

Migrant Labour in Kerala: A Study on Inter-State Migrant Workers

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Abstract : In the recent years, Kerala is witnessing a large inflow of migrants from different parts of the country. Though initially, the migrants were largely from the districts of Tamil Nadu and mostly of seasonal nature, but at a later period, the state started getting migrants from the far-off states like UP, Assam, Bengal, etc. Higher wages for unskilled labour, large opportunities for employment, the reluctance on the part of Kerala workers to do menial and hard physical work, and the shortage of local labour, paradoxically despite the high unemployment rate in the state, led to the massive influx of migrant labourers. This study takes a multi-dimensional overview of migrant labour in Kerala by encompassing factors such as channels of migration, nature of employment contracts entered into and the corresponding wages and benefits obtained by them. The study also analysed the circumstances that led to the large influx of migrants from different states of India. It further makes an attempt to examine the varying dimensions of living and working environment, and also the health conditions of migrants. The study is based on the empirical findings obtained as a result of the primary interviews conducted with migrants in the districts of Palakkad, Malappuram, and Ernakulam. The study concludes by noting that Kerala will inevitably have to depend on migrant labour and is likely to experience heavy in-migration of labour in future, provided that if the existing socioeconomic and demographic situations persist. Since, this is inevitable, the best way before the state is to prepare well in advance to receive and accommodate such migrant labour to lead a comfortable life in a hassle free environment, so that it would definitely play a vital role in further strengthening and sustaining the growth trajectory of not only Kerala's economy but also the states of origin.

Keywords : Kerala, labour, migration, migrant workers

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