
Economic impact of Gulf Migration in Malayalam Cinema

JINCY S.R.

Research Scholar, Dept. of History, Christ College, Irinjalakuda, Kerala, India.

Email: janiroze@gmail.com

Article History

Received: 1 April 2019
Received in revised form:
17 May 2019
Accepted: 21 May 2019

KEY WORDS:

Gulf migration,
socio-economic
changes, inflow of
Gulf money,
artistic cinema

ABSTRACT

The increased income of Gulf countries earned from high oil prices in the early 1970s necessitated large number of employment opportunities in the Middle East countries, which accelerated the Gulf migration by 1970s. The large scale migration to the Middle East countries resulted in unprecedented socio-economic changes in Kerala. Paradoxically it gave rise to a 'new' consumerist culture. The change is reflected in the visual communication sector also. The migration and the consequent remittance significantly influenced the Cinema industry. The theme and structure of Malayalam cinema at that time began to reflect the migration. By the mid of 1970s Malayalam cinema became increasingly capitalist especially with the inflow of Gulf money. Cinema became a business as a result quantity was increased whereas the quality was decreased.

INTRODUCTION

Migration from Kerala to other states in India and to countries outside has now become so rampant that its impact is felt in every aspect of life in the state (Zachariah, Mathews, & Rajan, 2006, p. 115). People move out of the state in search of better employment opportunities, higher income and economic security, with the hope of raising resources for improving the standard of living of their and their families. (Zachariah, K.C.; Mathews, E.T.; Rajan, S. Irudaya, 2003, p. 153). The demographic factors like high population growth rates and high population density considered as the one of the major cause for migration; thus the migration is a reaction to the increasing population pressure in the state (Zachariah, K.C.; Mathews, E.T.; Rajan, S. Irudaya, 2003, p. 146).

The income from rich oil fields and the lack of skilled labours in the industrial sector, created large number of employment opportunities in the Middle East countries, which accelerated the Gulf migration by 1970s. The migrations begin by 1970s reached its peak with a mass migration by 1980s and 1990s. Unlike the earlier other migrations (like inter-state migrations and migrations to the countries like Ceylon, Malaysia, Singapore, U.S.A. etc.) the Gulf migration was different one; due to its unprecedented impacts on the state and society. Among the migrants from India, a sizeable number were from Kerala especially from northern part (Malappuram, Kozhikodu, Kannur and Thrissur). Irudayarajan estimates that 90% of the Kerala migrants are working in the Middle East. (George, 2016)

Foreign remittance from migrants especially Gulf migrants has emerged as one of the most dynamic factors that contributed to the economic development of Kerala during the last

quarter of the 20th century (Velayudhan, 2010, p. 171). The large scale migration to the Middle East countries resulted in unprecedented socio-economic changes in Kerala. The migration and the consequent remittance significantly influenced the culture of Kerala. The migration had enabled the emigrants and their families to improve their socio-economic status as adjudged by land ownership, good housing and better education for children. (Zachariah, Mathews, & Rajan, 2006, p. 119) . As per the RBI reports, NRI deposits to India crossed 7 lakh crore by March 2014-15 and the contribution of Kerala(especially from Gulf) is more than one lakh crore per year. (George, 2016, p. 25).

In short the migration is affecting every aspect of life in society like cultural, economic, social, demographic, political etc. Gulf migration undoubtedly is a big economic liberating force for the Kerala which made Malayalee upwardly mobile, rich, entrepreneurial etc (Sanandakumar, 2015). Paradoxically it gave rise to a new consumerist culture.

Impact on Malayalam cinema:

The migration has changed the economic, social and cultural aspects of the state. P.T. Kunju Muhamed, film maker and specialist in the migration issues and T.V. anchor (who deals the issues of missing migrants in a private channel) points that, the migration especially of illegal ones has begun by the mid-1960s. (Sanandakumar, 2015) (He portrayed it through the film *Garshome*). He further says that the visual communication sector also benefited with the migration. According to Salim Ahmed, director of *Pathemari* (national award winner) the period 1980s was the best period for the migrants and for the first generation of migrants it was a journey for survival (Sanandakumar, 2015). (*Pathemari* is discussing about the issues.) He also added that it had been a continues process of migration with some people coming back every year, while a new batch boarding the flight, but the story of migration remains the same ie., an unending urge to prosper, to succeed (Sanandakumar, 2015).

The migration and the consequent remittance significantly influenced the culture of Kerala. Print and visual media have received considerable investments from the Gulf countries after the gulf boom. (Sanandakumar, 2015) Cinema being an agent of culture also undergone some changes. The theme and structure of Malayalam cinema at that time began to reflect the migration. Gulf migration has influenced the Malayalam cinema in two ways one is its **cultural or narrative (theme)** and the other is its **economic or industrial** context. Gulf migration has provided sufficient plots and themes for Malayalam cinema. Some Malayalam films have portrayed the life of migrants and the elements of migration. The first Malayalam cinema on the theme of Gulf migration was '*Vilkanundu Swapnangal*' (1980); written by the famous writer M.T.Vasudevan Nair, the movie deals with the feelings of the people who migrated to Gulf countries. (Musafir, 2008)

From then onwards many film has come out with the theme and plot of Gulf either passively or actively. The statistics says that more than five hundred films has made on this subject. The interesting part is that some films even made there while some others merely used only the 'name'. Gulf made its presence in almost all the Malayalam films of 1980s and 1990s. *AkkareNinnoruMaran, Dubai, Sharja to Sharja, SwapnaSanjari, Garshom, Visa, Nadodikkattu, Varavelpu, Ayaal Katha Ezhuthukayanu, Arabikatha, OruMaruboomi Katha, Gadhama, Diamond Necklace, persiakkaran, Kanal, marubhoomiyileAana, Hello Dubaikkaran, Sandcity, Kunjiramayanam, Perumazhakalam, JacobinteSwargaRajyam, Pathemari, MadhuraNaranga* etc. are some among them. Now a day's 'Gulf' became a

normal film location of Malayalam cinema. *Dubai, Sharja to Sharja, Arabikatha, OruMaruboomi Katha, Gadhama, Diamond Necklace, JacobinteSwargaRajyam, Pathemarietc* are the best examples. Malayalee became more familiar with Middle East countries than Delhi or Calcutta.

Some films portrayed the pain and gain, dreams and reality, life and future of a Gulf malayalee. While some films depicts the life of a Gulf returnee and his struggles to settle in the society in a realistic manner. The films also discussed the issues related with the migration like visa issues etc. Female issues were also discussed in few films. Some films also depicted the changes occurred in the food culture and dressing of malayalee. In short the Gulf migration directly or indirectly influenced the nature and form of Malayalam cinema.

Economic impact:

The gulf remittances were beginning to tickle in and were yet to make their full impact on our lives and the economy (Pillai, 2010, p. 43). Malayalam cinema industry also affected with the waves of migration. By the mid of 1970s Malayalam cinema became increasingly capitalist especially with the inflow of Gulf money (Pillai, 2010, p. 22). It had some positive and negative impacts. This resulted in the increase of the number of films and new experiments in cinema industry during 1970s and 1980s. From 1970 onwards there was a tremendous rise in the number of films made in Kerala.

Table 1 shows the details of the growth rate of film production in Kerala during the period.

Table 1

Growth rate of films from1950-1990

Period	Number of films
1950-1960	65
1960-1970	229
1970-1980	706
1980-1990	1048

The growth rate of Malayalam films in the pre independent period is very low when compared with that of the post independent period. Only 13 films were made in the pre independent period. Similarly the growth rate in the first two decades of post-independence period is lesser than the following two decades. There was a rapid increase from 65 to 1048 within a short period of 40years especially during the last two decades (Nair, 1999, p. 63). Among the above stated data it is clear that the average number of the films made per year also increased. The emergence of the film audiences especially the upper middle class was also visible here.

During the period of 1960-1969 an average of 20 films were made per year. It was increased to 70.6 during 1970-1979 and to 104.8 during 1980-1989. All these clearly indicate that from

1970 onwards the **number of the films produced in Kerala was increased**. Increase in studio facilities along with increase in the number of distributing and exhibiting concerns were the major factors which encouraged film production. Technological development, the introduction of ‘colour’ and the availability of new financial sources like Gulf money were the other encouraging factors. Thus cinema became the favourite entertainment which eliminated the caste/ class discriminations.

The Gulf money also contributed in the **growth of infrastructure facilities** like new/advanced movie theatres. The number of theatres showed remarkable improvement subsequent to the attainment of independence. The number of theatres in Kerala on the eve of independence was 111. But during the peak of Gulf migration/remittance there was a progressive increase in the number of theatres. In 1975 the number of theatres in Kerala was 766. By the next year it was increased to 900. The number was further raised to 1348(1389)? in 1987 and to 1422 in 1993 (Nair, 1999, p. 67). Cinema reached even in the local areas with the arrival of new theaters. But by the late 1980s the continuous flop of films (in number and in the box-office collection) led to the closure of a number of theatres in Kerala.

Film productions become more of a profitable business. Seeing the success of films more capital began to be invested into this sector. **Many people with huge black payments enter film production** in order to invest the black money. (Gulf Malayalees and some businessmen have invested tremendously in this industry.) Hope for the easy profit, encouraged people from different walks of life to try their luck in the film sector (Nair, 1999, p. 60). The new class of producers (most of them were NRIs), in mind and images of consumer culture were increased and the conquering of consumer culture over tradition began to take place in Malayalam cinema. As a result objectification and **commodification** became a norm and are reflected as much on the female body as a ‘commodity’ in the market (Pillai, 2010). As a reflection many **sex oriented films** came out which dominated Malayalam cinema industry in the 1980s and 1990s. This resulted in the **decline of the artistic cinema stream** or new wave cinema movement in Malayalam cinema, which was started by the 1970s. By the late 1980s there was a decline in the film industry; the decline of artistic stream of cinema as well as the quality of films.

By the late 1980s there was a tendency of decline in the film industry mainly because of the advent of television and video. This situation was sharpened by the mid of 1990s may be due to the economic changes occurred with the Gulf recession by 1996. There was a decrease in the number of the films made in Malayalam. However, TV and video are not the only factors to blame. During the 1970s seeing the profitability of business, many people with unaccounted money came forward and made a number of third rate films which led to a rise in the number of flops. The continuous flops discouraged many new producers to venture into the industry. The result is that while people interested in making money alone remain in the business, the artistically inclined group is forced out (Nair, 1999, p. 213). More of sex and violence introduced into the cinema destroyed the quality of our films. The important fact is that this has a far reaching effect on the existence of our films and society.

The table shown in below indicates the growth rate of film industry.

Table. 2

Growth rate of films

Year	Number of films
1965-70	166
1970-75	241
1975-80	465
1980-85	551
1985-90	497
1990-95	413

Data source: Public Relations Department, Govt. of Kerala (Nair, 1999)

The data indicates that there was a decline in the number of films produced since 1985-90. Recently the trend was changed. Gulf became a major market of Malayalam film industry. There was an increase in the demand for Malayalam films in the Gulf countries. The increasing number of audiences in the Gulf created new trend in the film making ie., ‘a Gulf chapter’. Films began to produce mainly for the foreign audience or for abroad. (Festival releases) To increase the popularity and the number of audiences there organizes film promotions, audio launches, film awards and stage shows in the Gulf regions.

Cinema became a business and a medium for the business. Many of the superstars have their business projects in abroad especially in Gulf. The popularity and stardom created through the films are using for the business promotions. A fine example can be seen in the film *Udayananu Tharam*. The Gulf chapter had a negative impact in the film industry i.e the rapid increase of piracy. Films released in abroad very soon spread to other parts of the world through CD’s or internet version, either before the release of the proposed film of very next to the release. (The series of pirated CD hunt especially at the airports was a fine example for it.)

REFERENCES

1. George, M. (2016, October). Gulf migration and its impact on kerala economy. *Kerala Calling* , 36 (12), p. 25.
2. Musafir. (2008). *Desadanathinde MIsihakal; keraleeya Pravasathinde 50 varsham*. Trivandrum: The state institute of languages, Kerala.
3. Nair, U. J. (1999). *Economic Aspects of Film Industry In Kerala*. Trivandrum: Centre For Development Of Information Technology.
4. Pillai, M. T. (2010). *Women in Malayalam cinema; naturalising gender hierarchies*. Newdelhi: Orient Blackswan pvt Ltd.

5. Sanandakumar, s. (2015, october 3). *The Economic Times*. Retrieved November 3, 2016, from <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/>: <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/politics-and-nation/a-fifty-year-old-phenomenon-explained-malayalee-migration-to-gulf-builds-the-new-kerala/articleshow/49201357.cms?from=mdr>
6. Velayudhan, K. (2010). *Economic development of kerala; retrospect and prospect*. Chengannur: Rainbow books.
7. Zachariah, K., Mathews, E., & Rajan, S. I. (2006). Impact of migration on Kerala's economy and society. In J. (. Tharamangalam, *Kerala: the paradoxes of public action and development* (p. 115). NewDelhi: Orient Longman.
8. Zachariah, K.C.; Mathews, E.T.; Rajan, S. Irudaya. (2003). *dynamics of migration in kerala; dimensions, differentials and consequences*. New delhi: Orient Longman.