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**Exploring the Drivers of
Long Distance Labour Migration to Kerala**

N. Ajith Kumar

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Khadi Federation Building, NH By-pass
Padivattom, Kochi-682024
Kerala, India.



91-484-2805107, 2805108



csesindia@gmail.com



www.csesindia.org

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Abstract

The paper examined the drivers of migration of labourers from far off states to Kerala. Kerala, which has a long history of in migration from the neighbouring states of Tamil Nadu and Karnataka, has been witnessing large inflow of unskilled labourers from far off states in East, North-east and North Indian states. The paper finds that the co-existence of several factors in the state helps to overcome the friction of physical, linguistic and cultural distance between the states of origin and Kerala. The high wage rates and opportunities for year round employment in Kerala are the obvious primary drivers of migration to Kerala. Fast economic growth taking place in the state and the structural change in the economy in favour of tertiary sector and construction sector are facilitating factors. The long tradition of out migration to other states and emigration to other countries, decline in the young domestic workforce caused due to demographic transition and higher educational attainment of Kerala population have resulted in a shortage of unskilled labour within the state. Apart from the above factors, the fast pace of urbanisation and the rural-urban continuum attracted people to Kerala. The paper also observes that the barriers to emigrate to other countries also facilitate long distance migration within the country. A pioneering initiative of the Government of Kerala to provide social protection to inter-state migrant workers did not have much impact on the migrant workers.

Key words: Drivers of migration, Kerala, inter-state migration, internal migration.

About the author:

Director, Centre for Socio-economic & Environmental Studies, Kochi, Kerala, India. Email: ajithcses@gmail.com. His areas of interest include social and economic aspects of education, governance and service delivery, migration and Kerala's development issues. The author gratefully acknowledges the support and helpful comments received from his colleagues at Centre for Socio-economic and Environmental Studies (CSES).

Exploring the Drivers of Long Distance Labour Migration to Kerala

1. Introduction

Kerala, located in the southern tip of India, has a long history of in-migration. People from the neighbouring state of erstwhile Madras (now Tamil Nadu) migrated to Kerala for working in the plantation sector from the early 19th century. In the post-independence period, in-migration from the neighbouring South Indian states of Tamil Nadu and Karnataka showed an increasing trend from the 1960s. The flow reached its peak in early 1990s. In the second half of the 1990s, Kerala started attracting large number of unskilled labourers from far off states in East, North and North-east India. At present, they outnumber migrant workers from the neighbouring states by a wide margin. Moreover, the flow from the neighbouring states has almost halted and some of the workers have returned to their native place. Majority of the new migrant workers are young in age, having low level of education. The sectors and activities the migrant workers are engaged in also got much more diversified than earlier. They are employed not only in urban areas but also in rural areas. For the purpose of the present study, the migrants from the neighbouring south Indian states are classified as Short Distance Inter-state Migrants (SDIM) and those from the far off states in the East, North-east and North India as Long Distance Inter-state Migrants (LDIM). Obviously, the migration for work within the state of Kerala has not been considered in the present study. This paper examines mainly the factors that drive the LDIMs to Kerala.

Unlike SDIMs from the neighbouring state of Tamil Nadu, the LDIMs from states such as West Bengal, Assam and Odisha have to traverse (between the origin state and Kerala) equal or more distance than to cross country borders. It may be noted that Kerala is the farthest state from West Bengal, Assam and other north-eastern states. There is not much difference in the distance from these to Kerala and countries in West Asia (Ajith Kumar 2011).¹ While the SDIMs from Tamil Nadu use both rail and road transport services to reach Kerala, the LDIMs depend solely on the train services. It takes about 40 hours from Kolkata and three days from Assam to reach Kerala by train. The difference between SDIM and LDIM is not restricted to the physical distance. The linguistic and cultural distance² between Kerala and the states of origin of the LDIMs is much more than that of SDIMs. It is also more than the linguistic and cultural distance between West Bengal or the North-eastern states and some of the neighbouring countries. Keralites speak Malayalam, a Dravidian language. People in Tamil Nadu speak Tamil, another Dravidian language. This is different from the language spoken by people in West Bengal (Bengali), Odisha (Oriya), Bihar (Hindi) or Assam (Assamese).³ All these languages belong to the Indo-Aryan language family. Similarly, the cultural and linguistic differences between a resident of West Bengal in India and one in Bangladesh is much smaller than the same between the former and a resident of Kerala. People of North-eastern states of India are culturally and linguistically closer to Bangladesh or Myanmar. Kerala stands first in Human Development Index among the states in India for which such data is available.⁴ States of origin of the migrant workers, such as

Odisha is ranked 26th and Assam is ranked 19th. West Bengal, another state of origin of the migrant workers in Kerala, is ranked 15th. Infant Mortality Rate, an important indicator of the health of the population, is 10 in Kerala in 2017 as against 44 in Assam, 41 in Odisha and 24 in West Bengal (Government of India 2020).

Zipf (1946) argued that as the effort and cost required would increase with the distance to be travelled and this “friction of distance” or “distance-decay” affects the migration flows. In spite of the significant distance that the LDIMs traverse physically, linguistically, socially and culturally, they have been migrating to Kerala for more than two decades. This paper examines some of the factors that more than compensates for the “friction of distance” experienced by the new migrants.

The study is based on qualitative research techniques such as depth interviews and focus group discussions with migrant workers and depth interviews with other key informants such as labour contractors and employers. However, analysis of the macro economic factors such as differences in wage rates and indicators of economic and social development of different states as well as the distance between states of origin and state to which people migrate provides valuable information for understanding the factors that led to the migration of people from far off states to Kerala for employment. The study also compares the situation of the LDIMs with that of the SDIMs from the neighbouring states who have a different trajectory of migration in terms of duration of stay in Kerala, distance travelled, social and cultural background, language etc.

2. Drivers of Migration

2.1 Difference in Wage Rates and Availability of Work in the States of Origin and Kerala

The unskilled migrant workers from other states in Kerala are mostly from the rural areas. Without ambiguity, most of those who were interviewed said that the most important factor that led them to migrate was the lack of job opportunities and that they cannot survive in their villages with the income they earn. Working in one's own plot of land was not an option as most of them had only a small piece of land. If at all something has to be done in one's own land, the elder members of the family can take care of the same. The second option available to them was to work as agricultural labour. The young migrant workers whom we met pointed out that the volume of such work in their villages or neighbouring areas was sufficient to provide work only for a small section of the workforce. Moreover, it does not provide year round employment. One young worker told us "I had nothing to do at home and was not in a position to survive that way". Another worker told us "we were taking loans, repaying it and again taking loan when I finally decided to move out". Opportunities for employment outside the agriculture sector were also not available. The strategy that appears to be followed is that the elder members in the villages take care of the work available in the locality while the youngsters migrate. In some cases, one of the young members in the family stay in the village while other young members migrate.

An equally important factor was the low wages for unskilled labour in the villages. As mentioned earlier, the

young people who are presently working in Kerala were pushed out of their villages in West Bengal, Odisha or Assam due to lack of employment opportunities and low wages in their villages. But they had other options such as moving to the urban areas in the same state or moving to metro cities in the country such as Delhi, Mumbai, Bengaluru or Chennai. None of the five cities in Kerala are million plus cities. Then why did they come to Kerala? A Bengali worker employed in the construction sector in Kerala told us “I could earn 2-3 times what I earn in Kolkata, capital of West Bengal. You may not get regular work there”. Similar opinions were aired by many others during the depth interviews. A clear picture about the wage difference between Kerala and other states in India is provided in Table 1.

Table 1: Average Daily Wage Rates for Male Labour engaged in Agricultural Occupations (ploughing and tilling) in Rural Area in December 2018

State	Wage Rate (₹)
Andhra Pradesh	358.30
Assam	283.89
Bihar	293.79
Gujarat	265.00
Haryana	384.00
Himachal Pradesh	501.00
Jammu & Kashmir	450.00
Karnataka	368.56
Kerala	767.50
Madhya Pradesh	222.01
Maharashtra	290.33
Meghalaya	290.00
Odisha	239.29
Punjab	358.14
Rajasthan	307.50
Tamil Nadu	557.38
Tripura	270.00
Uttar Pradesh	247.03
West Bengal	329.48
All India	320.85

Source: Labour Bureau, Government of India; http://labourbureaunew.gov.in/WRRI_DEC_2018.pdf accessed on 20-12-2019.

The table indicates the huge difference between the wage rates in the rural areas of Kerala and other states of India. The average wage rate of male casual workers engaged in agricultural operations in the rural areas was only ₹239 in Odisha and ₹329 in West Bengal and ₹284 in Assam. The average was much higher in Tamil Nadu at ₹557. As against this, a male worker engaged in agriculture work in rural Kerala received more than three times the wage in Odisha and more than two times the wages in Assam and West Bengal.

One of the important policy responses in relation to migration in India was the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS), the job guarantee scheme initiated by the Union government. The MGNREGS aimed at increasing rural employment in an attempt to stem the flow of migrants out of rural areas (Bird and Deshingkar 2009). But when the difference in the wage rates between states is very high, it becomes almost difficult to arrest the flow of people from one region to another. Taking into account the differences in the actual wages rates, the MGNREGS wages are fixed differently for different states. The MGNREGS wage rate is ₹189 in Assam, ₹182 in Odisha and ₹191 in West Bengal since March 2018. The wage rates in Kerala is fixed at ₹271. But as noted earlier, the actual wage rate for unskilled work in Kerala is much higher. Moreover, the MGNREGS guarantees employment only for 100 days to the family a year. In practice, the guarantee did not ensure 100 days of work. For instance, the average number of days of work received by households is only 35 in Odisha in 2019-20. The corresponding values are 29 days in Assam, 40 days in

Bihar and 39 days in West Bengal.⁵ Moreover, since the guarantee of 100 days is for the family, individual members of the family gets much lower number of days of work. As against this, migrant workers in Kerala can get job for 250-300 days. Therefore, the MGNREGS is unlikely to have a major influence on the migration from one state to another if the difference in the availability of job opportunities and the wage rates are significantly high.

2.2 Changes in the Structure of Kerala Economy

It was noted earlier that Kerala is ahead of the states of origin of LDIMs in terms of human and social development indicators. The state has also been successful in reducing poverty which is 9 per cent and 5 per cent in rural and urban areas respectively in 2011-12 (Government of India 2013), the latest year for which such data is available. The corresponding figures for Odisha are 36 per cent and 15 per cent respectively. The rural poverty ratio in Assam is 34 per cent and that in West Bengal is 23 per cent. The Kerala economy started growing from the late 1980s which continues till date. Kerala has become one of the fast growing state economies in India. The per capita net state domestic product (2011-12 series at current prices) of Kerala in 2017-18 was ₹ 1,84,000 while it was only ₹84,854 in Odisha, ₹74,204 in Assam and ₹ 93,711 in West Bengal (Government of India 2020). Moreover, the growth in SDP was also much higher than in the states of origin of the LDIMs. The economic growth in the state provided the necessary pull for migrants. The short distance migration to Kerala from Tamil Nadu started much before the turnaround of the state's economy while the new wave of migration of LDIMs started when the Kerala economy was

witnessing fast growth. The growth in Kerala's economy was mainly in the service sector. As a result, the share of different sectors in Gross State Value Added (GSVA) and employment are significantly different from that at the national level. For instance, in 2017-18, the share of the service sector in GSVA is 62 per cent in Kerala as against 54 per cent at the national level (Government of Kerala 2020). On the other hand, the share of agriculture, fishing and forestry in gross value added is 9.5 in Kerala while it is 14.9 at the national level. The difference between Kerala and India is more marked in the sectoral share in employment. In 2017-18, agriculture and allied activities employed 41.8 per cent of India's total workforce. The corresponding figure for Kerala is just 16.7 per cent. The share of manufacturing in gross value added was only 12.8 per cent in Kerala, compared to 18.0 per cent in India as a whole. The share of construction sub-sector of the secondary sector was 18.9 per cent in Kerala while it was 11.6 per cent at the national level. The services sector accounted for 51.9 per cent of the total workforce of Kerala in 2017-18 as against 32.8 per cent at the national level. It is clear that new employment opportunities were created more in the non-agriculture sector (service sector and construction sub sector of the secondary sector) while the employment in the agriculture sector showed a significant decline. The increasing importance of non-agriculture sectors in Kerala's economy was also an attraction for migrants who wanted to shift from agricultural labour.

2.3 Change in Structure of Population

The outward migration from Kerala (to other countries and other states) had created a shortage of local unskilled

non-agriculture labour, which in turn, pushed up the wages further. Outmigration and emigration⁶ and the demographic transition experienced by the state led to a significant change in the age structure of the population in the state⁷ (Table 2).

Table 2: Working Age Population (20-64 years) in Kerala in 1991 and 2011

Age Group	Population		Share in Working age population	
	1991	2011	1991	2011
20-34	7878650	7725402	50.3	38.3
35-49	4871010	7340701	31.1	36.4
50-64	2911250	5085224	18.6	25.2
20-64	15660910	20151327	100	100
Share of working age population (20-64 years) in total population	53.8	60.3		

Source: For 1991 data, Rajan and Aliyar (2004). For 2011, Census of India 2011.

Table 2 indicates that though the share of the working age group in the total population increased from 54 per cent in 1991 to 60 per cent in 2011, the share of the young workforce in working age population came down significantly from 50 per cent in 1991 to 38 per cent in 2011. In fact, the population of the young workforce (20-34 years) showed even a decline in numbers. The decline in the young workforce, caused due to demographic transition taking place in the state, was yet another reason for the increase in demand for young workers from other states.

2.4 Fast Pace of Urbanisation in Kerala and the Rural-Urban Continuum

Usually, the rural population migrates to urban areas for better opportunities. The fast pace of urbanisation in Kerala is yet another factor that attracts the migrants to the state. Kerala remained a much less urbanised society till the 1980s. But the ratio of urban population increased steeply from 18.7 per cent in 1981 to 26.4 per cent in 1991, thereby surpassing the country's average (25.7%). From 1991 to 2011, the pace of urbanisation further increased to reach 47.7 per cent. As against this, the proportion of urban population in India was only 31.2 per cent in 2011. The proportion of the urban population is also much lower in the states of origin of the LDIMs (14.1 per cent in Assam, 16.7 per cent in Odisha and 31.9 per cent in West Bengal). This was facilitated by the settlement pattern in the state which is often referred to as the rural-urban continuum. Unlike in the rest of India, the rural urban divide in Kerala is not very sharp. Due to the availability of water everywhere, the houses are distributed widely. The rural-urban distinction has been further blurred by the development of physical infrastructure and availability of social amenities in the villages. This has facilitated employment opportunities and better living conditions in rural areas of the state. This is one reason for migrants working in rural areas also.

2.5 Network Effects

“When people having nothing to do in the villages, seeing a living example of a person in the village who has earned money by working in Kerala” was something that inspired many of the recent migrants. This information has passed

on from the earlier migrants to the recent migrants. Many of the LDIMs in Kerala did not go to any other place for work (in the state of origin or other states) before coming to Kerala. However, there is a distinction between the group of LDIMs that reached Kerala about 15-20 years back and the recent migrants. The migrants in the former category did not have such information. The abject poverty had pushed them out of their villages. They were not particular about going to Kerala and according to this group, there was not much information about Kerala in the villages when they initially left the village for work. Some of them travelled to big cities in other states and later reached Kerala on knowing about high wage rates and availability of employment opportunities. The latter group came directly to Kerala. They depended solely on the information passed on to them by others who have migrated earlier to Kerala. When asked about what all information was communicated to them by the earlier migrants, almost all of them cited high wages and opportunities for regular employment. Some of them also mentioned that they were told that they can trust the employers about wages. The overall work environment in Kerala may have influenced the employers to be not as exploitative as their counterparts elsewhere. The strong base of the trade union movement has helped in ensuring the rights of local workers. They also acted as pressure groups to make changes in the regulatory framework to protect workers from exploitation (Kumar 2011). When local labour and migrant labour are working in the same premises, the employer may not have the same freedom they enjoy elsewhere to exploit migrant labourers. Moreover, at least a section of the media has also been

sensitive to the issues of the migrant labourers.⁸ This again puts pressure on the employers and contractors and might have affected the perceptions of the employers and contractors about the limits of exploitation.

Information about opportunities for migration flows through the networks. A young worker from Odisha told us “When we come, we know nothing. So, we call up people already here and ask them to find job for us”. Another worker who came to Kerala said “sometimes when I come back from my village, two or three villagers come with me”. The importance of networking in inter-state migration is further revealed from the case of a group of workers from West Bengal who reached Kerala after working for some years in Gujarat. They came to Kerala based on the information that the wages are higher in Kerala. But they went back and the reason cited by them to the fellow migrant workers was that they had established some networks in Gujarat and with that they will be able to go up the occupational ladder.

2.6 Increasing Preference of LDIMs by Native Employers

But network is not sufficient to explain the migration from a region as may be noticed from the Tamil migrant flow. They are closer to Kerala and have been here for long. They had built a strong network in Kerala (Surabhi and Kumar, 2007). Still, many of them are going back and the inflow of new migrants has almost halted. According to anecdotal evidences and newspaper reports, the workers from Tamil Nadu are relatively better off in terms of wages and living and working conditions compared to the LDIMs. The discussions with the Tamil migrant workers and employers gave some insights on the reasons for this

phenomenon. The availability of new labour from the far off states provided the employers an opportunity to make cuts in wages. The wages offered to the LDIMs was about ₹100 less than that of the local labour. Contractors and employers opine that workers from Odisha, Bengal, Assam etc. are more tolerant to poorer working and living conditions and “it is easier to extract labour from them”. Though the working conditions offered to the LDIMs may be better than that available in many other states, it was definitely lower than what was offered to the local labour and Tamil labour. They can also be employed in menial jobs and dangerous jobs. The preference of the employers for the LDIMs was one reason for the decline in the Tamil migrant population in the state. Another reason cited by the Tamil workers, based on the experience of workers who have already left, is that there has been an increase in the employment opportunities in their state. Though wages are still lower than in Kerala, it has improved over the years. Yet another interesting reason cited by the workers was that the welfare measures adopted by the Tamil Nadu government have made them think about going back to their home village.⁹

2.7 Opportunities for Occupational Mobility

Some of the migrant workers met had education beyond class X. All of them came to Kerala and worked initially as unskilled labourers. But after some time, many of them were able to get some semi-skilled or skilled work. One worker who started as a helper in the construction sector is now a mason. He says there are others also who had a similar experience. One of them told us that he is planning to bring more youngsters from the village who

will work initially as unskilled labourer but can later become semi-skilled worker like him. He did not have such an idea of skill upgradation while deciding to migrate to Kerala. But it appears that in the next stage of migration, the opportunities for getting employed as semi-skilled or skilled worker can also drive some of the rural people in other states to Kerala. It implies that factors other than higher wages and availability of unskilled are also important once a critical base of migrant population is available in a destination.

2.8 Safety of Women Migrant Workers

Bora Paromita (2015) in her study on migration from North-east India to Kerala points out another feature which attracts migrants to the state. According to her, women from north-east find Kerala much safer than the rest of the states. After the exodus of people of north-east India from some Indian cities in 2012, the pace of migration from north-east to Kerala started accelerating as Kerala was least affected by this crisis. To quote from her study,

“A migrant worker from Manipur states, “I have worked in Delhi, Hyderabad and Bangalore before in restaurants. Bangalore is the best place, but Kerala is the safest for us; here people do not look down upon the Northeast”. A girl of 23 years, working in a restaurant, from Manipur says, “While going back from previous work, I had to travel 2 hours to where I was staying. And my work ended at around 9pm. So, I can get an auto or bus to my place and there is no problem. It is not like other places.”

Bora concludes that the notion of safety in the state for

women from other states builds in confidence among them to choose this place over others while the question of migration arises.

2.9 Welfare Schemes

In India, social security is listed in the Directive Principles of State Policy and is one of the subjects in the Concurrent List in the Constitution of India, which is federal in nature. Kerala state has been a front runner among the states in India in initiating social security schemes for different vulnerable sections of the society. These schemes, implemented mainly through different welfare boards, have been successful in extending social security to a limited extent to majority of the vulnerable groups. The state government introduced a welfare scheme for the migrant workers, first time in the country, on the May Day of 2010.¹⁰ Under the scheme titled 'Inter State Migrant Workers Welfare Scheme', a membership card is issued to each migrant worker who gets enrolled. But the actual number of workers registered is only a miniscule proportion of the migrant workers in the state. In a state with an estimated migrant population of 25 lakhs, the enrolment in the scheme in 2016-17 was just 2741. It is also found that most of those who got registered in the initial years did not renew their registration in the subsequent years. Most of the migrant workers who were interviewed were not aware of the scheme. It appears that the welfare fund is yet to become a facilitating factor.

In 2017, the state government launched a health insurance scheme, Aawaz, for migrant workers. Just like the Inter-state migrant workers welfare scheme, Aawaz health insurance scheme is also first of its kind in the country.

Under the Aawaz scheme, a registered migrant labourer will get accident and death insurance coverage. The beneficiary will get a free health insurance cover of ₹15,000 and the government would also provide a death insurance coverage of ₹2 lakh. The benefit of this medical insurance scheme can be availed in government hospitals of the state as well as empanelled private hospitals. Aawaz, however, duplicates some of the benefits under the Inter-state migrant workers welfare scheme. The state government also initiated a construction project named *Apna Ghar* under which hostel facilities are provided to inter-state migrant workers at subsidised rates to address the difficulties faced by them to get suitable accommodation facilities.

The lack of proper identity card is one thing that can affect an individual's chance to migrate especially when the receiving state is strict in enforcing laws. The chances of verifying the identity card is higher for migrant workers compared to the local community as they are sometimes branded as 'unreliable outsiders' and criminals by some local people. Some of the migrant workers provided insights on the importance of the identity cards impacting the migrant flow. One worker from Odisha told us "I wanted to bring my brother. But he does not have an identity card". Another LDIM told us "Police sometimes ask us to go back when proper identity card is not there". The absence of identity cards also limit the chances of accessing welfare schemes for migrant workers.

2.10 Barriers in International Migration

Some of the LDIMs have thought about the possibility of going abroad for work. When asked about why they do not

go to the countries in West Asia or elsewhere, they had a perception that it is very expensive." Going to Dubai is very difficult as many certificates have to be produced. It is very strict now. It is very difficult for people like us". Another worker observed "It will cost us ₹1,00,000 or so. If we make that, we will have to work a few years to regain that money". As against this, migrating to Kerala does not incur much expense and there are no barriers to entry. The to and fro fare for reaching Kerala by train (₹1,400 from Kolkata to Kochi) is equivalent to about three days wages the Bengali workers get in Kerala and only about two days wage for those who come from Odisha. It appears that the entry barriers of the potential destination countries and cost of emigration are also influencing the migration flow within a country.

3. Conclusion

The paper examined the drivers of migration of labourers from other states to Kerala. Labourers from east, north-east and north Indian states are coming to Kerala, the farthest state from the states of origin. It happens in spite of the physical, linguistic and cultural distance and the availability of employment opportunities in other Indian states as well as other countries, particularly West Asia. It appears that the co-existence of several factors in the state helps to overcome the "friction of distance". The high wage rates and opportunities for year round employment in Kerala are the obvious primary drivers of migration to Kerala. The wage rates in Kerala are significantly higher than not only the states of origin but also the potential destinations of the LDIMs. Fast economic growth taking place in the state is a facilitating

factor. The structural change in the economy in favour of tertiary sector and construction sector created demand for non-agriculture labour, which attracted migrant labour who wanted to shift from agriculture sector. The long tradition of out migration to other states and emigration to other countries, decline in the young domestic workforce (caused due to demographic transition), higher educational attainment of Kerala population have resulted in a shortage of unskilled labour within the state. Apart from the above factors, the fast pace of urbanisation and the rural-urban continuum attracted people to Kerala.

Better wages and better work opportunities were the main drivers for migration LDIMs who reached Kerala about two decades back. Afterwards, the flow of LDIMs also depended on the availability of networks, better work environment and opportunities for skill upgradation. It is also observed that the barriers to emigrate to other countries also facilitate long distance migration within a country. The case of short distance migration from the neighbouring state of Tamil Nadu indicates that even when the physical, linguistic and cultural distance is short and there exists a strong network in the destination, the presence of a new workforce can push them out of the state to which they have migrated. The case of Tamil workers also illustrates how changes in the state of origin pulls migrants back to their home state. It is also interesting to note that an initiative of the state government to provide social protection to inter-state migrant workers in Kerala did not attract most of the migrant workers.

The Indian nationals have the right to freedom of movement anywhere in India and the state governments

cannot restrict such movements or insist on any compulsory registration in the destination. The scope for regulating the flow is, therefore, absent. The future of the labour market in Kerala will depend on future age distribution of the population in Kerala, trends in emigration of Keralites, pattern and structure of economic development and reduction or increase in the wage difference between Kerala and other states. The last one is likely to be dependent on the economic development not only of Kerala but also of the poorer states in India. The implications of migration on the local labour market competition are likely to be one of the major determinants of the attitude of the Keralites towards migration. At present, the attitude of the state government and the community has been of welcoming the migrants. But if there is a slowdown of the economy and consequent reduction in employment, the attitude of the public is likely to change.

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Notes

¹Majority of the international migration from Kerala is to the West Asian countries.

²One approach to measuring linguistic distance is based on mutual intelligibility, i.e. the ability of speakers of one language to understand the other language. With this, the higher the linguistic distance, the lower is the level of mutual intelligibility. It is a major factor that determines the easiness with which speakers of one language gained proficiency in a language of a place where they are newly inhabited. Similarly, cultural distance is defined as the extent to which different cultures are similar or different.

³The Eighth Schedule of the Indian Constitution recognizes 22 Indian languages. Even within a state, different languages are spoken by different groups. For instance, though Hindi and Urdu are the official languages of Bihar, majority of the people speak Angika, Bhojpuri, Magadhi, Maithili and Bajjika. In certain parts of Kerala, people speak Tamil, Kannada or Tulu.

⁴See <http://wcd.nic.in/publication/GDIGEReport/Part2.pdf> (accessed on 20-7-2011)

⁵Compiled from the official website of MGNREGA <https://nrega.nic.in/netnrega/home.aspx> accessed on 30-1-2020.

⁶Keralites have been migrating to other states in India and to other countries for several decades for employment. It is estimated that about 2.12 million (Rajan and Zachariah 2020) Keralites have migrated to other countries in 2018 .

⁷The state has reached the third stage of demographic

transition characterised by low mortality rates and low fertility rates.

⁸On the other hand, a section of the media shows a tendency to generalise from a few criminal activities in which migrants were caught by the police.

⁹Tamil Nadu state follows universal Public Distribution System where 35kg rice is distributed to destitute families and 20kg rice is distributed to all the remaining families at much subsidised rates. Some other welfare measures have also been implemented by the Tamil Nadu government.

¹⁰Though Punjab has constituted a Migrant Welfare Board (Parvasi Bhalae Board) in 2009, it was meant mainly to resolve issues related to the migrants. It is expected to take up routine problems faced by the migrants like police harassment and help in their integration with the local society. The Board is also envisaged to develop social safety net for the migrant labourers. The first Chairman of the Board is a migrant from Uttar Pradesh who migrated to Punjab in 1979.

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Centre for Socio-economic & Environmental Studies

Khadi Federation Building, N.H. By-Pass, Padivattom, Kochi - 682 024

Tel: 91-484-2805107, 2805108

Email: csesindia@gmail.com

www.csesindia.org