

Living Academic Conditions of Kerala Students in UK: A Retrospective of Global Exploitative Migration Flows

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Abstract

The migration pattern of Keralites has changed after 2010. The prime destination of migration aspirants were Gulf countries but the trend significantly changed to Europe and other Western developed countries. The journey starts with student migration and wish to settle there. Among these destinations, a significant chunk goes to the UK. This study primarily focuses on Kerala students' academic and living conditions in the UK. High living costs in these countries compel to work and it may affect their studies. The study's significance is not only confined to the Kerala context. People of the global south, especially in South Asia passing through the same conditions. The study reveals exploitative working and deteriorated living conditions. These conditions affect their studies significantly. The study was conducted through case studies and narratives. The nature of the study is qualitative.

Keywords: Migration, Global south

Introduction

Kerala, the southernmost state of India, famous for educational attainments and higher human development indices. The widespread migration of Keralites, both domestically and outside, is one of the most important phenomena connected to the state. The state's economy, society, and culture have all been significantly shaped by this movement, making it an intriguing research topic. Kerala has a long history of prioritizing education and having high literacy rates. But historically, the state's small industrial base and dearth of job possibilities have pushed its citizens to look for better opportunities elsewhere. Although Keralite migration dates back to the early 1900s, it took off in the 1970s and 1980s, especially with the Gulf Boom. Due to their comparatively high levels of education and fluency in English, Keralites were well-positioned to capitalize on the demand for trained and semi-skilled. The main destination for Kerala migrants shifted to the Gulf region, which includes nations like Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Qatar, and the United Arab Emirates. Known as "Gulf NRIs" (Non-Resident Indians), these migrants worked in a variety of industries, including engineering, hospitality, healthcare, and construction. But a major chunk of the migrants worked in unskilled manual jobs. Even though Kerala's economy has been significantly impacted by the remittances that migrants have sent home. Remittances now account for a sizeable amount of the state's GDP and support infrastructure development, rising living standards, and the expansion of the service industry.

The United States, Canada, the United Kingdom, and Australia are among the countries where Keralites have relocated in addition to the Gulf. These migrants are frequently members of the trained professional

class, which includes professors, engineers, doctors, and IT specialists. The new opportunities created by globalization and liberalized economies fostered the movement of people especially the workforce of global south. In earlier period as we seen, the movement of Keralite were towards the gulf land as semi and unskilled workers. But the Europe and American countries opened new opportunities and people move toward these countries. In earlier period these developed countries demanded the skilled professional workers, where the educated professionals attracted by the opportunities and moved to these countries. But later period, due to the scarcity of labour these countries compelled to attract even manual unskilled job for workers from other countries. People from Kerala as well as the global south used these opportunities and moved to these developed countries.

Student migration

As the globe becomes more interconnected and young people's desires to obtain high-quality education, experience life abroad, and launch prosperous careers expand. Student migration has become a defining worldwide trend of the twenty-first century. Students who want to seek higher education and career possibilities frequently migrate across borders, frequently from underdeveloped to industrialized nations. More and more students from underdeveloped countries—like India are choosing to study in affluent countries such as US, Canada, UK, Australia, Germany, and others. Several push influences this tendency and pull factors, such as the lack of domestic higher education options, the standing of institutions in industrialized nations worldwide, and the desire to travel abroad and, most importantly, to live in these nations. People from the global south, especially youth are highly aspiring to settle in these foreign countries and get citizenship. The student migration from Kerala is not an exemption from this. A significant chunk of Keralites are in European and American countries as student migrants. They study in colleges and Universities and work in unskilled manual job industries to maintain their daily life.

According to the Ministry of External Affairs 371506 Indian students travelled overseas in 2016. Number of the students who migrated to foreign countries are 456823, 456823, 520342, 586337, and 259655 from 2017 to 2021. From 2017 to 2021, Kerala's numbers are 22093, 26456, 30948, 15277, and 5040. Kerala's student migration rate is generally rising at a rapid pace. The decline in the last figure shows covid pandemic and elative downfall. Two main elements influence the decision to migrate for education: the destination country's pay levels and the quality of education. However, the driving motivation for migration in Kerala is the desire to settle in the new nation and get citizenship or permanent resident status. The labour scarcity in these wealthy nations is the primary reason for the significant migratory surge. In the coming years, the nations that generate 70% of the global GDP will likely experience a severe shortage of human capital. In 2030, China will experience a 3% deficit and Germany a 23% one. In the years to come, this will cause a significant influx of students.

Lack of labour force is the main reason for international migration to wealthy developed countries. The new opportunities of globalization, which is free flow of people, technology, capital, media, and ideas envisages transnational migration (Appadurai, 1990). Lack of better wages and socio-economic conditions are the main motive forces of migration. People from the global south are underpaid when compared to developed countries. and the quality of life is substandard compared with developed countries. People are frequently forced to migrate in quest of better living conditions due to the economic divide between the Global North and South. Massey et al. (1993) claim that migration to wealthier countries is fuelled by pay disparities, unemployment, and a lack of economic prospects in underdeveloped countries. Inequalities between former colonizers and colonized nations have persisted due to colonial history. As seen by the

migration of people from former colonies to European nations, migration flows frequently follow these historical linkages (Portes & DeWind, 2007). The neo-liberal world order which actively fuelling the international migration from poorer countries to developed nations. Harvey (2005) says neoliberal policies often benefit wealthy nations and corporations at the expense of poorer countries, exacerbating economic disparities and driving migration. Here it is important to look at what Saskia Sassen point out, international migration which negatively affects local economies by pushing workers to abroad (Sassen, 2000).

Here we can see that, student migration is an extension of international migration. The main reason for international students is not quality education or international education but to get a degree anyway and settle in these affluent countries. The international students who compelled to work heavily because of the repayment of their loan in home country and for sustenance at destination country. They have been exploited in various ways. Marginson (2012) says international students are charged higher tuition fees than domestic students, often subsidizing the education systems of host countries. This over financial burden significantly raises living costs exacerbated by rising living costs and burdens. The international students mostly, are underemployed. They work in manual job sectors which does not align with their qualification. international students being channelled towards low-skilled leads them to economic vulnerability (Neilson, 2009). The youth of the global south and their migration to wealthy conditions reproduces the inequality of colonial times in a manner. The manual job sector holds the people of these poorer countries (Madge et al., 2014; Raghuram, 2012).

Kerala's youth highly aspire abroad and settle a life in developed countries. They start initial preparations long before. The students of Kerala are not exempted from this world scenario of migration. They work part-time jobs while they are studying. They highly depend on bank loans from their home country. They have to repay the debt as well as need to find money for their daily sustenance. Most of the students who work in industries such as the care sector and other less-paid manual jobs.

Living in developed countries is expensive. Even the inhabitants of the country need to work hard for a better life. The international students who also carry big financial baggage need to work hard. Foreign students live in these countries without any social security and other financial support. Their fee structure is much higher compared to native students. The educational institutions that they study mostly have no quality compared to institutions that native study. Newly built Universities and substandard educational institutions are channelizing the foreign students. The quality of education and job perspectives of these institutions and courses are questionable at most times. People of global south, especially student migrants face difficulties in all ways. This insecure exploitative condition needs to be studied in all point of view. In a society like Kerala, where youth being educated from using public education system who underpaid in developed countries and do manual unskilled labour is a serious situation. Moreover the exploitative conditions which they face is a serious concern. This study delves into their economic and living situation and how they survive in these countries.

Objective

This study primarily focuses on the academic and living conditions of Kerala students. A significant portion of the migration aspirants of Kerala are moving to the UK. So, this study looks at UK Scenario. Students from Kerala migrate for studies in Universities in different cities of UK. To survive part-time work is a necessity. This study looks at the standard of the education and courses. Along with that, the study delves into the Socio-economic and academic life of Kerala migrant students.

Research Methodology

The study is completely qualitative and relies on the case study. There are 25 cases and each respondent are different city in the UK. Due to the inability to collect data directly from respondents who are abroad, this research is dependent on telephonic interviews with purposive sampling. Data is collected from the respondents from different cities of the UK because living and economic situations must vary according to each city. The interview is conducted by interview guide.

Discussions

This study is generally focuses on academic and economic condition of migrant students in the UK. The intake to UK took place in large manner during post covid period. Deficiency of work force and stagnant economic conditions compelled the governments to open the boundaries of the nation. This is not the case of UK only but also other developed countries. This special situation led the large influx of migrants, especially student migrants to UK. Plenty of educational institutions with attractive offers gave opportunities to students of global south as well as Kerala. But after that, the UK government make visa policies more stringent. These policies seriously affected migrant students of Kerala.

Most important policy which affected the migrant students of Kerala was the switching of visa. It was possible to switch a student visa to other visa types in previous times. But after 2022 the government of UK stopped the switching. Major portion of the students who switch their visa to other type of visa such as care visa after their studies. those who cannot complete their courses and fail in exams have an option to switch their visa. But the new stringent policy seriously affected Kerala migrant students in UK. Many of the students who struggled hard due to this situation. Those who cannot switch their visa migrated to eastern European countries such as Malta, Latvia, Lithuania etc. Many of the students migrated to Dubai also.

Academic conditions

There are two types of students migrant from Kerala who reach UK. One, those who did get opportunity to study in good universities in UK with fellowship and other financial support from various institutions. These students are mainly come to UK for post-graduation and research. The courses are often artificial intelligence, machine learning and other newborn courses. Second, students with no focus on their studies but to just reach in UK do any courses and secure a part time job, become permanent resident . Those students are mainly studying MBA, International business .etc. Theses students mainly study in post 92 universities. Post 92 Universities are the institutions which did get university status after 1992. Most of them were polytechnic and colleges. They have no higher standard as prestigious institutions. Migrant students of Kerala as well as students from global south studying in these institutions. The quality of these institutions is questionable. The main peculiarity of most of the institutions are no native students study in these institutions. The number of working days in each week confined to 3 working days. The teachers of these institutions were not expert on their area. The quality of education and course is bad. No student is satisfied with their education institutions.

The main problem related to their education is the amount of fee. Students need to pay 15 to 20 lakh Indian rupees for each semester. This huge money is a financial burden to migrant students. Students are not getting sufficient infrastructure or university facilities in these institutions. Here it is important to look at Haran (pseudonym) says,

We study in a university. But it does not have any facility. It cannot even compare with a college in Kerala. Teachers are not sufficient; they do not even know about basic academic understanding. We cannot complain about this to anywhere. Nobody is responsible. We are struggling to repay our loan and fees. But we do not get that much result and quality education from here.

Generally, migrant students do not focus on education and courses. The aim of students is, complete a course with part-time job. After, that secure a job and become a permanent resident. Private companies and educational institutions widely use this opportunity. They attract students from foreign countries. they have agents at countries like India. Malavika (pseudonym) says,

There are plenty of agents in Kerala. they showed numerous opportunities. But the condition and standard of the university and course was not what they claimed earlier. In my University, the students were from other part of India and countries like Bangladesh, Indonesia and other South Asian countries.

The quality of education which migrant student get is not satisfactory. Majority of the students are not focusing educational prospects but to complete course anyway. Students from global south getting education from post 92 universities which does not maintain good standard. Infrastructure as well as academic facilities are not good. Students pay high amount of fees, which compel them to work hard in part-time job sectors. The course which they adopt does not have job prospects. Only a few migrant student focuses on education and they study in good institution with financial support such as fellowship.

Economic life

Migrant students need to work in any part-time job for their survival. The main financial burden is the tuition fees which they should pay in every six months. The second financial liability of most of the students are loan which they taken from Kerala. Thirdly, the expenses at UK. An average Kerala migrant student find financial resources through bank loans and raise money from relatives but need to repay. The amount is very high. The money for visa, flight tickets, financial support during initial days at destination country make the migrant student in debt trap. Difficulty in getting part-time job is the main problem which each student face at initial days. Each respondent unanimously agrees the decline of part-time job opportunities after 2022. This leads a reserved army of labour and relative cheap labour in the market. This adverse condition of the market directly affects migrant student of Kerala. Nasif (pseudonym) says,

One of my friends discontinued his course due to financial problem. He has got a job but lost. He found some other jobs. But he couldn't meet the expense. He dropped course and searching for jobs

This is not an exceptional case. Many of the students face this problem. They face serious financial crisis at destination country.

There are clear labour policies in UK. The wage in part-time sector is also increase in each year. Last year it increased to 11.45 pounds. Students can work 20 hours in a week. Each student can work 4 weeks and 3 days in a month. A migrant student can earn an amount of 1013 pounds in a month. The average rent for a shared room with all bills is 400 pounds. Along with that travel, groceries and other cost will exceed another 400 pounds. The living cost is 800 pounds. The students need to pay the fees and repay the debt which taken from Kerala for their migration and studies. There is no money will be balance for an average student. So, the migrant students of Kerala compelled to work more. Working more hours and days which government prescribed is illegal in UK. Most of the students sustain in UK by doing this illegal part-time job. They can only survive by doing this work. This makes serious consequence on their studies. students

cannot attend the three-day classes at their institutions and fail in exams also. Meenakshi (pseudonym) says,

We have no other way. We cannot survive with 1000 pounds. We have to repay the loan from bank at Kerala, semester fee and also the daily expense is very high. Many of the students including me do not eat properly. We eat maximum two times a day.

Another main problem is the quality of housing. An average amount of 400 pounds paying as rent. But the rent would be higher in big cities like London and Manchester. So, the students live in substandard housing conditions. Nowadays students prefer outer cities and cities in Ireland, where the rent is lesser. But students will face in finding part time jobs in these less populated cities.

The migrant students face adverse financial conditions. The debt in which they already been trapped and high fees at institution and expenses compelling work. They have to work illegal ways with cheap wages. This situation affects their studies which is already problematic. Students try to stay and survive in any hardship. Their aim is to get a good job after their studies and settle there. A lot of Kerala students completed their studies and found better job. But still, they are struggling financially. But the financial hardship is significantly higher.

Conclusion

The main aim of Kerala students are settle in UK there somehow. Students focuses to become a resident in UK and become a permanent resident. This leads them to substandard institutions. Most of the migrant students of Kerala studying in post 92 Universities. These institutions do not maintain sufficient standard. Such institutions are backward in the case of academics as well as infrastructure. No English students studying majority of these institutions but students from South Asia studying in these institutions. They need to pay high amount of fees. In addition to that, the loans from Kerala which used for migration and daily expenses for sustenance is high. This leads student migrants of Kerala to a debt trap. Students need to work more than 80 hours in a month to survive in UK. The high living cost and fees in institution compel them to work further. The migrant condition for Malayali students in UK is struggling and hard. Students do part-time job illegally for economic existence. The global demand for labour force is significantly increasing in the global north. The unequal world order pushes the people of the south to these affluent nations for better living. This global scenario pushes Kerala students to UK. This is not the case of Kerala students but also other South Asian countries

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