

Reasons for extensive in-migration in Kerala; a study from the employers' perspective

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Abstract

Objectives: To find out the reasons behind the extensive employment of inter-state migrant workers in the selected regions and sectors of Kerala, from the employers' perspective.

Methods: A survey of 432 employers or owners of the enterprises who employed inter-state migrant workers was conducted with the help of pre-tested interview schedule. The data was collected from employers/owners belonging to three sectors in the three districts of Kerala. Stratified random sampling technique was used to select the sample. Descriptive statistics like tabulation analysis, percentages and non-parametric tests were used for data analysis.

Findings: The employers in selected sectors faced some labour related issues, mainly labour shortage, higher wages and union problems by native workers. To overcome these problems employer started sourcing and employing migrant workers. Native workers were not interested to take up unskilled and menial jobs in Kerala due to social stigma. Therefore severe labour shortage accompanied with more benefits and less cost/demerits from the employment of migrant workers and consequent preference for migrants in order to meet the demand in some segments of the labour market led to the extensive employment of migrant workers in Kerala.

Application: The study conveys the problems of employers/owners of enterprises and reasons for employing migrant workers in the present labour situation in Kerala. Due to the strong interference of labour unions along with several other reasons, Kerala doesn't have a supportive environment for industrial growth. Hence, this study may help policy makers to take appropriate measures to encourage entrepreneurs and their business.

Keywords: Employers' Perception, Labour Shortage, Reasons, Migrant Workers.

1. Introduction

Migration is a multi-dimensional phenomenon and very much linked with development process of a country or a region. It may have significant impact on population size, age structure, labour market, and socio-economic development of a country or a region and vice-versa. Similarly it is determined by various factors such as poverty, natural calamities, better economic opportunities, political chaos and other numerous socio-economic, demographic and cultural changes. The spatial movement of people from the place of birth to anywhere to reside and settle can be called as migration. It is more often happen due to the social, economic and regional imbalances among states. India has huge demographic potential. Its manpower ranges from unskilled to skilled, educated, English speaking and technically efficient. According to national sample survey report (64th round), a person is considered as migrant if his present place of residence is different from last usual place of residence (UPR). As per 2011 Census 45.36 crore Indians (37 percent) are internal migrants, the figure stood at 31.45 crore in 2001. Among them 70 percent are females, in which most (49 percent) of them are migrated due to marriage. Work and employment was the top reason for three crore of the 14 crore male migrants [1]. In some parts of India three out four households include a migrant [2]. India, unskilled informal workers are more in migration records and most of this migration is of temporary in nature.

2. Background

Demographic transition, high literacy rate, better education and lack of professional and skilled jobs had forced Keralites to look for higher wages and skilled works outside the state and abroad [3]. This trend has led to a decline in the availability of work force in Kerala especially in the unskilled job market. Labour shortage in some segment of the labour market had become a major challenge of the labour market in Kerala since long back. Labour shortage occurs when the demand for a particular type of labour exceeds the supply at prevailing wage and working conditions of employment. At present employers in Kerala found inter-state migrant workers as an alternative to their works due to the non-availability of natives for unskilled works in many fields like agriculture, food processing, and construction, manufacturing, hotels, and hospitality sector. Employing migrant workers is cost effective in many cases and a value added to the organisations in which they are employed in terms of their productivity and performance [4].

3. Review of Literature

3.1. Reasons for In-migration in Kerala

Previous studies have given hint on the reasons for the changing attention (from out migration to in-migration) of migration in Kerala. Some emerging trends in the Kerala economy which had noted in previous studies are age structural transition, changes in the labour market due to expansion of emigration and in-migration of manual workers to the state [3]. The number of expatriate from Kerala has been increasing year after year [5]. The emigration of Keralites and remittances flowing towards state prompted 'consumption boom' which led to increasing construction activities and demand for manual workers in the state. Continuous outflow of skilled and unskilled labourers created a scarcity of labour and boosted the wage rate [6].

3.2. Status of In-migration in Kerala

There are some evidences in the previous literature that the Tamil migrant workers have first arrived to Kerala to occupy the employment opportunities in construction sector, brick kilns and in tea and rubber plantations from the mid-1970s onwards [7]. The central Kerala also witnessed large presence of Tamil migrant workers in the towns from the 1990s onwards [8]. Labour migration from beyond southern states started significantly with the arrival of migrants from Odisha to work in the timber industry in Ernakulam district in the early 1990s [9]. The present stock of migrant labourers in Kerala to be over 25 lakh (2.5 million) and their number may increase to 4.8 million by 2023, with an annual arrival rate of 2.35 lakhs. At present, the number of in-migrants working in Kerala is greater than the out-migrants from Kerala working in different countries. The findings of their study also reveal that Rs.17500 crores a year flow out of the state as remittances of migrant workers. Migrant workers in Kerala are mainly from West Bengal, Odisha, Assam, Bihar, Jharkhand, UP, Karnataka and Tamil Nadu [10].

Migration sometimes leads to loss of entitlements such as rice, wheat, etc., at a subsidized price through Public Distribution System (PDS). In Kerala, inter-state migrant workers cannot avail any benefits from PDS or any other agencies and even some health insurances because they do not have Below Poverty Line (BPL) or ration card in the destination place [11]. Migrants are vulnerable group; they stay in crowded and unhygienic living conditions [10]. They sometimes branded as 'unreliable outsiders' [11]. Previous studies reveal that there is discrimination in wage rates and working hours among local and migrant workers in Kerala. This discrimination exists mainly due to lack of integration of migrants with the local community [12].

3.3. Employers' use of migrant workers

A study conducted in the United Kingdom found that around 50 percent of employers in the construction industry depend on migrant workers for their work. Migrants are preferred because of their "wider occupational profiles, greater problem solving, mobility of social and personal skills" compared to natives [13]. A study conducted in the hospitality sector in the UK found that employers' recruitment decisions were determined by three major factors; "minimising labour costs, reducing the indeterminacy of labour through recruiting 'good

attitude' workers rather than technical skills, and managing the mobility of workers to find the optimal balance between the labour retention and flexibility needs of the business" [14]. Employers' preference for migrant workers is also based on 'nationality' and 'national characteristics'. Employers had positive views towards hiring migrant workers, viewing them as a cost-effective commodity; therefore profit can be maximised [15]. Some other advantages of hiring migrant workers were that migrants were perceived to have a stronger and more positive work attitude and ethic than non-migrant workers [16]. Large number of works in the literature has been discussed about the inter-state migrant workers in Kerala, its impacts on the Kerala economy from the labour perspective. Many scholarly works talk about the labourers' working and living conditions, their compositions and backgrounds, their spending, saving and remitting behaviour, their needs, and problems and so on. But studies which focussed on employers' perception of migration and why and for what purpose employers hire migrants, what compelled for the change in the employment situation in the informal sector mainly from the in-migration context of Kerala have hardly come up. Hence, this paper tries to focus on the employer's perception of in-migration.

4. Objective of the study

The objective of this paper is to explore the labour related problems faced by employers/owners of the selected sectors and reasons behind the extensive employment of inter-state migrant workers in Kerala from the employers' perspective.

5. Data and methods

The present analysis is based on the primary data collected through a survey with the help of a semi-structured pretested interview schedule. Owners of the enterprises who employed or hired inter-state migrant workers constituted the population. Three enterprises namely, construction, hotel/restaurants and manufacturing were selected for the analysis where concentration of migrant workers is more. The sample constitute 432 employers/owners belonging to these three enterprises were selected from districts namely, Kollam from south Kerala, Ernakulam from central part and Kozhikode from northern part of Kerala. Stratified random sampling technique was used to select the sample for the study. List of manufacturing units was collected from District Industrial Centres of each district and that of construction contractors and hotels are obtained from respective local self-government bodies and government departments. The data pertained to the year 2017 (March-September) and descriptive statistics like tabulation analysis, percentages and non-parametric tests were used for data analysis.

6. Results and discussion

The present study made an attempt to understand the reasons or circumstances which compelled the owners of the enterprises to hire migrant workers. The results are presented in the following sub-headings. Reasons can arise from both supply and demand side of the native labourers. At this point it is important to understand whether employers in Kerala faced any labour related problems by native workers or not. If they faced any problems due to native workers, it could be a prominent reason for choosing migrant labour as a substitute. All the sample employers in the study reported that they faced one or the other labour related problems.

6.1. Different labour related problems reported by the employers

The following table shows the different labour related problems faced by the employers. Table 1 presents the distribution of employers based on type of labour problem faced before employing migrant workers. It is clear from the table that employers faced four major problems namely, labour shortage, skill shortage, high wages and labour union problems.

Table 1. Major labour problems faced by the employers in different sectors

Problems Related to Native Labourers*	Total No. of Respondents		Sector						Chi-square	Sig.
			Construction		Hotel/Restaurants		Manufacturing and food processing			
	N	%	n	%	N	%	N	%		
Labour shortage	379	87.73	114	79.17	125	86.81	140	97.22	157.740	0.000
Skill shortage	57	13.19	12	8.33	16	11.11	29	20.14		
High wages	278	64.35	119	82.64	60	41.67	99	68.75		
Union problems	52	12.04	6	4.17	0	0.00	46	31.94		

Source: Primary data, *= multiple response, n = number. of respondents

From the table it can be seen that the most important labour problems faced by the sample employers is labour shortage and high wage rate of natives which were reported by 87.73 percent and 64.35 percent of the total respondents in the study respectively. The sector wise analysis revealed that while labour shortage is the leading problem faced by the employers in hotels (86.81 percent) and manufacturing sectors (97.22 percent), high wage rate is the key labour issue in construction sector (82.64 percent of employers reported). There are a very few employers in these three sectors reported skill shortage as a problem and no employers from hotel industry faced union problems in this study. The chi-square analysis revealed that the pattern of labour problems faced by the employers in different sectors is significantly different as the significance level of chi-square is less than 0.05. From this analysis, it can be concluded that because of these labour problems, mainly, labour shortage and high wage rate of natives, caused for the arrival of inter-state migrants in the states and wide-spread employment of migrant workers in the informal sector.

6.2. Strategies adopted by the employers to avoid labour problems

In the above discussion it is seen that the employers in Kerala were facing different labour related problems such as labour shortage, high wages, union problems etc and also these are some of the important features of Kerala's labour market. To overcome the aftermath of these challenges employers found some alternatives. Table 2 shows the strategies adopted by employers by to solve labour problems.

Table 2. Strategies adopted by employers to address labour problems

Strategies*	Sector						Total	
	Construction		Hotel/ Restaurants		Manufacturing			
	n	%	N	%	N	%	n	%
Employing intra-state migrant workers	17	11.81	20	13.89	3	2.10	40	9.28
Employing inter-state migrant workers	143	99.31	144	100.00	143	100.00	430	99.77
Employing other local workers	14	9.72	19	13.19	7	4.90	40	9.28
Employing family members or relatives	5	3.47	2	1.39	6	4.20	13	3.02

Source: Primary data, *=multiple response, n= number. of respondents

It can be inferred from the table that in hotel/restaurants and manufacturing sectors, 100 percent of the employers and in construction sector 99.31 percent of the employers reported that they hired inter-state migrant workers to avoid problem of non-availability of native workers. While the second most percentage of employers in construction (11.81 percent) and hotels/restaurants (13.89 percent) opined that they also employed migrants within Kerala (intra-state workers). While that of the manufacturing sector, i.e. 4.90 percent of the employers in the sector, adopted employing other local workers as a strategy to address labour problems due to native workers out of total sample employers, majority of the respondents (99.77 percent) in total found employing inter-state migrant workers as a strategy to solve labour problems.

6.3. Supply of Local Labour

The previous literature has been reported that there is huge labour shortage in Kerala [3, 17, and 18]. This study also supports this because majority of the employers in the present study reported that labour shortage

was an important problem faced by them before employing migrant workers. Here an attempt is made to check the extent of supply or availability of local workers. This will also help to understand whether employers employ migrants really due to shortage of natives or not. Table 3 shows the employers' opinion about current status of local labour supply. The sector-wise analysis revealed that majority of the employers in construction (58.33 percent), hotel/restaurants (64.58 percent) opined that there is shortage of native workers whereas only 44.44 per cent of employers in manufacturing sector reported the same. While half (50.69 percent) of the sample employers in manufacturing sector reported that native workers are unavailable (intensity is more) to them. About 38 per cent of employers in construction and 32.64 per cent of the employers in hotels/restaurants also informed non-availability of natives for work. In total, among the intensity level of availability of workers more than half (56 percent) of the employers conveyed that there is shortage of native workers. About 41 percent (second largest share) of the sample employers reported that native workers were unavailable to them. From the analysis it is clear that there is low labour supply of natives in the low skilled manual jobs in Kerala. This might have been one of the reasons for change in the labour and employment situation in the states.

Table 3. Employers' perception about local labour supply

Present status of local labour supply/ availability	Sector						Total	
	Construction		Hotel/Restaurants		Manufacturing			
	n	%	n	%	N	%	n	%
Excess	1	0.69	0	0.00	0	0.00	1	0.23
Sufficient	4	2.78	4	2.78	7	4.86	15	3.47
Shortage	84	58.33	93	64.58	64	44.44	241	55.79
Unavailable	55	38.19	47	32.64	73	50.69	175	40.51
Total	144	100.00	144	100.00	144	100.00	432	100.00

Source: Primary data, n= number of respondents

6.4. Reasons for low labour supply of natives

There are numerous reasons for labour shortage in Kerala. Here an attempt is made to find out the reasons for labour shortage from the employers' experience and perception. Table 4 shows different reasons for low native labour supply according to the sample employers in different sectors. Majority of the employers in all the three sectors (87 percent in construction, 76percent in hotels/restaurants and 84 percent in manufacturing) have same opinion about low labour supply of natives. They opined that natives have higher expectations about their job in terms of wages, working conditions and other benefits. While in hotels/restaurants (75 percent) and manufacturing (57.64 percent) sectors the second most reported reason for labour shortage was lack of interest of natives to do low profiled jobs. But in construction sector, the second largest share (57.45 percent) of employers conveyed that migration of native workers to other places for better jobs.

Table 4. Reasons for low labour supply of natives

Reasons for low labour supply of natives	Sector						Total	
	Construction		Hotel/Restaurants		Manufacturing			
	n	%	N	%	N	%	n	%
Natives are not interested in low profiled jobs	67	47.52	108	75.00	83	57.64	258	60.14
They migrate to better jobs and places	81	57.45	86	59.72	82	56.94	249	58.04
Natives have higher expectations (wages, other benefits etc.)	122	86.52	11	76.39	121	84.03	353	82.28
High education of Keralites	47	33.33	78	54.17	67	46.53	192	44.76
Social stigma	19	13.48	16	11.11	39	27.08	4	17.25

Source: Primary data, *=multiple response, n= number of respondents

However, 82 percent of the total in all the sectors reported that higher expectation about jobs (like wages, working condition and other benefits) as the key reason for labour shortage in the state, because the job seekers in Kerala are mainly professionally and technically qualified and they try to obtain white collar job [19].

But due to the shortage of skilled and administrative jobs in the state they migrate out of state for better opportunities [3].

6.5. Demand for local labour

It is important to understand whether local workers have demand in the labour market or due to the less demand or less preference for natives, migrants are being demanded by the employer.

Table 5. Employers' demand for local labour

Present demand for local labours	Construction		Hotel/Restaurants		Manufacturing and food processing		Total	
	n	%	n	%	N	%	n	%
In demand	71	49.31	92	63.89	66	45.83	229	53.01
Not in demand	73	50.69	52	36.11	78	54.17	203	46.99
Total	144	100.00	144	100.00	144	100.00	432	100.00

Source: Primary data, n= number of respondents

The sector wise analysis in the Table 5 shows that only the majority (63.89 percent) employers in hotel/restaurants industry conveyed that natives have demand in the sector. While more than half of the sample employers in construction (50.69 percent) and manufacturing (54.17 percent) sectors revealed that native workers are not in demand. In hotels and restaurants, there is more need of native workers in order to fulfil the taste and preferences of local customers. This may be the reason for demand for native workers in the sector compared to other sectors. However in total, more than half of the sample employers (53 percent) reported that native labourers are still in demand while about 47 percent of the employers opined that natives lost their demand in the labour market. That means with the arrival of interstate migrant workers natives started losing their demand.

6.6. Composition of workers

Table 6 shows the percentage distribution of migrant and native workers in different sectors. It can be seen from the table that migrant workers are the main work force across the sectors out of the total work force in construction and hotel/restaurant and manufacturing sectors majority of the work force constitute migrants and among migrants, male migrants are more. There are no female migrants found in the construction sector and the composition of native females are also very less since works in construction sector may require more physical strength. While in the case of hotel and manufacturing sector, concentration of female workers are more compared to the construction sector. From the data it can be inferred that native females are still a significant part of these industries. The chi-square analysis suggests that there is significant variation in the number of male and female workers employed in different sectors as the significance level of the chi-square is less than 0.05.

Table 6. Sector wise distribution of migrant and native workers in percentage

Sector	Workers	Migrant		Natives		Total	
		N	%	N	%	n	%
Construction	Male	1619	81.77	361	18.23	1980	100.00
	Female	0	0.00	7	100.00	7	100.00
	Total	1619	81.48	368	18.52	1987	100.00
Hotel/Restaurants	Male	791	68.48	364	31.52	1155	100.00
	Female	11	13.75	69	86.25	80	100.00
	Total	802	64.94	433	35.06	1235	100.00
Manufacturing and food processing	Male	1926	84.85	344	15.15	2270	100.00
	Female	531	42.21	727	57.79	1258	100.00
	Total	2457	69.64	1071	30.36	3528	100.00
Total	Male	4336	80.22	1069	19.78	5405	100.00
	Female	542	40.30	803	59.70	1345	100.00
	Total	4878	72.27	1872	27.73	6750	100.00
Chi-square			129.353				
Sig.			0.000				

Source: Primary data, n= number of respondents

6.7. Reasons for reducing number of natives working in enterprises

Table-7 tries to explain the reasons for declining number of natives from low skilled manual jobs.

Table 7. Reasons for reducing number of natives working in enterprises

Reasons*	Construction		Hotel/Restaurants		Manufacturing and food processing		Total	
	n	%	N	%	N	%	n	%
Not/less interested to hire natives	15	10.42	7	4.90	10	6.94	32	7.42
Availability of migrants	71	49.31	53	37.06	60	41.67	184	42.69
Due to shortage/ unavailability of natives	125	86.81	138	96.50	138	95.83	401	93.04

Source: Primary data, *=multiple response, n= number of respondents

Majority of the employers in construction (86.81 percent), hotels and restaurants (96.50 percent) and manufacturing (95.83 percent) sectors and 93.04 per cent out of total reported that shortage of natives as the major reason for reducing number of natives working in enterprises. Availability of an alternative labour, i.e., in-migrants is the second most important reason and a very few employers in all the three sectors also opined that they are less interested to hire native labours. In the present labour market environment (shortage of labour, strong labour unions and consequent problems) in Kerala, employers may try to avoid problems and they found migrant workers as a substitute to avoid problems, because employers have a positive view towards migrant workers [15].

6.8. Benefits to employers by employing migrant workers

Table 8 illustrates the merits or benefits received by employers in different sectors by employing migrant workers.

Table 8. Benefits to employers by employing migrant workers

Opinion*	Construction		Hotel/Restaurants		Manufacturing		Total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Low wage	64	45.39	76	53.90	99	70.21	239	56.50
Willing to work overtime	118	83.69	77	54.61	118	83.69	313	74.00
Helps to reduce cost of production	52	36.88	23	16.31	47	33.33	122	28.84
No tension about union problems	40	28.37	0	0.00	29	20.57	69	16.31
Regular & punctual	94	66.67	77	54.61	83	58.87	254	60.05
Willing to do any kind of manual work	43	30.50	121	85.82	57	40.43	221	52.25
Convenient / easy/flexible to handle	44	31.21	60	42.55	16	11.35	120	28.37
No benefit	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00

Source: Primary data, *=multiple response, n= number of respondents

Most important reported reason reported by the sample employers was overtime working quality of the migrant workers. Majority of the employers in construction and manufacturing sectors opined the same. While most of the employers (85.82 percent) in hotel industry reported that willingness of migrant workers to do any kind of manual works (which is generally considered as menial jobs like cleaning and washing plates) as the most important benefit by employing migrant workers. Employers also reported many qualities of migrant workers or benefits from the employment of migrant workers such as low wage, cost-effectiveness, no unionism, punctuality and flexibility. Employers prefer to employ migrant workers generally because they have positive views towards hiring migrant workers. Employers consider migrants as a cost-effective commodity; therefore profit can be maximised [15]. They are in advantage of employing migrants in many cases since migrants were perceived to have a stronger and more positive work attitude and ethic than native workers [16].

6.9. Demerits of employing migrants

Employers' opinion about the demerits of migrant workers is explained by Table 9. The analysis says that around half (49.77 percent) of the sample employers out of total reported that migrant workers are floating labours, means they do frequent move from one work place to another and do not stay permanently. About 39

percent of the total employers conveyed that they do not find any demerit or cost by employing migrant workers.

Table 9. Demerits of employing migrants

Demerits*	Construction		Hotel/Restaurants		Manufacturing		Total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Floating labours	67	46.85	60	41.96	86	60.56	213	49.77
Dispute among migrants	13	9.09	11	7.69	10	7.04	34	7.94
Risk factor	4	2.80	13	9.09	7	4.93	24	5.61
Lack of neatness	11	7.69	19	13.29	37	26.06	67	15.65
No cost or demerit	64	44.76	62	43.36	40	28.17	166	38.79

Source: Primary data, *multiple response, n= number of respondents

The inter-sectoral analysis reveals that more number of employers/contractors in construction and manufacturing sector reported that frequent change of work-place as a major problem of employing them, whereas 43.36 per cent (largest share) of the employers in hotels and restaurants revealed that there are no demerits by hiring migrant workers. Employers also reported disputes among migrants and lack of neatness as characteristics or problem of migrants. It is possible among low-skilled workers since they lack education and socially and economically backward. According to a minority of the sample respondents risk is also matters in the employment of migrant workers because many illegal migrants come from Bangladesh to Kerala by name of Bengalis. The rising rate of crimes with migrants' involvement in the state also made their acceptance into the local community harder [11].

6.10. Employers' preference for workers

Table 10 shows the employers' preference for workers in different sectors. Majority, 73.61 percent, of employers in construction sector prefer migrant workers. While only 31.94 percent employers in hotel/restaurants and 41.67 percent employers in manufacturing sectors prefer migrant workers. The percentage of employers choosing migrant workers are less in hotel and manufacturing industries compared to construction. Though the share of employers who prefer migrant workers is more in all the three sectors, it is the least in hotels and restaurants. It may be because in hotels, employers have to maintain the taste and preferences of food items of Keralites. For that native cooks are more suitable than migrants. Therefore owners may have to maintain at least some number of native cooks.

Table 10. Employers' preference for labours

	Type of enterprise						Total	
	Construction		Hotel/Restaurants		Manufacturing			
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Migrant	106	73.61	46	31.94	60	41.67	212	49.07
Native	4	2.78	35	24.31	22	15.28	61	14.12
Both	23	15.97	36	25	29	20.14	88	20.37
No such preference	11	7.64	27	18.75	33	22.92	71	16.44
Total	144	100	144	100	144	100	432	100

Source: Primary data, n= number of respondents

7. Conclusion

Employers in Kerala faced some labour related issues, mainly labour shortage, higher wages and union problems due to native workers. To overcome these problems employer started sourcing and employing migrant workers. Moreover, Keralites were not interested to engage in low skilled, low profiled jobs because they are highly, professionally qualified and thus have higher expectation about the job profile and salary. Hence, natives were reluctant to engage in such jobs due to social stigma. Therefore, shortage of native workers and consequent labour situation in Kerala accompanied by more benefits and less cost/demerits of employing

migrant workers and resulted preference for migrant workers caused for the wide-spread employment of inter-state migrant workers in the state, in order to meet the labour demand in some segment of the labour market.

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