

Interstate Unskilled Migrants of Kerala, South India: The Push and Pull Factors of Long Distance Migration within a Country

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1.Introduction

Kerala state had a long history of in migration which was mainly from the neighbouring south Indian states, particularly from Tamil Nadu. The flow of migrants from Tamil Nadu started in the sixties and reached its peak in early 1990s. However, in the last one and a half decades, the state has been witnessing unprecedented flow of unskilled labourers from far off states in East, North and North-east India. At present, both categories of workers are available in Kerala's labour market. However, there exists a significant difference between the two categories of workers. The flow of workers from Tamil Nadu has almost halted and some of the workers have returned to their native place. As against this, the flow from the far off states continues to grow. For the purpose of the present study, we classify the migrants from Tamil Nadu as Short Distance Inter-state Migrants (SDIM) and those from the far off states as Long Distance Inter-state Migrants (LDIM). Obviously, the migration for work within the state has not been considered in the present study. This study examines mainly the factors that drive the LDIMs to Kerala.

2. The Setting

Kerala state, which accounts for 1.18 per cent (38863 square kilometres) of the total land area of India, accommodates 3.1 per cent (34 million) of the Indian population. The development experience of Kerala was often characterised in the past by high social development disproportionate to the level of economic growth. The experience, often described as the Kerala model of development, had received worldwide attention from both scholars and development agencies. The achievements of Kerala, going at least by macro level indicators of social development, have exceeded those of other Indian states and some of the developed countries. The state is ranked first among the states in India on the basis of human development index and rural social development index. Nobel laureate Amartya Sen cites Kerala as a case of support led security as against the growth mediated security. The achievements of Kerala are often located by Sen and others in the historical processes including the social reform movements, activities of missionaries and the church, mass mobilizations of the poor and the working class for their rights, public action and political activism. Decentralization of government conferring

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more autonomy and powers to local governments and provision for peoples' participation in planning at the local level are the recent political initiatives in the State for giving more voice to the people.

3. Inter-state Migrants in Kerala

Keralites have been migrating to other states in India and to other countries for several decades in search of employment. It is estimated that about 2.2 million (Zachariah and Rajan, 2012) Keralites¹ have migrated to other countries. As per National Sample Survey 2007-08, about 0.9 million Keralites have migrated to other parts of India and one million people from other states in India have migrated to Kerala. But there has been significant inflow of workers to Kerala during the period after the NSSO survey. A recent study by the Gulati Institute of Finance and Taxation has estimated the number of inter-state migrant workers in Kerala at 2.5 million (Narayana et al, 2013) which is equivalent to 7 per cent of the state's population.

In-migration of workers to Kerala has a long history. The migration in the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s was primarily from the neighbouring states of Tamil Nadu and Karnataka. But the recent migration is from states as far as West Bengal, Odisha, Bihar, Assam, Uttar Pradesh, and Uttarakhand. Majority of these migrant workers were young in age, having low level of education. The flow is from relatively backward states to a state ranked on top in human development index and gender parity index among the states in India. There are also differences in terms of the profile of the migrant workers, the occupation they are engaged in and the magnitude of inflow. The activities they are engaged in also got much more diversified than earlier. They are employed not only in urban areas but also in rural areas. The migrant workers are now engaged as construction workers, casual labourers, agricultural and plantation workers, road workers, domestic workers, carpenters, masons, plumbers, electricians etc. They are also employed in jewellery making, cashew processing units, plywood factories, flour mills, quarries, brick kilns, hotels, slaughter houses, petrol pumps etc.

4. Methodology

The approach is to develop a case study of the push and pull factors of inter-state migration to the city of Kochi, known to be the commercial capital of the state, and its suburbs. The case 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 contractors, agents and employers who employ migrant workers. 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 push-pull factors. The study examines the situation with two distinct groups of migrant workers viz., long distance migrants from states such as West Bengal, Odisha and Assam and those from the neighbouring state of Tamil Nadu. The importance of taking these two distinct groups lies in the fact that they have a different trajectory of migration in terms of duration of stay in Kerala, distance travelled, social and cultural background, language etc. Moreover, such an approach provides insights on the factors that pull the Tamil migrants in Kerala to return to their native place.

5. The Distance Factor

Unlike SDIMs from the neighbouring state of Tamil Nadu, the LDIMs from states such as West Bengal, Assam and Odisha may have to traverse (between the origin state and Kerala) 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. The distance to Kochi in Kerala from Kolkata in West Bengal is about 2360 kilometres. People from Assam will have to travel about 3500 kilometres to reach Kerala. This is almost equal to the distance a Keralite travels to work in Dubai (2787 km) or Abu Dhabi (2817km) in West Asia.² The distance the people of the states of West Bengal, Bihar or Odisha have to travel to migrate to countries in West Asia is also not much higher. It is also not much different from what people of Bangladesh have to travel to migrate to West Asian countries (Dhaka- Dubai: 3551 km). Needless to say, it is much more than the distance between Dhaka in Bangladesh and Kolkata in India. While the SDIMs from Tamil Nadu use both rail and road transport services to reach Kerala, the LDIMs have to depend solely on the train services. It takes about 40 hours from Kolkata and more than two 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 distance³ between Kerala and the states of origin of the LDIMs is much more than that of SDIMs from Tamil Nadu. It can also be 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)⁴. 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. Table 1 provides a snapshot of the social, demographic, cultural and linguistic dissimilarities between Kerala and some of the states from where migrant workers flock to Kerala.

Table 1: Selected Indicators of Kerala and States of origin of Migrant Workers

Sl. No	Indicator	Kerala	West Bengal	Odisha	Assam	Tamil Nadu
1	Language	Malayalam (Dravidian)	Bengali (Indo-Aryan)	Oriya (Indo-Aryan)	Assamese (Indo-Aryan)	Tamil (Dravidian)
2	HDI- Rank among states in India (2006) ¹	1	15	26	19	9
3	Literacy Rate (%) ²	93.91	77.08	73.45	78.81	86.81
4	Sex Ratio (2011) ² (females per 1000 males)	1084	947	978	954	995
5.	Religious composition (% in 2001) ³					
	Hindus	56.2	72.5	94.4	64.9	88.1
	Muslims	24.7	25.2	2.1	30.9	5.6
	Christians	19.0	0.6	2.4	3.7	6.1
	Others	0.1	1.6	1.1	0.5	0.3
8	Infant Mortality rate (2011) ⁵	12	32	57	55	22
9	Life expectancy at birth (2011) ⁵	74.0	64.9	59.6	58.9	66.2
10	% of households with access to toilet facility (2011) ⁶	95.2	58.8	22.0	64.9	48.3

Source: 1. <http://wcd.nic.in/publication/GDIGEReport/Part2.pdf> (accessed on 20-7-2011); 2. Census of India 2011; 3. Census of India 2011; 4. Planning Commission; 5. Registrar General of India 6. Census of India 2011;

The physical, linguistic, cultural and social distance between the states of origin and Kerala makes the inter-state migration to Kerala more similar to international migration than with the intra-state migration. Of course, there exist differences between international migration and inter-state migration in terms of visa requirements⁵ and restrictions on mobility imposed in some countries⁶. The point emerging is that the long distance inter-state migration in a large country like India is significantly different from the internal migration within a state in the country. 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 from a region. In spite of the significant distance that the LDIMs in India traverse physically, linguistically, socially and culturally, the flow of such workers to Kerala is showing acceleration over the last one and a half decades. In this paper, we try to examine some of the factors that more than compensates for the “friction of distance” experienced by the new migrants.

6. Push and Pull Factors

According to 'push' and 'pull' theory, migration may occur as a search for an opportunity to improve one's lot in life. Migration can occur as a flight from undesirable social or economic situations which constitute an expulsive push by the community. The destination exerts a 'pull' on the migrants. (Bogue, 1969). Push and pull are complimentary because migration can happen only if the reason to migrate is achieved by pull from an attractive location. The unskilled migrant workers from other states in Kerala are mostly from the rural areas. Without ambiguity, most of them 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 that 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 were clear that the volume of such work in their villages or surrounding 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 "the income was insufficient. 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 there. 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 and other young members migrate.

An equally important factor was the low wages for unskilled labour in the villages. According to the respondents, they get less than ₹200 a day for the work in their 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? We tried to get a feedback from the migrant workers in Kerala. A Bengali worker employed in the construction sector told us "If I work here properly, I would be able to earn around ₹ 15000 per month, whereas even in Kolkata I can earn only ₹ 6000. Regularity of work is also a problem there". Another worker agreed with him saying that "if I earn ₹ 6000 in Kolkata, I have to spend ₹ 3000 for expenses. Here I can earn ₹ 10000-15000 without much difference in working hours and cost of living". "In villages also, we need at least ₹ 4000 for my family

consisting of father, mother, myself, wife and one child". The other workers who participated in the FGD also agreed with him. Another worker from Odisha told us "anyone who has come like it here because they get work....they don't want to go back because there they won't get this kind of money". Similar opinions were aired by many others during the depth interviews.

A better picture about the wage difference between Kerala and other states in India is available in Table 2.

Table 2: Average daily wages for male casual workers of age 15-59 years engaged in works other than public works in 2004-05 and 2011-12

State	2004-05		2011-12	
	Rural	Urban	Rural	Urban
Andhra Pradesh	50.3	64.71	167.65	193.52
Arunachal	104.38	133.74	223.38	234.68
Assam	62.59	73.73	142.63	159.4
Bihar	45.41	54.65	129.01	158.28
Chhattisgarh	37.6	47.62	89.53	119.48
Delhi	73.1	82.87	--	284.85
Goa	97.74	125.27	205.56	181.46
Gujarat	52.8	83.46	115.77	160.64
Haryana	75.26	79.22	202.38	206.67
Himachal	88.88	69.67	182.14	170.87
Jammu & Kashmir	100.24	111.82	209.29	216.86
Jharkhand	51.11	60.16	137.43	154.44
Karnataka	48.33	80.75	162.94	192.24
Kerala	134.86	137	345.14	335.76
Madhya Pradesh	38.58	51.55	107.63	129.9
Maharashtra	47.37	79.57	133.69	173.18
Manipur	72.62	95.3	210.66	168.16
Meghalaya	73.2	79.99	197.84	214.85
Mizoram	111.86	116.97	283.09	231.53
Nagaland	146.05	93.3	163.5	174.94
Odisha	42.29	54.41	123.57	165.34
Punjab	75.14	83.9	202.35	198.45
Rajasthan	64.33	69.15	167.58	180.62
Sikkim	89.16	121.14	208.58	201.62
Tamil Nadu	70.45	83.1	196.65	227.66
Tripura	64.07	74.62	168.01	174.09
Uttaranchal	69.66	69.78	179.25	173.26
Uttar Pradesh	53.37	63.99	136.84	145.23
West Bengal	49.88	64	123.92	134.58
All-India	55.03	75.1	149.32	182.04

Source: NSSO (2010) and NSSO (2013).

Table 2 indicates the huge difference between the wage rates in Kerala and other states in India. The average wage rate of male casual workers in the rural areas was only ₹124 in both West Bengal and Odisha in 2011-12. It was ₹ 143 in Assam. The average was much higher in Tamil Nadu at ₹197. As against this, a male worker engaged in casual work in Kerala received more than three times (₹ 411) the wage in West Bengal or Odisha and about three times the wage in Assam. Based on the data on wages in rural India for the period 1998-99 to 2008-09, Usami (2011) also concludes that the wages in Kerala is the highest among the states in India for most occupations. Kerala had higher wages for long. It was so even when the state was economically backward. The reasons include the strong presence of trade union movement and the communist parties in the state⁷.

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 rates in Assam is ₹152, ₹143 in Odisha and ₹151 in West Bengal. The wage rates in Kerala is fixed at ₹180. 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 a year where as migrant workers in Kerala can get job for 250-300 days. Therefore, the MGNREGS is unlikely to have 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.

We have 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. The corresponding figures for Odisha is 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 of Kerala in 2011-12 was ₹ 83725 while it was only ₹ 46150 in Odisha, ₹ 33633 in Assam and ₹ 54830 in West Bengal. Among the major states, only Maharashtra, Haryana, Gujarat and Tamil Nadu are ahead of Kerala. 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 when the

state economy was stagnating. But the new wave of migration of LDIMs started when the Kerala economy was witnessing a growth. The growth in the economy was mainly in the service sector. As a result, the sectoral share in income changed over the last two and a half decades significantly. For instance, the share of agriculture, forestry, fishing and forestry came down from 33.2 per cent in 1987-88 to just 13.6 per cent in 2008-09 (George, 2011). As against this, the share of the tertiary sector increased from 41.9 per cent to 61.3 per cent during the same period. The share of the secondary sector increased marginally from 24.1 per cent to 24.7 per cent. In the secondary sector, the growth was in the construction sector while the manufacturing sector witnessed a decline. As a result, the new employment opportunities were created in the non-agriculture sector (service sector and construction 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.

Apart from its importance in the economic development of Kerala, inter-state migrant flow facilitated retaining the demographic balance in the state which has the highest proportion of aged population and where a good proportion of the population in the working age group have migrated out of the state. There has been a significant change in the age structure of the population during the last two decades⁸ (Table 3).

Table 3: 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
Total Population	29098518	33406061		
Share of working age population in total population	53.8	60.3		

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

Table 3 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 force,

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.

The growth of the economy was partly due to the large inflow of remittances from the Keralites who have migrated to other countries and other states in India. The outward migration (to other countries and other states) had other consequences on the state economy. Firstly, it created a shortage of local unskilled non-agriculture labour, which in turn, pushed up the wages further. The labour shortage in the state has been a puzzle for long. The work participation rate, according to the surveys of the National Sample Survey Organisation, has been consistently low in Kerala. It was more so in the case of women. The number of persons registered in the Employment Exchanges was also high. Still, the state has been attracting large number of workers from other states who readily got employed in many sectors. But the unemployment problem in Kerala is more for the educated than for the population as a whole. Unemployment rates for the educated in Kerala are the highest for both rural and urban areas among the major states (George 2011). It appears that the data on unemployment do not provide a complete picture of the absorption capacity of a state to receive migrants. The absorption capacity is also determined by the education level of the in-migrants, education level of the local community and the out migration rate (to other states and other countries).

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). Some of the migrant workers whom we interviewed worked and lived in the rural areas. 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. Most of the basic facilities are available within 2-5 kilometres. This has facilitated employment opportunities and better living conditions in rural areas. This is one reason for migrants working in rural areas also.

“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. Thus information has passed on from the earlier migrants to the recent migrants about Kerala. Many of the LDIMs in Kerala did not go to any other place (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 ten years back and the recent migrants. Those who have migrated to Kerala about ten years back 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 in Kerala. The latter group came directly to Kerala. They depended solely on the information passed on to them by others who have migrated earlier. 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. It is likely that the overall work environment in the host society may also influence the employers to be not as exploitative as 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.⁹ This again puts pressure on the employers and contractors to minimise unfair labour practices. All these 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 seven years back 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.

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 has almost been halted. According to anecdotal evidences and news paper 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. As one of the employers opined “they are willing to climb any heights and work there dangerously”. The preference of the employers for the LDIMs, from whom they can extract more labour, 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. It may be noted that the Tamil Nadu has higher per capita state domestic product than Kerala. 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 has made them think about going back to their home village¹⁰.

Some of those whom we 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 pull factors other than higher wages and availability of unskilled is also important once a critical base of migrant population is available in a destination.

A worker from Odisha, who is a Christian, cited a different reason for migration. He said that the religious tension that was prevailing in their village has forced him to migrate. Kerala, a state with

about one-third of its population being Christians, is also known for minimal tensions between religious groups¹¹. This might have prompted him to come to Kerala along with the high wages prevailing in the state. But we could not meet any other worker of this category.

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 incidents such as the arrest of a Maoist leader of Andhra Pradesh state from a hideout among migrant labourers in 2007 resulted in giving more attention to the migrant labourers. Some of the migrant workers we had interviewed 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".

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 2010.¹² Under the scheme titled 'Inter State Migrant Workers Welfare Scheme', a membership card is issued to each migrant worker who gets enrolled¹³. But the actual number of workers registered is only less than 2 per cent of the migrant workers in the state. To understand whether the existence of a welfare fund is in any way acting as a pull factor, we tried to capture the response of the migrant workers whom we interviewed. Most of the migrant workers are not aware of the scheme. Even those who are aware, do not find it be appealing. It appears that the welfare fund is yet to become a facilitating factor.

It appears that in the first stage of migration of LDIMs, push factors played the main role at the time of starting their migration journey. But in the case of recent migration of LDIMs, the influence of pull factors such as higher wages in Kerala, possibilities of getting year-round employment and better working and living conditions and possibility of skill upgradation seems to have played a role

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 ₹100000 or so. If we make that, we will have to work a few years to regain that money". As against this, migrating to Kerala do not incur much expense and there are no barriers to entry. The to and fro fare for reaching Kerala by train (₹ 1400 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.

7. Conclusion

According to Lee's (1966) push-pull theory, the flow of migrants from one place to another depend on the push and pull factors and the intervening obstacles. The main intervening obstacles in the case of LDIMs in Kerala are the physical, linguistic and cultural distance they have to traverse and the availability of employment opportunities in other states in India. In spite of the existence of such intervening obstacles, people from Odisha, West Bengal and Assam are now migrating for work in large numbers to Kerala, the farthest state form these states of origin. It appears that the pull factors in the state of Kerala overcomes the "friction of distance" and attracts large number of LDIMs. The push factors in the case of LDIMs and that of the SDIMs from the neighbouring state of Tamil Nadu are the same viz., the non-availability of employment opportunities and the low wage rates in the place of origin. The high wage rates and opportunities for year round employment in Kerala are the obvious primary pull factors. The wage rates in Kerala are significantly higher than not only the states of origin but also the potential destinations of the LDIMs. One reason for strong presence of pull factors in Kerala is the fast economic growth taking place in the state. 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. The structural change in the economy in favour of tertiary sector and construction sector also created a pull for non-agriculture labour. Apart from the above factors, the fast pace of urbanisation and the rural-urban continuum attracted people to Kerala.

A distinction has to be made between the LDIMs who reached Kerala about ten years back and the recent migrants. In the case of the former, only the primary pull factors worked. But after reaching a critical base of LDIMs, the flow of LDIMs is also dependent on the availability of networks, better work environment, opportunities for skill upgradation seems to play important roles. The barriers to emigrate to other countries also facilitate long distance migration within a country.

One of the policy responses to arrest the migration flow was the MGNREGS, the job guarantee scheme of the Union Government. However, it appears that the scheme failed to achieve this objective because of the presence of strong pull factors in Kerala. It is also interesting to note that an initiative of the state government to provide social protection to inter-state migrant workers in Kerala also did not act as a pull factor.

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.

One aspect of inter-state migration that makes it different from international migration is that the flow of migrants cannot be regulated by the host state. The Indian nationals have the right to freedom of movement anywhere in India and the state governments cannot restrict such movements. In the case of international migration, the host country can initiate policies that may promote or dissuade migration to the country. Given the pull factors, 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.

8. References

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Notes

¹ People of Kerala

² Majority of the international migration from Kerala is to the West Asian countries.

³ One 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 a 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 difference

⁴ The 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.

⁵ Migrants from Nepal do not require visa to enter India.

⁶ Of course there are always illegal migration as happened in the case of early migration from Kerala to West Asia through Dhows.

⁷ Kerala was the first state in India to have state government led by the communist party, way back in 1957.

⁸ The state has reached the third stage of demographic transition characterised by low mortality rates and low fertility rates.

⁹ On the other hand, a section of the media has shown a tendency to generalise from a few criminal activities in which migrants were caught by the police.

¹⁰ Tamil 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.

¹¹ A quarter of the Kerala population belongs to the Muslim community and one-fifth belongs to the Christian community. The rest belong to the Hindu community.

¹² Though 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.

¹³ Each registered worker would get up to Rs. 25,000 as healthcare assistance for in-patient care in empanelled hospitals in case of accidents or chronic diseases. However, the worker is eligible to get only Rs. 100 per day and the maximum limit fixed per episode of disease is Rs. 2000. If the labourers become incapable of undertaking jobs for more than six months due to accidents or chronic diseases, they are eligible to get a special assistance of up to Rs. 25000. The labourers who

have registered in the scheme continuously for three years are also eligible to enjoy a retirement benefit of Rs. 1000 per year subject to a minimum of Rs. 10,000 and a maximum of Rs. 25,000. Financial assistance to the tune of Rs. 50,000 in the event of death in accident at work site and Rs. 10,000 in the event of natural death is provided to the dependents of the migrant labourers. An additional assistance of Rs. 5000 to Rs. 15000 (depending on the distance to the state of origin) is also given for transporting the body to their native places. There is also a provision for assistance of Rs.3,000 per annum for the education of the children of migrant labourers who are studying beyond Class X in Kerala. The migrant worker will be required to pay an annual contribution of just Rs. 30. The Welfare Board, which is financed mainly from the cess on construction activities, will credit twice that amount in her/his account. The government will provide the rest of the money needed for the welfare measures. The welfare fund package is in addition to the assistance available to inter-State migrant workers under the Inter State Workmen (Regulation of Employment and Conditions of Service) Act and the rules framed under it. For a detailed discussion on the Migrant Welfare Fund, see Kumar (2011).