

Occupational Mobility and Self-employment of the Gulf Returnees in Villages of West Bengal, India

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Abstract: The present study focuses the impact of the international migration on occupational mobility of Gulf return migrants in villages of Murshidabad district. The process of return and its socio-economic implications in the context of international migration is understudied, especially in the newly developed pockets of migration such as West Bengal, Uttar Pradesh and Bihar. Moreover, the large-scale return from Gulf initiated by economic crisis during the Covid-19 pandemic made most of the state governments and the national government clueless regarding the occupational reintegration of return migrants. In this context, this study attempts to portray the occupational mobility of return migrants using the occupational mobility index. The mixed methodology is used to examine the occupational status of the Gulf returnees in three phases of the migration cycle, i.e., before emigration, during migration, and after the return. This study also focuses on deskilling, self-employment after return, and upward and downward occupational mobility among the returnees. The study reveals about one-third (35 percent) of returnees got upward movement, while the majority (46 percent) have no change in occupation and 19 percent of them experienced downward mobility or deskilling in their occupation in post-return phase. The engagement in self-employment activities among the returnees has increased after return (19.4%). Variables, such as remitted a good amount of money, having better educational qualifications, acquired skills from abroad, and being a conservative returnee, were positively associated with returnees being self-employed after the return.

Key words- International migration, Gulf return migrants, Occupational Mobility, De-skilling, Self –

Introduction

The human capital model of socio-economic theory (Schultz, 1961) explains that the migrants tend to move to higher occupational levels and experiences upward occupation mobility than natives at the place of origin. Migration can promote occupational mobility for both emigrants as well as return migrants (Srivastava, 2020). This occupational mobility brings considerable changes in the life of migrants regarding their socio-economic status. Studies found that change in aspirations amongst the returnees resulted in their changes of occupations (Athukorala, 2003; Zareva, 2018; Lianos & Pseiridis, 2009 ; Kveder & Flahaux, 2013).

Returnees are more prone to invest in changing occupations after return only if they had saved a significant amount of money to make the most profitable use of their limited resources. Changing occupation after the return is more dependent on the returnee's education level, acquiring skills from abroad, savings, duration of stay in abroad, social ties, age, etc. (Czaika, & Varela, 2015). Earlier studies found that most of the emigrants are unskilled and uneducated, and hence, they are easily cheated by their agents and ended up engaging unskilled work at abroad (Jain, 2005; Srivastava, 2020). Because of the temporariness

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of their movement and the relatively short length of stay. Contract workers tend to accept lower-skilled jobs for higher financial returns (Prakash, 1998). However, there is a possibility of 'de-skilling' where overseas workers lose previously held skills (Borodak & Piracha, 2011; Arif & Irfan, 1997; Sekher, 1999). Workers use their savings to set their businesses upon return for enhancing their socio-economic status at the place of origin (Démurger & Xu 2011).

Return migration is an inevitable aspect of temporary or contractual labour migration. Kerala has nearly 50 percent return migrants, followed by Uttar Pradesh, Delhi, West Bengal, and Tamil Nadu (NSSO, 2010; Srivastava & Pandey, 2017). In recent years, there has been a rise in the number of Gulf emigrants from the Indian state of West Bengal comprising 10.4 percent of the Gulf emigrants from India are from the state. About 38 percent of them are from the Murshidabad district alone (Ministry of Overseas Indian Affairs, 2019; Kumar, 2013; Ali, 2018).

There is a lack of studies examining the impact of international migration on occupational mobility in the Indian context. The present study attempts to fill the lacunae in the literature by mapping the occupational mobility of Gulf returnees in Murshidabad district. Hence, the aims of this paper is to explore occupational status of the Gulf return migrants in three phase of migration cycle, and their self-employment occupational activity after their return.

Data source and Methodology

Data was collected from June to November 2019 from the Murshidabad district of West Bengal. Murshidabad district has a population of 1.7 million and consists of 5 Subdivisions (Jangipur, Behrampore, Kandi, Lalbagh, and Domkal) and 26 blocks. Based on the preliminary visit to the areas and in consultation with local people three blocks, i.e. Beldanda I (Villages-Mohula, Dahakula) (n=75), Kandi (Villages-Gokarna, Hatpara, Purandarpur, Nabagram) (n=125), and Berhampore (Villages- Sahajadpur, Bholla, Saralapara) (n=130) having a high concentration of Gulf migrants were purposively selected. A sampling frame was created consisting of households with Gulf returnees. From this frame, the Gulf returnee's households were randomly selected for the study. Information was collected from the households of return migrants and the returnees themselves. Face to face structured interview scheduled was used to collect the data. The study's inclusion criteria were the respondents should work in any of the Gulf countries: UAE, Saudi Arabia, Oman, Qatar, Kuwait, Bahrain (Czaika & Varela, 2015) for at least two years and returned to their villages at least one year before the survey. At the time of the interview, the returnees had no plans to migrate again. 330 Gulf returnees were personally interviewed by administering structured interview schedules. The schedule focused on the occupational status of the Gulf return migrants in three phases of their life, i.e. pre-emigration, while in the destination and after return phase. In addition to the personal interview, some Key Informant Interviews (local leaders, Head of the village) and Case Studies have been conducted. Ethical clearance from the Student Research Ethics Committee (SREC) of the International Institute for Population Sciences (IIPS, Mumbai) was taken.

Descriptive statistics were used to explore the returnee's occupational status in three periods of the migration journey. Similarly, binary logistic regression has been used to determine the significant predictors of self-employment among return migrants. The outcome variable self-employed was binary coded as '1' for those return migrants who reported 'yes' and '0' for 'no'.

Operational Definition

- The World Bank provides the CPI (Consumer Price Index) for each country for a period of one year. We took the CPI of December 2019 for India as the base price to convert Gulf currency to Indian Currency.
- For analysis purposes, the occupational status at the Gulf countries of returnees has been taken into consideration. Here we got 31 types of jobs of the return migrants at the destination. We have modified the National classification of Occupations (NCO, 2004) which is based upon a classification scheme adopted by the International Labour Organization (ILO), suitably modified for the Indian conditions, and broadly categorized returnee's occupations at destination into three groups, namely skilled, unskilled, and semiskilled activity. **Skilled occupation comprises** construction workers, carpenters, chemists, electricians, drivers, mechanics, painters, plumbers, salesmen, cooks, and supervisors. **Semiskilled occupations/ Service sectors include** OT helpers in hospitals, AC helpers, housekeeping, dates processing, mirror workers, bookkeeping in a library, office helpers, water supplier, waiter, security guard. **Unskilled jobs** comprised of agricultural workers, cattle rearer, cleaner, gardening. Returnees who were not engaged in any income-earning activity were addressed as unemployed.
- **Upward Occupational Mobility-** Upward occupational mobility among the returnees refers to those returnees who were engaged as unskilled workers before emigration. However, they acquired some skills during their stay abroad and earned substantial money. After the return, they established their own business or were employed in some better job than they did before emigration. They were satisfied with their migration experience and earned a good amount of money to live a comfortable life after the return.
- **Downward Occupational Mobility-** Downward occupational mobility of returnees refers to those returnees who did some skilled work before emigration but engaged in unskilled jobs abroad. After returning, they could not secure a skilled job and forgot whatever they knew before their emigration. They were bound to do whatever job was available to them at origin after their return.

No Occupational Mobility- We levelled 'no occupation mobility' as those who were doing the same job after their return, what they did before their emigration. In this category, returnees experience no loss and gain out of their emigration process regarding their job sector. Maybe they earn a good amount of money, but they did not invest their money to upgrade their occupation.

Results

Background characteristics of returnees

Table 1 presents the demographic and socio-economic characteristics of the migrants after the return. Most of the returnees belonged to the young age group 20-30 year (40%), while the mean current age of return migrants was 35 years. However, the mean age of returnees at the time of return was 32.4 years. Most of the return migrants were belonged to the Muslim religion (92.7%) and were married (82.7%). About 68 per cent of the return migrants stayed separately from their parents after returning to the village, while 32 per cent of returnees lived in a joint family after their return to the village.

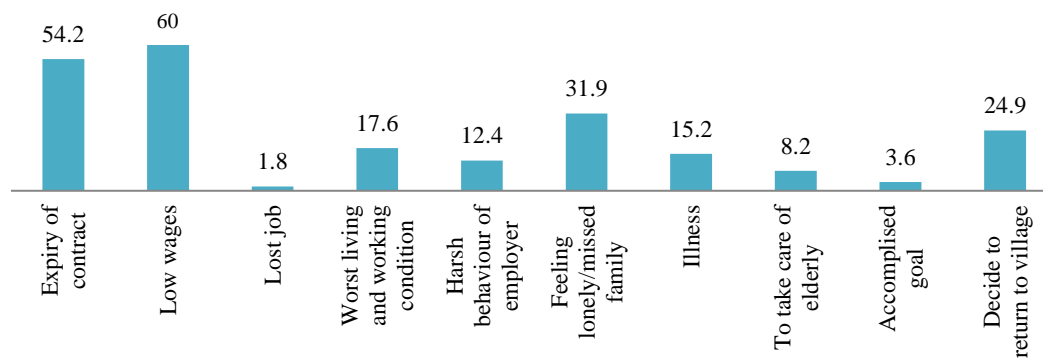
Table 1: Socio-demographic characteristics of return migrants

Background Variables	No. of respondents	Percentage
Current Age of RM		
Religion		
Hindu	24	7.3
Muslim	306	92.7
Social Category		
General	16	4.9
SC	8	2.4
OBC	306	92.7
Family structure		
Nuclear	221	68
Joint	109	33
Marital status at the time of last emigration		
Unmarried	54	16.4
Married	273	82.7
Others (Widow, Divorced, Separated)	3	0.9
Education		
No education	85	25.8
Primary	163	49.3
Secondary	68	20.7
Above Secondary	14	4.2
Duration of Stay Abroad		
2-5 year	292	88.5
6-9 year	28	8.5
>9 year	10	3.0
Desired to emigrate again		
Yes	185	56.1
No	145	43.9
Frequency of migration to Gulf		
1 time	288	87.3
2 times	40	12.1
3 times	2	0.6
Total sample	330	100

Further, a higher proportion (40.4%) of returnees were illiterate or did not complete their primary level of education, while about 34.9 per cent of respondents attained primary level of education, and 20.6 percent of the respondents had a secondary level of education. Most of the respondents migrated to the Gulf countries only once (87.3%), whereas 12.1 per cent of returnees migrated twice to the Gulf countries while only 0.6 percent of respondents migrated thrice. Despite facing many living and working problems, 56.1 per cent desired to migrate again to the Gulf countries. The majority of the migrants stated expiry of

job contract (54.2%) followed by low wages (60%) and missed family (31.8%), taking care of the elderly (8.2%) and accomplishment of migration goal (3.6 %) were the main cause for their return to villages (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Reasons for return from the Gulf countries



Occupation status of the return migrants before their emigration and while in the Gulf countries

Table 2 presents a significant variation in the occupations of migrants before their emigration and while in the Gulf countries. Before emigration, more than 56 per cent of migrants engaged in agricultural activity. Among them, few managed to secure semiskilled (5.4%) and skilled jobs (21%), but the majority of them got unskilled work (73.6%) abroad. At the same time, 6.4 per cent of them were involved as constructional workers and 7 per cent as a daily wage worker. Around 27 per cent were unemployed before emigration. While in the Gulf countries, primarily emigrants were engaged (69%) in unskilled work. Few returnees managed to do semiskilled (9%) and skilled works (22%) at the destination. From this table, it is clear that mostly emigrants were not engaged in skilled works at their origin place before their emigration, and also they considered jobs whatever came to them at the destination. They even accepted menial jobs in the Gulf countries.

"I spent Rs 80 thousand for getting a work visa. My agent informed me that I had to work as a cleaner in a hospital. So from the first day of my migration journey, I knew about my job profile and accepted it. Most of the villagers are engaged in farming, and they earn very less out of it. In Saudi Arabia, you will get a good salary even for some menial job also. It is better to do a cleaning job there (destination) than doing agricultural work in the village. I used to do overtime to get more money to remit a good amount of money to my wife in the village. But if I had stayed in the village, I would never have achieved what I have today. After returning, I worked in a construction site, but I have to migrate again within few years as I want to earn more money." (38 years old return migrant- Dahakula village)

Table 2: Occupations before emigration and while in the Gulf countries

Before Emigration	While in Gulf countries			Total
	Semi-skilled	Skilled	Unskilled	
Manufacturing	1	0	1	2 (0.6)
Constructional	3	4	14	21 (6.4)
Self Employed	0	2	5	7 (2.1)
Agriculture	10	39	137	186 (56.4)
Daily Wage	4	3	16	23 (7.0)
Unemployed	12	22	55	89 (27.0)
Driver	0	1	1	2 (0.6)
Total	30 (9.1)	71 (21.5)	229 (69.4)	330 (100)

Occupation status in the pre-migration phase and the post-return period

Significant changes in the occupations of migrants were seen between the pre-migration phase and the post-return period in Table-3. Sizeable proportions were unemployed (27%) before emigration, but this percentage has been reduced to 13.6 per cent after the return. Among the 89 unemployed emigrants before emigration, around half were unemployed after the return, because firstly, the unemployment situation is more common in origin place. Secondly, the most important reason was the changing attitudes and aspirations of returnees. They considered their previous job as a low-status job and hesitated to do the same job after returning. Many returnees aspire to improve the socio-economic status after the return. They believe that if they do the same job after returning, it would be very shameful. They would be considered as failure returnee to others. This kind of attitude was more common among the young aged returnees. Simultaneously, their educational attainments were not very conducive, and most of them were engaged as unskilled workers aboard. In this situation, many returnees preferred to remain unemployed and wait for better opportunities to secure their position and status after the return.

"I was very happy with my job in Saudi Arabia. I was working as a salesman in a shopping mall there. All the time, I was dressed in a good manner. I completed my higher secondary education from a Madarsa in my village. So with this qualification, I got a very good job there (Saudi Arabia). I was familiar with the Arabic language and would speak it fluently. I earned about 1700 Riyals (34000Rs.) and used to send money every month to my family. I returned to the village after my contract got expired. Now fifteen months have passed, but still, I am unable to find any suitable jobs. I will not do farming or any day labour work as I am not used to it. Hope I'll get a good job or a salesman job in my village or nearest town or else I'll again emigrate. It is challenging to find any suitable job in the village, but in Saudi Arabia, you will get good salaried jobs." (Return from Saudi Arabia, 30 years old).

A key informant stated, "Agents give hope about respectable jobs before migration. But migrants mainly are involved in driving and cleaning jobs in the Arab Countries. To earn more, migrants tend to do overtime in foreign countries and end up breaking the rules and are caught by the local police.". (KII-Mahula Gram Panchayat Head, Age-37)

More than 40 per cent of returnees were engaged in the agricultural field after their return. They had their land to cultivate, but after returning, the percentage of farmworkers decreased to 13 percent. The rate of construction workers (14%) increased after return period than before emigration period (6%). On the other hand, the percentage of daily workers reduced to 3 per cent than before the emigration phase (7%).

The noticeable feature about the activity status among the Gulf returnees was self-employment. Before emigration, only 7 per cent of them were engaged in self-employed works. Returnees invest their money in small enterprises. It resulted in a sizeable increase in self-employment (20 per cent) among the returnees. A few returnees, who were earlier unemployed, also started their own business. To maintain a good lifestyle, they run their small business (grocery shops, betel stall, chicken firm, packaged water supply, etc.). The low level of literacy among returnees acts as a hindrance to get a better-skilled job in origin. But, no one among the returnee was a prominent entrepreneur nor had a sufficient amount of money to start a small industrial unit where they could also employ others

The same thing happened to the driver category job also. Before emigration, it was only 0.6 per cent, but about 7 per cent of returnees were engaged as drivers after their return. There were no returnees who secured employers positions after their return to the origin.

"I had Kapil visa. I spent around 1 lakh on my emigration. It was mentioned that I was appointed as a driver in Kapil's house on my visa. So I was very happy to migrate with this job. But after reaching there (destination), I came to know that I had to paint 12 flats of my Kapil (employers). Being a graduate student, I did not agree to do so. I used to work for 20 hours there and felt very useless. After I returned home, I got admission to a computer course. Now I am working in a computer centre. Now, I feel more comfortable and satisfied with my job". (29 years old returnee, Beldanga block).

Table 3: Occupations before emigration and after return

Sectors	Before migration		After Return					Total
	Manuf acture	Constructio n	Self Employed	Agricultur e	Daily Wage	Unempl oyed	Driver	
Manufacturing	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	2 (0.6)
Construction	0	15	2	3	0	1	0	21 (6.4)
Self Employed	0	1	6	0	0	0	0	7 (2.1)
Agriculture	0	17	27	117	5	10	10	186 (56.4)
Daily wage	0	2	4	9	3	4	1	23 (7.0)
Unemployed	1	10	22	13	2	30	11	89 (27.0)
Driver	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	2 (0.6)
Total	1 (0.3)	46 (13.9)	64 (19.4)	142 (43.0)	10 (3.0)	45 (13.6)	22 (6.7)	330

Occupations while abroad and after return phase.

Table 4 presents the occupation profile of emigrants while in the Gulf and after their return. About 70 per cent of emigrants did unskilled work abroad. Among them, the majority were engaged in agricultural activity (46.3%), followed by self-employed (17.5%), and few returnees remained unemployed after return

(14%). Among 71 emigrants who got skilled work abroad, ten returnees got driver job, 16 return migrants were self-employed, and 28 returnees worked in the agricultural field. Among the semiskilled returnees, very few of them (8 return migrants) ran their small business and were employed as construction worker (5 return migrants) after the return.

From this table, it is observed that a good number of returnees were engaged in the agricultural field (43%) after the return phase. 20 per cent of them started their business, 13 percent of them worked in the construction site, and 13 percent chose not to work after return as they did not find any suitable job in the origin place.

Table 4: Activity status while abroad and after return

While Abroad	After Return							Total
	Agriculture	Manufacture	Construction	Driver	Self Employed	Daily Wage Labour	Unemployed	
Skilled	28	0	10	10	16	0	7	71 (21.5)
Semi-skilled	8	0	5	2	8	1	6	30 (9.1)
Unskilled	106	1	31	10	40	9	32	229 (69.4)
Total	142 (43.0)	1 (0.3)	46 (13.9)	22 (6.7)	64 (19.4)	10 (3)	45 (13.6)	330

Occupational mobility between the pre-emigration and post-return period

In this study, we have categorized the occupational status of the Gulf return migrants in three groups, i.e. upward, downward and no occupational movement. Table 5 shows that about 35 per cent of returnees got upward movement in their occupation after their return. While most (46%) had no change in occupation, about 19 per cent of the returnees had downward occupational mobility after their return.

"My employer provided me training, and within few weeks, I was able to manage this work (carpenter work). In the beginning, I made different types of stools and other small wooden things. I worked for eight long years in this field. Over time, I learned how to carve out a bed, dining table, windows and all other wooden kinds of stuff. I learned this skill very well. Presently I am well settled and have started my own carpenter business in the village. Saudi Arabia gave me this opportunity. Otherwise, I would have worked as a farmer throughout my life. Now my living standard has improved to a great extent". (Age-48_ Stayed long 8 years in Saudi Arabia_ Worked as a carpenter there_ after return opened up his own business in the village).

"After my return, I am engaged in farming. Even I had done the same job before emigration also. During my emigration, I worked as a cook in a police station and used to get 1000 Riyals (20000 Rs.). They taught me how to make their special tea (Kawaa). I use to make tea for them. After I returned home, I have started to work in the agricultural field again. Now I have decided not to move again because I have sent

my son to Saudi Arabia. My savings helped me a lot to send my son to the Gulf countries, as I did not have to borrow the money for it". (50 years old Return migrant, 2 years stayed in abroad).

This de-skilling was a two-level occurrence. The first level- took place when the emigrants went to the destination countries. At origin, many of them worked in different kinds of skilled or semiskilled sectors. But in the Gulf countries, they often had to take up unskilled jobs. De-skilling resulted from the non-availability of desire jobs in the destination and compulsion to stay and earn in the Gulf countries. The second level of de-skilling took place after the return. Some emigrants were able to acquire some skills during their stay abroad, but after return, they could not find any suitable jobs according to their acquired skills from abroad. Instead of doing ordinary jobs like working in the agricultural field, they preferred to remain unemployed after returning. Many of them were not be able to save much money to set up their own business, and this type of de-skilling phenomenon was more common among the young returnees.

"I paid Rs 50000 to the agent for getting a work visa for the Gulf country. I used to work as an electrician in Saudi Arabia. I joined my company as a trainer, and over time, I had acquired the skill. I used to earn 1500 Riyals (30000Rs). After eight years, I returned to my village as I felt very low there (destination). With my earnings, I renovated my old house, bought some agricultural lands. But now, I could not find any electrician job in my village. For the past two years, I am working as a farmer. Though the savings from Saudi Arabia bought a lot of development in our household, I will forget all my skills (electrical work). However, I plan to open a grocery shop to run my family in a better condition." (45 years aged Gulf return migrant).

The study has found that the workers end up with unskilled and undesired positions in the host country. It is also pointed out that workers tend to lose their original skills as there is no opportunity to practice in the host country. After return, they neither retained the skill they had departed nor gained new credentials to find themselves employed in a sector different from what they previously occupied. Even if there was any marginal up-gradation of skill, it was not suitable for the origin country. In this study, the stay of the emigrants in the Gulf is very short as their emigration is on a contractual basis. It is challenging for this short duration to adopt new skills and implement those skills after returning to the origin.

"I was working as a typewriter in Baharampore court before my emigration. But I earned very little. However, I decided to migrate to the Gulf country, and I was sure that I would find a good job as I have graduated with and technical degree (typewriter). But after reaching the destination, I had to work at a construction site as a painter. I was unsatisfied with my job profile. I stayed there (Saudi Arabia) for few years, and after my return, I open up a small grocery shop in my own house. During this long period, I completely forgot how to type and also my speed had gone down. Though I have earned quite a good amount of money from abroad, still I am not fully satisfied with my migration experience. I think I have wasted my skills and education degree." (36 years old Gulf return migrant).

Table 5: Types of occupational mobility between pre-emigration and post return period

Occupational Mobility	Frequency	Percentage
Upward	115	34.8
No	152	46.1
Downward	63	19.1
Total	330	100

Self-employment among the Gulf return migrants

Gulf return migrants were asked about their self-employment status after the return. Around 65 respondents reported that they have started their own business after return and worked as self-employed in their villages. The self-employed variable has been coded as 0= 'No' and 1= 'Yes'. Variables like age at the time of return, educational level, acquired skills from abroad, amount of remittances sent to the origin, reasons for return, duration of staying at the origin, readiness for return, typology of returnees were taken as background characteristics.

Table 6 shows the adjusted odds ratio for the Gulf return migrants who have started working as self-employed after return to the origin place. The result shows that returnees aged 40-50 were less likely to be engaged as a self-employed after return [AOR: 0.29; 95% CI: 0.12-0.72] compared to returnees aged 18-28 years. The likelihood of being engaged as self-employed after the return was higher among the return migrants who had primary [AOR: 2.51; 95% CI: 1.17-5.38], secondary [AOR: 2.79; 95% CI: 1.23-6.34] and above secondary level of education [AOR: 6.09; 95% CI: 1.54-24.03] compared to those who were illiterate. However, the likelihood of returnees being engaged as self-employed was 4.36 times higher among those return migrants who had reported 'prefer to work at origin' as the main reason for return [AOR: 4.36; 95% CI: 1.87-21.81] than those who reported 'expire of contract' as their main reason for return. However, the likelihood of returnees being self-employed was significantly higher among the conservative [AOR: 17.36; 95% CI: 2.78-28.37] and innovator return migrants [AOR: 9.17; 95% CI: 1.99-24.48] than the failure returnees.

The likelihood of returnees being self-employed was higher among those ready to return to their village [AOR: 6.43; 95% CI: 1.92-44.57] compared to those who reported not ready for their return. Returnees who sent remittances of Rs 10000-20000 per month [AOR: 1.85; 95% CI: 1.19-3.76] during their migration period were more likely to be self-employed than those who used to send remittances of below Rs 10000 as to their family.

Table 6: Logistic regression results of self-employment among the Gulf returnees after return in Murshidabad district with background characteristics

Self Employed After Return	N (330)	AOR	95% Confidence Interval
Age at time of Return			

20-30 ®	135		
31-40	107	0.75	(0.41, 1.39)
41-50	70	0.29***	(0.12, 0.72)
50 & above	18	0.41	(0.04, 3.58)
Educational Level			
No education ®	85		
Primary	163	2.51*	(1.17, 5.38)
Secondary	68	2.79*	(1.23, 6.34)
Above secondary	14	6.09*	(1.54, 24.03)
Reasons for Return (multiple responses)			
Expiry of contract ®	178		
Low wage	198	1.64	(0.71, 3.79)
Worst living and working	59	1.14	(0.30, 4.35)
Prefer to work origin	83	4.36*	(1.87, 21.81)
Typology			
Failure ®	147		
Conservatives	160	17.36***	(2.78, 28.37)
Retires	19	NA	NA
Innovators	4	9.17**	(1.99, 24.48)
Readiness for Return			
Not ready ®	279		
Ready	51	6.43*	(1.92, 44.57)
Duration of Last Stay Abroad			
Less than 5 years ®	292		
6-9 years	28	0.66	(0.20, 2.23)
More than 9 Years	10	0.82	(0.13, 5.27)
Skill acquired from Abroad			
Yes ®	89		
No	241	1.08	(0.48, 2.42)
Remittances Amount (Rs/Month)			
Below 10000 ®	73		
10000-20000	204	1.85*	(1.19, 3.76)
Above 20000	53	1.12	(0.30, 4.18)
Constant		0.01***	(0.00, 0.09)

* $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$

Discussion

The paper focused on the occupational mobility among the Gulf return migrants. Here we found the occupational status of the Gulf returnees in three periods of the migration cycle, i.e. before emigration, during migration and after the return. This paper focused on de-skilling, self-employment after return, skill acquired from abroad, upward and downward occupational mobility among the returnees. Gulf migrants have unique features that were predominantly young, less educated, and hailed from low socio-economic households. Previous studies found that most of them take Gulf emigration as a safety valve from their old age miseries (Nambiar, 1998; Arif, 2016). One crucial aspect of the Gulf emigrants is accepting any kind of jobs that came their way. Emigrants were ready to take up jobs which the local people refused to do. Emigrants readily accepted unskilled and menial jobs while in the Gulf. Croitoru (2020) also found similar findings in Poland that emigrants accepted any kind of jobs abroad. Still, the situation became change after the return, and returnee's more inclined to set their own small business in their villages. Two main reasons behind taking up any jobs at the destination were the salary which they received. The salary was much higher than the Indian standard. And the second reason for their readiness to take a job, even at worst living and working condition, was their anonymity in the foreign country. Their unfamiliar set up allows them to

do any employment. One negative aspect indicates that most of the migrants returned home without having proper future planning about their jobs at the origin. Lack of information regarding employment in their villages leads to their inability to plan upon return.

The study revealed respondents engaged in the farming sector (56.4%), day wage labourer (7%), unemployment (27%) before their emigration. They engaged some menial, unskilled and low skilled jobs such as cleaners, construction sectors, driver, cook, salesman etc in the Gulf country (69.4%). After return, the preference got slightly changed and shifted to self-employment (19.4%) or preferred to remain unemployed. The likelihood of being self-employed was higher among those who were ready for their return to their village (AOR: 6.43; 95% CI: 1.92-44.57). Other variables, such as having remitted a good amount of money, having better educational qualifications, having acquired skills from abroad, and being a conservative returnee, were also positively associated with returnees being self-employed after the return.

A survey conducted in Wuwei country in China also pointed out that return migrants are more likely to be self-employed than non-migrants. It depended on the return savings and the frequency of job changes during migration (Demurger & Xu, 2011; Piracha & Vadean, 2010). A survey carried out in West Bengal, India revealed a drastic change in the economic activities of the internal return migrants. At the destination, about 6 percent of the migrants used to work as casual labourers, which reduced to 2 percent after the return. Similarly, a rise in self-employment was clearly visible among the return migrants. The study showed that economic reintegration was a major challenge among the return migrants as less than 3 percent of returnees could use the skills gained abroad (Banerjee & Das, 2023).

A study about Yemeni's return migrants from Saudi Arabia revealed that small businesses (small grocery shop, stationery shop) were among the most common investments that returnees would make. The majority of business owners ran a small shop (Colton, 1993). A study of 300 return migrants in two West African states, Ghana and Côte d'Ivoire, also established the relationship between international migration and entrepreneurship. Previous study suggested that work experience abroad is the most significant predictor of entrepreneurial activity among return migrants (Black & Castaldo, 2009).

A study by Mallakh & Wahba (2021) supported that high skilled return migrants faced upward occupational mobility after return than non-migrants in Egypt. Still, in our study, returnees were unskilled and semiskilled, though above one-third of them achieving upward occupational mobility after the return. A study related to international migration and return in Albania showed that past migration experience increases the likelihood of upward occupational mobility as emigrants get skill acquisition opportunities across destination countries (Carletto & Kilic, 2011). An article drew on data from the Mexican Migration Project and the Latin American Migration Project. It portrayed that migration to the United States increases the likelihood of upward mobility relative to non-migrants in the origin place (Cobo et al., 2010).

In contrast, our study revealed that work experience abroad does not cause any significant upward mobility among return migrants in any occupational group. The study showed that mostly return migrants

had no occupational mobility (46%) between the pre-emigration and post-return periods. A previous study based on Kerala also portrayed similar findings that the majority of return migrants likely to return to their original occupation status after return (Abraham, 2020).

A Kerala based study applying Kaplan Meier Survival Function and Cox Proportional hazard regression models, to analysis the factors of unemployment among the return migrants and study found that a strong social network enabled returnees to be reabsorbed into labour market at home faster (Azad & Sujathan, 2022). However, return emigration is creating severe socio-economic problems in the economy (Zachariah et al., 2001). Demery, in 1982 focused on the changing aspirations of migrants about their occupations that could lead them to frustration and job hunt in after return phase. They hesitate to accept their previous jobs. In most cases, returnees show interest to take an independent job like starting their own business (Wassink & Hagan, 2018; Thomas-Hope & Nutter, 1989, Afsal, & Reshmi, 2020). Returnees became selective after the return due to their changing aspiration and attitudes. Rajan & Saxena (2019) addressed that this kind of mindset among returnees emerged another class of "status-consciousness" individuals at the origin place.

Moreover, a significant variation has been found in returnees' economic behaviour, lifestyle, and mindset between the two periods of time, i.e., before emigration and after the return. In this paper, the impact of international migration is observed, and the most critical aspects in this regard is the change of occupational mobility of returnees after their return. However, this situation also triggers off re-emigration. This study revealed that return migrants who were in their working years faced occupational challenges. Very few of them (26%) could bring some skills and experience acquired from abroad to their village. The study has a few limitations that need to be considered. firstly, only those respondents were considered who had returned to their villages at least one year before the survey. One year is a brief period. In this study, most of the return migrants had returned to their native place during 1-2 years prior to the survey, and they considered that period as a resting time. The study period of one year was not sufficient for the migrants to fully economically reintegrate into their society and did not provide a clear picture of whether they could get a suitable job in the coming future. Secondly, being localized to a few selected villages of the Murshidabad district, the study's findings could not be generalized to the overall district, state, or region. This study may not reflect the situation of migrants returning from elsewhere as it focused only on the Gulf return migrants. In addition, the findings cannot be generalized to the skilled return migrants from the Gulf countries as the study was based on semi-skilled and unskilled return migrants only.

Conclusion

Despite these limitations, this study makes several new and critical contributions to the literature regarding the occupational mobility of return migrants. International migrants help to improve the financial condition of their household through diversified income streams. However, the low occupational mobility

and lack of entrepreneurship among return migrants reveals no significant improvement in occupational status of return migrants in Murshidabad district. It is recommended to provide helpful information related to the job market at the origin place. Availability of vocational training for employment prospects in the country of origin can also play a vital role. The Government should also grant return migrants loans to start some economic activities and sustain their families. However, particular importance should be given to establishing small-scale industries with full benefits. In my understanding, this is the first study in West Bengal that tries to explore their occupational status in three phases of their migration cycle. The strength of the study lies in its use of the mixed-method design. Therefore, it seems that the study of occupation status among the Gulf return migrants would continue to fascinate social scientists for many years.

Conflict of Interest

No conflict of interest

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