

GOVT. OF INDIA - RNI NO. UPBIL/2014/56766

ISSN 2348-2397

UGC Approved Care Listed Journal



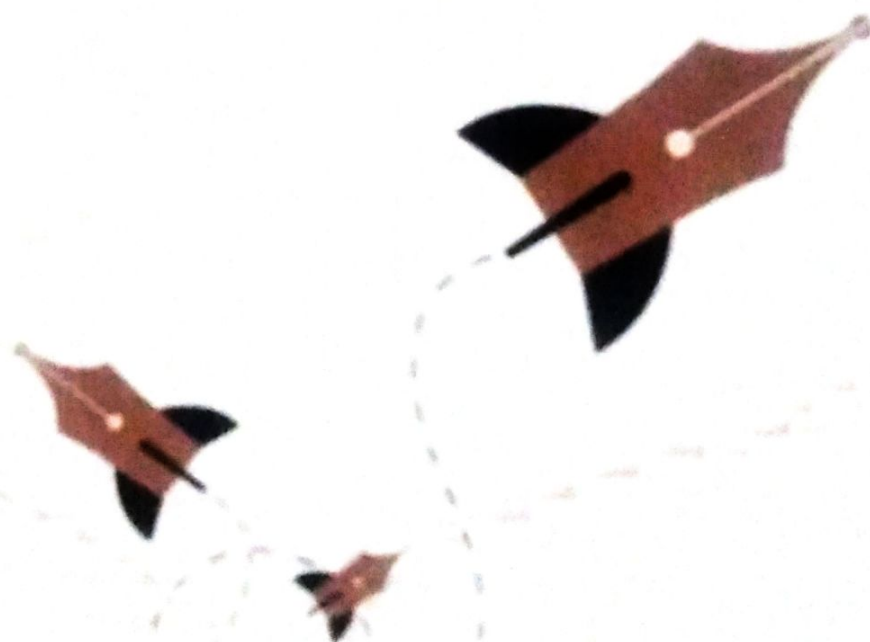
Shodh Sarita

An International Multidisciplinary Quarterly
Bilingual Peer Reviewed Refereed Research Journal

• Vol. 7

• Issue 28

• October to December 2020



Editor in Chief

Dr. Vinay Kumar Sharma

D. Litt. - Gold Medalist



sanchar

International & National Research Journal

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REHABILITATION OF RETURNED EXPATS : A STUDY OF KERALA IN THE WAKE OF COVID19

Dr. Reenu George*

ABSTRACT

The outbreak of the pandemic COVID19 has urged all the countries of the world to close their borders to foreigners and to impose travel restrictions to contain the spread of the virus. The decision taken by the nations to close their borders has resulted in a crisis for the third world countries that have a huge population of diaspora. India with the largest population of diaspora faces the greatest challenge of repatriating their expatriates who are stranded overseas for compelling reasons. The evacuation of Non-Resident Indians from many countries created economic crisis. Kerala, a small state in the southernmost part of the country with highest remittance was deeply affected by the pandemic. Kerala diaspora looked at their homeland with great expectations. The government took various steps to bring back the expatriates who had been the pillars of its economy. The paper critically looks at the initiatives taken by the state government to repatriate and rehabilitate the returned expatriates.

Keywords : COVID19, Kerala Diaspora, Keralite, Dream Kerala Project.

Introduction

The global economic crisis that set in with the COVID 19 pandemic has affected the entire human population. It has disrupted the normal life of people all over the world. One of the measures that every nation adopted to contain the spread of the pandemic is closing borders to foreigners. This has affected the developing countries to a large extent as a huge population of their citizens belongs to the diaspora. India has got the largest diaspora population in the world. As per the UN report cited in *Economic Times*, India has almost 17.5 crore people living outside in different countries (2019). Remittances play an important role in the economic systems of developing countries. The country tops the list with \$79 billion in remittances it received in 2018. Since 2009, *The World Bank* has recognized the importance of remittances by counting them in its measure of creditworthiness, permitting nations with high remittance levels to borrow more money than the others (2019 April 28). The pandemic that insulated

different countries has stuck its blow on the economy of India and especially of Kerala, a state in the southernmost part of India with an overseas population of 34.17 lakh and with the highest remittance rate (ER 2019). Of the total remittance to the country, 19 percent comes from the diaspora of Kerala. When India announced its official lockdown on 24 March, 2020 to contain the spread of the pandemic, huge population of the diaspora was stranded in different parts of the world. Of about half a million Indians stranded in the GCC countries in West Asia, the vast majority of the stranded people were from Kerala (Jacob 2020). The diaspora population of Kerala who stood as the pillar of its economy sought help from their homeland to return to their home. The state responded positively to their pleas to the extent that Kerala urged the Central government to arrange special flights to bring back the stranded expatriates. *The Indian Express* reported that the chief minister of Kerala recommended the central government to ensure the availability of test kits in countries with large diaspora populations (2020