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Keeping up with Kerala's Joneses:

Relative Deprivation and Conspicuous
Consumption among
Kerala's Gulf Emigrants

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ABSTRACT

Using data from the Kerala Migration Surveys (KMS), this mixed-methods paper investigates the role of relative deprivation as a driver of international migration in Kerala. The premise for this research derives from certain consumption patterns in Kerala that are referred to by scholars as 'conspicuous consumption', a result of the Gulf migration phenomenon witnessed since the 1970s. I learn from the work of Czaika (2012) and slice and dice the data based on reference groups within the state of Kerala to obtain measures of Individual Relative Deprivation (IRD) and Group Relative Deprivation (GRD), both derived using household consumption expenditures. I also derive two variants of the Yitzhaki index. Each measure is then empirically tested with reference to their role as drivers of international migration on the KMS 2011 and KMS 2016 cross-sections and the 2011-2016 panel. I find that IRD and GRD increase the tendency for international migration when the reference group is religion. I also find the presence of Multiple Relative Deprivation (MRD) among households in Kerala. The Yitzhaki index is also associated with increased emigration for certain religious groups and for specific consumption quartiles. While I cannot unassailably argue that conspicuous consumption among return migrant families in Kerala causes perceptions of relative deprivation among aspirant families which then motivates them to emigrate, I report my findings from semi-structured qualitative interviews to suggest the viability of the same.

KEYWORDS: international migration, relative deprivation, conspicuous consumption, Kerala.

JEL Classification: A14, D01, D31, D12, J61, I30, O10, Z1

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INTRODUCTION

The first Malayalee migrants crossed the Arabian sea on a dhow without communication aids and landed on Gulf shores, ignorant of both the beckoning demand for their labour and the emigration boom they would trigger.¹ The fruits of their labour transformed not just their families, but also contributed to building a new Kerala through macrosocial and macroeconomic gains, and spillovers. However, at its core, migration remains an individual and household level stimulus that elicits a change.

While it is true that emigration moved a significant amount of Kerala's poor out of state-defined poverty, Prakash (1998) notes that the rising prices of land and labour were a double-edged sword that had adverse effects on non-migrant households with no Gulf connection. After 50 years and numerous movies on the aspiring Malayalee emigrant, emigration remains a credible opportunity for Kerala's youth, who see in their neighbours and cascading levels of social organisation, the fruits of migration 'conspicuously consumed'. This phrase is gaining mileage among researchers in the context of Malayalees' consumption patterns and will be discussed in the following section (Dominic 2017). This also informs the questions in this paper:

In the presence of consumption patterns that can be deemed conspicuous, what role do perceptions of relative deprivation (if any) play among households as a driver of emigration? How do the multiple social identities of these households affect these perceptions? What is the role of absolute deprivation, both in terms of money and in terms of possessions, as drivers of emigration?

I use data from the Kerala Migration Survey (KMS) 2011 and KMS 2016 to investigate the implied hypothesis in my questions, that relative deprivation has a role to play in the emigration decision. I employ the relative deprivation variable defined by Stark and Taylor and the Yitzhaki index in the empirical analysis. To identify the influence of visible markers of conspicuous consumption and the possession of status-endowing goods, I use various controls ranging from the value of assets held to an asset index to raw consumption expenditures, to tease out relative deprivation in various levels of social identification and consumption preference. Since 89.3 % emigrants from Kerala are located in the Gulf Cooperation Countries (GCC) based on KMS 2016 reports, this paper assumes that 'emigration' means 'international migration to any GCC country'.² The rest of this paper will expand as follows: Section 2 reviews the theoretical and empirical literature on Kerala migration, conspicuous consumption and, relative deprivation; Section 3 quantifies relative deprivation and presents the data; Section 4 describes the empirical models; Section 5

¹ Emigration will be used throughout the rest of the paper to refer to international migration

² In the rest of the paper, GCC and Gulf will be used interchangeably

discusses the results and outlines the robustness checks; Section 6 presents results of the qualitative interviews; Section 7 concludes and addresses the scope by acknowledging the limitations.

CONTEXT AND LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Context; Kerala and International Migration

Kerala's society is characterised by paradoxes unprecedented among Indian states: co-existence of poor economic growth with Human Development Indices rivalling advanced economies, stunted industrial growth with high standards of living and low per capita income with high consumption and low rates of poverty with high rural and urban income inequalities (Zachariah, Mathew, and Rajan 2003; Nidheesh and Chandran 2016). The positive halves of these contradictions owe in large part to the 50-year Gulf Migration phenomenon, which burgeoned after the oil price boom of 1973, as a result of which Kerala has been among the largest sources of emigrants for the last 3 decades. Remittances travelling across the seas are crucial to the money order stability in the state, constituting 36.3 % of State Net Domestic Product (Zachariah and Rajan 2014). It is from this unsustainable morass that this paper teases out a cycle and disentangles the elements that be; namely, the cycle wherein migration and conspicuous consumption among a few leads to relative deprivation among a set of related others which increases their propensity for emigration and so on.

The theoretical migration literature regarding the determinants of migration is rich. Reviews of the drivers of migration were considered before crystallising the set of insights this paper benefits from, namely: the role of the household in migration and consumption decisions, the influence of migrant households on their society of origin through return migration, the role of perceptions of relative deprivation and aspiration on migration decisions and, the multiple identities of migrants in their source and destination (Massey et al. 1993; Ghatak et al. 1996; Massey et al. 2005; King and Skeldon 2010).

What ties these insights to the hypothesis is the bodies of literature that I navigate.

2.2 Conspicuous Consumption

Conspicuous consumption was presented in 'The Theory of The Leisure Class' as the purposive conduct of individuals to expend efforts 'to excel in pecuniary standing' in order to outdo one another. Veblen (1899) proposed that such consumption is undertaken in the pursuit of status-promotion, after the fulfillment of one's basic needs, to distinguish the upper class from the lower. It is undertaken in order to impress others, especially the social groups an individual identifies with (Chen et al. 2005; Riquelme, Rios, and Al-Sharhan 2011). There

is also correlation between status-seeking behaviour of consumers and their intention to conspicuously consume (Chaudhuri et al. 2011).

The tendency to enhance status and emulate consumption patterns for upward social mobility is a result of susceptibility to interpersonal influence, which has been defined as a construct that fetters an individual to a desire to please significant others. This susceptibility exists among consumers in emerging and less developed contexts where extended family structures exist (Childers and Rao 1992). If an individual or household from such a context comes to possess considerable purchasing power, consumption of goods that endow status and enable upward social mobility is low hanging fruit, after basic needs have been met. This leads to attempts to bridge structural differences through consumption, which can be seen at the macroeconomic level as well, where demonstration effects push less developed nations to emulate the consumption patterns of advanced ones (Ger and Belk 1996).

2.3 Relative Deprivation and Migration

Each one began to consider the rest, and to wish to be considered in turn; and thus, a value came to be attached to public esteem. Whoever sang or danced best, whoever was the handsomest, the strongest, the most dexterous, or the most eloquent, came to be of most consideration; and this was the first step towards inequality.

Jean Jacques Rousseau saw the gaze of others as a preeminent driver of the actions of humans, later picked up by Marx who outlined society's role as the rating agency for an individual's satisfaction, postulating its absolute form against its relative cousin (Skillen 1985). In the context of satisfaction and happiness, Easterlin (1974) found an unequivocal positive relation between individual income and happiness within 19 countries but found no positive relationship using US time-series data between 1946-70. The fact is that the proportion of people who answered 'very happy' remained largely the same in the data, despite the doubling of US GDP in the same span of time. Runciman (1966) defines relative deprivation as the outcome of social comparisons between individual and relative well-being within defined reference groups. In addition to this, studies highlighting the spatiotemporal nature of the frame of reference, have been done by Ferrer-i-Carbonell (2005) who used German panel data to demonstrate that relative income is just as important to the individual as absolute income, to derive happiness. This is seen even when controlling for family income (Oshio, Nozaki, and Kobayashi 2010).

Mobility of individuals, if unrestricted, can be brought about by economic constraints acting as forces that motivate a 'flight' decision. From rural to urban migration when the fields dry up, to emigration across the seas in search of unattainable riches in the source country, the aforementioned relationships serve only to add to the forces driving migration. Like in Sjaastad (1962), Stark's identification of individual relative deprivation as a determinant for human migration can even explain migration in the absence of significant spatial income

differentials. In fact, these are essential for neoclassical migration models (Harris and Todaro, 1970). Bhandari (2004) found a significant effect of relative deprivation on the propensity to migrate using the size of land holding as a proxy.

2.4 Keeping up with the Joneses in Kerala

Both strands of literature can be married with relative ease to the Kerala context by looking at this from the supply side and the demand side. On the supply side, there exist households that have engaged in conspicuous consumption patterns because of an interplay of influences. First, the nature of family structures in Kerala allows for susceptibilities to interpersonal influence. Because of the migrant's sense of dual residence, the currency arbitrage and cultural contrasts that migrants confront upon return makes differentiating between necessities and luxuries, difficult. In the context of Maslow's (1943) hierarchy of needs, the higher wage differential that motivated the migrant's emigration satisfies the subsistence needs of the household, advancing the migrant's motivation towards higher level needs like love and esteem. Allied with the greater propensity to consume from windfall earnings than from money earned through normal work, the Kerala migrant's devotion to luxury cars, palatial houses and, non-routine consumer goods find reason (Arkes et. al. 1994).

A study of 640 emigrants from 6 districts in Kerala confirmed previous findings by Batra et. al. that there is a link between exposure to global standards and conspicuous consumption, the latter being positively related to materialistic tendencies (Paulose and Varghese 2016). Consumption has become the yardstick to measure socio-economic status in Kerala (K. C. Zachariah and Rajan 2015). Housing and shopping trends that Kerala society pursues are indicative of the consumerist culture existing in the state (Nair 1986; Moorthy 1997; K. C. Zachariah 2003). Apart from houses, a common object of emulation and of ostentation was found to be vehicles. 97 % of the households surveyed had at least one vehicle, 50 % had two personal vehicles and 33 % had more than two. With regard to more aspirational products such as cars, 62 % of households had one car and 13 % had two. This is in sharp contrast to the national average of 13 cars per 1000 population (Ghate and Sundar 2014).

It is in this societal setting where: migrants constitute about 10 % of the state population, return migrants are aplenty and, households with a 'Gulf Connection' through a household member or close friend who act as points of reference and influence which Moutinho (1987) defines as reference groups, that the pressure to emulate and outdo emanates, thus constituting the demand side of the hypothesis.

The numbers resulting in Kerala's income inequality thus fall under the canopy of work which found empirical evidence for the positive link between higher income distributions and higher migration rates (Liebig and Souza-Poza 2004). It would be remiss to exclude Stark (2006) who supplied the behavioural foundation for this structural relationship. In the presence of this felt pressure, the household members decide to migrate not necessarily only to increase

their expected income, but also to improve their relative position with respect to a specific reference group (Stark & Taylor, 1989).

Aspirational states that have seen democratizing of the access to resources and the emergence of middle-income groups are prone to aspiration poverty traps. Migration is only one of the self-diagnosed solutions to escape this trap. A more pernicious issue crops up because of the discrepancy between aspirations and achievements. When individuals or households face a mismatch between their current living standards and their desired living standards, between what they get and what they think they deserve, there is discontentment and a call for individual or collective action (Brown and Pehrson 2019). This mismatch or discrepancy is central to relative deprivation theory as the influence of visible others is persistent on the aspirational psyche. Additionally, Appadurai (1998) notes that increasing availability of economic resources can not only enhance migration capabilities by loosening economic constraints but can also increase the overall individual capacity for aspirations. Considering the positive relationship between aspirations and education levels which Kerala has, the latter being a social indicator which Kerala leads among the Indian states, feelings of dissatisfaction are exacerbated by perceptions of relative deprivation due to the visible consumption on display, in the neighbourhoods, the cities and among the various social groups that indispensably characterise the Indian psyche.

Democratizing of access to resources through industrialisation and technological advancement have enabled the aspirational middle-income groups and rewarded it with increased financial mobility throughout India (Mai and Tambyah 2011). Malayali youth, however, as the qualitative analysis shows, tend to value the economic mobility afforded by emigration.

In the analyses that follow, I will investigate the initial questions posed to disentangle some of these roles and effects.

QUANTITATIVE ANALYSIS

3.1 Data Source

Kerala Migration Surveys (KMS) are a series of studies on international and internal migration from Kerala. The KMS 2011 study is based on primary data collected from about 15,000 households selected at random by a stratified multistage random sampling technique covering all the 63 taluks in the state. The 15000 households surveyed in KMS 2011 were resurveyed in KMS 2016. The 2011 and 2016 surveys include a household module, which records socio-demographic factors of the household, its members and employs additional modules for emigration, outmigration, return emigration and, return migration.³

³ Emigrant (EMI) will be used to refer to an individual who undertakes international migration. Outmigrant (OMI) will refer to a migrant who migrates from Kerala to any destination within India. Return emigrant (REM) and return outmigrant (ROM) correspond.

3.2 Quantifying Relative Deprivation

The more an individual is deprived relative to a pre-defined reference group, the higher the propensity to migrate (Stark and Yitzhaki 1988; Stark and Taylor 1989). This relationship is also conditional on the fact that absolute deprivation does not restrict mobility. This makes Kerala fertile ground for this research due to the interconnected networks that facilitate Gulf Migration, even at the expense of debts incurred to raise the capital required for emigration.

Individuals choose to either physically leave the context that makes them absolutely and relatively deprived, or they may deal with it through adjusting their set of held norms and standards or changing their reference groups, or by mentally disengaging with their sense of deprivation (Carver, Scheier, and Weintraub 1989). In a context where migration is a largely a household decision, which may either benefit from familial connections (an existing emigrant) or whether the decision-making regarding departure is decided collectively, the family's deprivation as a whole (absolute and relative), proxied by a legitimate marker, is important as shown in De Jong (2000). Hence, I measure the relative deprivation using the household as the unit of analysis.

While Stark and Taylor (1989) see migration and deprivation as interchangeable and inversely related, the relationship between relative deprivation and utility is not as simple.⁴ The practical measure they proposed to measure relative deprivation, assumes that relative deprivation can be measured by income which has a continuous distribution. In this paper, I choose to employ two distinct measures of relative deprivation, both measured using consumption expenditure instead of household income. My reasons being:

- a) 30 % of the values in the income variable from KMS 2011 and 43 % of the values from KMS 2016 are unreported, thereby constraining a lot of the variation in income as well as the dependent variable corresponding to the households, and
- b) household consumer expenditure, being a function of income, is calculated based on summations of more than 20 items, divided into non-food expenses and food expenses, allowing for more accurate data capture and reporting. This makes the variable more robust. However, there are in principle, problems of reverse causality for households reporting remittances received from an out-migrant. I refrain from using a Tobit estimation to predict consumption expenditures for these households due to poor data quality; namely the low correlation between the given consumption expenditures and remittance amounts. Additionally, I use monthly consumption

⁴ The marginal utility of income is a function of absolute income alone in the income approach, while the relative deprivation approach is a function of absolute income as well as income of others. This difference necessitates the existence of a reference group in the relative deprivation approach. This makes my choice of households as the unit of analysis less problematic.

expenditure as opposed to yearly, which spreads the effect of the remittances, except for cases where the remittances feed the bulk of the expenditure.

The following are the two distinct measures of relative deprivation which are used in this paper:

For the first approach, I draw on the work of Czaika (2012) and focus primarily on the importance of reference groups (Walker and Smith 2002). People are assumed to compare themselves to various social groups and then to further compare their social groups to other social groups within the same reference category. Using KMS data, I stratified the households into reference categories based on ‘consumption expenditure quartiles’ and religious group. While the latter is a more explicit social grouping, the former is a reasonable comparison for households to field.

The first explanatory variable in this approach is Individual Relative Deprivation (IRD), which measures relative deprivation of households with respect to other households in the same reference group, defined as:

$$IRD_{i,r}(c_i) = \int_{c_{ir}}^{c_r^{max}} [1 - F(z)] dz$$

In this measure of Individual relative deprivation, c_i denotes annual consumption expenditures of household i , with $F(z)$ representing the cumulative distribution of household consumption levels within a social reference group r .

This variable was used to measure

IRD with respect to every other household in the state

IRD within consumption expenditure quartiles

IRD with respect to 3 religious groups (Hindu, Muslim, Christian).

The second explanatory variable in this approach is GRD or Group Relative Deprivation which is defined as:

$$GRD_{i,r}(\bar{c}_r) = \int_{\bar{c}_r}^{\bar{c}_r^{max}} [1 - F(z)] dz \text{ with } \bar{c}_r = \frac{1}{n_r} \sum_{i \in r} c_{i,r}$$

In this measure, each household i that belongs to a social group r identifies with the economic well-being of the entire group, in this case religion. The well-being of the group is represented (proxy) by the annual household consumption c_r and compares with the average consumption levels of all wealthier social groups within the same societal reference category as in Czaika (2012). However, I use this measure only for religion as a social category and exclude consumption quartiles because households may not identify as strongly with a consumption-based group, let alone the lack of explicit identification in such a classification.⁵ Further, I also use a measure of Multiple Relative Deprivation (MRD), which is a principal component of the

⁵ To the extent that a household in the bottom 25 % feels bad about the bottom 25 % being the bottom 25 %.

IRD state and IRD religious group measures to test the hypothesis that households may feel deprived across multiple social groups.⁶

Thus, the propensity to migrate of an individual, is a function of overall aspirations, which are motivated by the deprivation felt individually as a unit, collectively across various reference groups, as a result of a combination of the two and fundamentally, as a function of the absolute deprivation.

The second approach draws on a more popular strand of literature and employs the Yitzhaki Index as a proxy for relative deprivation. Two variants of the index are used:

The original Yitzhaki index for household i is calculated in the following manner

$$RD_i = \frac{1}{N} \sum (y_j - y_i), \forall y_j > y_i$$

The modified Yitzhaki index is the second measure, calculated by:

$$\text{modified } RD_i = \frac{1}{N} \sum (\ln(y_j) - \ln(y_i)), \forall y_j > y_i$$

Both compare an individual i 's income to that of every other individual j , whose income is higher than i and belongs to the same reference group. In my analysis, I use household consumption expenditure to calculate the indices. The modified Yitzhaki index uses the log of income instead of the nominal income in order to capture relative deprivation as an increasing function of y_j and a decreasing function of y_i , and concave with respect to y_j , such that a transfer of consumption expenditure from a rich man to a poorer man both having more income than person i would increase person i 's relative deprivation (Eibner and Evans 2005; Lee, 2012).

In addition to the cross-section analysis, I use the same Yitzhaki index as explanatory variable(s) on the 2011-2016 panel.

3.3 Constructing the 2011-2016 panel

I construct the panel of KMS 2011-2016 in order to study the characteristics of households prior to migration. This helps reduce some of the potential endogeneity problems seen in cross sectional studies (Phuong et al. 2008). The panel contains 13199 households, the number of households which were resurveyed in KMS 2016, carried forward from the original 15000 that were surveyed in KMS 2011. Unlike the income variable, the consumption expenditure variable did not have missing values, so it was merged without dropping any observations. The KMS 2016 dataset had outliers on the higher tail, so it was winsorised at 0.5 % to bring

⁶ As Stata did not allow for the calculation of any of these measure for all observations, it was calculated on Python using the lognormal function for cdf, exported to excel and merged with the KMS 2016 dataset.

parity to the KMS 2011 consumption variable without compromising the log-normal shape or variance.

3.4 Reference group substitution

Podder (1996) defined reference groups as those to which the individual relates himself as a part or to which he aspires to relate himself psychologically. However, the concept of a defined reference group is tricky in empirical studies. Most work in the literature on relative deprivation define points of comparison towards individuals with proximate characteristics and similar opportunities as in Deaton (1997). Even geographical proximity is assumed as a reference group, as are sociodemographic factors (Eibner and Evans 2005; Ferrer-i-Carbonell, 2005; Stark and Taylor, 1991). Further studies on KMS data can exploit individual level data to tease out the effect of these characteristics within and across households. In fact, doing so gains credence from Mangyo and Park's China Inequality and Distributive Justice Survey project which says that classmates and relatives are reference groups for urban residents while neighbours are points of comparison for rural residents (Park and Mangyo 2011).

Reference group substitutions are frequent causes of concerns in migration studies involving utility and deprivation. However, in the Kerala case, the reference group is stable for the emigrants because 89.3 % of the emigrants identified by KMS 2016 are located in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries where permanent residence is close to impossible (Levene 2017). Additionally, the increasing pressures of nationalisation, uncertainties and exposure to global shocks (as was seen in the aftermath of the 2008 global financial crisis) and the influx of migrants from other states of India, crowding out new emigration from Kerala (according to KMS 2016 which saw a drop in the absolute number of emigrants), lends credence to a stable reference group (Roche 2017). Emigrants from Kerala frequently complain about poor living and working conditions in the Gulf, citing their inability to adjust to the completely different social milieu and their desire to return home once they have accumulated the required amount of savings (Rahman 2009). A large part of remittance money goes into buying a plot of land and/or building/renovating a house, a key reason why a household quality index has been a staple in the KMS for the last few rounds. Both the proclivity to return and the desire to build a new house was confirmed by the majority of the respondents interviewed in this paper's qualitative analysis. Feelings of homesickness are also rife among Kerala emigrants (Chakraborty and Mandal 2016). This owes in part to their temporary uprooting from the rest of the family which stays back and to the high incidence of festivals and community-based activities in the state.

3.5 Identification strategy

The KMS 2011 cross section categorises households into EMI, non-migrant, OMI, REM and ROM (see Table 1).

Table 1: Breakup of households based on migration status

Household Type	Frequency	Percentage
EMI	2736	18.24
Non Migrant	9695	64.63
OMI	792	5.28
REM	1324	8.83
ROM	453	3.02
Total	15000	100.00

Source: KMS 2011

The KMS 2016 cross section has a variable denoting whether Schedule2 was used. This is a supplementary module that is used by field investigators who conduct the survey when they are informed of the presence of an emigrant or an outmigrant.⁷ Another extension of the analysis in this paper is the interplay between short and long-distance migration, between outmigration and emigration. However, for the time being I concern myself only with emigrants as the context so heavily depends on them alone. The variable named outmigrant is used as dependent variable in the empirical models based on the 2016 cross section. For the panel dataset, the dependent variable is a binary variable that equals one if a household in the 2011 survey with no emigrants had at least one emigrant during the 2016 survey (see Table 2). Socio-economic status of the household prior to migration decision is measured in this setup, although the results are not telling for all reference groups.

Table 2: Change of Household Type by Migration Status between 2011 and 2016

2011	2016					
	EMI	REM	OMI	ROM	Non Migrant	Total
EMI	64.8	17.5	1.5	0.6	15.5	100.0
Non Migrant	4.8	2.0	2.0	0.7	90.5	100.0
OMI	15.8	1.9	32.2	10.6	39.6	100.0
REM	18.8	35.8	1.8	0.6	43.1	100.0
ROM	5.0	2.5	5.5	14.9	72.0	100.0
Total	17.6	7.9	3.6	1.6	69.3	100.0

Source: KMS 2016

⁷ I had to merge this dataset with the EMI and OMI dataset and drop duplicates in order to obtain the number of households with at least one emigrant

EMPIRICAL MODELS

The following empirical analysis is based on the KMS 2016 cross section as well as the 2011-2016 panel. The key explanatory variable is relative deprivation calculated according to the two approaches outlined in section 3.2. Every specification in the data analysis includes all households irrespective of whether they have at least one emigrant or no emigrants at the time of survey.

For the first approach which is based solely on the KMS 2016 cross section, I compute 2 measures of IRD (IRD state, IRD religion), 1 measure of GRD (GRD religion) and 1 measure of MRD (MRD religion and state). The MRD variable was calculated as a composite index based on eigenvalues generated by principal component analysis.

In this regression, emigration of a former household member is the binary dependent variable M , which is set to one if the household has at least one emigrant, and zero otherwise, predicted by the following probit.

$$M = 1 \text{ if } (\beta_1 RD_{ir} + X_i \beta_0 + \epsilon_1 > 0) \ \& \ 0, \text{ otherwise}$$

X_i is a variable that includes absolute deprivation as well as other controls.

Since the decision to emigrate is largely influenced by the household and is based on a lot of factors, I use the variables available from the 2016 cross section to control for several socio-economic-demographic factors:

First, household consumption expenditure along with a squared term is included because migration aspirations are assumed to be non-linearly related to the level of absolute deprivation as noted by Taylor (1996).

Second, household size including the number of outmigrants are used. The effect of this may be because a larger household size can spur the need for emigration due to economic intra-household risk diversification strategy (Stark and Levhari 1982).

Third, household assets are included in mixed ways. I use a dummy for land possession over an acre as it may signify farm holding or plot for house construction or rent. I include a dummy for value of land, construction and, gold possessed. I also include a dummy for the kind of fuel used at home and the quality of house owned. I differentiate the fuel dummy into good fuel and bad fuel, the latter being cheaper and possibly correlated with worse health outcomes. For the good house dummy, there is a 1-5 scale included in the survey instrument which is to be filled in by the field investigator. Since 50 % of households received the median ranking, I exclude them and use ratings 4 and 5 for very good and excellent housing to generate the good house dummy. For the consumer household items which are broadly luxurious goods and the centre-piece of what constitutes conspicuous consumption, I generate asset indices using the eigenvalues of the principal component analysis. The World Bank guidelines on asset index creation warns of the low correlation between household

consumption expenditure and the asset index due to either improper specification of the asset dummies or dissonance between the amount of money spent and the procurement of these assets (through discounts, sales, gifts, exchanges) (Filmer and Scott 2008). I try my best to avoid the latter by trying different combinations. I finally check the kmo statistic to find that the asset index has good sampling adequacy (above 0.8) (IDRE, n.d.). The inclusion of asset variables in the regression model would allow testing the effect of assets for people of higher income distribution.

Finally, I also take into account religious factors and include dummies for each religion except in the specifications which use IRD religion and GRD religion.

For approach two, which is based on the KMS 2016 cross section as well as the 2011-2016 panel, I generated 4 measures of the Yitzhaki index for the former and 5 measures for the latter. The Yitzhaki indices used as explanatory variables in the KMS 2016 cross section are based on religion as well as quartiles based on household consumption expenditure. For the panel dataset, I generated Yitzhaki indices for the consumption expenditure quartiles separately (2, 3, 4, 5), while also slicing the data based on consumption expenditure quartiles within the total number of households, as a robustness check (6, 7, 8, 9).

For the cross-section analysis, I used the same dependent variable as in the earlier approach, with different specifications. In this, I included the household size, the consumption expenditure, a rural dummy for the administrative classification of the household, as well as a dummy for Rashtriya Swasthya Bima Yojana (RSBY) insurance, which provides free social security schemes and medical insurance to eligible families (India, 2012). RSBY dummy is important in the context of studies which examine the motivation to migrate depending on the availability of insurance vis a vis risk preference of migrants (Greenwood 1997). Specification 2 used the modified Yitzhaki index while the original Yitzhaki index was used in the others. Clustered standard errors are used. Additionally, an LPM was also run on the same specification using the Yitzhaki index as a robustness check (see Table 5).

For the panel dataset, the dependent variable is a binary variable that equals one if a household in the 2011 survey with zero emigrants had at least one emigrant during the 2016 survey. Consumption expenditure of the households, household size and the rural dummy were used in each of the specifications which differed by the Yitzhaki explanatory variable. For specifications 2-5, the Yitzhaki index was generated within income quartiles separately, which reduced the number of observations. As a robustness check, the data was sliced into the consumption expenditure quartiles in specifications 6-9 while retaining the Yitzhaki's generated for the whole state, to run the model. Clustered standard errors were used while controlling for urban-rural fixed effects. Additionally, the conditional logistic model was used on the same specification with clustered standard errors.

RESULTS

5.1 IRD, GRD and, MRD

Results: Table 3 reports the results on the probability of outmigration of the household members. I find positive and significant effect for the relative deprivation variable across individual and group comparisons for the religious category (2 and 3). The positive sign of the IRD religion is maintained in (4) but the GRD assumes a negative sign in the same. The effect of relative deprivation when the comparison group is the whole state, is found to be negative on emigration, possibly because comparisons within a large group are less meaningful because of the lack of visibility of wealthier entities, preventing direct comparisons or because lack of knowledge about one's standing over such a large scale leads to overestimation of one's position. However, I find a positive and statistically significant effect for MRD in (5) which implies that individuals feel doubly deprived, vis a vis a standard norm as well as within their religious group. For the controls as well, the explanations are mixed. Controlling for other factors including household size, emigration is chosen by households that are better off but are deprived relative to their religious social group. This could mean that some level of resources is required to incentivise emigration. This effect is also supported by possession of a good house or a building and the possession of assets as shown in pc1, pc2 and, pc3. This kind of asset-based analysis, as stated earlier, might make more sense in village level data as people are likelier to compare their possession of assets with friends, relatives, neighbours and/or households in the same boundaries. For specifications 1 and 2, the absolute deprivation of the households predicts a larger tendency to migrate. Across all specifications land possessed is associated with lower migration tendency, so it could be argued that households without sufficient land tend to send emigrants in order to procure the capital required for acquisition of land. Kerala has had significant land reforms which reduce the size of land available to most and this

coincided with the onset of Gulf migration phenomenon. This is an exogenous shock in the emigration history that warrants its own analysis.

Table 3
Outmigration of HH member

Dependent Variable	1 all state	2 IRD religion	3 GRD religion	4 IRD & GRD religion	5 MRD
IRD state	-0.193*** -0.046				
cons_exp	-0.24*** -0.060	0.026*** -0.003	0.028*** -0.003	0.023*** -0.003	-0.247*** -0.060
cons_expsq	0.000*** -0.000	-0.000*** -0.000	-0.000*** -0.000	-0.000*** -0.000	0.000*** -0.000
Landpossacre	-0.247*** -0.050	-0.386*** -0.049	-0.381*** -0.049	-0.306*** -0.050	-0.247*** -0.050
hindu	0.154 -0.562				3.414*** -0.953
muslim	0.91 -0.563				2.088*** -0.625
christian	0.266 -0.563				-1.102 -0.655
goodhouse	0.225*** -0.043	0.493*** -0.028	0.498*** -0.027	0.497*** -0.028	0.225*** -0.043
badfuel	-0.057 -0.029	-0.046 -0.028	-0.063* -0.028	-0.06* -0.028	-0.057 -0.029
pc1	0.096*** -0.016				0.096*** -0.01
pc2	0.024 -0.012				0.024 -0.012
pc3	0.108** -0.037				0.108** -0.037
buildings	7.55e-08*** -1.16E-08				7.55e-08*** -1.16E-08
constructions	-0.000* -8.15E-08				-0.000* -8.15E-08
landvalue	-1.47e-08*** -4.29E-09				-1.47e-08*** -4.29E-09
goldvalue	2.41E-07 -1.97E-07				2.41E-07 -1.97E-07
IRD religion		0.182*** -0.010		0.431*** -0.019	
GRD religion			0.082*** -0.010	-0.303*** -0.021	
MRD					2.593*** -0.619

No.of observations 13199 13199 13199 13199 13199
pseuo R-sq 0.119 0.077 0.057 0.095 0.119

Note: Standard errors in parentheses; * p<0.05, **p<0.01, ***p<0.001

5.2 Yitzhaki and modified Yitzhaki (see Table 4)

For model 1 that uses the original Yitzhaki index with the reference group as the whole state, the effect is positive and significant on the emigration decision. The effect is larger when the modified Yitzhaki index is used. The effect of relative deprivation was similarly positive and significant for the specifications including Hindus and Christians. Muslims tend to be more absolutely deprived and are less likely to migrate if they are insured. The same decreasing effect on migration tendency persists across all specifications when the insurance dummy is included. The Yitzhaki indices calculated for each consumption level quartile however are not significant. For the all state variable, increase in relative deprivation by 1 % has a 6 % increase in the tendency to send an emigrant from the household. The increase in emigration tendency for Hindu households is 4 %, which is telling considering that better-off households are likelier to have an outmigrant. Table 5 uses the Linear Probability model as a robustness check to find positive and significant effects of relative deprivation on outmigration.

Table 4									
Outmigration of HH member									
outmigrant	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
	0-25 %	25-50 %	50-75 %	75-100 %	all state	all state	hindu	christian	muslim
Yitzhaki	-0.687	-0.261	0.184	-0.046	0.048***		0.048*	0.118**	0.027
	-0.376	-0.476	-0.295	-0.038	-0.012		-0.018	-0.036	-0.023
modified Yitzhaki						2.801***			
						-0.337			
RSBYmember	-0.653***	-0.774***	-0.376***	-0.357***	-0.506***	-0.499***	-0.272***	-0.209	-0.664***
	-0.116	-0.096	-0.090	-0.091	-0.048	-0.048	-0.072	-0.12	-0.087
Household Size	-0.168***	-0.085*	-0.046	0.053*	0.004	-0.016	-0.106***	-0.243***	-0.014
	-0.047	-0.039	-0.031	-0.021	-0.014	-0.015	-0.025	-0.046	-0.019
consumption expenditure	0.041	0.048	0.109	0.003	0.009	0.012**	0.016*	-0.011	0.020
	-0.218	-0.24	-0.139	-0.009	-0.006	-0.003	-0.008	-0.018	-0.012
rural	0.06	0.112	0.044	0.109	0.054	0.076	0.019	0.092	0.058
	-0.157	-0.117	-0.106	-0.092	-0.056	-0.056	-0.082	-0.143	-0.099
No. of Observations	3296	3299	3301	3228	13129	13129	7722	2657	2736
pseudo R-sq	0.047	0.027	0.007	0.01	0.023	0.028	0.019	0.034	0.03

Note: Standard errors in parentheses; * p<0.05, **p<0.01, ***p<0.001

Table 5	
Outmigration of Household Member	
	1 outmigrant
Yitzhaki	0.007** (0.002)
RSBYmember	-0.070*** (0.006)
Household Size	0.000 (0.002)
cons_exp	0.001 (0.001)
rural	0.008 (0.008)
No. of Observations	13129
pseudo R-sq	

Note: Standard errors in parentheses; * p<0.05, **p<0.01, ***p<0.001

5.3 2011-2016 Panel using Yitzhaki index

The results are shown in Table 6. For the reference group of all households in Kerala, the Yitzhaki index had a negative sign. When the Yitzhaki index was calculated separately for each consumption quartile, there were no significant effects observed in any of the models for the explanatory variable, except a migration reducing effect for households in the top 25 %. This could be the result of a prior experience with migration, outside the time scope of both cross sections or a redundancy of migration for accumulation of additional income that high up the food chain. When the original Yitzhaki index calculated on the whole state was split into consumption level quartiles, a positive and significant effect was observed for the 25-50 % consumption quartile. Household size was a migration enabling factor across each specification, feeding the idea of intra household risk diversification. It is also possible for a member with more siblings to emigrate because there are members left to take care of the household.

Table 6

Change from 0 migrants in 2011 to at least 1 migrant in 2016 (Household)

Dependent Variable	1 all state	2 0-25 %	3 25-50 %	4 50-75 %	5 75-100 %	6	7	8	9
Yitzhaki	-0.822*** -0.033	-0.878 -0.844	2.238 -1.223	-0.621 -1.046	-0.357** -0.112	-3.031 -3.346	9.527* -4.872	-2.079 -4.101	1.429** -0.45
consumption expenditure	-0.226*** -0.020	0.0498 -0.458	0.998 -0.632	-0.48 -0.502	-0.024 -0.023	-2.148 -2.947	5.851 -3.051	-0.955 -1.504	-0.024 -0.023
Household Size	0.088*** -0.022	0.140** -0.053	0.119* -0.048	0.112** -0.040	0.084** -0.030	0.138** -0.053	0.117* -0.048	0.112** -0.040	0.084** -0.030
rural	-0.063 -0.091	-0.209 -0.238	-0.032 -0.19	-0.003 -0.182	0.071 -0.159	-0.218 -0.238	-0.043 -0.19	-0.004 -0.182	0.071 -0.159
No. of Observations	21539	2881	2746	2668	2502	2883	2748	2670	2502
pseudo R-sq	0.119	0.03	0.008	0.007	0.017	0.031	0.008	0.007	0.017

Note: Standard errors in parentheses; * p<0.05, **p<0.01, ***p<0.001

The conditional logistic regression yields a negative sign for the Yitzhaki index across the whole state (see Table 7). It could not be run on consumption quartiles or religious groups because reducing the size of observations and restricting the variance in the dependent variable, preventing the logistic function from achieving convergence. The panel structure was useful insofar as providing the dependent variable required for Table 6 and 7. However, there is not enough time variation in the Yitzhaki for the panel to be truly appropriate.

Table 7	
Change from 0 migrants in 2011 to at least 1 migrant in 2016 (Household)	
	(1)
	depvar
Yitzhaki	-0.136*** (-6.03)
consumption expenditure	0.00930 (0.80)
consumption expenditure squared	4.86e-11 (0.21)
Household Size	-0.319*** (-8.70)
rural	0.225 (0.67)
No. of Observations	3192
pseudo R2	0.0653
Note: Standard errors in parentheses; * p<0.05, **p<0.01, ***p<0.001	

QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS

[how] we [were] always attracted by the promise of a land where we can harvest gold. Once upon a time it was Ceylon, then it was Malaya. In the last one decade there have been stories doing the rounds of a land where you end up being rich if you somehow,

even selling off the roof over your head, you can manage to reach there. Thousands of youth now found a dream to cherish – Dubai. ~ Vilkkannundu Swapnangal (1980)

6.1 Data Source

The results of the quantitative analysis lend empirical evidence to multiple stories which are telling. However, by design, they exclude, from the researcher, the privilege of learning in depth about the lives of the subject, unless the data collected was primary. In pursuit of stories that triangulate the research in this paper, I leveraged my access to the field.⁸

The Kerala Migration Survey 2018 included a pre-departure module, a real-life hyperlink to the question,

“To your best knowledge, in the last six months, have you or anyone else in your household thought about getting a job in a foreign country?

1 – Yes, 2 – No

If Yes, Proceed to Block 17 A of Pre-departure Module.”

The module was used in 529 households out of the 15000 surveyed. Apart from the two-stage randomization inherent in the survey, the low proportion of aspirants could be explained by the fact that the household member relevant to the module was not present at home at the time of survey.

6.2 Design

In addition to analysing the predeparture dataset, my exposure to the field benefits this paper from the doors it opened to semi-structured in-depth interviews with persons previously unknown. These interviews allowed me to address questions stemming from the hypothesis in this paper as well as to touch upon issues that could not be quantified nor were present in any of the previous KMS datasets.

I chose my respondents in the following manner: I randomly selected 15 answered predeparture modules, contacted the emigrant-aspirant who had answered them and requested him/her to introduce me to a friend who also had an interest in finding a job outside India. The result was a pool of 15 individuals who were all the result of one degree of separation, each found through this technique of snowball sampling (Biernacki and Waldorf 1981). This method was beneficial as it did not come as a favour from a friend or acquaintance since the predeparture respondent who led me to my subject was not obligated to me. I also did not have to ‘date members of my own family’, which reduced the possibility of biased interviews as noted by Hermanowicz (2002). Additionally, snowballing from different starting

⁸ Between January 2018 and April 2018, I worked as Survey Coordinator for Thrissur District in the Kerala Migration Survey 2018.

points reduced the tendency for strong selection bias that the method in general is prone to (Lopes, Rodrigues, and Sichieri 1996). Finally, this method of identifying subjects also guaranteed informed consent, adhering to the Graduate Institute Research Ethics Guidelines where the same was obtained orally in order to prevent counterproductive results that originate from the loss of trust related to signed documents for unique interactions such as these interviews. As a result, none of the subjects will be named and instead will be called P1-P15.

Among the pool, 13/15 interviewees were male while the rest were female. The range of age was 19-31 with a mean of 24.4 and standard deviation of 3.027. Interestingly, the predeparture respondents and the subjects they led me to, matched 100 % in gender. Only 6 interviews could be conducted at their homes due to logistical constraints. The rest were conducted through phone calls.

In contrast to 'focused interviews' with a predefined problem statement, the method employed was of 'elite interviews' as in Dexter (2006) where I was willing, and often eager to let the interviewee teach me what the problem, the question, the situation. This relaxed the interviewees from the preconceived notions formed around their first interaction with a stranger such as myself and the stimulus that is my own positionality as an interviewer and researcher; the ways in which my values and subjectivity are part of the construction of knowledge. A failure to consider this could lead to misrepresentation of the potential results (Vargas-Silva 2012). To avoid potential digressions inherent in elite interviews, Lilleker (2003) cautions interviewers of elites to tiptoe carefully around the issue of recording, inquire deferentially about how much time the interviewee can spare, listen attentively and use flattering phrases when bringing the interview back to the questions at hand. Hence, the interview transcripts that were created are unusable to be shared. In the appendix, I instead attach a spreadsheet of socio-demographic and religious characteristics, with y/n questions answered by all 15 respondents (see Table D).

Each interview follows a certain order of thematic questions, although, as stated earlier, the paradigm that ensured better answers were allowed as long as the following themes were covered.

Have you already secured a job or are you planning to search for one?

What motivates your desire to migrate? Are you happy with your current living situation?

Do your family and/or friends motivate your desire to migrate? Which country do you wish to migrate to? What profession do you wish to pursue?

Do you wish to return? How far ahead have you planned? Is step-migration to a richer country and more rewarding job, in your plans?

Do you plan to remit to your family?

How strong are your networks abroad? Who influences you more and do you find their information reliable? Have you done research on your own?

Are you worried about any risks in the receiving country? Have you heard stories?

In your estimate, what percentage of people in the age group 21-29 from Kerala wishes to migrate? Why do you think so? What factors affect your estimate? Is this good or bad?

Does your household possess luxurious consumer items?

Have you noticed a difference in households/people you knew before and after their migration? How has that motivated your decision to migrate?

This implicit flow has certain advantages in the chosen elite interview format. It allows for a progression that is specific, but with scope for verbose answers in questions 2, 4, 5, 8 and 10. I start each interview by telling the respondent that I am interested in what motivates their desire to migrate. Only in questions 9 and 10 do I partially give up the ghost and reveal the main ideas in the research, both through the questions and through my final admission at the end of the interview. The admission has, in 4 cases, prompted the interviewees to add afterthoughts.

6.3 Mixed Analysis of the Predeparture Module, the Interviews and Popular Culture

The following subsection has been constructed in this manner: Statistics derived from the predeparture dataset are contextualized with paraphrased excerpts and observations from the interviews with reference to the respondent(s). Additional examples from Malayalam movies are provided wherever relevant. This triangulation is simply being mindful of alternative sources of knowledge, seeing as how important they are in the field of development (Lewis, Rodgers, and Woolcock 2008). Each unique observation is in bold, followed by a description.

6.3.1 Of the 529 respondents, 68 % had thought about getting a job abroad while 25 % had begun the search.

Only subjects P5 and P14 had found jobs and were preparing their departure after settling affairs at home. P5 had secured a job in the UAE, as an accountant, that paid 3 times the amount he was earning in Kerala. He wished to return in order to start his own auditing firm with his colleagues who were also considering migration to raise capital for their future venture. P14, however, was moving towards a desk job in a Dubai based Malayali's company, one that he had obtained through an acquaintance in the same firm and who had been motivating him with the promise of a job. P1's student status (Bachelor in engineering) has not stopped him from planning for the next 20 years as he wished to work in the shipping industry in the Gulf, to return after a decade of higher savings in order to pursue the life of a farmer.

P6 who is 31 has almost given up the search because of changes in his professional life in the last 3 years: a promotion from accountant to manager, a revamp of the company he was once dissatisfied with enough to consider leaving and, a series of misfortune in the marriage market because of his aspirant migrant disposition. This opinion was heard from P3 and P10 as potential drawbacks of their aspirations. However, they assumed that they would get the required years and savings before having to enter the marriage market with location-based constraints. The movie *Vilkkannundu Swapnangal* (Dreams for Sale, 1980) by M. Azad, the first Malayalam movie to refer to what is called the Gulf came out in 1980, with the protagonist Rajagopala Menon discovering to his dismay that while the Gulf can make you rich beyond your dreams, it cannot help you win the hand of your love, who shuts the door at his face.

Nonetheless, the perception of Gulf migration and its effect on the marriage market requires further inquiry as there has been an inflexion in the migration trend and a decrease in the absolute number of emigrants (Zachariah and Rajan 2015). While there might be negative perceptions of emigrants constrained by poor working conditions and lack of proximity, there are some positive connotations associated with the emigrant status. In the movie *Akkare Ninnoru Maran* (A Groom from Elsewhere, 1985), the male lead fakes a job in the Gulf and arranges for a fake Arab to come over to Kerala to impress his uncle, in order to win the hand of his daughter, whom the father had decided would be married only to a Gulf-karan (an emigrant).

None of the respondents reported that they had contacted agents. Based on the dataset, only 3 % had spoken to agents. P8, P10 and P13 explicitly added that they distrusted agents due to the number of scams they had heard about, while P7 claimed that these days everyone knows someone in the Gulf, thereby crowding out the need to even find an agent. In *Visa* (1983) and *Nadodikkattu* (1987), the male youth in lead roles pay hefty amounts to agents only to get duped. From the dataset, 31 % of those who had contacted agents had found out about them by advertisement. Only 6/15 of my subjects recalled seeing a print or tv ad in the last 5 years about an ad to migrate to the Gulf. Overall the sense was that migration is just a few phone calls away for those who were slightly more connected than others.

6.3.2 An overwhelming 89 % were considering Gulf countries, consistent with the KMS 2016 figure of 89.3 % emigrants residing in countries in the Gulf cooperation council.

57.17 % wish to migrate to the UAE while 13 % wish to move to Saudi Arabia. Outside the GCC, 2.95 % wish to emigrate to Canada and 1.57 % to the USA. Does this imply a strength of networks, a predisposition to the familiar or a certain hierarchy among receiving migrant countries in terms of skillsets of the migrants?

I tried to pose this question to P5 and P6 because of their opinionated stances on the migration phenomenon. As it was a difficult question to pose in the aforementioned form, I asked them why the Gulf was a more popular destination than others, apart from the strength of networks. Now while this was a thinking question, P5 drew the comparison of jobs to countries, where the metric was skillsets possessed. He said that even with the degrees and superior education status a vast majority of Malayalis possessed, they still entered the global market against superior European nations. He said that akin to the replacement migration of North Indian workers in Kerala, workers from Kerala were mostly adequate to supply the labour needed for the GCC countries' infrastructure development, whereas they would not be suitable for jobs needing superior skillsets.

While this may not be the exact situation, his comparison scratches the surface of what the data says: 10 % of the predeparture respondents were going to be an accountant, cashier, clerk etc, 12 % were going to be engineers and 11 % were heading to be salesmen. There was not a single doctor. Nurses were the next category with 3 % of the respondents. Heller (2015) argues that the fact that a large proportion of the emigrants from Kerala fall into the skill category required for blue collar jobs, provides some credence to this opinion.

P6 tried to trace the timeline of perceptions towards Gulf migration with an anchor placed on marriage as an eventual event or milestone that it supports. He said that initially you would be 'hot property' on the market if you had a job in the Gulf whereas now it isn't as valued anymore. He said that people have started considering the difficult aspects of it, against the alternative of finding a stable job in Kerala. He argued that business is picking up and that the start-up culture allows graduates to discover niche areas of success within established and successful Kerala industries, especially tourism and hospitality, provided you had a knack for it. In the presence of visible and nearby examples of success, families had started becoming resistant to the Gulf-karan suitor for their daughters, he felt. His opinion is based on self-selection bias, but it does account for what the literature says about Gulf Wives, the left-behind women of Kerala society who battle loneliness, depression, social stigma and difficult equations with their in-laws because of the confusion in social dynamics brought about by their newfound freedom (K. C. Zachariah and Rajan 2001). They face pressures in the household to manage its activities and act as the bridge between the in-laws and the husband, especially when the constraints faced by the parents are as practical as an inability to make international calls (K. C. Zachariah, Mathew, and Rajan, 2001). The Gulf wife also has to act as the household's figurehead and perpetuate the image and uphold its status in society while

at the same time engaging in the market in a way that reflects positively on the household. Indeed, while the consumption pattern is conspicuous, another form of subtler inconspicuous consumption is visible in Kerala society today where female household members, empowered by absentee husbands, participate in reputation- building activities to enhance the status of the family (Currid-Halkett 2017).

However none of the male subjects (with whom the topic came up), wanted to face the situation of creating a Gulf wife. All of them had ambitiously envisioned a few successful years of savings and timed returns to their homes and the marriage market. Being with their family and friends was a strong connection for everyone except P5 who wanted to step-migrate to a better country. In fact the question of step migration was met with 14 no's because of this proclivity among the respondents, that home was where the heart was, by all means. Word soups containing weather, people, culture and family were heard subsequently.

While the desire seems to be in place, none of them expected a predicament where the margin of savings wasn't high enough keeping the increasing living costs in Kerala in mind, which would eat into the savings by increasing the remittance amounts. This lack of fear could again be a strength of network influence, where both concerns related to fears of migration are allayed by the knowledge of a successful migrant whose lived reality prior to migration was relatable for the aspirant.⁹

However, the strength of networks gets an additional boost while considering the following statistic.

6.3.3 87 % knew at least one person who had migrated abroad, of which 12 % knew 20 or more people working outside India.

Of the total number of people known, only less than 2 % did not know anyone in their preferred country of destination. 80 % of the people known in the RC were either friends or close family suggesting that the presence of a bankable contact increases familiarity with that country as well as increases chances of finding a job in that country.

The degree of closeness implicit in the question could also act as a check against recent additions to the roster of friends one has. Otherwise one would have stated the family member above the friend as their 'closest contact'. The degree of match between their intended professions and the profession of their closest contact was 0.3093.

6.3.4 63 % of the respondents felt that their networks had had fairly good experience working abroad while less than 3 % felt it was slightly bad.

⁹ Perhaps a study with an effective information-treatment and control would help disentangle the effect of information and networks

This statistic is riddled with conjecture because of various issues:

The aspirant could be aloof to the actual pressures faced by the migrant friend. These pressures could be those of poor work conditions as shown in *Arabikkatha* (2007) or of illnesses and even death in the Gulf, as in *Sharja to Sharja* (2001) and *Perumazhakkalam* (2004).

The aspirant could be convincing themselves to believe differently owing to an inherent disposition to go abroad. This was mentioned by P6 in the context that migrating still holds that charm connected to being an NRK, holding a VISA and being away from home. He said that the media's influence in how movies especially have shaped the mindsets related to migration influence you to consider the expected gains from migration to always be worth the costs. P8 and P4 mentioned that there was a certain quality of life related to the freedom they would get in Dubai and mentioned an interest in enjoying their young years. This exuberance of life in Dubai was shown in *Diamond Necklace* (2012), *Dubai* (2001) and, *Jacobinte Swargarajyam* (2016). But the last of these involves a twist where the successful businessman falls prey to an exogenous shock in the form of the 2008 global financial crisis, which forces him to abscond to Liberia, leaving his son to clean up his mess. *Khaddama* (2011) was the first ever depiction of a female household migrant labourer in the Gulf, where she is tortured. In *Oridam* (2005), the sex worker finds the Gulf a lifeline to escape her profession, which ironically is the sense with which male aspirants with blue collar jobs in Kerala describe the Gulf.

Migrants enjoy a certain status back home as their return is celebrated and gifts are exchanged. But movies like *Varavelpu* (1989) and *Garshom* (1999) are attempts to showcase the awkwardness felt by return emigrants in their relationships back home, because of a change in their practices, habits and wallets.

6.3.5 Regarding the intention of going abroad, 60 % had consulted their parents, while only 18 % had spoken to their friends alone, meaning that migration is by and large a household decision. While around 64 % of those who spoke to any family member found the advice received the most valuable, the levels of appreciation for friends' advice was around 78 %.

Both the female respondents, P11 and P12, considered their family's decision to be secondary in their migration decision. Both of them required to raise funds to manage their households and arrange for their siblings (females) weddings, sacrificing their young ages. The recent movie, *Take Off* (2017) captures the tale of female nurses who migrate to Iraq, despite security issues, because of their need for money. They get trapped in a hostage situation involving a terrorist organization which was unwilling to negotiate with any government.

6.3.6 All the interview respondents were migrating in order to remit amounts to their families at home.

14 respondents wished to build a new house or renovate their existing house with money earned abroad.

For some, purchasing new land was a decision to be made in the future. In the movie *Thinkalazhcha Nalla Divasam* (1985), the changing paradigm of social relations based on religion is shown, because in the movie, no one other than Muslims (who migrated more in proportion to their size in the population) had money to spare. It is interesting to note that several postmaterialist activities such as NGO activities and free health camps in Kerala are funded by Muslim emigrants who have made a fortune abroad (Osella and Osella 2009).

6.3.7 12/15 interview respondents answered that they had felt behavioural changes in one or more of their friends/family who had had an emigration experience.

In each case, it was related to how 'posh' they had become in their language, appearance and consumption habits. 10/15 admitted that seeing these changes made them want to have similar change of fortunes of their own, just so that they felt less deprived because they didn't seize an opportunity that was easy. P10 and P14 mentioned that one of their first gifts following their eventual migration would be an LED TV for their parents. P11, P12 wanted to purchase a washing machine, induction cooker and, microwave oven for their houses, among other goods.

6.3.8 All the respondents felt that more than at least 60 % of the population in the age group 21-29 wished to migrate (Table D in the appendix.)

The mean of the rates suggested by each respondent suggest their perception of the general trend, based on their influences, their contacts and their own bias on the matter. With respect to the last sub-question, P6 and P5 felt that it was not good as it left Kerala's economy unstable due to a heavy dependence on remittances. P6, especially, argued that there were enough opportunities at home, if people were innovative and entrepreneurial enough to take risks in their own backyard. Rajan writes about the irony in people who do not take enough risks at home emigrating and starting businesses in Gulf countries where more unstable elements can unsettle your prospects (2015).

6.4 Discussion

The analysis, with its real-life examples as well as examples from movies bring to light some of the realities this paper deals with. Although it is not generalisable by any mathematical extent, the analysis was enriching as an addition to the quantitative analysis, as it allowed me to tweak some of my specifications. Additionally, the case study method implicit in the

interview profiles put the real lives of real people right at the center of explanation and allows the exceptional and the peculiar to shine through but not eclipse, whatever passes for normality (Bennett and Shurmer-Smith 2002).

What I have conducted is an ethnographic approach in part, and what it offers is a holistic and in-depth glimpse into the lives of a migrant aspirant: what motivates their aspirations, what they see themselves doing, how others' actions influence them and how they feel about what they want, what they have and what others have.

CONCLUSION, LIMITATIONS AND, SCOPE

This paper investigates the role of perceptions of relative deprivation in the emigration decisions of individuals from households in Kerala, India using data from the Kerala Migration Survey. Additionally, it also examines the role of absolute deprivation, of material possessions and of the deprivation felt (both absolute and relative) with respect to the reference groups that households identify with. I triangulate my research using mixed methods, and within both the quantitative and qualitative sections, I diversify the measures used, the methods followed, and the sources of information consulted.

In the empirical analysis, using the IRD and GRD measures on the KMS 2016 cross section, I find strong evidence for increased emigration tendency when households feel deprived within their religious groups and when households feel that their religious groups are deprived compared to other religious groups. I also find that households tend to feel doubly deprived, both because of their relative deprivation felt in comparison to every Malayali households and with respect to their religious groups. I also find interesting results on the role of possessions like land, gold, constructions and expensive consumer assets in the propensity to migrate.

Using the Yitzhaki index and the modified Yitzhaki index on the KMS 2016 cross section, I find that households feel deprived relative to other Malayali households in the state, but do not find evidence for such feelings when the reference groups are based on consumption expenditure. I find that religious group comparisons (al- though not all) are strongly associated with increasing tendency for flight. Insurance and social security, if available is a deterrent to migrate across all specifications. The KMS 2011-2016 panel, however produced results that do not support the relative deprivation hypothesis, but that could be due to low time variation in the relative deprivation variable. Clustered standard errors were used whenever the Yitzhaki index was employed and urban-rural fixed effects were included.

In the qualitative section, which involved analysis of the predeparture module from KMS 2018, semi-structured interviews of emigrant-aspirants and, a dash a pop culture, the

stories are telling in ways that not only support the hypothesis, but also reveal multiple dimensions to it. The small sample interviewed confirms the role of feelings of relative deprivation felt in their daily lives because of the conspicuous consumption they observe among households and individuals that are more prosperous. However, as is the case with studies on perceptions, one can only hope to reduce the multiple biases prevalent in data collection and analysis, and as a result, the results of the qualitative section are fodder for in-depth projects that disentangle these feelings in rigorous fashion.

Although I attempted to triangulate my study in a way that some sections act as robustness checks for each other, there are limitations in this thesis. In general, using household level data excludes the possibility of more varied individual analysis, which is problematic in cases where an assumption regarding the household's involved role in the migration decision-making process is weak. Additionally, the lack of individual level analysis excludes observations of differences between gender, in how the feeling of relative deprivation exists and plays out in the migration decision. The relative deprivation hypothesis might also be better served if it was tested on village level data. The consumption expenditure variable that generates the explanatory variable(s) in the quantitative analysis might have biases due to remittance amounts that have not been teased out from it. This thesis also focuses specifically on the emigration decision with a larger inclination towards the Gulf. Extensions of this analysis could consider internal migration within Kerala, within India and postulate those results against those obtained here. Finally, there is scope for the panel to come useful if data with more time variation in the deprivation variable were available.

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APPENDIX

Table A: Correlations between the relative deprivation measures and consumption expenditure

Group of consumption expenditure	No. of observations on which RD was calculated	Correlation
All state	13199	-0.9915
Hindu	7760	-0.9935
Christian	2672	-0.9936
Muslim	2753	-0.9941
Bad house	4350	-0.9915
No land	714	-0.9925

Source: KMS 2011, KMS 2016

Table B: Correlation between Yitzhaki indices and Consumption Expenditure

	Consumption expenditure 2011	Consumption expenditure 2016
Yitzhaki 2011	-0.7101	-0.2780
Yitzhaki 2016	-0.2663	-0.7925

Table C: List of Variables and their Definitions

Variable	Definition	Mean	Std. Dev.	Min.	Max.
outmigrant	Dummy set to one if household is an emigrant sending household	0.1757709	0.3806395	0	1
IRD State	Individual (intra-group) relative deprivation on a state level (in 1000 rupees)	5770.731	950.6077	0	7214.037
cons_exp	Monthly household consumption expenditures (in 1000 rupees)	10.89396	8.821152	0.5358333	71.73
cons_expsq	Square of cons_exp	1.96E+08	5.03E+08	287117.4	5.15E+09

	Dummy set to one if household possesses more than 1 acre of land	0.1017501	0.3023309	0	1
Landpossacre					
	Dummy set to one if household is Hindu	0.5879233	0.4922274	0	1
hindu					
	Dummy set to one if household is Muslim	0.2085764	0.4063063	0	1
muslim					
	Dummy set to one if household is Christian	0.2024396	0.4018333	0	1
christian					
	Dummy set to one if household has a house of 'very good' or 'excellent' quality	0.3295704	0.470075	0	1
goodhouse					
	Dummy set to one if household uses poor sources of fuel	0.4027578	0.4904714	0	1
badfuel					
	First component of asset index which includes car, fridge, computer, oven, internet and a goodhouse	-4.45E-09	1.859219	-2.724626	8.417168
pc1					
	Second component of asset index which includes mobile and TV	-1.02E-10	1.167443	-6.515786	2.111291
pc2					
	Third component of asset index which includes gold, land and constructions	-3.90E-10	1.052543	-2.527759	15.75356
pc3					
	Value of buildings possessed by household	484433.2	1114015	0	3.00E+07
buildings					
	Value of other constructions possessed by household	19484.2	222169.2	0	1.00E+07
constructions					
	Value of land possessed by household	2368174	5276865	0	7.72E+07
landvalue					
	Value of gold possessed by household	70826.73	153838	0	2022500
goldvalue					
	Individual (intra-group) relative deprivation on a religious group level (in 1000 rupees)	2.61E-10	1.305203	-1.438393	1.84143
IRD religion					
	Collective (inter-group) relative deprivation on a religious group level (in 1000 rupees)	-1.98E-08	1.265781	0.9489326	2.245914
GRD religion					
	Dummy set to one if household is in a rural locality	0.7774157	0.4159972	0	1
rural					

RSBYmember	Dummy set to one if household has social security and medical insurance provided by Govt	0.4772331	0.4995003	0	1
HH_Size	Size of the household (including emigrants and outmigrant)	4.187363	1.871773	1	23
depvar	Dummy set to one if Household with 0 emigrants in 2011 went to have at least 1 emigrant in 2016	0.1788	0.38322	0	1

Table D: Results of Interviews

Respondent	Age	Gender	Occupation	Religion	Country intended	Estimate	Felt behavioral change? Y/N	Felt need to emulate? Y/N	Step-migration Y/N	Return Y/N	Build house Y/N
P1	19	M	Student	Hindu	UAE	70 %	y	n	n	y	n
P2	21	M	Electrician	Hindu	UAE	60 %	y	y	n	y	y
P3	22	M	Student	Hindu	Saudi	80 %	y	n	n	y	y
P4	25	M	Self-employed	Christian	UAE	80 %	y	y	n	y	y
P5	26	M	Accountant	Hindu	UAE	90 %	y	y	y	n	y
P6	31	M	Manager	Hindu	UAE	75 %	y	n	n	y	y
P7	28	M	Manager	Hindu	Australia	60 %	y	y	n	y	y
P8	23	M	Driver	Muslim	UAE	75 %	y	n	n	y	y
P9	25	M	Salesman	Hindu	Oman	90 %	y	y	n	y	y
P10	22	M	Tiles	Muslim	UAE	90 %	n	y	n	y	y
P11	21	F	Nurse	Christian	UAE	80 %	y	n	n	y	y
P12	27	F	Salesgirl	Hindu	UAE	70 %	n	y	n	y	y
P13	26	M	Call-center	Hindu	UAE	70 %	y	y	n	y	y
P14	27	M	Salesman	Muslim	Saudi	70 %	n	y	n	y	y
P15	23	M	Accountant	Muslim	Saudi	90 %	y	y	n	y	y

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