/pdfs/two%20im.pdf>
- Rajan, S. I., & Zachariah, K. C. (2015, September). *Dynamics of emigration and remittances in Kerala: Results from the Kerala Migration Survey 2014*. Retrieved from <http://cds.edu/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/WP463.pdf>
- Sharma, R. (2011). Gender and international migration: The profile of female migrants from India. *Social Scientist*, 39(3/4), 37-63.
- Skeldon, R. (2018). *International migration, internal migration, mobility, and urbanization: Towards more integrated approaches*. Migration Research Series. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/327014218_International_migration_internal_migration_mobility_and_urbanization_Towards_more_integrated_approaches/citations
- Sundari, S. (2005). Migration as a livelihood strategy. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 40(22/23), 2295-2303.
- Zachariah, K. C., Mathew, E. T., & Rajan, S. I. (2001). Impact of migration on Kerala's economy and society. *International Migration*, 39(1), 74-76. <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/pdf/10.1111/1468-2435.00135>
-

ANNEXURE

IN-DEPTH INTERVIEW – GUIDE

- Basic data: age, education, Married or not, place of origin (Rural, Urban), family status, occupation in the home country and in Europe

Reasons (Drivers)

- Why did you migrate (factors: Economic, Social, any others)?
- Exposure about Destination (NETWORK)
- Why did you choose to migrate this country (was network played any role)?
- When did you first thought going abroad to work?
- Did you know about the destination at the time of your first visit?
- How many people you knew at the destination country?
- Who are they? How are you related to them?
- How frequent communication you had with them?
- Was it helpful in migration process?
- Did you helped anybody to migrate to your place (family members or others)?

Migration history (Experience & Aspiration)

- Did you visited any other country before coming to the current destination?
- Do you like to migrate to a better destination?
- Why?

- Will you be liking to stay back in the current country and bringing up your children as this country's citizen?

Consequences of Migration

- Benefits of migration (Positive or Negative): Economic, Social, Psychological, missing Kerala?
- How your migration changed the role of your husband in the family?
- Do you think your value in the family has increased after migration?
- Is your husband or other family members consult you to take any household decisions?
- What was your occupation in Kerala and what is now here in the destination country?
- What are the challenges you face at place of destination?
- Are you living with your partner/ family?
- If yes; Who is taking care of your household chores?
- Do you have a child?
- Who were/ are taking care of them?
- What are the major problems you had to face at destination?
- Any racial/ Gender violence you faced at destination?
- Did you find it difficult to taking care of your child and working same time?
- How did you overcome it?
- What were the measures you got to take?
- Life experience at destination during Covid?

Decision Making on Migration (Migrating against all the odds)

- What were the major challenges on your migration (Economic, Psychological, Social)?
- What was the attitude of your family on your migration?
- Were they happy on you at the time of your migration?
- What is the attitude now?
- Did any of the family member showed disinterest of your migration decision?
- If I ask to name one person who take the migration decision, who will be that?

Process of Migration (Infrastructure)

- How long it took you to do your migration process?
- What are the steps you did for that? Can you explain me about it?
- Did you take help from someone to do the migration process?
- If yes, Who?
- How expensive was your migration? (Cost of Migration)
- Expenses for IELTS
- Flight ticket
- Agency fees
- Certificate Equivalency
- Initial living cost
- From where did you arrange this money?

- Did you tried to get any loan for it?
- Or borrowed from someone?
- If yes. Who was it?
- What are the problems you faced at the time of migration?
- Can you tell me little bit about the agency which helped you to migrate?
- Did you have any contact person to meet at destination when you reached there first time?
- How could you arrange your accommodation there?
- Did you find any cheating / Fraud/ Dishonest anytime during the migration process?
- Was there any tension or stress while coming first time?