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# Reintegration of Sri Lankan Returnee Migrant Workers from South Korea

Hettige Don KARUNARATNE<sup>1)</sup> and Kanaka ABEYGUNAWARDANA<sup>2)</sup>

## 《Abstract》

This paper attempts to shed light on reintegration of contractual laborers who are returning to Sri Lanka with new knowledge, skills and substantial monetary savings, after serving approximately 5 years in South Korea. The importance of foreign currency remittances sent by the migrant workers to Sri Lankan economy is shown at the beginning. Then, it proceeds to review various theories and empirical evidences that are used to explain the success or failure of reintegration process. South Korea became one of the top destinations for prospective Sri Lankan labour migrants due to several reasons such as; (1) low pre-departure costs, (2) no need to pay for agencies, (3) specific educational qualifications are not required, (4) except basic Korean language, other skills or professional tests are not required, (5) substantial high salaries (6) legally accepted working visa granted for five years. Therefore, in the years 2011, 2012 and 2013, respectively 7,406, 5,630 and 5,389 Sri Lankan workers had the opportunity to enter

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South Korea. Through interviews of selected 100 informants and by analyzing data available, paper proceeds to highlight characteristics of Sri Lankan returnee migrants from South Korea and analyze current level of reintegration of these returnees. The final section of the paper evaluate the migration experience based on the productivity of migrants after arriving home, rather than focusing on the experience from the host country. Contrary to structuralists understanding, only 32 percent of the respondents have focused in obtaining lands or building or renovating their houses, while 60 percent of the returnees claimed to be in business ventures in line with the original objectives of migration. The overall findings of this study challenge the popular understanding that unproductive investments and conspicuous consumption patterns breed the unequal relationship between the core (receiving countries) and the periphery (sending countries) forcing the returnees to re-migrate.

## 1. Introduction

According to International Migration Report of the United Nations (2015), 244 million people around the world live in a state other than their home country and they are categorized as international migrants. People leave their home country, state or the geographical location expecting higher income, better life, or to overcome poverty and inequalities as well as due to natural and man-made disasters such as human conflicts, human-animal conflicts and climate change, etc. However, workers cross the borders in search of better pay, better working conditions, employment security, and better life for them and their descendants.

In this paper, the focus will be on migrant workers from Sri Lanka who have crossed borders searching for better economic prospects, with intention of returning after a specific period of time in the host country. In general, migration is beneficial for both the sending and receiving countries; while migrant workers contribute to output growth and development in the countries of destination, the remittances sent and the skills acquired during migration period is beneficial to the countries of origin. Since contract labour migration is a relatively short-term phenomenon, achievements and reintegration of returnee migrant workers are important to ensure more inclusive development especially in a developing country like Sri Lanka.

The available statistics highlight the importance of international labor migration to Sri Lankan economy. According to the Sri Lankan Bureau of Foreign Employment (SLBFE) an estimated stock of overseas contract workers has increased steadily every year since this migration stream began in 1976, with about 1.6 million Sri Lankans working abroad in 2015. This is equivalent to 24 percent of the country's labour force and the

remittances sent by migrant workers form 33 percent of Sri Lanka's foreign exchange earnings and 8.3 percent of the GDP (Institute of Policy Studies, 2015: 31). By 2013, the total remittances received amounts to US \$ 6.4 Billion (Rs. 827.7 Billion) (Ministry of Foreign Employment; 2014: 7).

South Korea became one of the top destination for prospective Sri Lankan migrants due to several reasons such as; minimum pre-departure costs, no need of specific educational qualifications, no need of English language proficiency tests and most importantly, substantial high salaries.

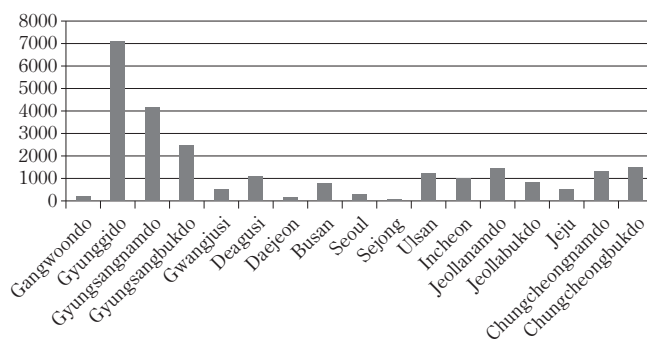
SLBFE has estimated that over 40,000 Sri Lankans working in South Korea under the Employment Permit System (EPS), and the labour section of the Sri Lanka high commission in Seoul has a record of 24,777 workers as of 1st January 2016. Figure 1 illustrates regional distribution pattern of Sri Lankan workers in South Korea.

Every year, over 40,000 Sri Lankan youths of ages between 18 and 39, apply for Korean language proficiency test. It is the first and only qualification to apply for a job in the South Korea from Sri Lanka. It is conducted by the South Korean Government to recruit workers from Sri Lanka. According to the records of the SLBFE in the years 2011, 2012 and 2013, a total of 7,406, 5,630 and 5,389 Sri Lankan workers respectively had the opportunity to enter South Korea under the 3-D visas issued by the South Korean Government under the Enforcement Decree of Immigration Control Act of June 1, 2007. Since the contract period of employment is 5 years, these workers return to Sri Lanka in their 40s (below the age of 45) and mostly with the money they saved during the contract period. Furthermore, the returnees from South Korea apply for their pension benefits after returning and obtain approximately US \$ 5000 as further saving. Therefore, when compared to a returning Sri Lankan contractual migrant from other parts of the world, the returning migrants from South

Korea has more skills, experiences and resources.

Therefore, youths between the age group of 18 and 39 who are entering the Sri Lankan labour market without specific skills and qualifications, migration to South Korea for five years as laborers seem to be an attractive prospect. Most of the South Korean bound Sri Lankan migrant workers have the objective of saving money and returning after five years can start their own business. Therefore it is worth to investigate that “Do these workers realize these objectives and end the migration cycle by reintegrating successfully into the society of their home country?”

**Figure 1 Regional Distribution of Sri Lankan Workers in South Korea**



Source : Extracted from data produced by HRD, Korea

This paper attempts to shed light on reintegration of these contractual laborers who are returning to Sri Lanka having acquired new knowledge, skills and substantial savings, after serving approximately 5 years in South Korea. Given the above background, the main objectives of this research can be divided into five fold as follows:

1. To review existing theoretical and empirical literature on labour migration and re-integration of returnee migrants.
2. To understand the characteristics of Sri Lankan returnee migrants from

### South Korea

3. To map out the experiences and skills gained and resources acquired by migrants during their stay in South Korea
4. To assess the level of reintegration of Sri Lankan returnee migrants from South Korea
5. To evaluate whether they have deviated from their original objectives related to migration after returning to Sri Lanka.

In order to achieve these objectives, this paper briefly describes the importance of foreign currency remittances sent by the migrant workers to Sri Lankan economy and the popularity of South Korea as a well-paid destination for less-skilled, male migrant workers from Sri Lanka. Further, it proceeds to review various theories and empirical evidences that can be used to understand the success or failure of reintegration of migrant workers back into the country of origin. As stated in the objectives, through survey findings, interviews of selected informants and by analyzing data available, the next section proceeds to present data on characteristics of Sri Lankan returnee migrants from South Korea, the experiences and skills gained and resources acquired by the migrants during their stay in South Korea and the current level of reintegration of these returnees. Predominantly using structural approach as the basis for analysis, the final section of the paper evaluate the migration experience based on the productivity of migrants after arriving home, rather than focusing on the experience from the host country. Though structuralists understand the returnees as a category that tend to orient their savings in unproductive investments and conspicuous consumptions due to their need to be "reaccepted" into the society, given the short nature of their stay abroad, , the sample used in this paper does not fit into this analysis. Only 32 percent of the respondents have focused in obtaining lands or building or renovating

their houses, while 60 percent of the returnees claimed to be in business ventures in line with the original objectives of migration. At least in the short run, the overall findings of this study challenge the popular understanding that unproductive investments and conspicuous consumption patterns breed the unequal relationship between the core (receiving countries) and the periphery (sending countries) forcing the returnees to re-migrate.

The next section of this paper provides a brief review of the literature on return migration in general and highlights the theories that are relevant to Sri Lankan Migrants from South Korea, presenting existing evidence on this phenomenon. The section three, of the paper presents the research data, including characteristics of the returning migrants, one need to know in order to understand the case in hand, their spending and saving patterns, and their pre-departure objectives. The fourth and the final section is dedicated to analyzing returnees' prospects for reintegration into the labor market and society and their intention to remain in the country of origin or to re-emigrate. In this final section, possible policy implications and recommendations related to reintegration of returnee migrants are also presented in brief.

## **2. Review of Literature**

### **2.1. Conceptual Background**

In the literature related to international migrant workers, it is assumed that the decision making related to migration by a person is based on three interrelated elements; (1) the context in home country (the most obvious factor), (2) the duration and type of migration experience while living



abroad, (3) the factors or conditions (whether they are favorable or not) in host and home countries which motivated return (i.e, pre- and post- return conditions) (Cassarino, 2014:159). The returns of Sri Lankan migrant workers from South Korea are determined mainly by the third element, which is the “condition in the host country” . As the host country, South Korea is strict in implementing IPS and determines to send the foreign workers back to their countries of origin after the contractual period of five years. However, understanding of theories related to decision making, to return is answering only part of the questions related to reintegration as reintegration has more complex dilemmas, specific to the theme itself. Therefore it is important to understand the specific theoretical frameworks that deal with reintegration itself. It is not wrong to say that, though scholars have been focusing on return migration from 1960s onwards, extensive debates and theorizing of return phenomenon and its impact on the country of origin seems to have happened only from the year 1980 onwards.

Within the context of this study, reintegration is defined as the process of give and take in the home country as return migrants learn to live with their families and communities back home (Kyei 2013). ‘Re-migration’<sup>1</sup> after a voluntary or involuntary return is measured against other variables to determine whether return migrants have reintegrated or not. The mere act of “returning” or “re-migrating” in this context, may not necessarily mean the returnee has reintegrated or not. Reintegration is looked at from two standpoints: the objective and subjective criteria. The objective criteria demonstrate the extent to which returnees have successfully or unsuccessfully secured accommodation, satisfactory jobs, among others. On the other hand, the subjective criteria reveal the subjective feelings of the returnees showing how satisfied they are with their reintegration based

on their own experiences.

## 2.2. Theoretical Review

Although there are various explanations given to human migration by different scholars, there are only limited number of important theories which attempted to explore sociological, economics and business factors behind human migration. All these theories attempted provide explanations on definitions, features and determinants of international migration. Table 1 summarizes explanations given such important ten theories. It is worth to consider implications of these theories on re-integration of returnee Sri

**Table 1 Summary of Theories of International Migration.**

Theoretical Approach and its origin	Focus of Analysis
<b>1. Laws of migration;</b> Ravenstein 1885; 1889; Bähr 2004.	Migration processes are mainly seen as an uni-or bidirectional movement brought about by emigration, immigration or return migration caused by isolated factors, such as economic or political ones
<b>2. Push-pull models;</b> Lee 1966	Pull and push factors initiating migration are present in the source as well as in the receiving regions of migrants
<b>3. Neoclassical (macro);</b> Lewis 1952; Todaro 1969; Borjas 1989	Migration as a result of labour market gaps between countries. Differentials in wages and employment conditions between countries, and on migration costs
<b>4. Neoclassical (micro):</b> Harris-Todaro 1976	Individual rational actors decide to migrate because a cost-benefit calculation.
<b>5. New economics theory:</b> Stark 1991	Views migration as a household strategy to minimize family income risks or to overcome capital constraints on family production activities
<b>6. Dual labour market:</b> Leiws, 1952, Harria - Todaro 1976, Piore 1979	Structural changes in demands and supplies of developing countries.
<b>7. World systems theory:</b> Wallerstein 1974, Hoffmann-Nowotny1989.	Market and cultural potential from the core to peripherals
<b>8. Network theory;</b> Tilly and Brown 1967, Lomnitz 1977,	Informal social connections connect current migrants, former migrants and potential migrants in sending and receiving countries
<b>9. International theory;</b>	Organizations that support, sustain, and promote international movement
<b>10. Cumulative causation;</b> Massey 1990.	Conditions that make subsequent migration inevitable, more likely or easier

Source: Authors simté letters own summarization based on various publications

Lankan migrants from South Korea.

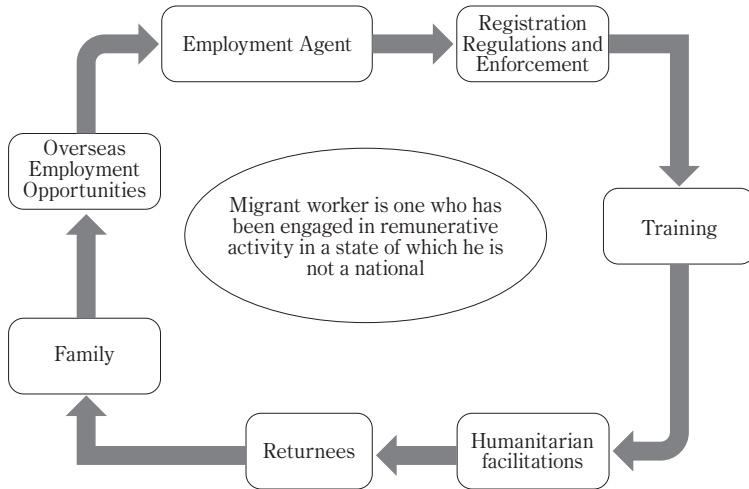
Theoretical explanations on phenomenon of labour migration has emerged in classical economists explanations such as Robert Malthus, David Ricardo and then later extended by neo-classical, traditional, dual, structural approaches and new economic theory as well as social network theory (Karunaratne 2007). The neo-classical approach exclusively looks at migrant workers as who miscalculated the cost of migration and returned as a result of their failed experiences or because they were not rewarded as expected when they were abroad (Cassarino 2004). According to neo-classical approach, success in migration means permanent settlement in the host country without returning to the country of origin to settle down. In contrast to neo-classical theory, New Economic Labour Migration (NELM) perceives migrants as individuals who want to maximize not only their earnings but also the duration of stay with the objective of settling permanently or reunification with families. Therefore, it is argued that the return cannot be motivated by failed migration experiences. NELM considers return migration “as part of a defined plan conceived by migrants before their departure from their countries of origin” (Thomas 2008). According to this theoretical understanding, the migrants plan their eventual return as early as the departure to destination countries and the time spent in destination countries is used to acquire skills, savings and other resources that would be useful upon their return. Therefore, the time spent abroad is considered a temporary in nature and these migrants tend to travel backwards and forwards to maintain their social networks and family ties anticipating eventual return. Transitional approach provides a better framework for explaining return and reintegration according to Cassarino as it perceives reintegration as a process of re-adaptation which may not entail the abandonment of the identities acquired by migrants

while in the host country. It is believed that regular communication and travel back and forth would allow migrant workers to better prepare for their eventual return by maintaining regular contacts with the country of origin and the host country. Therefore re-integration is seen as part of migration cycle itself and not as an end of a cycle (Cassarino, 2004). Social Network Theory perceives the returnees as persons with tangible and intangible resources. Similar to transitional approach, this theory highlights the importance of migrants maintaining strong links to their country of origin, during migration. Interpersonal linkages that had been maintained with networks of persons from the country of origin are seen as a key for making the decision to return.

Social and economic cross border networks are highlighted by the social network theorists as an important factor in influencing the decision to return. None of the above four; neo-classical, economic, social network theory or transitional approach pays much attention to the context that determines the decision to return and the possibilities of reintegration of migrant workers. In contrast, this is a major interest of the structuralism. In structural approach, the argument is that the return is not just a personal issue. The return is contextualized taking various social factors including the socio-political context of the country of origin. In the structuralism's understanding return migration can be understood under four different characteristics (Cerase. 1974: 248); retirement, failure, conservatism and innovation.

The first two are self-explanatory, while conservatism indicates return by someone who never even tried to integrate thoroughly in the destination country and returns without having been much affected by the migration experience. In this approach by structuralists, innovation denotes a migrant who did absorb some of the values and structuralists, innovation denotes a

Figure 2 Migration Cycle



Source: Adopted from the Ministry of Foreign Employment and Welfare, (2014) Annual Report.

migrant who did absorb some of the values and practices of the destination country and returns intending to catalyze changes at home country using what he or she has learned while away. Structuralists highlight the importance of appropriate capacities and institutions within the country of origin to absorb this learning. Innovation argues the importance of having systems and structures in place to absorb and guide skills and financial resources brought back by returning workers, as it is a key to successful reintegration.

Though the migrant workers to South Korea spend only 5 years away from their home country, learning to live with their families and communities again could be as daunting for some other migrants who could be returning after several years or decades. At the same time, it is unrealistic to assume that the social and economic environment in the home country would stay static for five years. Furthermore, there is a need to

appreciate the different social settings of the two destinations in question. Several factors determine the extent to which migrants would be estranged upon their return to home country. These, include the age of the migrant prior to leaving home, marital status, the length of time spent abroad, the nature of contact with family members and friends back home, and the level of engagement in transnational activities. According to structuralism, returnee migrants are “prepared to make use of all the means and new skills they have acquired during their migratory experiences” (Cerase, 1974: 251). *“The structural approach to return migration is essential to show how influential contextual factors may be on the returnees’ capacity to innovate and to appear as actors of change. Not only do skills and financial capital shape return experiences, but local power relations, traditions and values in home countries also have a strong bearing on the returnees’ capacity to invest their migration experiences in their home countries”* (Cassarino; 2004, 259).

### **2.3. Empirical Literature**

In understanding return and reintegration of migrant workers, returnee migrant workers are considered as changed persons, compared to their pre-departure status/condition. This change could be related to one or more areas such as social, physiological, financial, skills, knowledge, attitude, aspirations, etc. According to a study published by the World Bank in 2013, upon return most females revert to household work and most men revert to their previous occupation. According to this study male and female figures are 64% and 29% respectively. According to the same study, another 13 % of the men have established their own businesses (Sharma, 2013).

A study on Returnee Migration from the United State to Southern Italy has highlighted a case of return migrants providing one of the main sources

of life to their original villages. These migrants have invested their earnings in the agricultural sector in Italy “keeping alive that system of labour relationships and labour engagement” (Cerese, 1974) A study conducted by IOM on "Return Migration and Reintegration in Albania" revealed lack of employment at home and better job opportunities abroad along with the prospect of better income as the main reason for migration. According to the same study, loss of job in the country of immigration, melancholy and longing for the family and the country, job opportunities in the country of origin and investment plans seem to have prompted the return (IOM; 2013, 9). According to Athukorala, in normal terms, migrant workers receive as much as eight times of salary/wages from working abroad, compared to working locally. This he argues as perhaps the sole “pull factor” determines migration. The study that had focused on Sri Lankan experience of reintegration revealed that *“an overwhelming majority of returnees have distinct preference to invest in real estate or to keep their money in the form of institutional savings”*. According to the same study, disillusionment of long periods of job search or difficulties in finding jobs have not been an important factor influencing remigration.

### **3. Methodology of the Study**

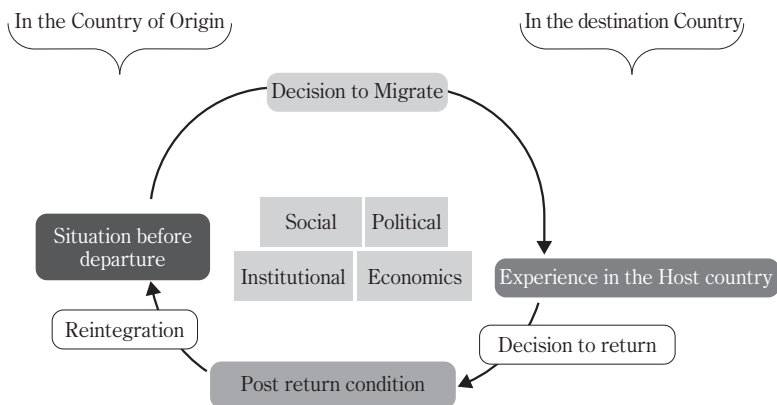
#### **3.1. Research Framework**

Research framework is developed based on the migration cycle and incorporating factors that influence reintegration. Such factors could be related to the country of origin or the destination country. It is understood that the social, political, institutional and economic reasons in the destination country and country of origin affect successful reintegration

(see Figure: 2 in page)

Given that the sample used for this study are young, largely male workers returning from South Korea, following a fixed term contract, this paper will predominantly use structural approach as the basis for analysis, since that analytical framework helps understand the factors that affects migrants’ ability to integrate into their original society. *“Structural theories on return migration, on the other hand, stress the importance of the social, economic, and political conditions in the home countries, not only as major factors in the decision to return, but also as components affecting the ability of returning migrants to make use of the skills and resources that they have acquired abroad”* (Hazan: 2014: 10). In this scenario, success of the migration experience in the host country is not considered a key factor but productivity of migrants after arriving home is considered a key to understanding the success of reintegration. *“Structural theorists argue that returnees may not be able to reintegrate and consequently may decide to*

**Figure 3 Factors Influencing on Re-integration of Returnee Migrants in Sri Lanka**



Source: Authors’ creation Based on Migration Circle.



leave again if the gap between their own norms and values and those at home is too large” (Cassarino; 2004, 268). Furthermore, returned migrants may also respond to expectations at home by spending their savings on consumption or unproductive investments.

### **3.2. Sampling**

The research was conducted largely through qualitative data gathering. While existing materials and data was used to understand and analyze the research question, a purposive sample survey of 25 returnees and interviews of 5 informants were conducted to gather necessary information. Since 99% of the Sri Lankan migrant workers in South Korea are male, the sample consists only of males. Attempts made to include at least a smaller number of women have failed. The sample is from mixed geographical locations.

### **3.3. Data Collection**

With the above objectives, a questionnaire (See appendix A, page no. 26 for the questionnaire) was developed to gather data of returnee migrants and a few interviews were also conducted involving officials from government institutions who are involved in services provided to Korean Migrants, allowing cross checking of data gathered. A literature review was done to understand this returnee phenomenon in the international reintegration contexts

### **3.4. Data Analysis**

Once the questionnaires and interviews were completed, an attempt was made to quantify the data received by ranking the answers. With the ranking, subdivisions were created adding value to each sub division as

necessary. This helped to measure subdivisions as a ratio to the whole and create, bar-charts, pie-charts, etc. indicating the analysis in a visual form.

### **3.5. Presentation of Data**

The definition of the returnee used in this study is based on the one recommended by the United Nations (U.N.) on the subject but with some slight modifications. For the purpose of this study a return migrant is:

*Any person of Sri Lankan nationality who returned from South Korea during the course of the last five years, worked in South Korea for at least one year, and has been back in Sri Lanka for three months or longer.*

Migrants who returned more than five years ago were excluded from this study both because it is assumed that they were already reintegrated in Sri Lanka and also because they do not reflect recent return migration dynamics. The survey respondents were selected after considering at least one year's service in South Korea.

### **3.6. Data Limitations**

There are no records of return migration that can be accessed readily for any analysis. SLBFE is having departure records of low-skilled workers who travel with the support of Recruiting Agencies. Though it is a statutory obligation, professionals and skilled categories leave as contractual migrant labour without registering at the SLBFE. Furthermore it is a well-known secret that low skilled categories, who find jobs through personal contacts and in some cases through recruitment agents also leave for employment even in domestic sectors, without registering, in order to avoid training and registration fees. In such situations, their departures are recorded by Immigration and Emigration as "visit" ; meaning traveling abroad as tourists. Thus, they are not included in the SLBFE data. Given

all these reasons, the data related to departure of migrants are unreliable and as a result of the same reasons and for not having any institutions documenting returnee migrants, data on return migrants are not available in a systematic manner. However, since South Korea has strict migration polices and the workers are sent back after the contractual period, unless becoming citizens of South Korea by getting married to South Korean nationals during the contractual period, which is very rare, it is understood that majority who leave for South Korea returns to Sri Lanka after 5 years. Therefore, the return data is assumed on the basis of departure data, which is comparatively systematic since SLBFE is the only institution involved in recruitment for South Korea.

#### **4. Analysis and Findings**

Since the sample selected for this research are young male migrants who went to South Korea under EPS, which is a visa category issued for less-skilled workers, the attempt of the research was to provide insights as most of them had no previous work experiences or professions prior to departure. Though the jobs in South Korea are categorized as “3D” jobs (dirty, difficult and dangerous), salaries, benefits and other incentives are relatively high, when compared to various popular destinations among Sri Lankan workers. Furthermore, most of the workers were engaged in industrial sites where new knowledge and technology was at their disposal.

Though the research in this area is largely qualitative, attempts were made to gather quantitative data and also to quantify information gathered from informants. The research used a four-stage questionnaire that considered:

The conditions that motivated return migrants to emigrate in the first

place,

1. The skills, knowledge and experiences acquired during their stay in South Korea,
2. Their situation back in Sri Lanka and their integration into its economy and society,
3. The conditions that may lead them to remain in Sri Lanka or to re-emigrate.

Thus, there were questions related to demographic and social characteristics of the return migrant workers; reasons for emigrating from and returning to Sri Lanka; social and financial conditions before leaving, while in the South Korea, and after return; education/skills acquired before leaving, while in the South Korea and after return. In order to complement the information gathered through the quantitative survey, a few in-depth interviews with State officials including officials from the Sri Lankan embassy in South Korea, SLBFE, former officials of the HRD were also conducted.

#### **4.1. Demographic Profile of Returnees**

The research revealed that majority of the returnees from South Korea are still below the age of 40 years. As a percentage, returnees below the age of 40 constituted 60 percent of the sample selected. While 20 percent were within the age category of 25 to 30 years and another 20 percent were within the age category of 40 to 45 years. Since the maximum age limit to sit for the Korean Language Proficiency Test is 39 and the minimum age is 18, unlike returnees from other destinations, Korean returnees are still young and in the prime working age. Out of the total respondents, 60 percent were married and 30 percent were with 1 or 2 children and another 10 percent were with 3 to 4 children.

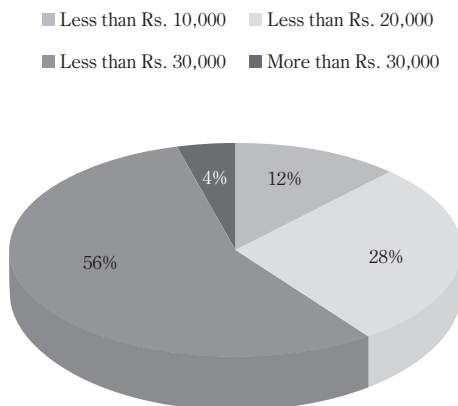
About 90 percent of the respondents have sat for their advance level exams and only 10 percent were below ordinary level educational qualifications. Since the first requirement for Korean jobs is the language proficiency in Korean, it is clear from the educational background that majority of the youth who attempt to find jobs in South Korea are with some abilities to acquire new learning skills.

#### 4.2. Pre-departure Income Levels

When questioned about the reason to find a job abroad , 20 percent claimed as not having suitable jobs as the reason for looking for jobs abroad, large majority of 80 percent sighted better pay as the reason for deciding to migrate for work. As given in the Figure 4, 96% of the respondents were receiving less than Rs. 30,000 as their monthly income prior to departure.

Given settling of debts, purchasing of land or building a house, saving

**Figure 4 Pre-departure Income Levels**



Source : Created by authors, based on survey findings

money to start a business or any other reason as objectives related to migration to South Korea, an overwhelming majority of 90 percent sighted as saving money to start their own business as their objective of migrating to South Korea. Only a mere 10 percent had other reasons such as settling of debts.

### 4.3. Income Levels on Return

As given in the Table 2, more than 56 percent of the respondents received less than Rs. 30,000 as their income during their engagement in work in Sri Lanka, prior to migrating. Now, after returning to Sri Lanka, 64 percent claim that they receive between Rs. 10,000 and Rs. 25,000 from their savings. Only 30 percent is engaged in jobs that pay less than Rs. 25,000 and it is interesting to note that those who are in this category are; either already selected to re-migrate or waiting to re-migrate in the near future.

The overwhelming majority of 52 percent of the respondents claim that they earn more than Rs. 75,000 from their current salaries or wages.

**Table 2 Financial Status of Migrant workers prior to departure and on return**

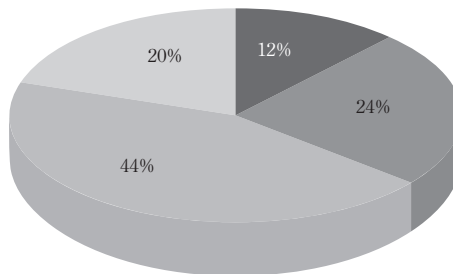
Income Preior to Departure				Current income from								
				Interest Income from Savings					Income from Employment/Business			
Less than Rs. 10,000	Less than Rs. 20,000	Less than Rs. 30,000	More than Rs. 30,000	Less than Rs. 5,000 or nil	Less than Rs. 10,000	Less than Rs. 25,000	Less than Rs. 50,000	Less than Rs. 25,000	Less than Rs. 50,000	Less than Rs. 75,000	Less than Rs. 100,00	
3	7	14	1	3	6	11	5	3	4	5	13	

Source : Created by the author, based on survey findings

Every respondent claims that they earn more than Rs. 125,000 per month as their income during their employment in South Korea and out of the total number 80 percent had spent between Rs. 25,000 and Rs. 50,000 as their income, 20 percent of the respondents have claimed that they spent less than Rs. 25,000 as their monthly expense. In terms of savings, 20 percent declared their monthly savings/investments to be less than Rs. 100,000 per month while remaining 80 percent of the respondents claim that they saved or invested more than Rs. 100,000 per month while employed in South Korea. Every single respondent had maintained their links to Sri Lanka and immediate family and have supported immediate family financially, throughout their employment abroad. For their family monthly expenses, 30 percent workers have contributed less than Rs.25,000; another 30 percent workers have contributed between Rs. 75,000 and Rs. 100,000 and another 40 percent workers have contributed

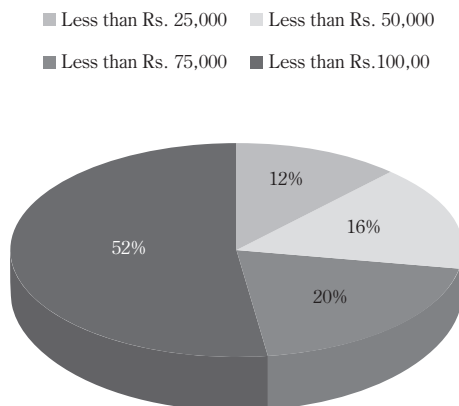
**Figure 5 Current Income from Savings**

■ Less than Rs. 5,000 or nil    ■ Less than Rs. 10,000  
 ■ Less than Rs. 25,000        ■ Less than Rs. 50,000



Source: Created by authors, based on survey findings

**Figure 6 Current Income from Employment/Business**



Source: Created by authors, based on survey findings

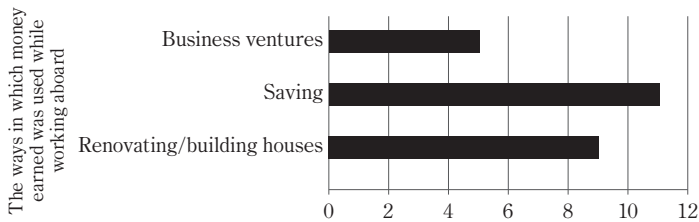
between Rs. 50,000 and Rs. 75,000.. However, as explained in the Figure 5 below, a majority had saved money in line with their objective of migrating for work; to save money to start a business on their return to Sri Lanka.

Some have already spent money to start businesses using friends and family while they were still working. Only 32 percent claim that their major spending was related to obtaining of lands or building or renovating their houses. It was interesting to note that 60 percent of the returnees claiming to be engaged in business ventures as originally planned. Though this research did not go deeper into study, the sustainability aspects of the business, since majority claim their current income to be over Rs. 75,000 per month, it is safer to assume that their economic reintegration had worked up to now.

Majority of the workers have been in the industrial sectors as laborers. Their duties varied from machine operators, machine operating assistants, Folk-lifters to injection molders. Except one person, none of the other



**Figure 6** The ways in which money earned was used while working aboard



Source: Created by authors, based on survey findings

respondents used the skills or training received during their employment in South Korea in their current employment or business. But the respondents claim that they have learnt value systems which they would be using in their life engagements. These value systems include; Engage in your employment for several hours of the day (in comparison to spending time in leisure), Courage to face challenges in life, Respect for co-workers, How to get maximum out of limited time similar to Korean Nationals? Work according to a system and a time plan, How to live with limited facilities and comforts. Majority of the respondents claim that the only regrets they have about the time spent in South Korea is that it kept them away from their family and loved ones. A few respondents (approximately 30 percent) used words such as “lost youth” engaged in heavy duty work.

#### 4. Concluding Remarks

Structural theorists argue that returnees may not be able to reintegrate and consequently may decide to leave again if the gap between their own norms and values and those at home is too large (Cassarino; 2004, 268). Furthermore, Structural theorists argue that the returned migrants may

also respond to expectations at home by spending their savings on consumption or unproductive investments. The respondents of this study did not support this argument perhaps because they were away only for a limited period of time; 5 years only. 60 percent of the respondents revealed that they are already engaged in business ventures in line with their objective of migrating to save money to start business.

Perhaps owing to values and cultural habits, this category of respondents seems to have invested money or saved money rather than spent on family or to keep up with societal expectations. When a similar study was done in 1990 (Athukorala: 1990) involving Sri Lankan returnee migrants, the research concluded that “*an overwhelming majority of returnees have distinct preference to invest in real estate or to keep their money in the form of institutional savings*”. According to this current research findings involving a particular set of returnee migrants; returnees from Korea, overwhelming majority have saved a reasonable amount and currently earning interest from those savings. On top of them, a reasonable amount and currently earning interest from those savings. On top of them, a majority of the returnees are receiving income from their business ventures too. Only a relatively smaller group, 30 percent is planning to re-migrate while others have not shown any keenness to migrate in the near future. Though the latter does not necessarily completely rule out the possibility of re-migrating in the future, they seem to be contented with the current status of affairs in their lives at the moment. Out of this group also, approximately 10 percent rejected the possibility of migrating for work stating “no need to go again as I have saved enough”.

As mentioned by Athukorala (1990), in normal terms, migrant workers receive as much as eight times of salary/wages from working abroad, compared to working locally. This he argues as perhaps the sole “pull

factor” determines migration. An overwhelming majority of respondents of this research also supported this argument stating “better pay” as the main reason to travel to South Korea for work. Since returning, by investing their earnings in business ventures and savings, these returnee migrants seem to be still receiving substantial sums, which is comparatively at least 3 times higher than the salary of the government servants in the same age group with similar educational qualifications, which perhaps explains the main reason for the popularity of South Korea as a destination among male youth with a reasonably good educational level.

What needs to be highlighted is the fact that 90 percent of the sample had completed their education Level up to G. C. E. Advance Level and decided to migrate a few years after completion of schooling. They have not found employment in the local market that provides them with salaries to meet their expenses. For example, 56 percent claimed that their income prior to departure was less than Rs. 30,000. They have migrated and workers in industrial sites as laborers, machine operators, assistant machine operators, etc but skills they acquired was not transferable on return. Only 1 respondent out of the sample is using language and other skills learnt in South Korea in his current work. He had migrated with the objective of saving money to start a business, while abroad, he had engaged in the bakery industry. On return, with his own money he had started a bakery and subsequently, he had managed to invite an investor from South Korea to come to Sri Lanka and become a partner in his business. He is currently having two bakery outlets and is aiming to expand the business into a chain of outlets. All the others are engaged in work that is not directly linked to what they did or learnt in South Korea, which perhaps, is wastes of skills but as structuralists argue, if there are no systems and structures in the home country to absorb the skills gained, that inevitably go waste.

As target savers, majority of these returnees seems to have displayed resilient in the face of spending options in their destination country, even though they are still young and could have spent a portion of their income for leisure. With the understanding that their stay in South Korea as a temporary opportunity to reach a life time target, they have undergone hardships and reached their ultimate goal of saving enough to start a business on return. As some have mentioned, South Korean environment itself where factory owners and laborers work side by side with strict schedules and targets may have had an impact on their behavior. As one respondent mentioned, he seems to have learnt “how to work more hours of the day without wasting too much time in leisure”.

This resilient, hardworking and still young workforce had left the country of origin, had learned new skills, experienced new values including commitment and dedication to work, workplace equality, reaching difficult targets, etc and collected money to realize their ultimate target of opening a business venture and returned to the country of origin as individuals. All they carried back with them, monetary and non-monetary is used or wasted as individuals. South Korea is currently 3rd in the world in terms of Steel Industry and as a nation they learnt their technology by purposely placing workers in German firms. Perhaps, as South Korea did in 1960s, Sri Lanka as a country should have a practical and long-term reintegration plan to utilize skills and experiences gained by these workers for the development process of the country.

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