



Socio-Economic Background of Long Distance Inter-State Migrants in Kerala

Dr Sheeja J

Associate Professor

Department of Economics

University college, Thiruvananthapuram.

ABSTRACT

The inter state migration in Kerala can be considered as the life blood of Kerala economy. Today migrant workers are engaged in almost all sectors of Kerala and have contributed to the growth of the state. The major objective of the study is to examine the socio economic background of the long distance migrants in the construction sector of Kerala. The study is based on primary data collected from 369 long distant migrant construction workers in Trivandrum and Ernakulam districts. The study found that, more than half of the respondents are from West Bengal followed by Odisha and UP. Findings of the study indicates that, low income, poverty and lack of employment opportunities are the major push factors and better wage rate and better employment opportunities in Kerala are the major pull factors which attracted the migrants in long distance states like West Bengal, Odisha and UP.

KEYWORDS: Migration, Construction sector,

Received 04 Apr, 2022; Revised 16 Apr, 2022; Accepted 18 Apr, 2022 © The author(s) 2022.

Published with open access at www.questjournals.org

I. INTRODUCTION

In-migration of workers to Kerala has an extensive history. Initially, the migrants were from the neighbouring districts of Tamil Nadu and Karnataka¹ (Kumar, 2011 ; Anand, 1986). After 90's the state started getting migrants from far distant states like West Bengal, Bihar, Odisha, Assam and Uttar Pradesh² (Saikia, 2008 ; Kumar, 2011). This change is much visible in many of the construction sites where the languages spoken are Hindi and Bengali. The contemporary migration is diverse in terms of profile of the migrant workers, the work they are engaged in and the extent of inflow. The activities they are employed are also get much diversified than earlier. The migrant workers are now performing various activities such as casual labourers, agricultural and plantation workers, road workers, domestic workers, carpenters, masons, plumbers, electricians etc. They are also engaged in jewellery making, cashew processing, plywood factories, flour mills, quarries, brick kilns, hotels, petrol pumps etc. There is also a trend of allocating more complicated and dangerous jobs to migrant workers. About 60 per cent of these migrants are employed in the construction sector in Kerala (Narayana & Venkteswara, 2013).

The acute scarcity of local labour felt in the construction sector in Kerala and the ensuing higher wage rates and opportunities for employment attracted migrant workers from other states to Kerala. A large number of workers began to move to Kerala in search of work. As a result Kerala again become an in-migrating state. Initially the migrants were from the neighbouring states. Recently there has been a massive influx of migrant workers from the long distance states like West Bengal, Assam, Odisha, and Uttar Pradesh. This change is much visible in many of the construction sites as the language spoken is not often Malayalam, rather Hindi, Bengali or Assamese. A primary survey was carried out to have an in depth analysis of different dimensions of long distance inter-state migration to Kerala.

II. DATA SOURCES & METHODOLOGY

The study is based on a primary survey conducted by the researcher. Relevant information was collected from migrant construction workers by using a well structured interview schedule. Data collected through interview schedules were supplemented by interactions held with construction workers, recruiting agencies, builders and officials of the Labour Department of the state. Interactions with the workers were held at

their places of dwelling during non working hours by the researcher with the help of people who are familiar with the mother tongue of the migrants.

III. ANALYSIS & FINDINGS

Back ground Information of the Migrants

Migration is a biased process in which individuals with certain characteristics tend to migrate than others (Bhatia, 1992). When the better educated, the better skilled and the economically better off population migrate, the implications will be different as compared to a condition where the poorest and illiterate migrate. Worker participation in the labour market differs from nation to nation and from area to area. It also fluctuates by sex and age. In India most workers are working in the unorganized sectors, who are distinguished from those in the organized sector. A detailed profile of long distant migrant construction workers is made by taking into account their state of origin, age-wise distribution of long distant migrant workers in Kerala, educational status, distribution by religion, history of migration etc.

Native State of Respondents

Before making an in depth analysis of the socio-economic and demographic status of the long distant migrant construction labourers, it is worthwhile to identify the state-wise distribution of the migrants. Table 1 shows the native state of respondents.

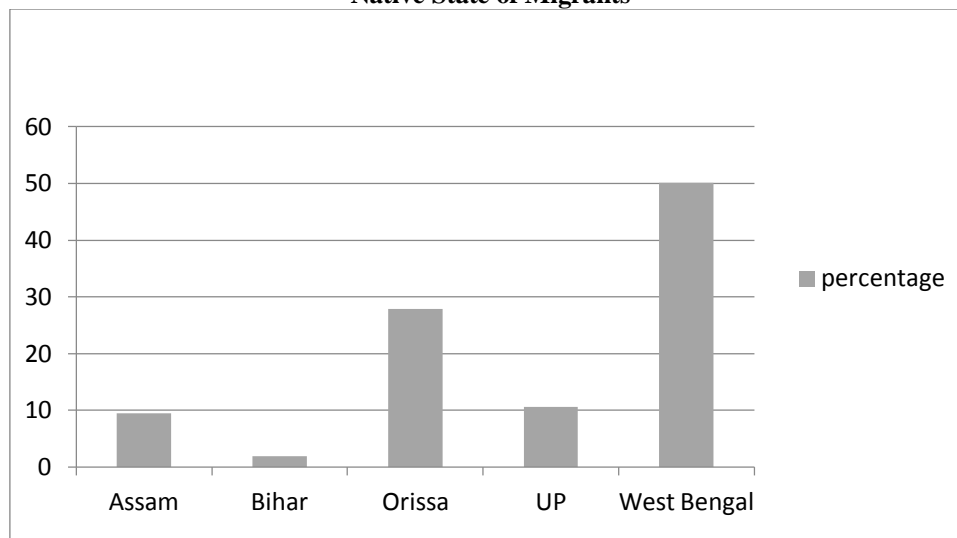
Table 1
Native State of Migrants

Native State of Migrants	No. of Respondents	Percentage
West Bengal	185	50.1
Odisha	103	27.9
UP	39	10.6
Assam	35	9.5
Bihar	7	1.9
Total	369	100.0

Source: Primary Data

It is clear that the largest proportion of the migrant population is from West Bengal (50.1 percent) followed by Odisha (27.9 percent) UP (10.6 percent), Assam (9.5 percent) and Bihar (1.9 percent) (Table 4.3). West Bengal and Odisha together constitute 78 percent of the respondents. The present study proves the findings in the study done by Saikia (2010) and GIFT (2013) that most of long distant migrant workers engaged in construction sector today are from West Bengal. It can be concluded that the majority of the migrant labourers are from West Bengal and Odisha. Most of the respondents from West Bengal are from Murshidabad, Jalpaiguri and North 24 Parganas districts. Most of these migrant labourers travel by train to reach Kerala.

Figure 1
Native State of Migrants



Source: Primary Data

Age Composition of the Migrants

Age plays a prominent role in undertaking any economic activity. Age is a critical variable and it has a vital role in determining the occupational status of labourers especially in construction sector. The economic development and prosperity of any region largely depends on the demographic composition and quality of its people. If they are hardworking, ambitious and willing to bear risk, the region will develop. Table 2 shows the age wise classification of respondents.

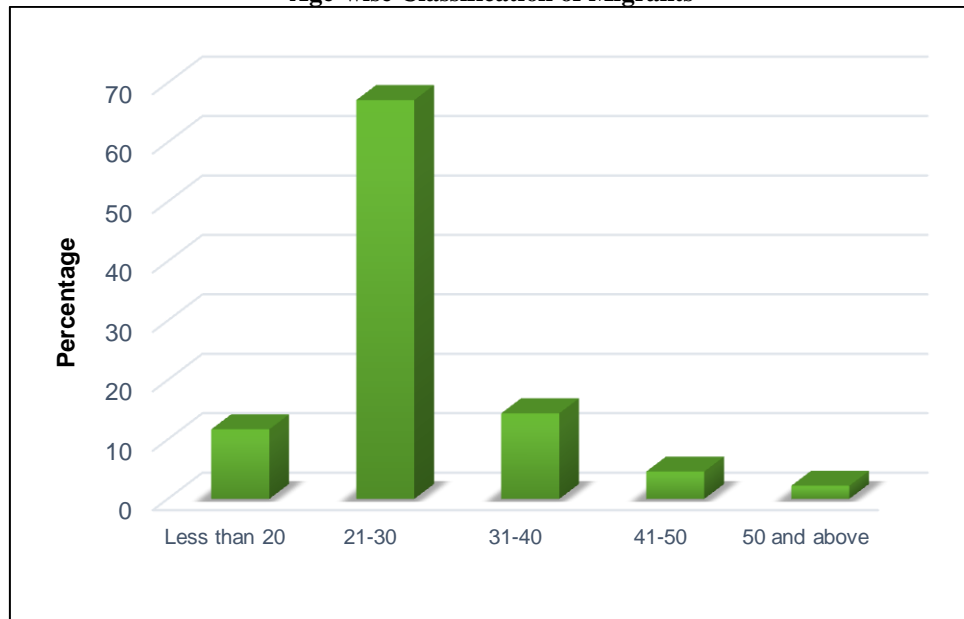
Table 2
Age Composition of Migrants

Age	No. of Respondents	Percentage
Less than 20	43	11.7
21-30	248	67.1
31-40	53	14.4
41-50	17	4.6
50 and above	8	2.2
Total	369	100.0

Source: Primary Data

Age-wise classification of migrants shows that the highest proportion (67 percent) of the migrant labourers belongs to the age group of 21-30 followed by the age group 31-40 (14.4 percent) (Table 2). This shows that most of the migrants are below the age of 30 and are motivated to move out of their native place at a very young age for a livelihood in a sector which is hazardous in nature. We can also notice that nearly 82 percent of the sample migrants belong to the age group of 20-40. This study confirms the findings of the previous studies on this subject done by Saikia (2008) and Narayana (2013) that very young energetic age groups are engaged in construction sector.

Figure 2
Age-wise Classification of Migrants



Source: Primary Data

They have migrated in the most productive age in order to take advantage of employment opportunities and also made good earnings.

Marital Status of the Migrants

In Indian context marriage is an important practice based on tradition and social values. Marital status of an individual influences the decision to migrate (Misra, 2009). The marital status of the respondents is examined by the researcher for the purpose of analysing the socio-economic conditions.

Table 3
Marital Status of Migrants

Marital status	No. of Respondents	Percentage
Unmarried	192	52.0
Married	176	47.7
Divorce	1	0.3
Total	369	100.0

Source: Primary Data

Table 3 shows that more than half (52 percent) of the migrants are unmarried whereas 48 percent are married. This is similar to the previous studies that most of the long distant migrants in the construction sector are unmarried.

Classification of Workers by Religion

Religion and caste are the two significant factors which not only elucidate the composition of population but also have a bearing on the socio-economic structure. The Table 4 shows the religion-wise classification of migrants.

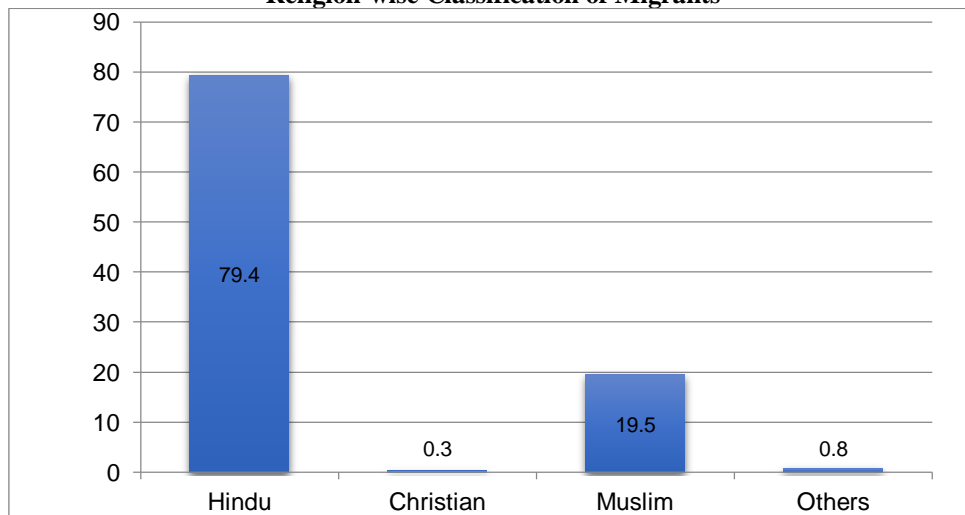
Table: 4
Religion-wise Classification of the Migrants

Religion	No. of Respondents	Percentage
Hindu	293	79.4
Muslim	72	19.5
Christian	1	0.3
Others	3	0.8
Total	369	100.0

Source: Primary Data

The distribution of sample population on the basis of their religion reveals that more than 79 percent of them are Hindus. Nearly 20 percent of them are Muslims. Respondents from other categories are negligible (Table 4.6). Majority of the respondents belong to Hindu religion.

Figure 3
Religion-wise Classification of Migrants



Source: Primary Data

Classification by Social Category

Social category is an important indicator of social status in the Indian context. So it is necessary to identify the social category of the respondents in order to understand the socio-economic status of the respondents. We know that India is a country with number of caste, creeds, religion, languages etc. The distribution of workers among the social category is given in the Table 5.

Table 5
Social Category of Migrants

Social Category	No. of Respondents	Percentage
OBC	138	37.4
SC	53	14.3
ST	12	3.1
Others	166	45.1
Total	369	100.0

Source: Primary Data

It is clear from the Table 5 that, 37.4 percent of the respondents belong to other backward class, 14.3 percent belong to scheduled caste and 3.1 percent belong to scheduled tribe community. The above analysis clearly shows that majority, ie 55 percent of the respondents belong to backward communities. Of these 55 percent, 17.4 percent are in the category of SC and ST alone.

Educational Status of Migrants

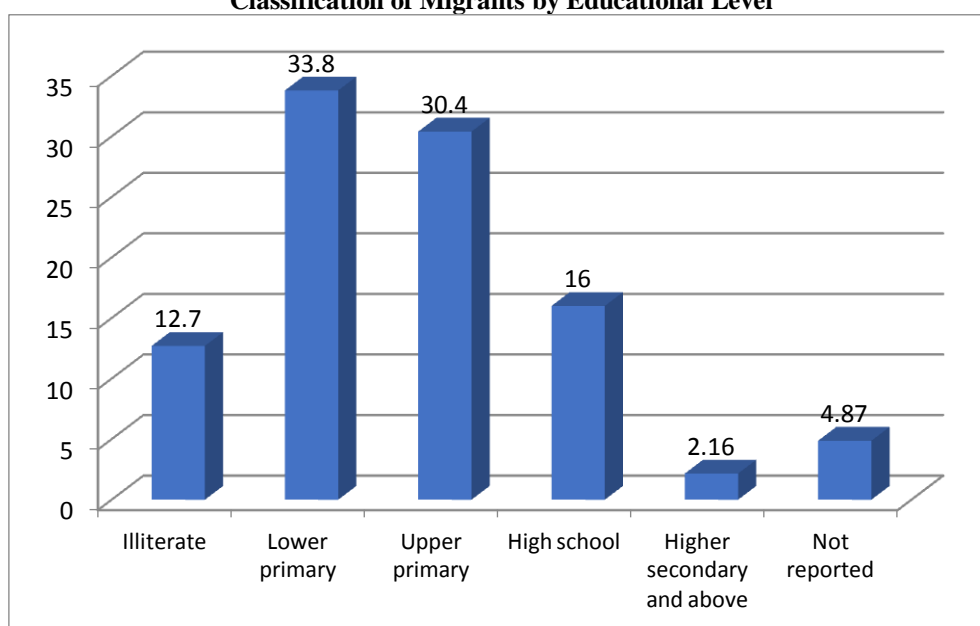
Education has a vital role for development as it enables a person to recognize his surroundings and his economic role and subsequently improves his socio-economic status (Lamani, 2009). Level of education and skills have very important role in determining migration decisions. Education empowers labourers with higher bargaining power and competition. It helps workers to be free from exploitation. Literacy is one among several indicators of educational development. It is capable of transforming the existence order of defining the aims and objectives of an authentic human resource development.

Table 6
Educational Status of Migrants

Education	No. of Respondents	Percentage
Illiterate	47	12.7
Lower primary	125	33.8
Upper primary	112	30.4
High school	59	16.0
Higher secondary and above	8	2.16
Not reported	18	4.87
Total	369	100.0

Source: Primary Data

Figure 4
Classification of Migrants by Educational Level



Source: Primary Data

The data on educational attainment of the migrants show that the highest proportions (33.8 percent) of the respondents have attained education up to lower primary level only. Roughly 30.4 percent of the respondents completed upper primary level and 16 percent completed high school level education. Illiteracy rate is relatively high (12.7 percent). 77 percent are either illiterate or having primary education. 2.16 percent of the respondents have attained higher secondary level education or above and 4.87 percent of the respondents are reluctant to report their educational level. This clearly shows that less educated people who lack employment opportunities in their native states are forced to migrate to long distance states and seek employment in a sector which is hazardous in nature.

It is a fact that the level of literacy does not have much to do with the kind of work the migrants are called upon to perform. What is important perhaps is the skill to undertake the work in hand. Though literacy will empower a worker to bargain and get a better wage, the job profile does not offer much scope in this regard. The illiteracy of a migrant worker may not cause him much of a problem so long as the literate member of the group can help him in taking crucial decisions regarding migration, travel, plans for arranging stay and for negotiating the terms and conditions of work with the employer.

Family Size of the Respondents

Family size is a vital aspect which influences one's standard of living. The size of the household plays a main role in shaping the employments in which people attempt to locate employment somewhere even for low wages. It is therefore crucial to understand the family size of the migrants. Table 7 presents the family size of the respondents.

Table 7
Average Family Size of the Migrants

Average Family Size	No. of Respondents	Percentage
Less than or equal to 4	275	74.5
Five or more than 5	94	25.5
Total	369	100

Source: Primary Data

An analysis of the average family size of the migrant labourers shows that 74.5 percent of the respondents have four or less than four members and the remaining 25.5 percent of the respondents have a family size consisting of five or more than five members (Table 7). Majority of the respondent belongs to nuclear family. About three fourth of the migrants have a relatively smaller family size.

Only 177 out of the total 369 respondents are married. Out of these, 35 percent have no children. 23.2 percent of the respondents have one child, 31.1 percent of the respondents have two children, 8.5 percent have three and 2.3 percent of the respondents have four or more children.

History of Migration

An analysis was made regarding the prior experience of migrants to other places before coming to the present destination. While about three fourth of the migrants migrated to Kerala for the first time and the remaining have earlier experience to places like Delhi, Bombay, Gujarat, Goa and Arunachal Pradesh.

Nature of Migration

An analysis of the nature of migration is given in Table 8.

Table 8
Nature of Migration

Nature of Migration	No. of Respondents	Percentage
With family	4	1.1
Alone	365	98.9
Total	369	100

Source: Primary Data

The study highlights that 98.9 percent of the labourers migrated alone by leaving their family at their native place of residence (Table 8). Only 1.1 percent of them migrated with their families. This shows that they preferred to sustain their families in their home state itself since they spent most of their time in the work sites, in their migrated destinations. From an informal discussion it was understood that most of them had to keep their children and wives with their parents and relatives in their native places in order to give better education to their children. However, it enhances their pain and plight as they are anxious about the safety and security of their family members.

Average Number of Hours / Days Worked Before Migration

After analysing the socio-economic profile of the sample migrant labourers, their nature of work before migration is analysed. Table 9 shows the average number of hours worked by the migrants in a day before migration.

Table 9
Average Number of Hours Worked per Day before Migration

Average number of hours worked/day	No. of Respondents	Percentage
≤7	19	5.7
8	253	76.4
≥9	59	16.0
Total	331	100.0

Source: Primary Data

More than 60 percent of the population in India lives in rural areas depending upon agriculture directly or indirectly. The economic conditions of the agrarian community are not only fluctuating but also not regular in nature. As a result, to improve one's own economic status either they have to leave agriculture or to go to far off places to engage non agricultural jobs. It was found that out of 369 respondents 38 respondents were not engaged in any type of work before migration. This is one of the regular features of Indian society (Naik et.al, 2009). An analysis of the number of hours that the migrants worked in their native place showed that most of them (76 percent) worked 8 hours in a day, 16 percent of the respondents worked above 9 hours and 5.7 percent of the respondents worked 7 hours in their native place.

Table 10
Average Number of Days Worked Per Week before Migration

Average number of days worked/week	No. of Respondents	Percentage
≤ 6 days	18	5.4
7 days	313	94.6
Total	331	100.0

Source: Primary Data

The above analysis shows that the workers had to work for more than 6 days in a week (94.6 percent) in their native place.

Income of Migrants before Migration

Income is an important factor from the economic point of view. As income increases standard of living also increases. The economic status of migrant construction workers are examined on the basis of monthly income of the workers. The study made an attempt to analyse the monthly income of migrants before migration.

Table 11
Monthly Income of the Migrants before Migration

Monthly Income	Before migration
No income	17 (4.6)
≤ 2500	187 (50.7)
2501 – 5000	149 (40.4)
5001 – 7500	12 (3.2)
7501- 10000	3 (0.81)
>10000	1 (0.2)
Total	369 (100.0)

Source: Primary Data

Note: Figures in brackets indicate percentages.

A close examination of the monthly income of the respondents before migration shows that more than half of the migrants (50.7 percent) of the migrants were earned below Rs. 2500. More than 40 percent earned Rs. 2501-5000. This clearly indicates that low income of the migrants in their native place was one of the most important factor which compelled them to migrate.

Push and Pull Factors of Migration

Even though their family size is very small, less skilled and less educated labourers from backward areas in West Bengal, Odisha and other long distant states are coming to Kerala in search of petty jobs. In any type of migration, there are some reasons behind it. It is interesting to examine the important factors that compel them to leave their native place and also the factors which attract them to Kerala. This section looks into the factors behind the migration of workers to the construction sector of Kerala. Several overlapping factors have been identified behind the migration of labour force from other states to construction sector in Kerala. Labour migration is often perceived through the ‘push’ and ‘pull’ frame work that emphasizes the specific local conditions in the places of origin (Lee, 1966). Push and pull factors can range from financial to social factors that either motivate or compel the individual to migrate to another place.

Push Factors behind Migration

Push factors involve those factors that motivate the labourer to migrate from his local place. Pull factors involve those factors that attract the labourers to the place of destination. According to ‘push’ and ‘pull’ theory, migration may occur as a search for an opportunity to improve one’s lot in life, while push factors compel labourers to move out of their native places. The destination exerts a pull on the migrants. Migration can also occur as a plight from undesirable social or economic situations which constitute an expulsive push by the community (Bogue, 1969). The Table 12 presents the push factors associated with the migration of the sample population.

Table: 12
Major Push Factors of Migration

Major Push Factors	No. of Respondents	Percentage
Low income	187	50.7
Poverty	93	25.2
Lack of employment opportunities	63	17.1
Low standard of living	14	3.8
Debt	11	3.0
Others	1	0.3
Total	369	100.0

Source: Primary Data

Behind each migration there may be the influence of several push factors. Among the most important push factors which prompted for migration, low income or low wage in their native place, lack of employment opportunities and resultant poverty, low standard of living, debt etc were identified as the major push factors behind migration. It is clear that there are differences in economic opportunities among states which induce the labourers to migrate. 51 percent of the respondents opined that low income in their native land is the main push factor behind migration, 25.2 percent of the respondents opined poverty and 17 percent of the respondents opined lack of employment opportunities are the major push factors behind migration.

Pull Factors behind Migration

Kerala has been an attractive place for most of the migrants of India. Majority of the migrants from various states consider Kerala as the best destination to work and live in. The major pull factors behind migration of construction labourers to Kerala are given in the Table 13.

Table: 13
Major Pull Factors of Migration

Major Pull factors	No. of Respondents	Percentage
Better wage rate in Kerala	243	65.9
Better job opportunities in Kerala	120	32.5
Better working conditions	4	1.1
Better educational facilities	1	0.3
Better prospects for saving	1	0.3
Total	369	100.0

Source: Primary Data

Better wage rate in Kerala, better employment opportunities, better working conditions, better educational facilities and better prospects for saving accounted as the pull factors behind migration. Roughly 66 percent of the respondents reported better wage rate in Kerala as the most important pull factor behind migration to Kerala and 32.5 percent of the respondents reported better employment opportunities in Kerala as the major pull factor behind migration to Kerala (Table 13).

IV. Conclusion

This chapter examined the socio-economic status of long distance migrant construction labourers in Kerala. Analysis of primary data revealed that more than half of the respondents are from West Bengal followed by Odisha and UP. Analysis of primary data revealed that most of the respondents from West Bengal are from Murshidabad, Jalpaiguri and North 24 Parganas districts. Age composition of migrants showed that 87 percent of the migrants are young belonging to the age group of 21- 30. More over almost 52 percent of the migrants are unmarried. Nearly 79 percent of the respondents belong to Hindu religion. Apart from that almost 55 percent of the migrants belong to backward communities including SC and ST. More than 64 percent of the migrant workers have only primary education. An examination of the family size of the migrant worker revealed that majority of them are from small families consisting less than or equal to 4 members at home. Regarding the history of migration, 75 percent are having their first migration experience in Kerala. It is quite interesting to find that 99 percent of the migrants migrated alone leaving their family at their native place.

An examination of the long distance migrants show that majority of them are belonged to marginalised category. A close examination of the monthly income of the respondents before migration shows that more than half of the migrants (50.7 percent) earned below 2500 rupees per month. More than 40 percent earned Rs. 2501-5000. They were compelled to work on all days in a week and even nine hours in a week before migration. Despite of the hard work they got only less income. This clearly indicates that low income of the migrants in their native place was one of the most important factors which compelled them to migrate. In order to identify the major determinants of long distance inter-state migration the researcher examined the major push and pull factors of migration. Study found that, low income, poverty and lack of employment opportunities are the major push factors which compelled them to migrate from their native state to a distant state like Kerala. The fact that they were ready to take up employment in a sector which is hazardous in nature at a very young age reveals the intensity of their economic backwardness. It was also found that better wage rate and better employment opportunities in Kerala are the major pull factors which attracted the migrants in long distance states like West Bengal, Odisha and UP.

Reference

- [1]. Anand, S. (1986). *Migrant Construction Workers: A Case Study of Tamil Workers in Kerala* (Unpublished M. Phil. thesis), Centre for Development Studies, Thiruvananthapuram.
- [2]. Bhatia, A. S. (1992). *Rural Urban Migration*, New Delhi: Deep & Deep Publications.
- [3]. Chand, K. C., Singal, & Modi, S., (1998), Socio Economic Variables & Process of Migration in Sugar Industry of Punjab, *The Indian Journal of Labour Economics*, Vol. 41, No.4.
- [4]. Das, K. (2007). *Construction Workers of Guwahati City: Employment, Employability and social Security*, V.V. Giri National Labour Institute, NOIDA, Delhi.
- [5]. Divya, (2008). *Socio-Economic Conditions of Women Workers in Khadi and Village Industries in Kerala* (Unpublished PhD thesis), Calicut University.
- [6]. Government of Kerala. (2009). *District Urbanization Report Ernakulam* : Thiruvananthapuram: State Planning Board.
- [7]. Government of Kerala. (2009). *District Urbanization Report Thiruvananthapuram* . : Thiruvananthapuram: State Planning Board.
- [8]. District Human Development Report Ernakulam (2009): UNDP/ Planning Commission Project on Strengthening State Plans for Human Development, HDRC Unit, Kerala State Planning Board.
- [9]. Lamani Prakash. R (2009). Out migration among Banjara people: An Empirical Study, *Third Concept*, Vol.23, No.270, Pp 45-50.
- [10]. Meena, M. (2011). *Rural Labour Out migration in Theni District: Determinants and Economic Impact among Migrant Workers in Cardamom Estates* (Unpublished PhD thesis), Avinashalingam Institute for Home Science and Higher Education for Women, Coimbatore.
- [11]. Misra, H. (2009). Rural Urban Migration in India, *The Indian Journal of Social Work*, Vol.70, No. 1, Pp 5-23.
- [12]. Naik, Limbya, L., Huddar, M. G. & Tarachand, K., (2009). Socio Economic Problems of Migrated Lambngns- An Empirical Study” *Indian Journal of Social Development*, Vol.6, No.1, Pp 177-185.
- [13]. Oberai, A. S., & Singh H. K. M. (1983). *Causes and Consequences of Internal Migration: A Study in The Indian Punjab*, New Delhi, Oxford University Press.
- [14]. Shree, M. (2012). Female Tribal migrants as Domestic Workers – A Study of Their Compulsions and working Conditions. *Man and Development*, March 2012