



DOMESTIC MIGRATION IN KERALA; ISSUES, CHALLENGES AND RESPONSES: AN ANALYTICAL READING



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ABSTRACT

After opening of the doors of the world to globalization, privatization and liberalization, the trends in modern culture of employment, lifestyle and economic development pattern have seen apparent changes than before. Considering India after the new economic reforms the term 'Unity in Diversity' has become very tender and narrow space, especially looking into the migration. Globalization has challenged and changed the economy, labour class, agriculture, even social-cultural patterns of life. It has opened the world to modernization but traditional practices, patterns of production and consumption have been reluctant to adopt or change. Democratic concepts of the world even failed in this regard and job openings and better life opportunities created the pathways of migration and thus limited the space and place concept of individuals and even of State.

KEYWORDS: Migration, Labour, Wages, Economy, Lifestyle, Culture, Poverty, Unemployment,

INTRODUCTION

Kerala being politically highly dynamic and culturally vibrant has sometimes failed to adopt new labour culture after the new economic reforms. It was not because of the poor quality and skill of the labour force but reluctance to appreciate new job opportunities for development. This has been closely observed by labour force of the other States who have been interested to avail the opportunities that later resulted in Domestic Migration of Labour Force [DML] which sometimes instigated conflict between host and migrants. Initially it was started with Tamil migration to Kerala which sounds like '*Pandy Culture*' and later to migration of labour force from other States who outnumbered the Tamilians (Venkateshwaran, 2013). The right to migrate, especially in India and own up or involve in a job is vested in the fundamental right of the Indian constitution (Article No.19) though issues and challenges of the migration vary.

Considering the internal migration statistics of the country; it is higher than external (Deshingkar & Aktar, 2009) and contribute 10% of the domestic income (433982

Million). The apathy of the domestic migration is that it is unorganized and no proper policy can be found though law stipulates working license. Domestic labour migration to Kerala amounts almost 8% of the total population of Kerala which means 25 lakhs DML (Narayana, D; Venkiteswaran; M P Joseph, 2013). Trains that run from North to South (Kerala) and South to North are fully packed and not even sleeper or III A/C tickets are available. This is an evident example of dangers in the trends of labour market in Kerala. Huge Job openings thus and invite them to Kerala. Their presence affects wages, economy, lifestyle, culture and creates new labour market culture in State.

Interestingly as per Interstate Migrant Workmen's Act of Kerala 1978 & 84 it is illegal to import labourers. Accordingly they need to register and obtain Identity card to work in Kerala. If registered they need to pay Rs.30 and get insured for which agents need to bear responsibility though rarely become a reality. Labour contractors see them as easy available labourforce, politicians see them as vote banks - who even arrange



residential certificates, and for businessmen they are customers for profit earning by selling low quality food, dress and other materials (Sunday markets found in the cities for them.)

PERSPECTIVES ON POSSIBLE CAUSES OF MIGRATION

There can be push and pull factors working towards the migration of the domestic labour force from other States. The push factors like poverty, unemployment, density of population, bad yield from agriculture, low demand for unskilled labourers, and other factors like raising up of family, lack of civil activities in their residential villages, disasters, wars, internal fights on the basis of race, caste, creed etc. affect the heavier inflow of Domestic migrants to Kerala. Adding to this the pull factors like new employment opportunities, standard of living in Kerala, high rate of wage as compared to other States, absence of communal and other clashes, high health indices, provision for education of the children attract the Domestic Migrants to Kerala.

Seemingly average age of the migrant's labourers in Kerala is 30 years and 70% of them are Hindus, 24% are Muslims and 6% are others (Narayana, D; Venkiteswaran; M P Joseph, 2013). The migration in the State can be resultant of a vacuum created by Malayalee migration to other States and Countries. Apparently there is no adequate number of work forces to meet the demands of the market. Earlier it was Tamilians but appropriate actions by Tamilnadu Govt. to provide welfare schemes like pension, gas, education etc. have called them back to their State. Tamilians were accepted by people due to cultural similarities. But the other State migrants were not accepted normally by Keralites due to cultural, linguistics, life style, food habits, and political difference. It is therefore fit to understand the migrants of Kerala and related issues like:

1. How society understands DML in Kerala?
2. What are the perspectives and behaviours expressed towards DML by Keralites?
3. Are DML in Kerala enjoying the rights as a citizen?
4. What are the issues and challenges faced by Kerala and DML of Kerala?

SOME GLARING REALITIES

It is found that out of 3.33 Crore people of Kerala 25 lakhs are migrants and out of which 60% are working in construction sector; 8.30% are in industry and 7% are in hotel and others are in various segments respectively (Narayana and Venkitesharan 2013). There is an apparent wage difference among the migrants. It depends on the sector and relationship with agent, capacity and

skill. Though most of them are coming to Kerala for employment there is greater instability. They need to depend on local DML agents who even provide work on 7 days a week. For the agents they are easy accessible work force. Since most of the work force is male they earn RS.300-400 per day and own a bank account transferring Rs.70000/- per year to their home. It is also observed that almost 56% have bank account.

Most of the work force lives in the construction sites with limited toilet and living facilities. Labour camps are furnished with poor civil amenities, less employment security and high risks. If the residence is not at worksite they live in buildings of poor facilities with unhygienic environment and create law and order issues. Toilets are broken; they cook in common and eat low quality food. Since they need to change from one site to another site they live in groups and sometimes create public nuisance. Some of the DML work as daily wage workers. To the DML selling their work force early in the morning is highly risky but profitable. They face no exploitation of the middle man which is very apparent in the market. Another form of selling labour is working under an agent who identifies the employment market and provides accommodation to DML and in turn they are paid salary. This is a safe mode of employment but an evident form of exploitation of the middle man.

ISSUES AND CHALLENGES OF DML IN KERALA

1. Health Issues: In the initial stage of migration inflow was not in group but now pattern has changed with settling down as their adopted home with families. They are more than 5% of total population and marginalized always. They are often outside of the community health care network in the State etc. (Since Migrant labour force in Kerala is not homogeneous and community health intervention is always demanding convergence with other departments and local bodies.) which is always difficult. Since they are from other States where Malaria, Miescles Tuberculosis etc. are common they acts as vectors that carry the diseases in the State. They do sometimes prone to Tuberculosis and other diseases that need health intervention at the beginning (Patric & Chammartin, 2003).
2. Challenge to Trade Unionism: DML provides cheap labour to the production sector of Kerala. Kerala being a State of very formal labour intensive, trade unionism the DML has

- informalized the labour supply. Since social security benefits are often borne by the employer, the cost of production is brought down. DML has created a new labour market system of hiring labour force. Low wage and readiness to work by DML challenges the trade unionism of Kerala.
3. **New Marketing Days and Settings:** Since most of the DML are working six days they can go marketing only on Sundays. Being aware of the situations markets that were closed on Sundays are opened and goods and consumables that they require are supplied. This includes availability banned goods, low quality products, second hand sales of danger, selling of drugs, Pan masala, beedi etc. On these days food is cooked in unhygienic places and sold to this labour force. Existence of middle man and presence of money lenders are also observed.
 4. **Low Profile Individuals with poor Quality Living without Rights:** Most of DML work 8 to 10 hours in a day and live in poor quality buildings and sometimes see them as not individuals but work force. The Kerala being migrant State the very migrant people of Kerala see migrant to Kerala differently (Bibin, 2013). They fail most times to respect migrants as human beings and recognize as citizens of the country with all the rights assured in Article 19 of the Indian Constitution. The ignorance of language and poverty has made them vulnerable and migrants later to accept situations. Keralites forget that the dirty, degrading and dangerous jobs done by them makes the living of Keralites comfortable.
 5. **Problems of Law and Order:** It is true that excretion can be observed and seen Maoists or terrorists can intrude into Kerala through migrants. Most of the time when intelligence report of the Maoists presence or terrorists attacks in Kerala the DML from northern parts of India are observed and even remanded under suspicion. It is true that police or law and order officers need to keep surveillance on them but the best means is ensuring identity. They are migrants and minority. The question raised is can they attack the sons of the land without identity approved by the State? If so it is our fear of being hijacked by external culture.
 6. **Issue of Hygiene:** Kerala being a socially advanced State promotes hygiene and cannot find open defecation where as the labuor camps andresidential area of the DML are unhygienic and sometimes observable open defecation. Therefore some argue that the presence of the DML denies the clean and hygienic environment. Is it our responsibility to create awareness and provide amenities to DML instead of accusing them? Law and order authority have to assure agents or middlemen or contractors to provide safe and secure place for them.
 7. **Cultural Intrusion or Pollution:** The presence of DML, many Keralites believe that creates malignance to Kerala culture and poise threat to social security. Social evils like theft, robbery, drug abuse, sex abuse etc. are due to them. It is true that most of the DML are vulnerable to social maladies but does not mean that they are agents of these maladies. It is unwarranted fear of Keralites who are not ready to accept external culture and their anxiety of being threatened of exposing their culture to others. The unacceptance of others good culture or practices especially their readiness to accept, adjust, work without demanding and shedding pride of being demanded worker is unapprovable. In other words they should avoid social insularity to DML.
 8. **Unwillingness to Accept DML's Contribution to Economy:** The DML contributes a major chunk of the labour force in the unskilled and skilled employment sectors, especially in construction. The absence of their presence can even stop the prestigious project like Metro Rail in Cochin. Construction sector can be stand still without their presence. Their contribution though informal is decisive in the formal economic growth of the State. But Kerala government or local self-governments are not ready to accept them as boosters of economy. Development plan of the State never incorporated their welfare. No local self-government has made willful effort to accept them. For the government they are temporary workers and their contribution is ignored though reality is opposite (K G, 2013). The structural changes in the marketing days are gradual emergence and not planned activities. Government could have constructed labour camps with amenities which could have rented out to ensure safe and secure stay as contributors of the economy. In order to ensure welfare of the DML the political will have to work out amendments of Kerala Migrant Workers Act. Labour officers need to ensure welfare schemes are availed and safety measures are taken.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Improving housing and living conditions for DML should be the priority of the State government. Provisions for affordable housing to DML may be done by the government. Private enterprises with public support should be encouraged to build clean and hygienic residential area and can be provided to DML.
2. State government shall initiate provisions of social security schemes to DML
3. Health coverage through national programmes such as RSBY should be implemented. Targeted interventions shall be initiated and coverage areas of health interventions shall be included the DML as in the case of Polio eradication.
4. To make aware DML their rights and obligations learning of the local languages shall be initiated through television, Radio, long distant trains, railway stations. Radio can be best means because in many of the labour camps they listen to music using either radio or mobile phones.
5. Dispelling the baseless fears of both DML and Local populations should be the top priority of government, especially local government.
6. Development of Domestic Migration Policy at Center and State levels need to implemented
7. Strong actions to keep hygiene in labour camps shall be taken. Law enforcing authorities along with health department shall be vigilant.
8. Diseases left by cultural practices can be another area of fear of the local population and of government. Therefore government must ensure DML obtain medical fitness certificate from local health departments.

9. Invite and promote DML from nearby State or States of similar culture than of DML from different culture. Since some of the DML are staying with families provisions should be made to vaccinate their children (John, 2014)

CONCLUSION

Malayalee (Keralites) a migrant but indifferent and unbearable to migrants of Kerala should change their perspective to DML. They came to Kerala with high hope and looking towards their future as Keralites migrated to other parts of the country and world. It is imperative for us to create a culture of respect and recognition of individuals as human beings and citizens of the country who have constitutionally ensured rights. Right attitude and right perspectives can build nation. Contributions of the DML can never be ignored. Constant efforts and readiness of government inspired by political will can change their living better and build a welfare State.

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