

Domestic Migrant Labour in Kerala

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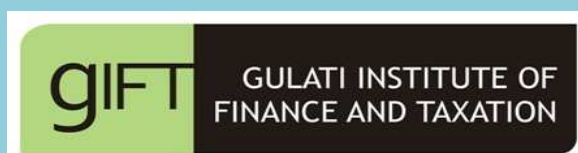
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Preface

With the quickly growing presence of Domestic Migrant Labour (DML) in Kerala, the Labour Department of the Government of Kerala, led by the Hon'ble Minister for Labour and Rehabilitation Mr. Shibu Baby John has been giving some serious thought to the steps that the State needs to take to ensure that the Domestic Migrant Labour has recourse to protection under the labour laws and to an appropriate minimum social security floor. However one of the main constraints that the state faced in responding to the socio-economic and social security concerns of the DML and in framing policies for them, was the absence of authentic data and information on the numbers and extent of the DML in the state and to the socio-economic conditions in which they were living.

Mr. Shibu Baby John having made this one of his priorities, tasked Mr. M. P. Joseph IAS (R) Advisor and Consultant to Government to delineate the contours of a study to determine broadly the numbers of Domestic Migrant Labour in the state, as well as arrive at a broad understanding of their socio-economic situation etc.

A meeting with Mr. Shibu Baby John, arranged by Mr. M. P. Joseph led to the Gulati Institute of Finance and Taxation (GIFT) taking up this study. After detailed consultations, it was decided that the best methodology for understanding the numbers and the socio-economic context of the DML in Kerala was to conduct train-based surveys of the migrant labour, who were coming in and going out of the state. The guidance, the encouragement and the inauguration of the train-based survey at the Kollam Railway Station by the Minister made this challenging study possible. We express our deep sense of gratitude to the Minister.

The arduous task of coordinating the train surveys and monitoring it effectively was taken up by Mr. Rajesh Kumar. He played an important role in the final production of the report too. The surveys and the count of DML in the trains were conducted by the students of Masters in Social Work (MSW) Departments of Don Bosco College, Kannur and the De Paul College, Angamali. Thanks are also due to the Pranavam Educational & Charitable Trust, Valayam, Kozhikode District for facilitating the enumeration of DML in trains.

Ms. Sheeja N. took up the task of scrutiny of the data that was entered by a team of data entry operators. She generated all the tables at quick notice.

Thiruvananthapuram
7 February 2013

Dr. D. Narayana
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Introduction

The movement of people in search of better economic conditions and a more secure environment is as old as human history. Such movements not only affect the lives of the migrants profoundly, but also lead to significant economic and social transformation in the regions of origin and destination of the migrants. Until recently, large out migration was viewed as the result of poverty and deprivation and development was thought as an antidote to levels of migration. Large investments of foreign assistance by the US in Caribbean and Central America, or trade liberalization in Mexico, did not reduce pressures of migration in the region. European, in particular France's experience with co-development has also been no different. The discussions have, since, gradually shifted away from this perspective and now it is widely recognized that migration is an aspect of globalization.

Development and migration go hand in hand. But the historical record is deeply ambiguous. In several prominent countries- Germany, Great Britain, South Korea for example, - out migration has coincided with social and economic transformation. But in several others such as Egypt, Lebanon, Mexico... - decades of migration have moderated poverty but have not led to sustainable growth. Between these two extremes lies a third group of countries that includes - Greece, Portugal, Russia etc. - where living standards have improved and migration process have subsided. There is little evidence of causality in success stories or failures and hence it is difficult to draw universal conclusions.

It is difficult to dispute that poverty drives people to search for better conditions. But relatively few migrants from the poorest countries move to developed countries. As Aaron Terrazas points out, "...most wealthy, developed countries still have higher levels of emigration than developing countries" (Terrazas, 2011: p.6). Thus, developed regions both attract migrants and send migrants.

According to Nigel Harris, “The idea that people of necessity are permanently located in one national entity, that the distribution of the world’s population is complete forever, and only temporary anomalies now occur are also being challenged. It would be a curious outcome if the size and composition of the labour force of each country was exactly optimal, requiring no exchanges. In practice, world economic integration continually increases rates of mobility, so that in future it is going to be as difficult internationally to give an unequivocal answer to the question ‘where are you from?’ as it already is in developed countries. (Nigel Harris, 1999: p 268).

In many ways, migration has meant international migration. The intense research and policy debate in international migration has largely been owing to its importance to richer countries. Along with migration, remittance flow has also increased and for many countries it has overtaken external aid and foreign direct investment (Ratha and Shaw, 2007). Human rights issues and labour rights have also become important areas of policy. Despite the high visibility of international migration, recent years have seen the recognition that internal migration is much larger both in terms of numbers and remittances. Bell and Muhidin (2009) estimate that internal migration in the world at 740 million are about four times the number of people living outside their country of birth.

India is the largest recipient of international remittances in the world of which about 50% were classified as remittances towards family maintenance. Kerala accounts for about 40% of the Indian household remittances. Kerala along with Punjab and Goa also reports high international migration: whereas at the all-India level only 38 per 1000 out-migrants leave the country, it is over ten times that number for these states (Figure A 3, Czaika, 2011). The large international migration, precipitous fall in fertility, and rapid urbanization has seen Kerala attract domestic migrant labour in large numbers in recent years.

Urbanisation is one of the key “pull” factors of migration: “Contrary to conventional wisdom on urbanization and migration, high rates of migration (permanent and temporary) into urbanized areas have continued despite rising levels of (formal) unemployment and persistent urban poverty. The explanation lies in the expanding urban informal sector which represents a significant pull” (Deshingkar and Grimms, 2004: p.25). While persistent poverty may not be true of Kerala, urbanization and informalisation has been taking place rapidly. And it has attracted migrant labour in large numbers.

In many instances, large migrant population provokes substantial popular unease translated into xenophobia, racism, or lesser forms of hostility toward migrants. While the inflow of migrants has grown exponentially in recent years into the rapidly urbanizing- and rapidly

growing- South Western and Punjab- Haryana- Delhi belt, policy makers have not woken up to this reality, except for knee-jerk reactions following Bangalore exodus, or Suzuki violence. It is politically imperative that policy makers pay attention to living conditions in the migrant centres.

Part of the reason policy attention has not been forthcoming is that data on internal migration are notoriously inadequate as censuses and surveys are based on households which do not capture the temporary or semi-permanent migration satisfactorily. For instance, NSS 64th round (2007-08) collected information on household characteristics, employment status and migration particulars of household members and information on out-migrants. In the survey, the out-migrants present place of residence in relation with the household being surveyed was classified as being any of the five categories: same district, same state but different district, another state, another country or 'not known'. This is sufficient information to classify out-migrants as international or internal and remittance as international or domestic. However, it does not enable analysis of specific State-to-State, country-to-State or urban to rural migration or remittance

With what was thought to be over one million DML in the state¹, the Government of Kerala (GoK) is concerned about their economic and social situation. The GoK also feels the State has a responsibility towards the DML in Kerala and is seriously considering some interventions that are needed to ensure their welfare.

The Labour Department of the State Government, led by the Hon. Minister of Labour Mr. Shibu Baby John had been for some time now been giving some deep thought to the measures that the state need to take to ensure that the Domestic Migrant Labour in the state had recourse not only to protection under the labour laws but also to the appropriate welfare measures and to a minimum social security floor. One of the main constraints that the state faced in framing policies for the DML and in responding to their socio-economic and social security concerns, was the absence of authentic information and data on the numbers and extent of the DML in the state and to their broad socio-economic situation.

Any government intervention, however, needs necessarily take into account the differing backgrounds the labourers come from, the different caste groups and their differing food habits amongst others. It would not suffice to think of the DML only as single set without differing backgrounds and needs. Only a culturally sensitive intervention would be useful in understanding the DML in Kerala and contribute to maintaining a healthy flow of DML to the State that is now so necessary to sustain the State's economic growth.

¹ The present study has shown this to be a gross under-estimate.

It was thus felt that a study was necessary to achieve that purpose. The objectives of this Study therefore were articulated as follows:

- (i) To estimate the stock of DML in Kerala;
- (ii) To estimate the net annual inflow of DML into the State;
- (iii) To estimate the distribution of the DML by State (and where possible District) of origin;
- (iv) To understand the Channels of Migration of the DML into the State.
- (v) To map the distribution of DML by location and sector in the State;
- (vi) To map the skills of the DML in Kerala
- (vii) To assess the age and sex composition of the DML;
- (viii) To understand the nature of employment contracts entered into by the DML
- (ix) To assess the wage and benefits obtained by the DML;
- (x) To understand the nature of accommodation and issues associated with it and
- (xi) To understand the social and cultural problems if any faced by the DML.

Estimation of Stock and Flows of Migrant Labour

Estimating the stock of DML in Kerala is not an easy task and some of the well known methods of estimation based on sample surveys are not of much help in the context of the state. The basic problem is one of not having a proper sampling frame. The conventional approach to overcome this problem would have required a detailed listing of the places of stay of DML in a large number of administrative units to build a sampling frame, selection of samples and survey- almost akin to the massive decennial population census. As this would have required huge resources and considerable time a different approach had to be conceived. What came in handy for the present purpose is the unique feature of domestic migration into Kerala, namely that the migrants are from far away Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Bengal, Assam and elsewhere and the only mode of travel available to them is the great Indian railway, for which Kerala is the Terminus; the DML get into the long distance trains to arrive in Kerala or to visit home and come back in these trains. The present study therefore came up with a unique method of estimation exploiting this exceptional feature of migration into the state to generate robust estimates of DML (the statistical theory of which is given in the technical appendix). This method would not have been suitable if the state were not a terminal point for the long distance trains. The chapter begins by discussing the method of estimation.

2.1 The Method of Estimation

Let 'S' be the size of the stock of Domestic Migrant Labour (DML) in Kerala. Let μ be the average number of visits home made by a DML in a year. The expected number of DML visiting home (and returning) on a randomly selected day is, say X.

Then,

$$X = (\mu * S)/365 \dots\dots\dots (1)$$

Alternately, S, the stock of DML in Kerala is given by $(X * 365)/\mu$ (* stands for multiplication)

X needs to be counted taking all the trains entering Kerala from all the outside destinations. It is possible that DML travel in both sleeper and unreserved coaches of trains. In order to manage this dimension of the work, let us take the proportion of DML travelling by sleeper class as s. Then, $X = X_u/(1-s)$ where X_u is the number of DML travelling in unreserved coaches of trains.

$$\text{Now, S takes the form } (X_u * 365)/(\mu * (1-s)) \dots\dots\dots (2)$$

S is implicitly assumed to be constant. However, S is a dynamic entity as there is continuous inflow (there is some outflow too!). The number of inflow X_{in} also needs to be observed which can be done exactly as that of X. (The assumption here is that first time inflow is only by unreserved coaches of trains.). The total count of DML, both those who are already in Kerala and travelling home and coming back as well as those coming for the first time, $X_u + X_{in}$, is the number that is obtained by a full count of the DML in unreserved coaches of all the long distance trains entering Kerala.

The stock of DML grows at the rate of $(X_{in} * 365 * 100)/S$

$$\begin{aligned} &= [(X_{in} * 365 * 100) * \mu * (1-s)] / (X_u * 365) \\ &= [X_{in} * 100 * \mu * (1-s)] / X_u \dots\dots\dots (3) \end{aligned}$$

The procedure adopted for counting the DML in trains is as follows. A complete list of all the long distance trains entering Kerala through the Konkan Railway and through Palakkad is made. It ran into 63 trains in all in a week excluding trains from Mumbai, Mangalore, Bangalore, Hyderabad and Chennai. Some were daily trains, some weekly, bi-weekly and so on. Each train was to be surveyed by teams entering the trains at Kasaragod or Palakkad as the case may be. Initially, it was thought that counting the number of DML travelling in the unreserved coaches, that is X_u and X_{in} , and canvassing the questionnaires SQ₁ and SQ₂ (See appendix for the questionnaires) on a sample from among them could be done simultaneously. Soon it became apparent that this was difficult to manage as many DML get

down at Kasaragod and Palakkad and at all the train stops till the destination. Combining the counting of the number and canvassing the questionnaires was leading to a situation where many who got down at stations were missed out. So, it was decided to separate the two activities. During one full week in October November teams entered the unreserved coaches of the long distance trains and canvassed questionnaires SQ₁ and SQ₂. Later during one full week teams counted the number of DML. The two together generated the data for estimating X_u , and X_{in} .

Data for estimating μ , s were generated by canvassing the questionnaire SQ₃ on DML in a few locations all over Kerala. Some of the parameters are estimated using both the questionnaires and the differences pointed out.

2.2 The Estimates of the Stock of DML in Kerala

The estimates are as follows:

1. Number of visits a year by an average DML (μ) = 0.672; this is the estimate obtained from the data on canvassing SQ₃.
2. Number of visits a year by an average DML (μ) = 1.00; this is the alternate estimate obtained from the data on canvassing SQ₁. This is bound to be slightly higher as the sample would have a higher proportion of more frequent travelers.
3. Proportion of DML travelling by sleeper class (s) = 0.80; this is the estimate obtained from the data on canvassing SQ₃. A lower estimate is 0.70; thus, the range of the value is between 0.70 and 0.80.
4. Proportion of travelers in unreserved coaches who are new comers = 0.338
5. Number of DML coming to Kerala on an average day = $13373/7 = 1910.43$; the total number is obtained by the count of DML in all the unreserved coaches of 63 long distance trains entering Kerala in a week.
6. Number of DML coming to Kerala on an average day after visiting home = 1264.7
7. Number of DML coming to Kerala on an average day (new comers) = 645.73
8. Annual remittances by an average DML = Rs 70,000 from SQ₃; SQ₁ gave a slightly lower amount; it is possible that in the midst of many others in the train the respondent would tend to report a lower amount.

[Both the number of DML returning after a visit home and the number of new comers are under- estimates as only the long distance trains have been covered in the train count. It has been noted that a very small number of other DML travel by trains to Chennai, Mumbai and elsewhere and change trains there.]

The stock of DML can now be estimated as follows:

- I. $S = (1264.7 * 365) / (0.672 * 0.20) = 34,44,891$ when the proportion of DML traveling in sleeper class is taken as 0.80; the number will be 22,96,594 when the value is 0.70.
- II. $S = (1264.7 * 365) / (1.00 * 0.20) = 23,08,077$; the number will be 15,38,418 for the lower value of 0.70.

At this point it is necessary to carry out a reality check. Taking the value of 0.672 as the number of visits home by a DML in a year and the value of stock at the highest as 34 lakhs, the number of travelers returning to Kerala in a year will be over 21 lakhs and the number per day would be over 5500. If 80% are travelling by sleeper coaches, then about 500 out of the about 800 berths (60% of all berths in a train) would have to be occupied by DML which seems unlikely. When we take the lower value of the stock (23 lakhs) and the lower value of the proportion traveling in sleeper coaches, it would come to about 280 DML travelling in a train in a day. It would imply that in a train of 11 sleeper coaches and 72 berths in each coach, it is expected that around 25 on an average are occupied by the DML returning after a visit home. Casual observation suggests that this number is reasonable. Thus, **the stock of DML is assessed to be over 25 lakhs.**

The population of Kerala in 2011 was 333.88 lakhs and the male population age 20-64 years is 87.36 lakhs (based on the Expert Committee's projection as the age composition data from the 2011 Population Census have not become available). Considering that this entire population is not in the labour force as the work participation rate for males is around 50%, the ratio of DML to the local male population in the working age group could be 1:2.5. Whichever way we look at it this is huge and needs necessarily be taken due note of.

- I. Growth rate of DML (annual) =
 $(645.73 * 365) * 0.672 * 0.30 * 100 / 1264.7 * 365 = 10.35\%$
- II. Growth rate of DML (annual) =
 $(645.73 * 365) * 1.00 * 0.30 * 100 / 1264.7 * 365 = 15.30\%$

The number of DML newly arriving in Kerala each year is around 2,35,000.

About 11.60 per cent of those going home in unreserved coaches say they will not return to Kerala, which implies $S * 0.3 * 0.116 / 365$ return from Kerala every day (that is about 3.48%). Then the growth rate will come down by that rate. Thus, the net growth of DML would be 6.87% or 11.82% depending on whether I or II above is taken as an estimate of the growth of the stock of DML. The net addition to the stock of DML is then 235000 less 53360 which is equal to 1, 82,300.

The annual remittances by the DML as a whole would be Rs 16076.16 crores or Rs 10,768.93 crores depending upon the stock of DML taken. It would definitely be over Rs 14,000 crores a year.

2.3 Some Characteristics of the Domestic Migrant Labour in Kerala:

States of Origin and Age Distribution of DML in Kerala: The surprising fact about DML in Kerala is that currently the state has migrant labour from almost all the states of India and Nepal. While the numbers are few from Punjab, Haryana, Gujarat, Maharashtra and so on, the largest proportion hail from West Bengal (20%), Bihar (18.10%), Assam (17.28%), and Uttar Pradesh (14.83%) (See Table 1) The DML are almost entirely male and 75% of them are in the age group of 18-29 years; there are few above the age of 36 years. A handful of the migrant labour report that they are below 18 years of age. There is not much difference in the age distribution of migrant labour across the states of origin.

Table 1. Distribution (%) of DML by State of Origin and Age:

| State | Age Class in Years | | | | | | Percentage Share |
|---------------|--------------------|-------|-------|-------|--------------|--------------|------------------|
| | Below 18 | 18-23 | 24-29 | 30-35 | 36 and above | Not reported | |
| Uttar Pradesh | 00 | 38.53 | 38.53 | 15.60 | 7.34 | 0 | 14.83 |
| Assam | 1.57 | 50.39 | 34.65 | 10.24 | 2.36 | 0.79 | 17.28 |
| West Bengal | 1.36 | 46.26 | 29.25 | 14.97 | 7.48 | 0.68 | 20.00 |
| Bihar | 0.75 | 34.59 | 33.08 | 21.05 | 9.03 | 1.50 | 18.10 |
| Orissa | 2.04 | 34.69 | 30.61 | 20.41 | 10.20 | 2.04 | 6.67 |
| Others | 1.18 | 37.65 | 37.65 | 14.71 | 8.82 | 0 | 23.13 |
| Total | 1.09 | 40.95 | 34.29 | 15.65 | 7.35 | 0.68 | 100 |

Distribution by Religion: About 70% of the DML are Hindus, 24% are Muslims and the rest are either Christians or have not reported their religion. An important fact is that the DML from Assam and West Bengal are about 50% Muslims. Interestingly, about 20% of the DML from Orissa are Christians. From Assam about 12% of the DML are Christians (Table2).

Table 2. Distribution (%) of DML by State of Origin and Religion

| State | Religion | | | | Total |
|---------------|----------|--------|-----------|--------------|-------|
| | Hindu | Muslim | Christian | Not reported | |
| Uttar Pradesh | 81.65 | 16.51 | 0.92 | 0.92 | 100 |
| Assam | 40.16 | 45.67 | 12.60 | 1.57 | 100 |
| West Bengal | 47.62 | 48.98 | 1.36 | 2.04 | 100 |
| Bihar | 88.72 | 6.77 | 1.50 | 3.01 | 100 |
| Orissa | 73.47 | 6.12 | 20.41 | 0 | 100 |
| Others | 85.29 | 7.65 | 2.35 | 3.53 | 100* |
| Total | 69.25 | 23.54 | 4.76 | 2.18 | 100 |

Note: * there is a small other religious group which has to be added to get the row total of 100.

Duration of Stay of DML in Kerala: The question regarding the duration of stay in the current place of residence went unanswered by about 38% of all the respondents. The rest reported almost equal percentages for duration below one year, 1-2 years, 2-3 years and above 3 years. However, it needs to be noted that this is not the total duration of their stay in Kerala for the reasons discussed below. That could also be the reason for such a high proportion of DML not responding to this question.

An interesting aspect of the mobility of DML is that they move around quite a lot within Kerala. A worker picked at random in Aluva might have worked earlier at Kannur, Kasaragod, Wayanad, Thalassery, or Kottayam. Similarly, a worker picked at random at Cheruthuruthy or Edapalli would have worked at Kadalundi, Kaladi, Kozhikode, Thiruvananthapuram or Malappuram. That is probably the reason only about 15% of all DML report having stayed in the current place of residence for 3 or more years.

Channels of Migration: Historically contractors have played an important role in labour migration. Is it a significant channel through which the DML arrive in Kerala still? It is still an important channel as 28% had used such channels to migrate to Kerala (Table 3). It is slightly higher for labour from Bengal and Bihar at close to 33% and lower at 16% for labour from Orissa. The most important channel is a friend with over 50% reporting it. It is much higher in the case of labour from Uttar Pradesh at 65% and lower in the case of labour from Bengal. Relatives and others come way below at around 10% and 5% respectively. On the whole, it is friends and relatives who are instrumental in channeling a large number of labour from far distant parts of India.

Table 3. Distribution (%) of DMLs by Channels of Migration and State of Origin

| State | Channels of Migration | | | | | Total |
|---------------|-----------------------|--------|------------|--------|--------------|--------|
| | Relative | Friend | Contractor | Others | Not reported | |
| Uttar Pradesh | 6.42 | 65.14 | 25.69 | 0.00 | 2.75 | 100.00 |
| Assam | 11.81 | 56.69 | 24.41 | 5.51 | 1.57 | 100.00 |
| West Bengal | 8.84 | 46.94 | 33.33 | 10.20 | 0.68 | 100.00 |
| Bihar | 9.77 | 54.14 | 32.33 | 3.01 | 0.75 | 100.00 |
| Orissa | 16.33 | 51.02 | 16.33 | 12.24 | 4.08 | 100.00 |
| Others | 12.94 | 54.71 | 28.24 | 2.94 | 1.18 | 100.00 |
| Total | 10.61 | 54.69 | 28.16 | 5.03 | 1.50 | 100.00 |

Interestingly, a small proportion among the DML had left home in search of employment before coming to Kerala. Close to 20% of the DML from Uttar Pradesh and Bihar had worked elsewhere before coming to Kerala. The proportion was about 10% for DML from Assam and 8% for labour from Bengal and Orissa. Thus, a small group of about 13% of the labour had experience of working elsewhere in the country or Bhutan before they decided to move to Kerala. They must have had information from friends and relatives that the Kerala environment is more secure and offers more prospects which took them here.

2.4. Work Arrangements

Nature of Employment Contracts: As mentioned earlier the information flow about the work environment is largely through friends and to a smaller extent through relatives. However, having reached Kerala the bulk of them (66%) work under contractors. This is higher with labour from Uttar Pradesh and Bihar and significantly lower with regard to labour from Orissa. Oriya labour seem to be largely on their own (Table 4).

Table 4. Distribution of DML by Work Arrangement and by State of Origin

| State | Working with | | | Total |
|---------------|--------------|-----------------|--------------|--------|
| | Contractor | Casual Employer | Not reported | |
| Uttar Pradesh | 77.06 | 21.10 | 1.83 | 100.00 |
| Assam | 65.35 | 28.35 | 6.30 | 100.00 |
| West Bengal | 62.59 | 32.65 | 4.76 | 100.00 |
| Bihar | 72.18 | 23.31 | 4.51 | 100.00 |
| Orissa | 38.78 | 55.10 | 6.12 | 100.00 |
| Others | 66.47 | 27.65 | 5.88 | 100.00 |
| Total | 66.26 | 28.84 | 4.90 | 100.00 |

Sectors of Employment: The striking aspect of the DML in Kerala is that they have come to fill almost all occupations and sectors of the economy. A look at Table 5 and the observation that almost all cells have entries is enough to substantiate it. The train survey over two weeks, a small window to the world of DML, was enough to testify it. Their largest concentration is in the booming construction sector with 60% reporting it. Manufacturing, Hotel and Restaurants and Trade too report substantive numbers. Interestingly, Kerala agriculture has also become dependent on migrant labour. The others group contains a multitude of sectors. Thus, Kerala economy is driven by the large DML.

Table 5. Distribution of DML by Occupation and Sector of Employment

| Occupation | Sector of Employment | | | | | | | Total |
|----------------|----------------------|--------------|----------------------|---------------|-------|--------|--------------|-------|
| | Agriculture | Construction | Hotel and Restaurant | Manufacturing | Trade | others | Not Reported | |
| Carpenter | - | 0.54 | - | 0.14 | 0.14 | 0.81 | 0.14 | 1.90 |
| Electrician | - | - | 0.14 | - | - | 0.41 | 0.14 | 0.68 |
| Mason/Flooring | - | 3.54 | - | - | - | - | 0.14 | 3.68 |
| Sales person | 0.14 | 0.27 | 0.14 | - | 0.14 | - | - | 0.68 |
| Tailoring | - | - | - | 0.14 | - | 0.27 | - | 0.41 |
| Skilled work | 0.14 | 10.61 | 0.54 | 3.13 | 0.14 | 3.67 | 0.27 | 18.50 |
| Unskilled work | 2.04 | 43.40 | 5.44 | 4.22 | 1.36 | 11.56 | 1.50 | 69.52 |
| Others | - | 4.91 | 0.54 | 0.67 | - | 0.15 | - | 2.45 |
| Not reported | - | 0.27 | 0.14 | 0.14 | - | 0.68 | 0.95 | 2.18 |
| Total | 2.31 | 60.00 | 6.94 | 8.30 | 1.77 | 17.55 | 3.13 | 100 |

While the largest concentration of DML is among the unskilled work, they are not just confined to it. The next largest category is that of skilled work whether it is construction, manufacturing or hotels and restaurants. Masonry, carpentry and electrical work too have seen their entry (Table 5). On the whole, the DML have begun entering all skills and all sectors in Kerala.

Unemployment and Under-Employment Amongst DML: Further, examining the number of days of employment, it is clear that there is no sign of unemployment or under employment amongst the DML in Kerala. Over 85% get employment six or seven days a week. Another 11% reported working for five days a week. Only about two percent reported employment for less than four days a week (Table 6).

Table 6. Distribution of DML by Number of Days of Employment in a Week

| Number of Days of Employment in a Week | Percentage of Labour Reporting |
|--|--------------------------------|
| 3 | 0.54 |
| 4 | 1.50 |
| 5 | 10.88 |
| 6 | 57.82 |
| 7 | 28.71 |
| Non Reporting | 0.54 |
| Total | 100.00 |

Wages Earned by DML: The daily wage rates are almost double the minimum wage rates in Kerala. About one-third the DML report receiving wages of over Rs 400 a day (Table 7); another one-third report wages between Rs 300 and 400 and the rest below Rs 300. The wages earned by the DML does not seem to depend on whether a DML works under a contractor or as a casual labourer. Comparable distribution of DML by wage rates is seen in both the cases. For instance, the proportion of DML receiving a Daily Wage above Rs 400 per day is almost the same between the two classes. Similarly, the variation in wages across channels of migration is also insignificant.

Table 7. Distribution of DML by Daily Wages

| Wages per Day (₹) | Percentage of Labour Reporting |
|-------------------|--------------------------------|
| NR | 2.45 |
| Below 300 | 29.12 |
| 300 - 399 | 35.51 |
| 400 - 499 | 23.13 |
| 500 & above | 9.80 |
| Total | 100.00 |

Outward Remittances of Wages by DML: The money received as wages finds its way as remittances to their homes. The periodicity of remittance varies from monthly (32%), to once in two months (18%) to occasionally (42%) (Table 8). The amount remitted varies from ₹ 1000-5000 at the lowest to over Rs 20,000 at the last remittance (Table 9). In the aggregate it turns out to be around Rs 70, 000 per person in a year. And most of it flows through the banking channels (Table 10).

Table 8. Distribution of DML by Periodicity of Remittance

| Periodicity of Remittance | Percentage of Labour Reporting |
|---------------------------|--------------------------------|
| Every month | 32.38 |
| Once in 2 months | 17.82 |
| Occasionally | 42.18 |
| Never | 7.62 |
| Total | 100.00 |

Table9. Distribution of DML by Amount Remitted (₹)

| Remittance Amount (Last Remittance) | Percentage Reporting |
|-------------------------------------|----------------------|
| Never | 7.62 |
| Not Reported | 5.31 |
| 1000 - 5000 | 24.08 |
| 5000 - 10,000 | 38.50 |
| 10,000 - 20,000 | 19.73 |
| 20,000 & above | 4.76 |
| Total | 100.00 |

Table 10. Distribution of DML by Mode of Remittance

| Mode of Remittance | Percentage Reporting |
|-----------------------|----------------------|
| Own bank account | 57.69 |
| Others bank account | 21.50 |
| Post office | 1.63 |
| Other known person | 6.94 |
| Contractor | 0.54 |
| Others | 0.68 |
| Not reported | 3.40 |
| Never send money home | 7.62 |
| Total | 100.00 |

Most importantly, almost all the DML have identity cards of one type or the other. Voter's ID card is the most widely held ID card; 83% hold it. Less than one percent have driving license. Almost eight percent have PAN card. A small percent –slightly over one percent- of DML have both PAN and Voter's ID cards. About three percent of the DML- mostly from Orissa – have an ID card issued by their Gram Panchayat. Only about five percent of the DML reported that they do not have any ID card.

2.5 Living Conditions of the DML

The Domestic Migrant Labour in Kerala are often living crowded in rooms with hardly space to move around. While about 8% of all those surveyed did not respond to the question, 'how many reside in your room', 42% reported seven or more in a room, 13% reported six in a room, 12% reported five, 13% four and 8% reported three in a room. Only about 5% of all DML reported one or two persons in the room. There is hardly any difference as regards crowding across the DML from different States. Further, almost 84% of them all congregate among their own language groups. Almost all the DML also reported access to toilets, but 95% of all are common toilets. Language groups stay together and work together. And about 94% of all do common cooking with their own language groups. Individual cooking is reported by only 3% of the DML.

It has been noted earlier that the numbers of DML in Kerala is over two million. The numbers being large and the crowding in many places is well beyond the acceptable limits it is important to introduce policies and regulations to protect the DML as well as the local population.

Life and Work Environment of Migrant Labour

“Most people, given the opportunity, will not choose to move from their family, friends and home. Indeed, most immigrants yearn to return home and may eventually do. It is only under the most hopeless conditions that potential emigrants consider the exit option, and only a fraction of these have the character, contacts and resources to carry it off” (Moses, 2006: p. 13)

“The migrant worker comes to sell his labour power where there is a labour shortage. He is admitted to do a certain kind of job. He had no rights, claims, or reality outside his filling of that job. While he fills it, he is paid and accommodated. If he no longer does so, he is sent back to where he came from. It is not men who immigrate but machine-minders, sweepers, diggers, cement mixers, cleaners, drillers etc. This is the significance of temporary migration. “(Berger& Mohr, 1989: p 58)

The current wave of migration which gathered momentum during the early 1990s is new both in terms of its quantity as well as sources. Earlier migrations to Kerala were mostly from the neighbouring states of Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh, and they were mostly seeking employment in professions predominated by manual labour such as earth work, road works, unskilled jobs in construction, and in services like ironing clothes, and as cooks and waiters in small hotels and eateries. They were concentrated around cities and towns, with the construction workers congregated at the construction sites. They stayed mostly in temporary sheds or vacant shop floors and on rare occasions in accommodation provided by the contractor.

In terms of patterns of migration, settlement, employment and mobility, The present wave of migration differs from the earlier ones in terms of patterns of migration, settlement, employment and mobility,. As seen in the previous section, the present DML stock is spread

across both rural and urban areas and has percolated into all professions. Though it is still predominantly linked to construction activities, their presence is significant in various other professions too, like hotels and restaurants, brick kilns, jewelry work, bakeries, head-load work, hospitality, and in manufacturing industries of all kinds. They have a very visible and considerable presence even in the small towns of Kerala, and it is a common sight during early mornings for these labourers in great numbers congregating in town centres waiting for prospective job offers. One can see crowds of DML ranging from hundreds to thousands in the suburbs of Thrissur, Kannur, Ernakulam and Thiruvananthapuram cities. They have not only outnumbered the local workers in many professions but they have also totally replaced them. This is happening not only in manual labour sector, but also in the manufacturing sector and also in certain specific services/professions like hospitality. For instance, in Perumbavur Town and its surrounding panchayats, there are more than a thousand wood-based industries (according to sources there are 500 more units which are unlicensed) that engage around 30-40,000 workers, literally all of them are migrants! Most of the DML in Perumbavur area originally came to work in the wood industries, and many among them who are more enterprising and skilled, have consistently moved to other professions like construction and petty trade, hotels, petty shops etc. where wage levels or earnings are higher.

In order to get a bird's eye view of the range of issues around the life and work of DML, field studies were carried out in a number of sites spread over Perumbavur, Thiruvananthapuram and its suburbs, Ramanthali and Aluva. Unlike the previous chapter, this chapter and the next takes the approach of detailed case studies and personal interviews.

3.1 What triggered the migration to Kerala?

No one wants to leave one's home, family and surroundings to work in an alien place and under uncertain conditions. Obviously there were several factors that prompted these workers to leave their homes to come to the distant Kerala. Most of them have left home in their teens and have worked in several other Indian towns before coming to Kerala. The comparatively low level of wages, lack of employment opportunities, and the increasing unviability of the agricultural sector and its seasonal nature, have prompted most of them to seek employment elsewhere. Some of them have also come upon invitation by their friends/relatives in Kerala. In the case of Assamese workers, the first batches came to Kerala in the late 80's and early 90's in the aftermath of a legal ban on wood felling and the consequent closure of wood/plywood industries in their state. It was also a time when wood industrial units were being set up in Perumbavur; they came in groups to work here, and were much preferred due to their experience and expertise in it. Later, when the construction boom started in the mid-90's many of them moved to construction, where the wages were much higher.

The pattern was different in the case of construction workers in Ramanthali, where, most workers were recruited by labour contractors from Maldah district in West Bengal, and they were sent for a period of 60 days at a time; new batches came and went in response to the demand. In Thiruvananthapuram, the first batches came during the construction of the Southern Air Command campus in Aakulam.

3.2 Housing and Accommodation

The pattern and nature of the housing of the DML and the facilities available to and demanded by them, and their integration with local communities differ from place to place and profession to profession. The nature of housing of the DML is largely determined by the sector of employment and level of wages and skill: some live at the work site, in temporary shacks or sheds in common lands, in single room flats, one-room tenements, or one bed room houses and many of them live in open spaces or common lands in huts made of plastic or tin sheets.



The DML also stay in many semi-permanent tenements and huts. The lands in these cases belonged to local people, for which they paid rent. These hutments are either covered with tin or plastic sheets and did not have any facilities such as kitchen, or bathrooms and the toilets. Wherever they had facilities they were the bare minimum. There were instances of open defecation too. The hygiene around such settlements are pathetic and the settlements are littered with waste. Cooking, eating and sleeping are carried out in open spaces, and most of the occupants are unskilled workers with low wages. Most of them ate from a ‘mess’

nearby which was run by their fellow men. The local public has very low opinion about them and saw them as a threat to public hygiene, security and law and order.

Common kitchens are the rule and cooking is done either in the open or in make – shift kitchens. In Perumbavur where the DML live in groups and in tenements without kitchen facilities, the more enterprising among them have established a ‘mess’ for breakfast and dinner; the mid-day meal is carried by those with families while for the others it is prepared at the work site: in the case of construction workers, it is most often provided by the employers, but in the case of other casual jobs, they have to eat in hotels outside.

In the manufacturing sector, temporary sheds are provided at the manufacturing units where the DML live; these sheds differ from unit to unit. In one of the units visited, around 30-40 labourers were accommodated in a row of 6 rooms made of bricks, with a common kitchen, toilets and facilities for washing and bathing. Here, 6 to 7 persons occupied one room, some of which had small television and radio sets. Availability of water, access to drinking water and sewage facilities are common problems in most such settlements.

The temporary sheds at the work site are roofed with tin sheets and covered at the sides with plastic sheets. Though there were a few toilets, there was not enough facility for cooking or bathing, both of which were done in the open. In the wood industry sector, though the wage levels do not differ widely between units, the attrition rates are high; the labour contractors wait at the factory doors during Saturdays to ensure that the workers stick to the same unit, or to lure them to other units which are in need of labour. The difference is in the facilities offered like the quality of accommodation and food. In one of the units, the weekly menu was mutton for three days, chicken for two days and egg for one day. The daily wages ranged from Rs 200 to 300 per day, and the working hours extended up to 10 hours a day. According to the manager, if the workers are not provided with proper food, they tend to shift units. They also tend to shift in search of facilities and for reasons like caste/group affiliation. All the mill owners were unanimous about the sincerity and hard working nature of migrant labourers.

The construction/infrastructure sector portrayed another dimension of the life of the migrant labour. In the case of workers engaged in temporary works like earth work along roads etc, the workers were accommodated in temporary structures in adjacent compounds. Even though most of them had a contractor as their almost-permanent employer, the nature of their job involves constant movement from place to place and site to site, which makes renting accommodation costly and unviable.

The temporary sheds and living arrangements in construction sites were a common phenomenon, and their condition differs with the number of inmates and the scale of construction. In huge construction sites, workers stayed in semi-permanent structures made of brick walls and tin roofing. Water and electricity are usually available at such sites, which are extended to these temporary sheds too. The workers also slept in the completed portions of the buildings they are constructing. The cooking was common and in some places, different groups of workers, according to their place of origin and nature of work, lived in separate sheds, with separate cooking facilities.

Most of the labourers working in construction sector, lived in small houses or flats, depending upon their income and profession. Only a very few workers have brought their families with them, and so most of the houses are overcrowded with men. In one of the one room houses, we visited there were 12 occupants, and they paid a rent of 400-500 per head per month. Apart from sleeping space – all of them slept on the floor – there was only a tiny kitchen and a single toilet. Most often occupants of a house work in the same profession/unit. They are also from the same locality/region/village and often from same caste/community group. For instance, in one of the one room row houses the team visited, where more than 200 young men aging between 18 and 30 stayed, all of them belonged to the same district and religion. Even the owner of these houses, a local businessman, belonged to the same religion, and kept a watch on their activities. No anti-social activities were permitted, and it was closely monitored by the local people living in the vicinity. The owner also reported some instances where he had to evict some workers when they engaged in gambling, liquor consumption etc.

Workers earning better wages (mostly masons and supervisors, petty traders, hawkers etc) lived in proper flats, with one room and a common veranda, a small kitchen and a toilet; these flats had electricity and water connection, and were occupied by an average of 5-6 persons. The ‘official’ tenant was a single person who enters into an agreement with the house owner; the average rent of such buildings ranged from Rs 4000 to 5000 apart from water and electricity bills. These houses were mostly rented for a period of time, with the official tenant accommodating his colleagues and friends. Very few of them had brought their families with them. In one of the buildings with 30-flats the team visited, local families were also living in them. According to them, these ‘bhais’ (as they are called in Perumbavur) were very timid and seldom created any problems.



3.3 Employment

All the employers of DML – construction firms, labour contractors, manufacturers, casual employers, business owners, quarry/brick kiln owners etc – are unanimous about their professional sincerity and work culture. As noted, DML are employed in all sectors – formal and informal, agriculture, industry, trade and services, and belong to all levels of skill, experience and work categories – unskilled, skilled, trained, apprentices, helpers, experts, middlemen etc.

The employers have no complaints about their dedication to work and output, though when compared to local workers doing similar jobs, especially in skilled jobs, their productivity is less. For instance, many construction labour contractors opined that the quality of masonry work differs between the local masons and migrants, with regard to its finish and perfection. But the time and quantity of labour put in by an average migrant worker is much more than that by the local labourers. In many cases the average daily wages for a local and migrant mason vary up to Rs 100, and in many jobs that need complex calculation and perfection, they are yet to achieve a level of efficiency that is at par with the local workers. But, the migrant labourers are easy to manage and supervise; they do their jobs silently and continuously without breaks. They also put in longer hours and are ready to do overtime. In the case of construction workers at Ramanthali, their normal working day extends to 14 hours a day. In the case of workers working in bottling plants near Aluva, the effective working hours extend to more than 10 hours a day.

Some employers expressed apprehensions about DML getting organized or ‘unionised’. One mill owner openly said that ‘now we (mill owners) are happy because they work well, they are happy because they get better wages here, the local people and traders are happy because the DML spend most of their earnings here, and all of us get cheap labour. If they get organized then everything will get upset.’ He substantiated his argument by saying that the recent closing down of wood industries in the area literally paralyzed the local economy bringing it to a standstill.

Some sectors like brick kilns bring labourers on a seasonal basis. In this sector, the workers come with their families, settle near the kilns and stay there till the season gets over and work finished. There are workers who come regularly every year to Kerala for this work. They are paid on a lump sum basis.

Construction workers belong to two categories: those who work with a contractor and have some assurance about regular employment, and those who seek daily employment by casual employers. Though the casual workers who seek daily jobs independently get more wages, they don’t get regular employment. Their employment is dependent upon market demands, and they have to be ready to move in search of better wages and employment opportunities. In the case of workers attached to a contractor, they usually get employed on a regular basis, with the employer shifting them from site to site where he has work. This kind of employment also helps the labourer to work with experienced workers and acquire expertise to become more skilled and earn/demand better wages. The casual labourers who live independently or in small groups in the suburbs are comparatively more aged, and many of them have their families living with them. In most cases, both husband and wife go for work and earn for the family.

Many respondents reported that they come to Kerala due to lack of employment opportunities in their home state. Agriculture has become uneconomical, and there are no openings in industrial or services sector. And, when one compares the wage levels, the wages in Kerala is more than double they get in their homeland. All this makes Kerala a very lucrative destination.

In Perumbavur, it was reported that many DML were engaged in illegal sand mining operated through local contractors.

There was unanimity from Local Self Government representatives, mill owners, contractors, health workers and local people that the DML were constantly on the move. Very few of them stayed for a long time in a particular house/settlement, many of them came for a few months or seasonally. Most of the DML had no long term plans about settling in Kerala; they wanted to earn enough money and go back to their natal families. In the case of

plywood workers, it was quite common for them to shift from one firm to another, and many casual labourers even shifted residence and to casual work in the construction sector. This constant mobility and lack of fidelity to a particular firm also became an excuse for the mill owners to employ them on casual/daily wage basis perpetually. One Mill owner reported that despite his efforts to register them under Employees State Insurance and Employees Provident Fund, they refused to get registered. The attempt of the Labour Department to register DML met with very limited success; they were able to register only 600 labourers in Perumbavur! According to the mill owners, the migrant labourers are not interested in such registrations, as they do envision their settling here for good. And as they never stay in one place or stick to one employer for long, the mill owners were not ready to register them as their employees. “After registering with the government as employees in my factory, and getting ID cards certifying that, if they leave my factory and engage in some mischief, I will be in trouble.” said one of the mill owners.

Such mobility was also posing problems to the Health Department, who are not able to follow up cases of communicable diseases. Once the disease is identified, and medicines prescribed, most of them do not come back. A few AIDS and TB cases were reported in Perumbavur area, and these cases are being followed up with great difficulty.

3. 4.Wages

A factor that contributes to the attraction of Kerala as a job destination is the high wage level here compared to that in the states of origin of DML. For instance one of the migrant workers from Assam who is working in construction sector in Thiruvananthapuram now, and has worked in various other places in India, describes it thus: “I am 25 and I have been in Kerala for one and a half years. During the last 8 years I was working in various cities in India like Chennai, Ahmedabad and Kolkata. What I find attractive about Kerala is that, it is a place whose terrain and climate are similar to ours, the people here are friendly, the bosses are professional in their approach, the fellow workers from Kerala are cooperative and ready to teach, and most importantly, we are paid the promised wages at the end of the day without fail. At present I work as an assistant and I get Rs 350-400 a day plus lunch”.

But wages differ from sector to sector, profession to profession, level of skill, supply of labour, and market demands. Migrant labour being a population in flux and virtually being a reserve army of labour for various productive sectors, the level of awareness about minimum wages and demand for such legal rights are non-existent.

Almost everyone confirmed that wage rates were much lower in their states, which was one reason that makes Kerala an attractive destination for them.

3.5 Leisure

In almost all the sectors, the DML work long hours during working days, and have only one day off on Sundays. For instance, in many construction sites, they work 12-14 hours a day, and thus have no time for any relaxation or entertainment. After coming home late in the evenings, they don't have much time for anything else but cooking, eating and sleeping. Sunday is the only day they get to enjoy and relax. Many people do their weekly chores during that day, like washing etc. Some people stay in their rooms watching movies on television. Elaborate cooking is a common feature on Sundays.

It is also the day they go for an outing, to the local market to buy provisions, recharge phones, check out VCDs, and to do more elaborate shopping if they are planning to go home the week after. Parks, city centres, gardens, and open spaces etc are the only spaces available for them as pre-fixed meeting points to talk to their friends, relatives etc. But even such spaces are very few and their presence often seems to irritate local people. There have been instances in Trivandrum when they were driven away from parks by the police. Not only that their participation in local festivals and celebrations are minimal, some of their celebrations like Holi and Deepavali are seen as too noisy and riotous by local population. All this further insulates them from any kind of social life.



In some places like Perumbavur, a theatre (Lucky Theatre) is solely dedicated to screening Hindi and Oriya films. The DML from all the nearby districts throng this theatre during the

weekends. In some settlements, they have arrangements to screen DVDs, which they watch as a group. But for such very limited occasions of cultural consumption, they are totally deprived of any kind of cultural expression/celebration here. As their population grows and stays lengthen, these communities will necessarily tend to assert their rights and identity by seeking spaces and asserting presences, which in turn, could create tensions with the local populace.



3.6 The Migrants and the Locals

One of the most striking characteristics of migrant labour in Kerala is their total insularity from the local population. Though they contribute their labour to sustain local economy and make possible infrastructure development, and their presence is gradually percolating into agriculture and services sectors, they are not accepted as equals. The local community has a lot of apprehensions – more often unfounded – about them. These fears arise out of the anonymity of these workers: “Nowadays when I go out in the morning, the streets and my residential area are filled with these people. The presence of these aliens make me uneasy..” “Who knows who they are, and from where they come? What if they have a criminal background? What if they rob us and run away? Is it possible to identify them?” etc are some of the common expressions of fear and apprehension about them. They are also seen as a health threat, as carriers of diseases that were eradicated from Kerala. An year ago, a case of Malaria was reported in Perumbavur, the source of which was a migrant labourer. They are also accused of dumping food and other wastes into common land and rivers/canals thus

polluting the environment. As they are a shifting population, and the local community has no link with them, prevention of such activities or conscientisation about the fallouts etc is almost impossible. Added to the class barriers are language barriers which makes communication with them difficult.

One indicator of the extent of integration of migrants into the local polity/society is the acknowledgment of their presence by the grass root level of government, the local bodies. Such concentration of DML population in certain pockets should be an area of concern for the LSGs, who issue licenses to small units and are mandated to provide basic facilities for sewage, waste disposal, drinking water supply etc. But the Development documents of the LSGs in the area do not make any mention of DML, leave alone any schemes/programmes addressing their welfare or problems. The DML are officially non-existent as far as the LSGs are concerned.

Discussions with the representatives of the LSGs revealed that they are very much aware of the problems and issues relating to DML in their area, but do not have any specific plans to address them. According to them, it has to be initiated at the state government and departmental level. If any such initiatives are made, they are ready to cooperate and implement the same. The Perumbavur Municipal authorities mentioned instances where they cooperated with the Health Department to conduct inoculation camps in DML settlements. But for such rare instances, there was no concerted effort on their part about DML.

In almost all the places the Team visited, the local people did not consider DML as a threat to law and order in the locality. Though some stray theft cases were recorded against them in certain places, they were exceptions rather than the rule. DML were most often seen as a health threat due to their unhygienic living conditions in many places, and as carriers of HIV and other contagious diseases.

According to the LSG authorities and some landlords who rented houses to DML, the latter do not pose any security threats because,

- a) Almost all of them carry ID cards – either Election IDs or Certificates issued by their local Grama Panchayat;
- b) They come and stay in groups and are introduced to the landlord by a senior among them known to the landlord;
- c) Most of the settlements have people belonging to the same caste/community/religion, and so, they are a socially cohesive group. Individual tenants are not entertained, unless they have a proper job in a reputed firm;

- d) Moreover, the movements of each tenant were being closely monitored by group leaders and the local community, who, in most cases, seemed to have the power to oust them without any excuse, if they happen to suspect anything out of the way. As one of the landlords who rented more than 20 houses told the Team: “They are always under our surveillance. The moment somebody is upto some mischief, we throw them out immediately”;
- e) According to sources, altercations and disputes do occur among the DML, but it is in almost all the cases amongst themselves, or between different groups among them, and very seldom between DML and the local people.

But the clustering of settlements of people from the same caste/community etc could pose social problems of communal dimensions, as there are chances of tensions/enmities between groups in their homeland being carried over to the present settlements. Also, there are chances of local communal elements manipulating and working in tandem with DML communities to foment trouble, taking advantage of the group dwelling and anonymous nature of the individuals. In such cases, the apprehensions about ‘anonymity’ and group habitation patterns of DML could give rise to social tensions and mistrust. In many places, local people quoted media reports about such settlements being used as hideouts by criminals and extremists.

But, as of now, in almost all the places, the contractors and group leaders seem to have strict control over the movement and activities of the labourers.

3.7. Demographic/Gender Dimensions

One has to take into account the demographic/gender dimensions of DML issue in the context of Kerala. As the age profile of DML presented in Section 2 shows, the vast majority of them are young able-bodied belonging to the age group of 18 to 30 years. More importantly, almost all of them are male, and only a very small minority has brought their families with them. (The female presence is limited to certain specific sectors like jewelry work and brick kilns etc). The most obvious and immediate issue such a huge population, that too so predominantly male and young, raises is that related to their emotional and sexual needs. According to the volunteers of Kerala State Aids Control Society, this sudden influx of migrant male population into Kerala, who earn wages and has extra money to spend, has given a boost to local sex industry. Prostitution is rampant among them, but is carried out under veils of secrecy; moreover, they also are careful not to invite the wrath of local moral policing. All this, along with the total lack of knowledge about safe sex and the use of condoms make them a section that is very vulnerable to fatal infections and diseases. According to health volunteers, vast majority of them have not even heard of HIV or AIDS.

Looked at from a long term perspective, another potential area of concern is the stark contrast that is emerging in the demographic profiles of the host and migrant population in the state. The demographic profile of Kerala, due to various interventions like family planning programme, and factors like out migration to Gulf and other countries, is increasingly weighed towards the older age categories, and in another ten years, majority of the population will be 40 plus. So, in the near future, a very explosive demographic situation will arise in Kerala, where a big majority of the host population will belong to the older age groups while the migrant population will dominate the other segment of the population that is young and working.

3.8. The Economics of Sub Contracting

The DML is large in number, docile and easy to manage, work long hours and are highly mobile. They are in one place today and in another tomorrow. Paradoxically, most of the DML are employed by very 'formal' but labour intensive sectors like infrastructure/construction, and manufacturing industries like wood. They also figure prominently in the service sectors - hospitality, beauty parlours etc.

In the construction sector, they are procured and supplied by labour contractors, who in turn have links with construction firms, most of which are very reputed and even multinational. In wood industry, they are brought in batches, almost invariably from the same district/locality and belong to the same community/religion, artisanal group etc. Again these labourers, most of them are from the regions from which they recruit labour, are brought by and through suppliers. What these labour contractors assure the employers in the infrastructure/construction and manufacturing sectors is the uninterrupted supply of labour with the required skill sets and experience. It is a kind of package deal between the contractors and the employers.

This subcontracting system is beneficial to the employers as it relieves them

- a) From the burden of identifying and recruiting labourers when in need
- b) Worries of negotiating wages
- c) By keeping a labour force 'permanently temporary' through willful attrition and frequent rotation/change of jobs
- d) From the burden of having to employ workers on a permanent basis and thus adhere to labour laws and other mandatory welfare schemes

The seasonal nature of migration, whose ebb and tides are influenced by the seasonal demand for labour at their homeland and in Kerala, works to the advantage of the labour contractor as well as the employer. Most importantly, the manufacturing firms are able to

draw from this reserve army of labour any time they need according to the rise and fall in demand for labour, which in turn is related to the supply of timber from abroad and to production deadlines.



The economic imperatives are very evident: “Small and medium size companies and labor-intensive economic sectors do not have the option of relocating operations... Responses in these sectors include downgrading of manufacturing processes, deregulation and flexibilisation of employment, with increased emphasis on cost-cutting measures and subcontracting. In a considerable number of countries, these measures have expanded the number of jobs at the bottom of the employment scale. these jobs are referred to as the 3-D jobs: dirty, degrading and dangerous.” (Patrick and Moreno-Fontes Chammartin, 2003: p 4)

It is interesting to note that in our public discourses and reports, we tend to categorise DML almost invariably as ‘casual’ or ‘informal’. But if one looks into their patterns of employment, labour conditions, wage rates and also attrition, nouns such as ‘informal’ ‘casual’ etc need to be seen as verbs. They are in fact ‘informalised’ or ‘casualised’ to suit the interests of capital and host society that employs them. On the one hand, their ‘anonymity’ or ‘lack of identity’ and low levels of integration to host politics help to institutionalize their disenfranchisement. In fact, they are very well integrated into the host economy but not into the host culture or society, which means they are often deliberately kept at bay, in order to ensure not only their social insularity but also to disempower them from asserting their rights – as citizens and labourers. This systematic exclusion works to the advantage of the

host society in various ways: to keep the wage levels low, rent levels high, services cheap, and to maintain a labour force that is at their beck and call, one that can be absorbed and driven out at will.

Many of the factory owners in Perumbavur ‘complained’ that these migrant workers are ‘not interested’ in subscribing to many welfare schemes like Employees State Insurance, Provident Fund etc. They also complained about these workers never sticking to one firm, but always shifting places and jobs the moment they are offered better wages or facilities. In fact, such mobility also works to the advantage of the employers, as it helps them to access labour force at will – according to the changing labour requirements of the unit – and also as an excuse to keep them permanently ‘casual’ and thus relieving them of the burden/liability of offering them mandatory labour benefits.

The labour contractors of Naval Base at Ramanthali had a different story to tell. Most of the construction companies here are national or multinational companies who access labour from all over the country based on their skills and demand for labour supply. A large proportion of construction workers here come from Maldah region of Bengal, and they are brought in batches to be employed for a fixed period of 60 days after which they are sent home. The labour contractors ensure that each batch is replaced by the next. Though the system keeps track of labour movement at source or origin, the conditions of labour are not in tandem with a rights-based economy. According to sources, they are given a daily wage of around Rs 300-350 plus accommodation. But the flip side is that they are brought to work for 14 hours a day! One labour contractor said that ‘even if they work for less hours, our contract conditions say they have to be paid for 14 hours. For them, a working day is 14 hours, so we pay them fair wages according to their definition of a working day’. This constant rotation of labourers also works to the advantage of both the labour contractors and the construction company to have at their command a reserve army of labourers who can be accessed and fired at will. Given their working hours and construction site-centric settlements, they have no contacts with the host community outside their work site, and so, are isolated in multiple ways.

This is a universal phenomenon in migration where the host community reserves the ‘right’ to keep the migrants temporary and out of the purview of legal provisions that obligate them. What the ILO states very strongly in the global context rings very true here: “numerous governments informally tolerate irregular migration while they officially reinforce controls against ‘illegal’ migrant workers. The effects are, on the one hand, a continued supply of cheap labour, while on the other hand, ‘illegal’ migrants are unable to organize in the workplace to defend their dignity and decent work conditions, stigmatized and isolated as well from allies and support.

The practices of many states of tolerating the presence of migrant workers in irregular status to meet labour needs in certain sectors of the market constitutes a de facto employment policy in which part of the work-force becomes a variable which can be reduced or even eliminated (in theory) in periods of economic downturn, through exercise by states of their prerogatives to expel foreigners from their territory” (Patrick Taran and Eduardo Geronimi, 2003: p 6).

3.9 Formalizing Migrant Labour - Emerging Challenges

As is evident from the discussion in earlier sections, the DML presence in Kerala is a structural one that is closely and intricately linked to the state’s economy and society, and whose presence has percolated into all walks of economic activity. But in public discourses and media they are still called ‘anya-samsthana thozhilalikal’ which though literally would mean ‘workers from another state’ can also with the usage of the prefix ‘anya’ often denotes workers from an ‘alien’ state or simply alien workers . This is a potent indicator of the insularity and distance of the DML from the local people.

There is a deep ambivalence in the way society and government – officials of Health, Social Welfare, Police, LSG, Labour etc Departments and employers from various formal and informal sectors and contractors – look at them. On the one hand, everyone is aware that the supply and labour of DML is absolutely essential for the State’s economy; but on the other, they are also not very willing to accept the DML as equals, as citizens with all the democratic rights. Many of them look at the DML as a threat to security, health etc.

Evidently, most of the stakeholders who have some economic interests relating to DML, like the contractors, builders, manufacturers, local traders, and casual employers, would like the status quo to continue: that is, a situation where the flow of DML is unhindered and free, the wage levels and working conditions dictated by the local employers and the middlemen are accepted by them without much protest (which, in any case, is much above what that existing in their home states), their demands are minimal, they go on shifting jobs, places and employers, and live in the margins of our society. This kind of semi-illegal nature of residence help to keep DML population under constant surveillance and control, at the same time giving the host community the power to oust or redistribute them according to the push and pull of local economy.

Unless Kerala society and government address the DML question urgently and meaningfully, it is bound to throw up social problems and tensions of various kinds. Kerala, which has a huge population of men and women working all over the world, could be a model in ensuring the rights and freedom of the migrant population, and in integrating them with local society and culture.

Case Studies

4.1 Migrant Living

Perumbavur, Ernakulam District

The study team visited various settlements of Domestic Migrant labourers across the state including that of construction workers, factory workers, and casual labour.

Perumbavur is one of the oldest settlements of Domestic Migrant Labourers and is a place with a large concentration of migrants from north and north-east. The DML settlements are spread over Perumbavur Municipality, and the adjacent Grama Panchayats namely Vazhakulam, Vengola, Rayamangalam, Asamallur, Okkal, Koovapady, and Kalady. The size of DML population in this region is roughly estimated as 1.15 to 1.30 Lakhs as per the opinion of the elected members of various local bodies with whom the study team interacted. Approximately 3,000 migrants are settled in a single settlement in Palakkattuthazhath in the outskirts of Perumbavur municipality which the local people popularly call as 'Orissa Colony'. There are both multi storied flats and single storied sheeted rooms in clusters specially built for giving on rent to the migrants. In both kinds of settlements, the layout of the interior consists of a hall, a small kitchen and a toilet in a single row connected with a common passage veranda. On an average 10 migrants reside in a single unit of approximately 200 square feet. In some cottages the toilets are located outside the room for common use by the inmates of all the units.

In most of the multi storied buildings, there was waste water disposal facility connected to soak pits, but in case of many of the sheeted buildings the outlet is into the open area

without any arrangement for disposal. Like any other densely populated settlement here also arrangement for disposal of household solid waste was near absent. Many LSG ward members from the Panchayats complained that the waste was dumped into nearby streams.



In the multi-storied cluster cottages, the migrant labourers and, Malayali families were residing side by side harmoniously. In a three storied building of 24 units three units were occupied by the Malayali families and the remaining by the domestic migrant labourers from West Bengal, Odisha and Assam. The Malayali housewives with whom the study team interacted did not feel any inconvenience in living in these settlements. They had issues only regarding waste disposal and hygiene which they blamed on the large number of occupants per room. The migrant labourers staying in all the units in this building were single. It is not clear whether they were unmarried, or whether they were married, but had left their wives and families behind. In some of the units they have television and cable connections.

In most cottages the migrants pay rent individually or per head which ranges from Rs. 400 to 700 per month. In the multi storied buildings an occupant is charged Rs. 500-700 per head. In the sheeted structure the rent per head is around Rs. 200-300. In almost all the cottages, cooking is common by one or two persons in turn using Kerosene Stove. There are some hotels in the vicinity which are run by the migrants. In some other settlements of Bengali migrants, women from their villages are appointed for food preparation and other household chores.

In a settlement called Manjapetty in Vazhakulam Panchayat which is 12 Kms from Perumbavur town, the rent per head in the single storied sheeted building is slightly lower than that in other settlements. Here the rent per head ranges from Rs. 350 to Rs. 500. In

one settlement seven units are constructed in a single storied sheeted building. All the inhabitants in this site are from west Bengal working in construction sites and a railway cement godown. The migrants live in this settlement under the strict control of the house owner and the local people. They are not allowed to consume alcohol or to play cards in their dwelling place. In case, such incidences are noted, the inhabitants are immediately ousted by the building owner. The area of a unit is around 180 square feet and has a hall and a small room. The hall is used as bedroom for 10-12 inmates, where they sleep on plastic mats. There are seven such units in this cluster cottage of 70-80 people. The small room is used as kitchen where food is prepared using the Kerosene stove placed on the ground. This settlement has only four bath rooms and five toilets for the use if all the inhabitants. Some of the immigrants were seen shaving and bathing in the open.

An auto driver living in a rented cottage near to this settlement said that the migrants in this settlement do not create any problems for the local people. But he expressed his concern over the rent escalation in recent times for the small cottages which has adversely affected the family budget of the families living in rented houses with limited income. For the migrant labourers, they do not feel much burden as 10-12 people share a unit. But for the local families the rent is unaffordable.

In a settlement in Manjapetty , a majority of the rooms were occupied by the migrants from Assam. Some of them were construction workers and some others working in the packaged drinking water bottling unit. The lay out of the building is same as in other places. Here also there are 10-12 Migrants per room, with the owner is charging Rs. 400 from each individual.



The study team also visited the migrant settlements inside the plywood and veneer making factories. The cottages in the plywood factories also have the same lay out seen in other settlements, but instead of the bath room they have constructed a bathing area with an open tank with space for bathing around the tank. Here also a large number is accommodated in

each unit. In some of the factories they have provided TV and cable connection in a common area. In the well-established industries they have recently started providing free food to the workers to prevent a large turnover of employees.

In the construction sector, the contractors in major work sites provide temporary sheds in the site for the workers. This helps to reduce wages. When the sheds are full, the workers are accommodated in the partially completed buildings.

Chavadimukku, Thiruvananthapuram District

The living conditions of migrants in large size construction companies and under large contractors were studied in various locations in and around Thiruvananthapuram Corporation. Contractors in major work sites, like office complexes and flats, set up temporary sheds in the site to accommodate the migrant workers. The provision of accommodation is a means to reduce wages for the contractor. In the case of sites for office complexes, enough space will be available in the plot apart from the space marked for the building. So the temporary sheds constructed in such locations are retained until the work is completed and the building is transferred. . The building in progress also is used to accommodate the workers after the building raises to a certain stage. There are various sets of workers in the site, differentiated by the type of work, place of origin and otherwise groups brought by different labour supplier. In most sites, the labourers reside and prepare food together at the site. Generally a group consisting of five to ten persons prepares the food including breakfast lunch and supper for everyone. Group members generally are from the same village and some of them are relatives and are lead by a team leader. Each one contributes daily for the purchase of food articles, but the cost sharing and settlement of account are done in the weekend. In the construction sector, wages are settled at the weekend.

In sites where flats are constructed, the sheds set up in the initial stage are used for a certain period only. Thereafter when more workers come to the site they are accommodated in that portion of the flats whose super structure has been completed. When the work progresses the temporary sheds are removed and all the workers are shifted to the building in progress.

Three or four temporary toilets are constructed for 50-60 workers. Bathing arrangement in many of the sites is in the open and in a few places; cubicles are made of construction materials. The sheds are set up with tin sheets and with minimum ventilation. Food and food articles are stored in the same space which is used for sleeping. Cooking in many settlements is in the open or under a temporary roof. Both Kerosene stove and firewood are used for cooking in this kind of settlements. Broken parts of wooden planks and runners used for shuttering and wooden remains of the carpentry work available in the site is used as firewood.

As kerosene is very expensive in the open market, the migrant labourers depend on the wooden waste available at the site for cooking to the maximum possible extent.

When the work stops due to scarcity of sand or for any other reason, the contractor permits the migrants to go for other casual employment while staying in these sheds. But they should join back his work on demand. The migrants stay in the work sites works up to seven days a week if work is available.

Thirumala, Thiruvananthapuram District

Thirumala is one of the settlements in Thiruvananthapuram suburbs, where migrants who work as casual labourers stay. Here, they occupy rooms and houses on payment of rent on a per head basis. There are a number of such settlements in various parts of the city. In the settlement at Thirumala which is within Thiruvananthapuram Corporation, the Team found many casual workers from Orissa and West Bengal living in the upstairs of a commercial complex. Five to seven people live in the rooms with an area of 80-100 square feet. There are 24 such rooms in this settlement. Apart from these rooms upstairs, some rooms are constructed at the back portion of the ground floor. Migrants from Assam, Bihar and West Bengal live in these settlements. But each of the language groups stay in separate rooms or clusters. Out of the 24 rooms, one room is occupied by a Bihari Migrant family who is a carpenter with wife and three children. Two of his children are of the school-going age group, but they seldom attend school. The remaining 23 rooms are occupied by migrants who are single. Only 4 rooms in the second floor have attached toilets. There are only 4 toilets and 3 bathrooms for the 120 odd inmates in the remaining 20 rooms.

There is no separate space for cooking in any of these rooms. So they cook in the passage and corners of the building using Kerosene stoves. The migrants in this settlement very rarely depend on hotel for their food, except for some light refreshments at 10 pm. They prepare breakfast, lunch and supper at the dwelling place itself and take lunch with them while going for work. The building owner resides close to this building and the migrants stay under his close supervision. Environmental hygiene is too poor, the passage and the premises are littered with pan masala foils, beedi stubs and other wastes. Each inmate pays a monthly rent of Rs. 700 in advance before the last day of the month.

Unlike workers at work sites, generally Sunday is a holiday for casual labourers. Earlier they used to visit Gandhi Park in East Fort, a place of congregation for casual migrant labourers where they used to meet their friends and enquire about better job opportunities. But due to the restrictions imposed by the city police against the free entry of domestic migrants in Gandhi Park, they are forced to go to other places like Kovalam, Shangumugham Beach, Museum, Veli beach etc. to meet their friends and relatives. The restriction was imposed in

the light of some stray incidents of violence involving domestic migrants. Though the police withdrew from imposing such restrictions upon the DMLs due to protest from human right activists and social organizations, the migrants in this settlement said that they are hesitant to go there after that incident.

There are television sets in some of the rooms in these settlements. These televisions are owned by the inmates who have been staying here for a long time. The people residing in the nearby rooms also come to the neighboring rooms to watch the programmes in their language. Some of them prefer to stay back in the room watching TV even on Sundays as it is less expensive.

Majority of the inhabitants here are below 30 years. There are some masons from west Bengal and carpenters from Bihar above this age. Almost all the inmates use pan masala which add to the unhygienic conditions as they spit on the corners of the parapet and the staircase.

Ramanthali, Kannur District

The situation in the Construction site of the Naval Academy in Ramanthali in Kannur District was very different. The construction here is by large construction companies and some by their sub-contractors. The workers are arranged through ‘tekkedars’ or labour contractors for which the construction companies pay commission to these labour suppliers per working day. The migrants are provided accommodation in the temporary sheeted structures. There are three types of workers recruited here from outside the state. A majority of the unskilled labourers in the settlement are from Andhra Pradesh who comes along with their families including children. A majority of the masons in this site are from Odisha, and the workers in carpentry and bar bending are from west Bengal.

All the family members work in the site for upto 12-15 hours, the payment being made on piece rate and output basis. The local Gram Panchayat and the health authorities are not permitted to enter the site being a defense area. So they are not quite aware of the working and living conditions of these workers. The workers approach the local Primary Health Centre (PHC) to get treatment for ailments, as other health care facilities are not affordable. The PHC authorities provide health care services to them free of cost. According to local information the situation of the unskilled workers brought by the labour suppliers is quite bad. It is reported that they are not permitted to go home before the agreed period as they receive a portion of payment in advance before migrating from their village.

Additional requirement of unskilled workers is met from Maldah district of West Bengal through labour suppliers. The unskilled workers are recruited through the local Panchayats

in Maldah. Each batch of migrant workers stays for 60 days and return to the village, and they are replaced by another group that reaches the destination to work for another 60 days.

Entry to the defence academy is restricted by the authorities and no one is permitted to visit the location of the settlements of unskilled labourers living with families, one of which is known as ‘Andhra Colony’. The suppliers and the local workers who frequent the settlement point out that the living condition of these migrants including little children was deplorable. A few months ago, following media reports about the prevalence of ‘bonded labour’ in the settlements, a team of officials headed by Tahsildar, visited the location. According to reports, they returned satisfied after meeting the labourers and inspecting their living conditions.

4.2 Case Studies – Migrant Lives

SA, Grocery Shop Owner, Perumbavur

SA is from an agrarian Muslim family in the rural part of Murshidabad district, West Bengal. He has two brothers and a sister. His father is a marginal farmer. Both his father and mother work in their land as well as in the lands of other large scale agriculturists. SA studied up to 12th standard but discontinued studies to find a job to support his father who was struggling to meet the needs of the family because of diminishing income from agriculture caused by increased input costs. According to SA, he stopped his education as there is little employment opportunity in West Bengal for well-educated youth. So he preferred to search for a job without delaying it for education. He left his village when he was 19 and came to Kerala with the help of a relative working in plywood industry in Perumbavur.

SA first joined in a plywood veneer making factory and continued there for over eight months. Though the wage in veneer factories is lesser than for other manual labour, he used to get the payment promptly at the weekend. He was also provided accommodation by the factory. Later he left this work in search of better paid employment. He started working as a helper in building and road construction which was more remunerative than the work in plywood industry. Later he got an opportunity to work in a fruit stall in Perumbavur. SA learned to speak Malayalam very quickly from this fruit stall through having to deal with the local costumers. After two years, SA married a girl hailing from Murshidabad whose father was working in Perumbavur. His father in- law was supplying a Bengal brand beedi to the shops in Ernakulam district. Apart from this he owned a grocery shop in Palakkattuthazhe which is thickly inhabited by the Migrant labourers from Odisha, West Bengal and Assam. Now SA is running this grocery shop while his father in-law is in the beedi business. SA has established good relations with all his customers including the local Malayali families. He has a good customer base among the locals.

SA's wife lives in his ancestral house with their two year old girl child. SA visits his home 3-4 times a year. During his return journey he brings local commodities including Murshidabad brand beedi for sale.

SA explained that his experience in the fruit stall as a sales boy has helped run his business. However, he added that there are many others from Murshidabad and Maldah doing various businesses in Perumbavur and Aluva. He also took our team to a nearby grocery shop and a hotel (mess and a light refreshment centre) which was run by Mr. FL, his friend from the same village. FL is living in a cottage with his wife and two children. His elder son was studying in the 2nd standard and the daughter in UKG in an English medium unaided school in Perumbavur. FL has brought two persons from Murshidabad including a woman to work in his shop and to cook at the 'mess'.

SS, Production Manager, Plywood Unit, Perumbavur

SS belonging to Bhadrak district in Odisha, came to Perumbavur in 2001. He has a brother and a sister. His father and mother are working in a brick kiln for a low wage. Due to the bad financial situation of his family, he was not able to continue his education after the 12th standard. On completing his higher secondary education, SS attended an industrial training centre for three months to learn tool molding work.

After this short term course, when he was 18 years old he migrated to Mysore, where one of his relatives was working in an industry. SS managed to get a job in this industry. He remained there for about a year and shifted to Kerala along with some of his colleagues. The wages they received in Mysore was low, and in addition there was a huge cut in wages for food and accommodation. So they moved to Kerala in search of better wages and employment following the advice of his colleagues from Assam who informed him about the job opportunities in Perumbavur.

SS started to work in a veneer factory as a helper under a work contractor. He got accommodation in the workers cottage that was attached to the factory. Later many of his colleagues who came to Kerala with him left plywood industry in search of better wages and joined the construction sector. But SS felt comfortable working in plywood factory as he is happy with the facilities there; moreover 6 days work is assured even though the wage was lesser than in the construction sector. He was promoted as a work supervisor with an increase in wages. Now he is working as a production manager in the same factory which is one of the oldest plywood factories in Perumbavur. SS says that the accommodation facilities in this factory are much better compared to other factories in this locality.

Four years ago, SS got married. He brought his wife to Perumbavur renting a separate cottage rent near his place of work and they stayed together for one and half years. She went back home when she became pregnant. Now she is staying in her house in Bhadrak with her parents and their three year old girl child. According to Mr. SS he could not bring his family to Kerala as the cost of living is very high here, especially the rent for a single bedroom cottage. In their village, they produced enough rice and vegetables required for a family in their own land. Here, they need cash to purchase them, apart from high room rent for family accommodation. However SS is happy about his life in Perumbavur. Some of the workers from Odisha have gone back, as there is shortage of labour in Bhadrak during harvesting season; they will get a wage of Rs. 300 for the harvesting work in this season. Earlier it was only Rs. 150-200, but now the seasonal wage has increased in Bhadrak as there is severe shortage of labour in harvesting season due to large scale migration of youth from this region.

SS has a TV in his room and he regularly goes to watch Oriya films in theatres in Perumbavur. Recently SS got a prize of 50 Lakhs and a Maruti Swift Dezire car in the Kerala Government Lottery. He sold the car and settled all the debt of his family in his native place. Now SS is helping the work contractor for managing the production and labourers from Odisha and West Bengal. Many of his villagers have reached Perumbavur with the help of SS and some of them are working in the same factory under his supervision.

Now SS sends Rs. 8000-12000 once in two months to his family. Most of the time he deposits money in his father's bank account, who gives a portion to his wife who is residing with her parents. His wife also has an account in the State Bank of India. Apart from this she has the ATM card of SS's own bank account. On special occasions, he will deposit money in one of these accounts from which it can be withdrawn by his wife from the ATMs at the nearest town. Apart from these accounts, SS has opened a bank account in Perumbavur branch to encash the lottery prize money.

According to Mr. SS, depositing money in the Bank Account is a tedious task and is one full day's affair. There will be a huge queue for depositing cash for the other branch account holders. They use to stand in the queue by 08.00 am to remit the cash. Many times they have to wait till noon time for making the remittance. The bank will accept remittance only upto three accounts from a single person. Therefore to avoid loss of one day wage there is practice among them to send one person to the bank for cash remittance by sharing wage compensation and other expenses. SS feels the drudgery of sending money home as a major issue faced by the migrant labourers in Perumbavur. He feels it would be good if SBI could open a separate branch for the Domestic Migrant Labourers in Perumbavur with more counters to deal with their remittance.

RS, Casual Labourer, Perumbavur

RS from Murshidabad of West Bengal state left his village when he was 14. He has been working in Perumbavoor and nearby areas as a casual worker for the last 10 years. His father and mother are agricultural labourers. His family owns 33 cents of land in which they had an ancestral house. He has a brother and a sister both elder to him and married. His brother and his wife are doing their post-graduation, and RS is providing financial support for their study.

RS came to Perumbavur with one of his relatives working in a plywood factory. He also joined as a casual labour under a work contractor in a veneer making factory. He worked there nearly for a year and later shifted to the construction sector. Later for some time he joined a sand mining group in Perumbavur and nearby areas. It is more lucrative than any other work available in this region. As the district authorities and the police have increased raids against sand mining, for the last one year he is engaged in loading and unloading of cement in a railway godown. In his present work RS is earning Rs. 400-600 a day depending on the number of bags he loads/unloads. RS occasionally visits his village. Every month he deposits whatever he can save in to the bank account of his father in order to support his family and also for the study of his elder brother and sister in law.

RS is staying in one of the migrant settlements in Manjapetty in Vazhakulam Panchayat near Perumbavur. He is residing in a single bedroom cluster cottage with a kitchen and a common toilet outside the room. There are 10 persons in his room including himself and all are from Murshidabad. Those renting the accommodation have to pay the building owner individually. He is paying Rs. 400 for his accommodation in the small hall.

NM, Worker, Bottling Plant, Aluva

NM migrated four years ago after the business he ran in his village became unviable due to meager turnover and insufficient profits. He belongs to Hoswaragoan village in Morigoan district in Assam. His father and mother are marginal farmers and are agricultural labourers too. His father cultivates rice and vegetables in the 15 Bigha land owned by him. NM, 38 years old, has studied up to the 10th standard. He has built a house in his ancestral land. His wife and six year old boy are residing in this house. His boy child has not yet started to attend the school and NM has not yet planned the child's schooling.

NM was running a small textile shop in Hoswaragoan village centre. When the people started to shop apparel items from bigger textile shops in the cities, his business started to diminish and in soon the turnover became inadequate to meet his wage and room rent. In

addition, when he shifted to a separate house from his joint family, his cash requirements also started to increase. Thus NM migrated to Secunderabad in Andhra Pradesh in search of a better paid employment. He worked in a factory in Secunderabad for one year. From there he shifted to Chennai and worked there for more than two years in various jobs including in the Hyundai car factory as a helper under a work contractor. Four months ago he came to Perumbavur hearing from a friend in Morigoan about the employment opportunities in Kerala. He worked in construction sites for nearly one month and is now working in a packaged drinking water bottling unit in Perumbavur.

NM has no clear plans regarding his work and stay in Kerala. He is not sure how long he is going to stay here, and seems to be taking stock of the situation here before taking a decision. Apart from seeking livelihood, he said, he had heard about Kerala from his friends, and so came to see and experience the place and to enjoy the thrill of living in a faraway place. The climate in Kerala he felt was very pleasant when compared to Chennai and Secunderabad. Another attraction was the prompt payment of wages every week end.

NM is staying in a cottage of 200 square feet area with 11 others. They have a small hall, a kitchen and an attached bathroom. All of his roommates are from Assam. Each of the inmates pays Rs. 400 per head as monthly rent. The inmates are admitted by the cottage owner and rent is paid individually by each of the inmates. Consumption of alcohol and playing cards is not permitted here. Cooking is done in the small kitchen using a Kerosene stove. Everyone takes turns to prepare food.

Every month NM sends at least Rs. 5000 to his family. He says that his wife can manage the household expenses with this amount and even could save a portion. He makes his remittance through the bank account of his brother in law. He has not yet started an account in the name of his wife as it is difficult for his wife to travel to the town to withdraw cash from the bank.

Recommendations

From the results emerging from the Study, there is clearly a need to address the following issues urgently:

1. A voluntary registration of DML based on which all benefits to the DML will converge.
2. Improving Housing and Living Conditions of the DML.
3. Social Security and Health issues.
4. Employment Issues.
5. Sustaining good relations between the DML and the local population in Kerala.
6. Help – line in different languages.

It is therefore suggested that Government may be pleased to consider taking the following steps and if found appropriate and feasible take measures to implement them expeditiously.

1. Registration on Arrival in Kerala

- 1.1 The issue of Domestic Migrant Labour concerns the domain areas and jurisdictions of many Departments of Government including the Labour, Health, Social Welfare, Police, Education and Local Self Governments. It is therefore important to link the provision of all government benefits to DML through a **common single point one-time voluntary registration system**. It is therefore recommended that the Government may expeditiously put in place a computerized common system of voluntary registration of the Domestic Migrant Labour in Kerala.
- 1.2 The procedure for this voluntary registration would necessarily have to be a simple one with a registration form that can be filled up in a few minutes. Only the basic and

necessary details including DML's place of origin, names of next of kin to be contacted in an emergency, copy or details of any identity card they are carrying, the place of work in Kerala, name of contractor if any, nature of contract, nature of work etc. need to be filled.

- 1.3 Thereafter a unique Registration Number needs to be generated and given to the DML along with the Registration Card.
- 1.4 This voluntary registration would be valid for availing benefits of all the Schemes that the different Departments of the State Government has to offer the DML including the benefits and services indicated in the Recommendations below. This would avoid duplication of registration of DML by different departments.
- 1.5 While the lead for the voluntary registration may be taken by the Department of Labour, the facilities for registration should be available at all the offices of the Local Self Governments. The format for the Registration may be developed by the Labour Department in consultation with all the relevant Departments mentioned in para 1.1 above.
- 1.6 It may also be examined if the Registration can be made available on-line at the Akshaya centres.
- 1.7 Wide publicity on the benefits of the voluntary registration may be given through TV, press etc. in Kerala in the different languages of the DML and in their States of Origin and on trains coming into Kerala. Every encouragement may be given to the DML to register on arrival in Kerala.

2. Housing and Living Conditions

- 2.1 Leaving the housing of DML to vagaries of the local market forces has led to the DML having to live in highly crowded and unhygienic conditions. It is important that the State Government initiates steps to provide affordable group housing and associated services (provision of water, electricity, sanitation, toilets, washrooms, ensuring a green environment etc.) to the DML in the state. It is also important that the Government provides subsidies in the State's Budget for such an Affordable Housing Scheme for DML.
- 2.2 It is suggested that the provision of affordable housing and associated services (water, electricity, sanitation, toilets, washrooms, ensuring a green environment etc.) to the DML may be done by the State Government through the formation of a non-profit Company under section 25 of the Companies Act.
- 2.3 Private enterprises with Public support may be encouraged to build and provide hygienic accommodation with electricity, running water, sanitation facilities, sufficient toilets,

washrooms etc. on reasonable rent to DML especially in the major cities and towns where they work or near areas of major concentration of DML. This may also be done under the umbrella of the non-profit Company suggested in 2.2 above.

2.4 The benefits of these Schemes may be limited to those who register as per Recommendation 1 above.

3. Social Security and Health Schemes for the DML

3.1 There being a total lack of Social Security for the DML in Kerala, it is important for the State Government to have a Social Security Net for the DML. It is therefore strongly recommended that the **Government introduces appropriate Social Security Schemes** for the DML, taking into consideration the period of their stay in the State. The Social Security Schemes should include provision for payment to take care of cases of ***accidents and serious illness, death, loss of limbs etc.***

3.2 The Social Security Scheme may also consider the setting up of a ***Provident Fund DML*** with contributions from the employers in the case of those who work under a contractor, and a non-contributory scheme fully paid by the DML in the case of those who work on their own.

3.3 The Social Security Schemes may be implemented by one of the Existing Welfare Boards now under the Labour Department of the State Government.

3.4 The Social Security Schemes may be limited to those who register as per Recommendation 1 above.

3.5 The DML are at times a health threat to the local community with reported cases of Malaria and AIDS. Therefore wherever the DML is eligible to be brought under the National Health Insurance Scheme, the ***Rashtriya Swasthya Bhima Yojana (RSBY)*** (ie. if the DML is from a BPL family), the DML may be encouraged to do so.

3.6 However, in view of the relatively high levels of income that the DML are earning in Kerala, it is quite possible that a majority of the DML working in the State do not fall within the eligibility criterion of RSBY. It is therefore suggested that the Government of Kerala design a **Kerala State Health Insurance Scheme** specifically targeting DML, most of whom may be above the poverty line. The scheme may be on a **contributory basis** and with subsidies from the Government of Kerala. Being an issue of inter-state migration, both the Government of India (and the Governments of the States of Origin that are willing to do so) may also be encouraged to contribute to the Scheme.

3.7 The Health Schemes may be limited to those who register as per Recommendation 1 above.

4. Employment Issues

- 4.1 While only isolated cases of exploitation of DML by employers are reported, it is still important that steps are taken to make employers and the DML aware of the Labour Laws and their rights and responsibilities. Towards this it is suggested that the State Government **undertake awareness programmes both amongst the employers and amongst the DML**, the latter in their languages. The State Government may seek the support of the States of Origin of the DML in these awareness campaigns.
- 4.2 While no case of payment of wages below the Minimum Wages have been reported, efforts need to be taken that over-time etc. are given for work over 8 hours.
- 4.3 Similarly, while only very few cases of serious accidents at the work-place involving DML have been reported, efforts need to be taken to ensure sufficient minimum levels of **Occupational Safety at the workplace of the DML**. This may also have to begin as an awareness drive amongst both the employers and the DML and later as an enforcement effort.
- 4.4 The employers should also be informed that they should restrict employment only to DML who have registered themselves as above.

5. Sustaining Good Relationships between the Local Population and the DML

- 5.1 While as noted in the Sections above, there is at the moment fairly good relations between the local population in Kerala and the DML, it is important that this healthy relationship is sustained over time. Towards this it is important to **integrate the DML** with the local population by developing common platforms of interaction through cultural exchange programmes, specific schemes dedicated to the socio-educational and cultural development of DML population; this needs to be a participatory programme with the active involvement of peer leaders/activists from amongst them.
- 5.2 It is also important for the Government and the people of the state to **make the DML feel welcome**, wanted and at home in the State. It is recommended therefore that the Department of Public Relations of the State Government in conjunction with the Department of Labour to put out advertisements in papers, local TV channels as well as Bengali, Assamese, Odiya etc. TV Channels that explain the State's Schemes for DML and encourage them to get the Identity Cards mentioned in 1 above and get themselves registered as per 2 above.
- 5.3 Similarly, advertisements and programmes targeting the local population in the state to sustain the good relationships that they have with the DML may also be telecast.

5.4 While publicity for ongoing schemes for DML may be given in TV channels in their States of Origin as well as in TV channels in Kerala in Bengali, Hindi, Assamese, Oriya etc. **Such publicity may also be given on long distance trains coming in to Kerala and on railway platforms.**

5.5 There is also need for initiating programmes at the level of the Local Self Government to address location specific and industry specific issues relating to the DML.

6. Help- line in different languages

6.1 It is recommended that the Government (either on its own or in partnership with voluntary agencies) set up a help- line for the DML with different numbers for DML speaking different languages (Particularly **Bengali, Hindi, Assames, and Oriya**). The help- line may be manned by persons who understand and speak these different languages and are fully conversant and trained to respond to and guide the DML on all matters including labour laws, health issues, social security, emergency issues etc.

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Migrant Labour Survey, Kerala, 2012

Survey Questionnaire SQ 1

(For those DML who have been in Kerala for a time and/or on a visit home, and/or those who are coming back to Kerala after a visit home)

| | |
|---|--|
| I. Descriptive Identification of Sample Individual | |
| 1. Name: | 2. Sex: Male/Female |
| 3. Age: | 4. Completed years of education: |
| 5. State/UT of Origin: | 6. District of Origin: |
| 7. Tehsil/Town of Origin: | 8. Village of Origin: |
| 9. Religion: | 10. Caste: |
| 11. Category: Going back not to return/Visiting home for Holiday/Returning after visit home | 12. If the latter two, how often do you visit home? Once in three years/ once in two years/every year/twice a year/other (specify) 13. Mobile number if available: |
| II. Place of Residence in Kerala | |
| 1. Name of Place: | 2. City/Town/Panchayath: |
| 3. District: | 4. Residing since: Month/Year |
| 5. Nature of Dwelling Place: House/Room | 6. Toilet: Common/Individual |
| 7. Number of persons per room/house: | 8. Cooking arrangement: Common/Individual |
| 9. If common, only your language groups: Yes/No | 10. What is the fuel used for cooking? Kerosene/Gas/others(specify) |
| 11. Rent per month (Rs): | 12. Advance (if any) Rs: |
| 13. Have you stayed in Kerala earlier? Yes/No | 14. If yes, where? List all places with duration in months |

| | |
|--|--|
| III. Channels of Migration | |
| 1. From whom did you come to know of the possible employment in Kerala? Relative/ Friend/Contractor/ any other (specify) | 2. Did you borrow money for travel? Yes/No 3. If yes from whom? Parent/Relative/Friends/Other (specify) 4. How much? |
| 5. Did you repay the loan? Yes/No 6. How did you repay the loan? Cut from wages/repay on the next visit/ other (Specify) | 7. Have you stayed away from home earlier? Yes/No 8. If Yes, When, where and for how long? |
| IV. Family Size and composition | |
| 1. Number of members in your family (back home): | 2. Male: 3. Female: |
| 4. How many have migrated for employment? Adult Male: Adult Female: Children: | 5. How many are with you in Kerala? Adult Male: Adult Female: Children: |
| 6. How many family members work in your current place of work? | Adult Male: Adult Female: Children: |
| V. Employment and Wages | |
| 1. Are you working under a contractor or casual employer? | 2. Is the contractor from your place, or from Kerala? |
| 3. How many days in the week do you get employment? | 4. What is your wage in Rs?. Per month/week/daily |
| 5. Nature of present employment contract: Regular contract/ casual | 6. Sector of Present Employment: Construction/trade/manufacturing/agriculture/ hotel and restaurant/mixed/ other (specify) |
| 7. Present Occupation: unskilled work/skilled work (specify) | 8. How often do you send money home? Every month/ once in two months/ Occasionally |
| 9. How many times did you send money home during the last 12 months? | 10. What is the amount remitted last? |
| 11. When was the amount remitted? | 12. How do you send money? Through own bank account/other's bank account/ post office/ other known person/ contractor/ other (specify) |

Migrant Labour Survey, Kerala, 2012

**Survey Questionnaire SQ 2**

(For those DML who are first time entrants into Kerala)

| | |
|--|--|
| I. Descriptive Identification of Sample Individual | |
| 1. Name: | 2. Sex: Male/Female |
| 3. Age: | 4. Completed Years of Education: |
| 5. State/UT: | 6. District: |
| 7. Tehsil/Town: | 8. Village: |
| 9. Caste: | 10. Religion: |
| 11. Occupation: | 12. Mobile number: |
| II. Destination in Kerala | |
| 1. Place name: | 2. Town/city/panchayath: |
| 3. District: | 4. Promised accommodation: Room/house/none |
| 5. Who is the contact person in the destination? Relative/ Friend/Contractor/ any other (specify) | |
| III. Channel of Migration | |
| 1. From whom did you come to know of employment in Kerala? Relative/ Friend/Contractor/ any other (specify) | 2. Did you borrow money for travel? Yes/No 3. If yes from whom? 4. How much? |
| 5. How do you propose to repay the loan? Cut from wages/repay on the next visit/ other (Specify) | 6. Have you stayed away from home earlier? When, where and for how long? |
| 7. What is the attraction of Kerala? | |

| | |
|--|--|
| IV. Family Size and composition | |
| 1. Number of members in your family (back home): | 2. Male: Female: |
| 3. How many have migrated for employment? Adult Male: Adult Female: Children: | 4. How many are travelling with you? Adult Male: Adult Female: Children: |
| V. Employment and Wages | |
| 1. How many days employment a week is promised? | 2. What is the promised daily wage rate? Rs. |
| 3. Nature of employment contract: Regular contract/ casual | 4. Industry of Employment Promised: Construction/trade/manufacturing/agriculture/ hotel and restaurant/mixed/ other (specify) |
| 5. Occupation: unskilled work/carpentry/masonry/... | 6. What is the wage back home? |

Migrant Labour Survey, Kerala, 2012

Survey Questionnaire SQ 3

(For those DML who will be surveyed in Kerala locations)

| | |
|--|--|
| I. Descriptive Identification of Sample Individual | |
| 1. Name: | 2. Sex: Male/Female |
| 3. Age: | 4. Completed years of education: |
| 5. Do you have an ID Card ? Yes / No | 6. Type of Card : |
| 7. State/UT of Origin: | 8. District of Origin: |
| 9. Tehsil/Town of Origin: | 10. Village of Origin: |
| 11. Religion: | 12. Caste: |
| 13. How often do you visit home? Once in three years/ once in two years/every year/twice a year/other (specify) | 14. In train, do you travel by Sleeper Class? Yes/No 15. Mobile number if available: |
| II. Place of Residence in Kerala | |
| 1. Name of Place: | 2. City/Town/Panchayath: |
| 3. District: | 4. Residing since: Month/Year |
| 5. Nature of Dwelling Place: House/Room | 6. Toilet: Common/Individual |
| 7. Number of persons per room/house: | 8. Cooking arrangement: Common/Individual |
| 9. If common, only your language groups: Yes/No | 10. What is the fuel used for cooking? Kerosene/Gas/others(specify) |
| 11. Rent per month (Rs): | 12. Advance (if any) Rs: |
| 13. Have you stayed in Kerala earlier? Yes/No | 14. If yes, where? List all places with duration in months |
| 15. Are you residing in a work site? Yes / No | |

| | |
|--|--|
| III. Channels of Migration | |
| 1. From whom did you come to know of the possible employment in Kerala? Relative/ Friend/Contractor/ any other (specify) | 2. Did you borrow money for travel? Yes/No 3. If yes from whom? Parent/Relative/Friends/Other (specify) 4. How much? |
| 5. Did you repay the loan? Yes/No 6. How did you repay the loan? Cut from wages/repay on the next visit/ other (Specify) | 7. Have you stayed away from home earlier? Yes/No 8. If Yes, When, where and for how long? |
| IV. Family Size and composition | |
| 1. Number of members in your family (back home): | 2. Male: Female: |
| 3. How many have migrated for employment? Adult Male: Adult Female: Children: | 4. How many are with you in Kerala? Adult Male: Adult Female: Children: |
| 5. How many family members work in your current place of work? | Adult Male: Adult Female: Children: |
| V. Employment and Wages | |
| 1. Are you working under a contractor or casual employer? | 2. Is the contractor from your place, or from Kerala? |
| 3. How many days in the week do you get employment? | 4. What is your wage in Rs?. Per month/week/daily |
| 5. Nature of present employment contract: Regular contract/ casual | 6. Sector of Present Employment: Construction/trade/manufacturing/agriculture/ hotel and restaurant/mixed/ other (specify) |
| 7. Present Occupation: unskilled work/skilled work (specify) | 8. How often do you send money home? Every month/ once in two months/ Occasionally |
| 9. How many times did you send money home during the last 12 months? | 10. What is the amount remitted last? |
| 11. When was the amount remitted? | 12. How do you send money? Through own bank account/other's bank account/ post office/ other known person/ contractor/ other (specify) |

Date:

Name of Investigator :

Signature :

Statistical Estimation Procedure

Domestic Migrant Labour (DML) Survey, Kerala

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ABSTRACT

Keywords : DML

AMS Classification: Primary

1. Clouds

Let S be the size of the stock. Let V be the random variable that denotes the number of visits per year by a randomly selected Domestic Migrant Labour (DML). V then takes values $0, 1, 2, \dots$, and $\frac{1}{2}, \frac{1}{3}, \frac{1}{4}, \dots, \frac{2}{3}, \frac{2}{5}, \frac{2}{7}, \dots, \frac{3}{4}, \frac{3}{5}, \frac{3}{7}, \dots$, etc. Here, for instance, $V = \frac{2}{5}$ means visiting twice in a five year period etc. If $\Pr[V = v] = p(v)$ then, $\mu = E[V]$, expected number of visits per year is given by

$$\mu = \sum_v v \times \Pr[V = v].$$

The interpretation of μ is a randomly selected DML is *expected to visit* home μ times a year. Therefore, since S is the size of the stock, the expected number of DMLs visiting home per year is given by

$$\mu \times S.$$

That is, the expected number of DMLs visiting home on a randomly selected day is given by

$$\frac{\mu \times S}{365}.$$

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Now if X_1, X_2, \dots, X_n denote the number of DMLs travelling home on n randomly* chosen days (and not purposive days like *durgapooja* or *deepaawalee* or *holi* holidays) then

$$\bar{X} = \frac{1}{n} \sum_{i=1}^n X_i, \quad (1.1)$$

would act as a reasonable guess for unknown quantity $\frac{\mu \times S}{365}$.

Therefore, if we solve $\frac{\mu \times S}{365} = \bar{X}$, a good guess for S would be

$$\hat{S} = \frac{365\bar{X}}{\mu}.$$

But μ is unknown and needs to be estimated. It can easily be estimated based on a sample of the *second kind* that is taken from settlements, pan-chayats etc. A random sample of such DMLs would give a *multinomial model* that would give estimates of $\Pr[V = v] = p(v)$, for various values of v . We only have to worry about the nonzero estimates.

Explain how to get observations X_1, X_2, \dots, X_n .

For the sake of discussion assume that there is exactly one unreserved bogey. On a randomly chosen day the unreserved bogey has certain number of travellers, say N_{out} , which can essentially be found out by enumeration. A proportion η of them is of DMLs. This η can be estimated from a random sample of commuters from the bogey. If we sample m commuters randomly and m_O^\dagger many of them are DMLs then $\hat{\eta} = \frac{m_O}{m}$ is an estimate for proportion of DMLs travelling home in that bogey. Thus $N_{out} \times \frac{m_O}{m}$ is an observation on X mentioned above. We take observations X on n randomly chosen days. That would give us X_1, X_2, \dots, X_n and $\bar{X} = \frac{1}{n} \sum_{i=1}^n X_i$.

So far we have not implicitly assumed that S remains constant over the period of survey. However, S is a dynamic entity. We thus have to worry about the inflow. Let us again consider for the sake of discussion that there is exactly one unreserved bogey on the arriving train. On a randomly chosen day the unreserved bogey has certain number of travellers, say N_{in} , which can essentially be found out by enumeration. A proportion θ of them is of DMLs arriving for the first time. This θ can be estimated from a random sample of commuters from the bogey. If we sample u commuters randomly and u_F^\ddagger many of them are DMLs arriving for the first time then

*It is important that we take truly random sample of say, n days to get the correct estimates and not the *rush* days.

[†]One can collect other information from these m_O commuters as per the requirement of the questionnaire.

[‡]One can collect other information from these u_F commuters as per the requirement of the questionnaire.

$\hat{\theta} = \frac{u_F}{u}$ is an estimate for the proportion of DMLs arriving for the first time in that bogey. Thus $Y = N_{in} \times \frac{u_F}{u}$ is an observation on number of DMLs arriving for the first time. We take observations Y on n randomly chosen days. that is we get observations Y_1, Y_2, \dots, Y_n the number of DMLs arriving for the first time on n randomly chosen days. This would constitute basis for inflow inference.

It is also important that we validate the assumption that all the DMLs always travel without reservation. Such hypothesis can be tested based on the sample of the *second kind* by adding suitable question to the questionnaire like do you always travel unreserved? One can then *a)* estimate the proportion δ of DMLs travelling with reservation and *b) test the hypothesis*

$$H_0 : \delta \geq \delta_0 \text{ versus } H_1 : \delta < \delta_0$$

for some specified δ_0 , either using a *binomial test or approximate normal test*. This would give us a sense whether δ is significant or not.

Are we interested only in Thiruvananthapuram alone or entire Kerala. There may be DMLs boarding trains at different stations. May be the survey should go beyond the boundaries of Kerala.