

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

UGC FUNDED MINOR RESEARCH PROJECT

THE SOCIO POLITICAL IMPLICATIONS OF MIGRANT LABOUR INFLUX IN KERALA

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Due to chronic poverty a large number of India's rural youth migrated to urban areas of Kerala in the last few decades. Kozhikode in Malabar has been attracting many a migrant since 1990 and they have been working mainly in construction firms, hotels, shops etc. The influx of migrant labour has a lot of repercussions in the socio-economic fabric of the society. Out of the total of 1210.2 million population in India ,the size of rural population is 833.1 million. A good number of them are forced to migrate to urban areas and are facing the challenges due to migration .Migration brought about rapid transformations in the structure of the labour market and consequently of the employment

Objectives of the study

1. To analyse the overall profile of migration of labourers to Kerala in a historical perspective.
2. To examine the socio-economic impact of migration in Kozhikode.
3. To analyse the spatial transformation and to examine the measures that can be taken to make living better for the labourers.

The Historical Context of Migration to Kozhikode

A major wave of migration that affected Kerala was during the Gulf boom in 1970's . Unskilled youth of Kerala migrated to the Persian Gulf in large numbers and made Kerala's economy a remittance based economy. The migrants had to live hard lives in the deserts of Gulf countries leaving their families behind in Kerala. Their miseries became the central theme of literature and mainstream Malayalam cinema for more than three decades . Natives of Kerala sympathized and empathized with the labourers who migrated abroad in search of 'Gulf gold'. This migration led to the shortage of unskilled labourers in Kerala and the labourers from other states of India started migrating to Kerala. Kerala with its strong lenience to socialist thoughts and commitment to Marxian labour values but was not ready to welcome the migrant labourers into its fold. People of Kerala who have always been tender hearted towards its own people who migrated to the Gulf were not ready to share the same attitudes to their fellow countrymen from other parts.

Regional parochialism which is rampant in the states of India makes it very difficult for the labourers who have migrated from other states seeking better life opportunities. There have been a very strong wave of migration to Kerala (commonly referred as India's gulf) from 1990's onwards.Over 75% of the labourers have come from West Bengal,Bihar,Assam,Uttar Pradesh and Odisha.Today in Kerala there are over 25 lakh migrant labourers –nearly 7 to 8 percent of the state's population. The movement of

domestic migrant labour within India has been difficult for Governments to keep track as their movement is not recorded anywhere and mostly go unnoticed.

Kozhikode (Calicut) is a fast growing district of Kerala which was a part of Madras Presidency during the British colonial rule. People here generally prefer the so called white collar jobs and have a tendency to look down upon menial and manual jobs. For example a mason never wants his son to be a mason and so a labourer never wants his son to be a labourer. Moreover the education here been transformed to such a way where clearing the matriculation exams which was seen as a major hurdle some decades back is no longer an issue now. Private tuitions and the scheme of passing board exams through moderation (as decided by the government) make majority eligible for college education. The youth in Kerala prefer only the executive jobs offered by the multinational companies in banking, insurance and construction sectors which created heavy demand for labourers in all these sectors. This demand has drawn in labourers from north and north-eastern India in large numbers.

So it can be said that the opening up of opportunities as a result of the international migration of local people, the reluctance of the educated unemployed youth in Kerala to do what they consider as menial jobs, the drastic fall in fertility levels that has caused a decline in the young working age population and the comparatively high wage structure in the state of Kerala all are reasons for the current wave of migration.

Impacts of migration

The migrant labourers are able to earn more in Kerala than in their own state. On an average each of them sends home at least Rs.70,000 annually, almost entirely through the banking channels. Together they have sent at least over Rs.17,500 crores every year to their home states. This has made considerable economic impact on the economy. A mason proficient in his work is given as much as Rs 700/- per day. Moreover they work over time and for night shifts and earn more. Also in a state known for high levels of unemployment, especially of its educated youth, there is no sign of unemployment amongst the migrant labourers. Even for agricultural work in rural areas they are employed now due to dearth of domestic agricultural labourers.

The living conditions of the migrants in Kozhikode show that their lives have been taken for granted by the affluent groups in the society. We can see that unemployment that leads to migration also results in personal and financial pathology and carries with it a range of stressors (psychological, social and economic). The pressure of the host culture and the parent culture cause the creation of a sandwich culture coexisting with the host culture. Also there is worry of an unwelcome reaction by the natives against the arriving cultures demanding an equal treatment

We can see that the health and hygiene of the migrant workers have not been taken of consistently. Malaria and diseases of the digestive and respiratory tracts such as diarrhea, dysentery , bronchitis and even tuberculosis are endemic in the areas where the migrants live ,due to poor sanitation . They take epidemic form during and after the summer monsoon when there are flooded drains and pools of stagnant water everywhere. As a result of the prevalence of these diseases ,mortality and morbidity are very high , particularly among women and children. In 2015 Malaria was reported in Kozhikode and the first ones to get infected were the migrant workers. Public health official take measures to control epidemics and improve sanitation when these diseases take epidemic form but after these are controlled they neglect the migrants as no continuous and sustained effort are made to improve sanitation in the slums. Another major problem is the inadequacy of safe drinking water due to their low paying capacity and due to the peculiar conditions governing their settlement patterns. Poor quality of water attributes to a good number of diseases and epidemics amongst the urban poor.

Migration of labourers has severly added to the overuse of natural resources and congestion in Kozhikode. Migration to the cities adds to their population thereby significantly increasing the demand for land and housing. But even if sufficient accommodation is available at reasonable prices, it may be argued that the rural poor migrating to the cities mostly end up in slums.This is very true in the case of Kozhikode district.

As the migrants in Kozhikode are still not organized they do not have any say in fixing wages and allowances. Wage levels result from the individual and collective negotiation between the employees with the owners of firms and no party has come forward to bargain for them. Middlemen and agents extract a share from them which they are forced to give as they are ignorant and organised.

Migrants in Kozhikode do the filthiest jobs that no one dares to do. Numerous cases have happened when migrants lost their jobs while cleaning drainages and sewers due to asphyxiation. Laws and rules in the city fail to secure demands of the migrant group as their presence is least liked by the host population

Migration to Kozhikode has drastically affected the villages in North India , the source destinations from where they have migrated. Villagers are deprived of their most productive and dynamic manpower because most of the migrants are young men and women who aspire for more secure and higher income and better life in the cities. They go to live in the cities through most of their working life and return to their villages only at the end . Women in the absence of their men folk experience a lot of stress and agony due to this separation. Some women accompany their husbands who migrate to Kozhikode Women are placed under different types of responsibilities in the cities where life revolves around the clock. Working hours and other form of discipline replace the informality of rural living. Commuting to work , late working ours absence of sufficient female workers and distance to work place – all these make them easy prey to the anti social elements .

Another major impact is the presence of the children of the migrants accompanying their parents and brothers .The problem of child labour is interrelated to the inadequate wages of the parents . Chronic poverty and also the illiteracy of the parents force many children to take up hard and tough jobs. Diseases and other contingencies may need extra money and the employment of children is resorted to as an easily accessible method to bring in that money.The presence of child labour in the urban sector is mainly in the restaurants, small industries, paper sellers, shoe shine boys and rag pickers

The local population of Kozhikode has a lot of grievances against the indiscriminate use of natural resources by the migrants including land and water bodies. *Mampuzha* , a famous river and supplier of pure drinking water is now filled with filth and non biodegradable plastic waste. The allegation for the present situation of the river is mainly on the callous approach of the migrants. They lack environmental consciousness and thus damage the concept of sustainable use of nature and ecology. Migrants lack environmental consciousness and thus damage the concept of sustainable use of nature and ecology.

In Kozhikode most of the migrants work in construction firms more than any other industry. One of the major features of construction industry is that despite mechanization and may be due to mechanizations , it is highly prone to risks of accidents. Due to no- detection and non reporting the statistics remains unclear and tarnished. Kerala which has tremendous socialist and leftist leanings but do not has not rendered much help to these labourers from other states. Parties left and right have failed to bring about anything concrete for the migrants.

However some positive impacts can be seen as a result of the stay of migrants in Kozhikode. Every time a migrant goes to his village he takes back with him some urban ideas or customs like the discipline of factory, the concept of job with fair wages, the advantages of trade union organizations, ideas on health and hygiene, the convenience of piped water supply and electricity, the usefulness of book and newspapers, the need of education etc. Rural population thus get exposed to urban ways of life. In a state known for high levels of unemployment, especially of its educated youth, there is no sign of unemployment amongst the migrant labourers.

Observations

Some measures can be taken by the authorities for improving the conditions of the migrants. When the state establishes an industrial estate or a wholesale market, the housing of the labourers should form part of planning within the urban infrastructure. This step can prevent overcrowding and growth of slums in the city. Another step is to have a proper record of migrants and their whereabouts. We should have enough information about the migrants: their identity in terms of employment, residence, places from which they have migrated, reasons for migration, local contacts, age sex, skills etc. This will help assess the state of unemployment among migrants with specific categories of skills, the direction of migrant inflow, the demands made on housing, transport, communications and social welfare

The increased attractiveness in rural areas will alleviate or discourage the rural to urban migration by increasing activities right in the rural areas through community development projects. Besides the economic development, the most significant aspect of checking rural to urban migration is to inculcate in rural young the pride and enthusiasm for rural customs, beliefs, values, attitudes, and general culture which educated urban youth tend to shun. It can be done through national rural youth mobilization programmes inducing the young to be responsive, adaptive, and accommodative of rural environment and contingencies.

Though one basically agrees with the concepts of deregulations, privatization and liberalization of the economy, their extreme forms are not likely to work in the interest of the economy or in the interest of the poor. Selectivity and gradualism both are desirable. There is a need for a fresh look at the structural adjustment package in the context of the interests of the total economy as well as the welfare of the poor. Planning in India doesn't incorporate the requirements and demands of the poor. The cities need the poor as automations to keep the show going but are increasingly intolerant to their existence as human beings. The city migrants eventually earn more and eat more and better and whether they continue to live with their kith and kin or not, they certainly miss their rural fraternity.

Free Market Economy must not end up creating islands of prosperity surrounded by sea of destitution. Migration which is ensued by dislocation of millions is going to be graver even more in the coming days. It so becomes the need of the hour to safeguard their interest and make them a part of the mainstream society.

Significance and Inter-disciplinary Relevance

The above study of migration to Kozhikode benefits significantly when examined within the context of multi disciplinary frame work since the social economic and demographic factors influence the spatial distribution of migrants and this spatial distribution in turn has social economic and demographic consequences. Moreover the interdisciplinary approach has been indispensable in attempts to understand the causes of migration, in describing the patterns of migration, their integration with the people etc. Though economic variables may be dominant in any process of migration, non economic variables like education, social structure, institutional setup, demographic pressure etc. are equally strong in determining the direction, size and pattern of migration