

CONCEPTUAL AND THEORETICAL ISSUES INVOLVED IN THE MIGRANTS OF KERALA

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Abstract

There are both economic and social imbalances among states in India and this leads to internal migration in general. High literacy rates, better education and lack of professional and skilled jobs had prompted Keralites to look for higher wages and skilled labour outside India. This trend has led to a decline in the availability of workforce in Kerala especially in unskilled jobs. Kerala has the lowest population growth rate in the country and is set to become the first state with zero population growth rates or with a negative growth rate. The structure of Kerala economy has change from one dominated by agriculture to one dominated by services sector. This is primarily due to growth of both public and private services necessitated by increased demand due to the high remittances from abroad. The manufacturing sector is no longer attractive to the entrepreneurial class in Kerala and much investment has taken its course to the service sector which is not governed by strict labour laws. The State does not produce many things it should have and nature and quantity of labour demanded and supplied. For instance there is labour shortage for traditional agriculture purposes or for manual work as well as for trained and skilled personnel in emerging areas of employment. Due to this acute shortage of manpower, in the farm and construction sector over the recent years, has encouraged migration of casual workers from other states of India. Migration in general, internal or inter-state, migration of labour is an age-old phenomenon in India. The people compelled to migrant due to two factors-development; driven factors and distress factors. On one hand, the migration of people is mainly motivated by the desire to access better employment opportunities, higher wages, good quality education, health condition and better living conditions. While on the other hand, it is also impelled by push or distress factors at home such as the lack of employment, low wage rates, agriculture failure, debt, drought and natural calamities. Both these reasons are equally responsible for migration of casual workers to Kerala has thus lost reasonably stable and secure jobs which come from the manufacturing sector. Consequently there has occurred a structural imbalance in the labour market of kerala.

Key Words: internal migration, remittance.

INTRODUCTION

Today, the presence of migrant workers in Kerala's labour market is so visible that language spoken in many of the large-scale construction sites is often not Malayalam, but Tamil, Hindi, Bengali, Assamese or Nepali. Initially migrant workers in Kerala were from the neighbouring districts of Tamil Nadu and Karnataka, and they were mostly seasonal and short-duration (especially daily, weekly and monthly) migration. However, in recent years Kerala is witnessing large inflow of migrant worker from different states of the country, such as Assam, West Bengal, Bihar, Uttar Pradesh and Orissa. As per the Census 2001, total

number of migrants (by place of birth) from other states in Kerala recorded at 412849, which is 1.3 percent of Kerala's total population. The largest number of migrants in Kerala is from Tamil Nadu (67.8 percent) followed by Karnataka (13.49 percent), Maharashtra (4.47 percent), Andhra Pradesh (2.29 percent), Pondicherry (2.12 percent), Uttar Pradesh (1.43 percent) and West Bengal (1.03percent). Among the districts of Kerala, Ernakulam district received the highest inflow of migrants (13.56 percent), followed by Idukki (12.85 percent) and Trivandrum (11.77 percent) (Surabhi and Kumar, 2007).

Reasons of Migration to Kerala

Several overlapping factors have been identified behind migration of the workers. The major reasons of migration are the poor economic condition and low wages in native region. About 76 percent migrants reported the reason of migration as getting employment/better employment, another 46 percent reported as meeting household expenditure and 33.73percent reported as accumulation of savings. The other reasons reported by the migrants are to repay debts, financing education of dependents and marriage of dependents. This suggests that migration is possibly for the creation of outside support system for livelihood. Further, dominance of economic reasons also suggests that it is primarily the differences in economic opportunities between different states that pushed for migration of workers to other states.

Theoretical analysis

According to a study , Kerala is not able to create enough jobs suitable for an increasingly larger number of youngsters with high levels of education. Although lack of jobs was the main reason for migration of Keralites till 2000 , the notion of higher wages abroad have become an addictive trend among Keralites even though currently the wages obtained in Kerala has become similar to those obtained abroad in many cases. Besides, the glamour associated with Gulf emigration is still very strong among the Kerala youngsters. This is an important positive factor in their decision to emigrate instead of working in the state.

According to a 2013 study conducted by Mr. M. P. Joseph IAS (R), Dr. D. Narayana and Dr. C. S. Venkiteswaran on behalf of the Gulati Institute of Finance and Taxation for the Department of Labour and Skills of the Government of Kerala, there are over 25 lakh (2.5 million) domestic migrant labourers in Kerala from other states of India, as well as from Bangladesh and Nepal , in 2016 this figure stood over 40 lakhs (4 million) with an annual arrival rate of 2.35 lakhs with a sum of Rs 25,000 crores going outside the state each year as wages to the migrant workers. According to official estimates, the expatriate Malayali population earns in excess of Rs. 75,000 crore annually. The number of migrant workers in Kerala is much larger compared to only 16 lakh (1.6 million) keralites working outside India .In 2013, the number of migrant workers in Kerala was almost one-tenth of that of the local population which was about 33 million in 2011. It is estimated to rise as high as 48 lakhs(4.8 million) by 2023 despite the decline of migration of keralites to other countries for lucrative jobs. Besides, within 10 years, the majority of the local population would have aged above 40 years and this could lead to a further increase of migration from other states. In many cases, the high linguistic, social and cultural differences of Kerala and these other states and the large distance makes it similar to international migration rather than internal migration.

Push and pull factors for attracting migrants to Kerala.

According to Dr. Manav Paul, there are push and pull factors attracting migrants to Kerala. The push factors like poverty, unemployment, density of population, bad yield from agriculture, low demand for labourers and other factors like raising up families, lack of civil activities in the residential area, disasters, wars, internal fights on basis of caste, creed, race affect the flow of migrants to Kerala. Adding to this, the pull factors like better employment opportunities, standard of life in Kerala, high wages compared to other states, lesser communal clashes, high health indices, provision of education for children attract migrants to Kerala.

Wages

The high minimum wages with comparatively better living conditions in Kerala even in the villages are often the motivating factor for migrant workers from other states as the wages are often double or even more than three times of the wages obtained in other major cities in India with higher living costs. For agricultural work like ploughing and tilling, the average daily wage in Kerala was more than Rs 713, followed by Tamil Nadu at Rs 515. The lowest wage being paid in the country was Rs 187. States like Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Gujarat and Odisha paid wages in the vicinity of Rs 200. The wages for non-agricultural work is also much higher in Kerala. Carpenters and plumbers get wages which are two times the national wage average for their profession. The data shows that while the average wage ranges between Rs 200 and Rs 300 for different professions in states across the country, Kerala does not pay below Rs 600 for any job. It is even said that a migrant labourer from Bihar, who would get Rs 40 at his native place, makes a minimum of Rs 600 in Kerala. However, Keralite workers are paid even higher amounts and so, most of the times the local residents prefer the migrant workers because of the comparatively cheaper labour. Even though the wages for labour are high, the cost of living in the state is the same or even lower than in many other parts of the country. Over 70 per cent of them earn wages above Rs.300 per day. On an average, they remit Rs.70000 per person annually and the remittances are almost entirely through banking channels.

However, according to the last NSSO Survey (2011-2012), in the category of major states, Kerala has the highest Unemployment Rate (UR). Kerala's unemployment level is at 7.4% , while in other states it is below 4%. Even though the rate has declined over the years, a whopping 50 lakh (5 million) people are estimated to be unemployed in the state. The unemployment rate is lowest in Gujarat, at 0.5 per cent. However, Gujarat is a low paying state on daily wages. Reading the two reports together, one can infer that while migrant labourers are attracted by the high daily wages, the natives are not opting for these jobs. Literacy and higher levels of education too has contributed to this.

Demographics

The authorities find it difficult to get an exact number since thousands of migrants are said to move through the state from one part to another every day and at least 1500 new migrants reach the state every week. According to the 2013 study, which was based on a Survey of the Domestic Migrant Labour coming into and leaving the Kerala, the remittances of migrant workers in Kerala to their home states are over Rs. 17,500 crores which is equivalent to 4 per cent of Kerala's gross domestic product. To put this in perspective; while the total

remittances to Kerala from Keralites abroad, including in the Middle east countries from Apr 2013-Mar2014 were Rs 72,680 crores, the amount of household remittances to Kerala from its citizens abroad during Apr-March 2014 was only Rs 15,129 crores which is lesser than the amount which the migrant labourers in Kerala send to their home states.

The Migrant workers is a work force consisting almost entirely of single males aged between 18 and 35 years and is highly mobile within Kerala. As per a 2013 study commissioned by the government, every fourth male between the ages of 20 and 64 in the state is likely to be a migrant. Whereas 60 per cent of them work in the construction sector, they also work in the hospitality, manufacturing, trade and agriculture sectors. Their skills range from unskilled to skilled carpenters, masons, electricians and the like. Around 30,000 migrants have settled down permanently at Kozhikode and Thiruvananthapuram. Migrants now make around 65% of several private enterprises. In industries such as cashew, hotels, brick kilns, construction, quarries and fishing their daily wages range from Rs.400 to Rs.900.

Traditionally, the largest number of migrant workers in Kerala used to come from Tamil Nadu with many Tamil colonies existing in Kerala and many of them having been integrated with the locals in Kerala. Although a few studies say that labourers from neighbouring states like Tamil Nadu far outnumber the others, the cultural similarities with Kerala makes them well integrated with the local population. Even though there are still a large number of workers from Tamil Nadu and Karnataka, the trend in replacement labour seems to have reversed as according to the survey in 2013, 75 per cent of the migrant workers come from five states, namely West Bengal, Bihar, Assam, Uttar Pradesh and Odisha. A large number consist of workers from Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Gujarat, Haryana, Uttarakhand and Manipur as well. The languages seems to have found ground in Kerala with many shops advertising themselves also in hindi and instances of local transport buses displaying destination names in Bengali and even Oriya .In Perumbavoor, one of the towns with the largest migrant population in the state(over 100,000 migrants), there are Bengali hotels, churches with gospels in Oriya and Imams from Bengal and Odisha who give their speeches in their respective languages, theatres playing Bengali, Assamese and Oriya movies as well as a Gandhi Bazaar and a Bhai Bazaar. According to S Irudaya Rajan, a professor and expert on migration studies at Thiruvananthapuram's Centre for Development Studies (CDS) , Kerala is a field to watch out how migration, ageing and demographics change the landscape .

1. Issues and Challenges

Initially the tamil population used to migrate in large numbers to Kerala but appropriate action by the Tamilnadu government in providing welfare schemes has called many of them back. Tamils were generally accepted because of the cultural similarities. But migrants from other states often find it difficult to integrate due to large differences in culture, food habits, language and lifestyle.

2. Illegal Migrants

The government is taking steps following the concern about public hygiene and the scare of insurgents and illegal migrants finding their way into the state.

3. Bangladeshi Migrants

Illegal migrants from the neighbouring country of Bangladesh have also been arrested in many cases where the migrants, come under the pretext of being from West Bengal or Assam and as citizens of India. It is estimated that a large number of Bangladeshi illegal immigrants live in Kerala under the pretext of being from West Bengal and the Kerala police has been finding difficult to identify as they often mingle with migrants from other states and disappear into the crowd. It is estimated that about 20 million (2 crore) citizens of Bangladesh have crossed into India illegally in the last two decades alone. and had even led to events like Assam Movement. In Kerala, this migration happens due to the high wages, quality living conditions but also due to the sizable minority population in the state. Anti national activities have been reported; the latest in which in August 2016, a native of west Bengal was arrested for insulting the national flag and he was later found to be an illegal immigrant from Bangladesh. There is said to be major racket at the borders of West Bengal and Assam with Bangladesh which provides illegal migrants with identity cards.

4. Education

Majority of the migrant workers do not have any special skill, while the state's construction, hospitality and retail sectors among other areas demand skilled work force. The unskilled migrant workers are unable to fill the skill gap. Skill development institutes are proposed to be setup in the state. The poor enrollment of children from migrant families in schools is also a concern in the state historically boasting of the highest literacy rate in the country.

5. Health and Social status

A study conducted in 2013 by the Gulati Institute of Finance and Taxation for the Kerala government has recommended that the government take steps to improve their housing and living conditions. Registration on arrival is also proposed. The report also suggests that the migrant labourers be brought under the ambit of Rashtriya Swasth Bhima Yojana

There have also been concerns about the working conditions and long working hours of migrant labourers, this issue came to the forefront in regard to the plywood industry in Perumbavoor. Introduction of health cards were also proposed due to finding diseases in migrant workers which were eradicated by the state and because of the introduction of new diseases and a proposal to screen all the workers is being made under the "Safe Kerala" campaign.

6. Begging and human trafficking

Kerala has the lowest proportion of homeless in india. Once a rare sight, begging on the streets is on the rise. There also have been reports of child trafficking on the rise with many street children in Kerala from other states. Although Kerala does not have major industries with scope for potential child labour, small-scale industries, particularly based in cottages and quarters, are stealthily engaging children.

7. Crime

The rising rates of crimes with many of them attributed to the growing number of migrant workers have made their acceptance into the local community harder. Perumbavoor and its

adjoining areas in the Ernakulam rural area with the largest concentration of migrant workers in the state has earned itself a prominent place in the state crime map. During the last five years, 1,770 cases registered in the state in which migrants were accused. Drug trafficking, fake currency, robbery are the major cases involving migrants, while there were brutal murder cases also in which migrants were involved. In an analysis, out of 38 cases of murder reported in Perumbavoor area which has one of the largest number of migrant in the state in the last 5 years, 32 had links to migrant labourers and such a trend is observed in other parts of the state as well with only a few arrests made as the accused often flee the state. 323 cases of crime are registered relating to migrant labour in the Ernakulam rural area alone in the last five years.

The local respondents reported that no doubt the migrant labourers were advantageous but at the same time they were also responsible for causing a number of problems such as environmental, health, social, psychological and economic. During the data collection, local respondents also held that migrant labourers were responsible for increasing evils like drug addiction, rape cases and alcoholism and as a result the local youth is getting addicted to these evils. In spite of all these problems and evils, the general impression of the local respondents was favourable towards the migrant labourers. A majority (58 percent) of the local respondents had supported the fact that migrant labourers should be allowed to migrate in Kerala as the industrial, agricultural, construction and household work were being done by such labourers.

Welfare Schemes are necessary for improving the conditions of migrant people of Kerala.

8. Education

The Kerala government is considering the development of a Skill Development Institute for migrant workers. It has already established Indian Institute of Infrastructure and Construction in Kollam city and new centres of Kerala Academy of Skills Excellence (KASE) will be opened soon in other districts. Although a large number of the children of migrant workers are enrolled in government schools, the state education department has opened schools for the children of migrant workers under Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan. Region specific teaching curriculum has to be often adopted as the origin and languages of migrants always differ.

9. Health and Social security

Kerala is the first State in the country to enact a social security scheme for the migrant workers and the State is the first to provide benefits to the job-seekers from outside with the Kerala migrant workers welfare scheme set up in 2010. The police has started audit of migrant workers in cities like Ernakulam through which biometric details have been captured and ID cards issued. In 2016, a new insurance scheme called Awas was launched to provide social security to the migrant workers and also to act as their database and registry as the crimes involving migrant workers are also rising along with the population.

Conclusion

Migrating for work is an historical source of livelihood for many regional households and migrant labour is an important source of labour for many sectors including agriculture. West Bengal and Assam dominated the sources of migration to Kerala. Kerala economy faces the existing agriculture and construction sectors is mostly dependent on migrant labours .

Kerala currently offers free health care for all the migrant workers and is planning legislation to address the migrant labourers issue with the "The Kerala Migrant Workers Social Security Bill". The first official labour camp will also be opened for workers from the North and North eastern parts of the country in the Palakkad district which would accommodate about 1500 workers and camps will be established in all other districts in the next phase. The department also plans to start kiosks and call centres with people proficient in Hindi as staff to interact and understand the problems of the labourers. Migrant Suraksha Project is being implemented across the State under the aegis of the Kerala State Aids Control Society among migrant labourers since 2009 mainly to detect HIV+ cases among them and to create awareness and health cards also have been issued to the labourers. Many private foundations have their own 'migrant suraksha projects' and even free medical camps which aims to improve the life of migrants working in the state. Exclusive grama sabhas or village councils are planned for the migrant labourers to identify their issues and find solutions. New initiatives like total literacy programmes and health campaign for migrants also introduced recently.

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