

Towards a More Inclusive Society: A Study on the Assimilation and Integration of the Migrant Children in Kerala

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Abstract : For the past few years, the state of Kerala has been witnessing a large inflow of migrant workers from other states of the country, which emerged as a result of demographic transition and Gulf emigration. The in-migration patterns in Kerala have changed over the time with the migrants having a higher residence history bringing their families to the state, thereby making the process more complicated and divergent in its approach. These developments have led to an increase in the young migrant population at least in some parts of the state, which has opened up doubts and questions related to their future in the host society. At this juncture, the study ponders into the factors that are associated with the assimilation and wellbeing of migrant children in the society of Kerala. As one of the objectives, the study also analyzed the influence and role played by the educational institutions (both public and private) in meeting the needs and aspirations of both the children and their parents. The study gains significance as it tries to identify various impediments that hinder the cognitive skill formation and behaviour patterns of the migrant children in the host society. **Data and Methodology:** The study is based on the primary data collected through a series of interviews and interactions held with parents, children, and teachers of different educational institutions, including both public and private. The primary survey also made use of research techniques like observation, in-depth interviews, and case study method. The study was conducted in schools in the Kanjikode area of the Palakkad district in Kerala. The findings of the study are on the basis of a survey conducted in four schools and 40 migrant children. **Findings:** The study found that majority of the children have wholly integrated and assimilated into the host society. The influence of the peer group was quite visible in giving stimulus to the assimilation process. Most of the children do not have any emotional or cultural sentiments attached to their state of origin, and they consider Kerala as their 'home state' and the local language (Malayalam) as their 'mother tongue'. The study could also find that the existing education system in the host society fails to meet the needs and aspirations of migrants as well as that of their children. On a comparative scale, to some extent, private schools have succeeded in fulfilling the special requirements of the migrant children. An interesting point that the study could pinpoint at is that the children of the migrants show better health conditions and wellbeing than compared to the natives, which is usually addressed as an epidemiologic paradox. As a concluding remark, the study recommends the inclusion concept of inclusive education into the education system of the state with giving due emphasis on those who are at higher risk of being excluded or marginalized, along with fostering increased interaction between diverse groups.

Keywords : assimilation, Kerala, migrant children, well-being

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