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Labour migration and alternate avocation in marine fisheries sector of Kerala

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Original Article

Abstract

The migration of labour has become an important feature of the globalizing world, accompanied with many economic, social and political concerns. Income inequalities, climate change, demographic shift and conflicts had contributed much for the migration of labour in search of employment and security. Hence a study over the labour migration as an adaptive or coping strategy has its own relevance in the current scenario. This study is an investigative research over the labour migration and alternative avocation in the marine fisheries sector. Marine fisheries sector is one of the most important sectors in India contributing much for the economy, still facing disguised unemployment. The study attempts to estimate the pros and cons of labour migration in the marine fisheries sector by analyzing the cases of fisher folks from various part of the country who migrated to Kerala coast. The empirical evidence presented in the paper explores the reasons, problems, income and savings and the seasonality of the migrants.

Keywords: Migration, Labour migration, alternative avocation, marine fisheries, fishers.

Introduction

Labour migration, generally defined as the cross border movement of workers for the purpose of employment, has become an increasingly important feature of the globalizing world, which raised many important economic, social and political concerns. Income inequalities, climate change, demographic shift and conflicts had contributed much for the migration of labour in search of employment and security. More recently, various studies portrayed the idea of migration as an adaptive or coping strategy, which is gaining acceptance. This explains migration as an integral to people's adaptive and livelihood strategies (Davies, 1996; Rao, 2001; Conroy *et al.*, 2001; Mosse *et al.*, 2002) and not just a response to emergencies. Migrant workers add up to the growth and development of the host area, while benefitting their home area through the remittance.

Migration in the marine fisheries sector may indeed be a relevant adaptive mechanism of the fisher folks to survive themselves in a situation of changing fish-catch, disguised unemployment etc in a particular location. The movement of fisherfolks has latent impacts upon the economies of both the home area and the host area.

Migration in India

Seasonal and circular migration has long been part of the livelihood portfolio of poor people across India (De Haan, 2002). Although India lacks panel data on seasonal migration, a lot of studies have opined that seasonal migration for employment is growing both in terms of absolute numbers but also in relation to the size of the working population as a whole (Breman, 1985; Breman, 1996; Rao, 1994; Rogaly *et al.*, 2001). In the studies conducted at the Ananthapur and Rayadurga districts of Andhra Pradesh, Rao (2001) pointed out three types of migration happening in India. Type I migration is meant for coping and survival, Type II is for additional income, whereas Type III is for better income or better work environment. Even though it is difficult to analyse whether migration reduces poverty, various micro-studies has detailed that the migrants are having a comparatively higher income (Haberfeld *et al.*, 1999; Chakrapani and Vijayakumar, 1994)

Migration in marine fisheries sector of India

Marine fisheries, being one of the important sectors of the country, contributes much for the food security and provides direct employment to over 1.5mn fisher people, along with other indirect dependents in the primary, secondary, and tertiary sectors associated with fishing. Still, disguised unemployment is prevalent in the country, which incites the fishermen to migrate to distant waters with better resources and better earning potential. According to Shyam *et al.* (2013), the fishers in India are undergoing a transformation in terms of improvement in the social security measures which is evident through the improvement in the literacy standards, health profile, income and engagement in the different alternative avocations.

The study attempts to estimate the pros and cons of labour migration in the marine fisheries sector by analyzing the cases of fisherfolks from various part of the country who migrated to Kerala coast. The empirical evidence presented in the paper explores the reasons, problems, income and savings, and the seasonality of the migrants.

Material and methods

The study was conducted by using the primary data collected from the migrant fishermen involved in different fisheries related jobs in the trawl boats as well as in the harbours of the two major districts of Kerala, *viz.*, Ernakulam and Kozhikode, using simple random sampling method. A total sample of 200 seasonal migrants (115 from Ernakulam and 85 from Kozhikode) were personally interviewed by using a well-structured interview schedule. These migrants spend considerable period of the year in Kerala and engaged in fishing activities related to harvest and post-harvest operations and move to their native place during festivities and fishing holidays. The major parameters

considered in the study includes the demographic profile, education status, average income, asset particulars, savings, indebtedness, expenditure pattern, details of migration, reasons for migration, problems during migration, and the major socio economic achievements through migration.

Descriptive statistical analysis was done on the data using excel and R language. The pattern of expenditure of the migrants at the home as well as the host place is plotted using the R software. The Garette ranking technique is used to analyze the rankings given by the respondents for both the reasons and problems of migration.

Results and discussion

Socio-economic characteristics

The major findings about the socio-economic characteristics of the migrant labour are detailed in Table 1 from which it can clearly be noted that the majority of the respondents are from the age ranging from 20 to 40 constituting 60 percent of the total respondents. About 19 percent of the respondents are below the age of 20, 18 percent are middle aged (40 to 60), and only a 4 percent are found aged above 60.

Table 1. Socio - economic characteristics of the migrants

Age distribution (years)		Education status		Income status (Rs 000)	
Age range	Frequency	Grade	Frequency	Amount (Rs 000)	Frequency
<20	38 (19)	Primary	45 (23)	<10	12 (6)
20 to 40	119 (60)	High School	28 (14)	10-30	63 (32)
40 to 60	35 (18)	Higher Secondary	115 (58)	30-50	52 (26)
>60	8 (4)	College education	10 (5)	50-70	46 (23)
		Illiterate	2 (1)	>70	27 (14)

Figures in the parentheses indicates percentage to total

While analyzing the education status, it was found that about 58 percent of the respondents are possessing higher secondary education, 23 percent are having primary education, and 14 percent were having high school education. Only one percent of the respondents are illiterate where as two percent were graduates. The income status of the migrants was also scrutinized, which indicates that about 32 percent of the respondents are earning an amount between Rs.10,000 and Rs.30,000 where as 26 percent of the respondents are earning between Rs.30,000 to Rs.50,000 per month. About 23 percent of the respondents are having an income ranging from Rs.50,000 to Rs.70,000 and about 14 percent of the respondents are earning above Rs.70,000 per month.

Religion and nativity

The study reveals the details regarding the religious orientation and nativity of the migrants as depicted in Fig. 1 and 2

respectively. Fig. 1 indicates that 71 percent of respondents are Christians, while 15 percent are Hindus and 14 percent are Muslims.

Fig. 2 indicates that 78 percent of the respondents are from Tamil Nadu, 14 percent from Uttar Pradesh, five percent from West Bengal, two percent from Assam, and one percent from Andhra Pradesh.

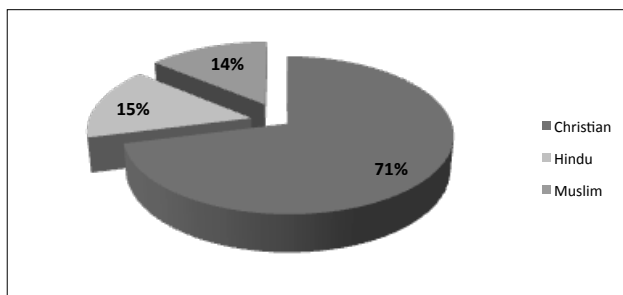


Fig. 1. Religious orientation of the respondents.

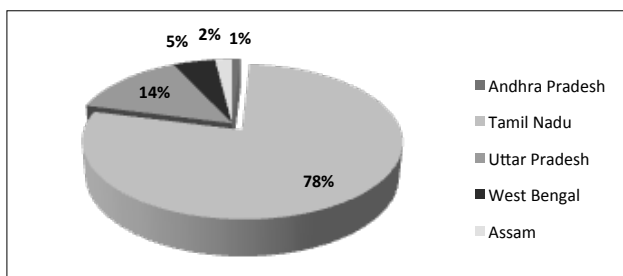


Fig. 2. Profile of the migrants.

Asset particulars, valuation and savings

Even though most of the respondents were reluctant to reveal their asset details, information regarding the asset particulars and savings of the migrant workers were somehow collected and analyzed in the study. Over the period of years, the important assets created by the migrants were found to be houses, land, jewels, vehicles as well as cash deposits, which has an average asset value ranging from one lakh to ten lakh. Table 2 shows the data regarding the assets, which reveal that majority of the respondents are in a well off position.

The study shows that the migrants are giving more importance to house construction rather than other assets they possess. About 62 percent of the respondents are possessing house and around 36 percent among them own house valuing below Rs. one lakh. The second most important asset possessed by the migrants is found to be the land, which was acquired by around 58 percent of the respondents. About 29 percent of them are occupying land worth between Rs. one lakh and two lakhs.

Table 2. Asset creation, Valuation and Savings

Asset Valuation	House	Land	Jewels	Vehicle	Cash deposits	Total
Less than one lakhs	45 (36)	24 (21)	1 (6)	17 (100)	6 (67)	93
1-2 lakhs	33 (27)	33 (29)	5 (31)	0 (0)	1 (11)	72
2-3 lakhs	25 (20)	14 (12)	3 (19)	0 (0)	1 (11)	43
3-4 lakhs	10 (8)	15 (13)	2 (13)	0 (0)	0 (0)	27
4-5 lakhs	5 (4)	4 (4)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	9
Above five lakhs	6 (5)	25 (22)	5 (31)	0 (0)	1 (11)	37
Total	124	115	16	17	9	281

Figures in the parentheses indicates percentage to total

Only an eight percent of the respondents are found to be having jewels and a majority among them is holding jewels valuing between Rs.1 lakh and 2 lakhs. Around nine percent of the migrants own vehicles with them which are valued less than 1 lakh, whereas five percent of the respondents holds cash deposits. The study shows that majority of the respondents are possessing various assets valued between Rs.1 lakh and Rs.5 lakhs, which indicates the economic stability of the migrants.

Indebtedness and repayment

The study analysed the indebtedness details of the migrant workers which shows that majority of the workers are having minimal financial liabilities and are economically well off. The details regarding the indebtedness level of the migrant workers are picturised in Fig. 3a and source of finance in Fig. 3b.

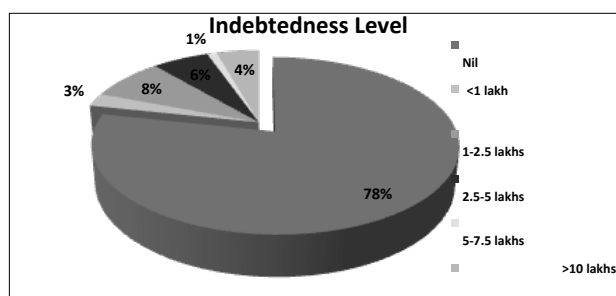


Fig. 3a. Level of indebtedness of the migrants.

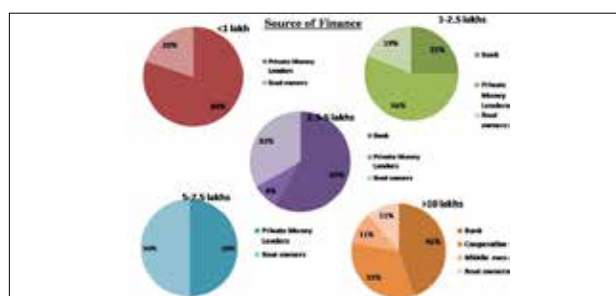


Fig. 3b. Source of finance

According to the data analyzed, it can clearly be noted that 78 percent of the respondents are not having any financial liabilities. Eight percent of respondents are having financial liability of an amount between Rs.1 lakh and Rs.2.5 lakhs whereas six percent are having a liability amounting between Rs.2.5 lakhs and Rs.5 lakhs. Only a four percent is having liability amounting above Rs.10 lakhs.

The details regarding the source of finance depicted in figure 3.b shows that the major source of income of the migrant workers are from the banks (34.88 percent) followed by private money lenders (32.56 percent), boat owners (23.26 percent), cooperative (6.98 percent) and middle men 2.33 percent). The analysis also reminds that even though banks plays the major role in the source of income of the migrants, the influence of the non-institutional credits from the private money lenders, boat owners and middle men (about 58.14 percent in total) is inevitable for their livelihood. Moreover majority of the migrant workers have a high credit of about 1-2 lakhs rupees from banks (37.21 percent) followed by 2-2.5 lakhs (27.81 percent), greater than 10 lakhs, rupees credit (20.93 percent), less than one lakh (11.63 percent) and 5-10 lakhs rupees credit (4.65 percent). The results shows that the migrants needs a basic source of income of the range of about 1-2 lakhs rupees .

Pattern of expenditure

The expenditure pattern of the migrants at their workplace as well as their home is also analysed and results were drawn. The average size of the family is found to be four and hence the per capita expenditure is calculated and is detailed in Table 3, which indicates that the majority of the expenses is meant for food at both the home (81 percent) and work place (64 percent). Eventhough the overheads of expenditure are lesser in the workplace comparatively a bit higher amount of total expenditure is found out in the work place. The major expenses at the workplace are found to be for food, clothing, health care, social expenses and others. Still the absence of expenses for accommodation, fuel, etc at the work place increases the savings of the workers and thereby improved their social standard of living.

Table 3. Expenditure pattern

Pattern of expenditure (in Rs/Month)		
Items	Home (average amount)	Work place (average amount)
Food	1536 (64)	2400 (81)
Clothing	211 (9)	236 (8)
Shelter	33 (1)	0 (0)
Fuel/Electricity	72 (3)	0 (0)
Health Care	33 (1)	39 (1)
Education	205 (9)	0 (0)
Social Expenses	91 (4)	88 (3)
Others	103 (4)	184 (6)
Total	9636	2947

Figures in the parentheses indicates percentage to total

Details of migration

According to the study, 98 members (49 percent) out of the 200 respondents had migrated with the male members of their family. An average number of three to four members from the same house were found among the migrant workers, which indicates the higher income level of the family. The migrants working at the harbours of Ernakulam and Kozhikode had not taken their wives with them, even though they were able to afford them at their work place. This shows the money saving mentality of the migrants.

Reason analysis

The reason analysis of migration was done on the basis of the opinion of the migrants from both the Ernakulam and Kozhikode districts. The major reasons opined by the migrants were analyzed using Garrett ranking and the ranks with score are presented in Table 4. The Garrett's ranking technique is usually used to rank the preference indicated by the respondents on different factors. The ranks assigned by the respondents for different factors are converted into scores.

Table 4. Reasons for migration

Parameters	Score	Rank
Low Income	81	1
Seasonality of employment	69	2
Debts & Financial commitments	61	3
Lack of technical knowledge	31	8
Interest towards travelling	50	5
Low level of education	38	7
Disguised unemployment	56	4
Persuasion by friends	45	6
Others	19	9

The factors with highest mean value or Garrett score are considered to be the most important factor. Accordingly the most important reasons for migration conceived by the respondents are low income and seasonality of employment. The same parameters were found out as the most important economic factors contributing for the migration of fishermen, in the study conducted by Dhas and Raj (2014) at the Kolachel village of Kanyakumari district. Apart from this, debts and financial commitments, disguised unemployment, interest towards migration were suggested as the prior reason for migration.

Problem analysis

Major details regarding the problems and constraints faced by the migrants at the work place were also collected and analyzed in the study. The problem analysis was done for the extensive problems pointed out by the respondents. The results obtained by analysing through Garrett ranking techniques

are represented in Table 5, from which a clear picture of the problems can be retrieved.

Table 5. Problems during migration

Items	Score	Rank
Difficulty in Language	50	5
Cultural Lag	38	7
Lack of Education	61	3
Competition amongst migrants	81	1
Competition amongst locals	56	4
Lack of experience	45	6
Discrimination in terms of revenue sharing	69	2
Inadequate skills other than fishing	31	8
Others	19	9

According to the study, competition among the migrants is identified as the most important problem faced by the workers, which indicates the intensity of migration in the sector. Competition is found among the migrants working in the harbours of the study area, due to which the workers are ready to deduct their monthly wages slightly in order to avail the opportunities. Followed by competition, discrimination in terms of revenue sharing as well as lack of education are also given countable relevance by the respondents. Discrimination in revenue sharing is found in between the migrant workers and local workers in the study area. An average of 10-20 percent lesser wage is demanded by the migrants when compared to local workers. Higher wages demanded by the local workers may be having the back up of trade unions and all which is absent in the case of migrant workers. The employers are interested to appoint migrant workers at the harbor due to easiness of management. While competition among the migrants was given first priority, competition amongst the local workers has only the fourth position among the problems. Along with that, lack of experience, cultural lag, and inadequate skills other than fishing are all least ranked problems, which points out that no much skills are required to work in the sector and moreover they are not having much threat from the local workers also.

Details regarding the money sent by the migrants to their home are also collected and depicted in Fig. 4 which reveals that about 53 percent of the workers are sending money amounting between Rs.15,000 and Rs.25,000 monthly. About 32 percent of the migrants are sending between Rs.5,000 and Rs.10,000, while 14 percent are sending an amount upto Rs.5,000, monthly. Only one percent of the respondents are sending amount above Rs.25,000 monthly. This indicates the comparatively better financial condition of the migrants, and pin points the range of savings while an average of three members from the same family are migrants.

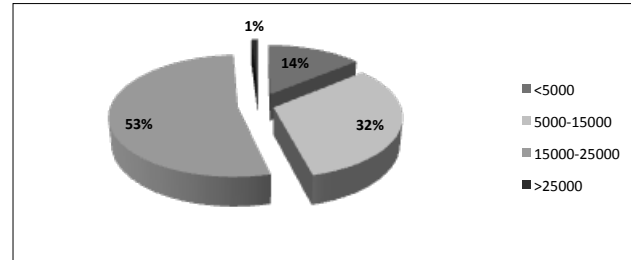


Fig. 4. Amount sent by the migrants to home monthly.

Employment during closed season / Alternative avocations

The 45 days of trawl ban period in Kerala during the months of June and July is considered as the off season for the migrant workers. According to the respondents, the trawl ban period is the only period during which they are unemployed and no assistance is provided by the owners or government during this period. Most of them return to their home during this time period to take leisure. An infinitesimally small portion of the respondents (19 percent) are departing for alternate avocations, mostly at their home town, during the closed season. The details regarding the alternative avocations and the income drawn from them are described in Table 6.

Table 6. Alternative avocations during ban period

Job	Frequency
Carpentry/Masonry/	
Painting/Plumbing	9 (6)
Boat repair	1 (1)
Net mending	30 (21)
Others (mainly farming)	42 (30)

Figures in the parentheses indicates percentage to total

According to the details collected, the major alternative avocations depended by the workers during the closed season are on daily wage basis. Farming, net mending, carpentry, masonry, painting, plumbing etc are the major alternative avocations for the workers. It is found out that an average amount of Rs.1,180 is earned as income ranging from Rs.9,83 to Rs.3,736 monthly through various alternative avocations in which the migrants are engaged during closed season. About 30 percent of the respondents who are departing for alternative avocations during the closed season are engaged in farming at their own home town whereas 21 percent are engaged in net mending. About six percent of the respondents are opting carpentry, masonry, painting or plumbing while a one percent of them engages in boat repairing during the trawl ban period.

Effect of migration on socioeconomic status

According the respondents, their socioeconomic status has much

improved through migration, which can be ascertained with analyses done in the study. The major achievements through migration, according to the details collected are depicted in Fig. 5. According to this about 71 percent of the respondents had repaid their debts with the income earned through migration. About 62 percent of the migrants had constructed or renovated their house while 61 percent had increased their savings. About 53 percent of the migrants had constructed or renovated their house while 61 percent had increased their savings.

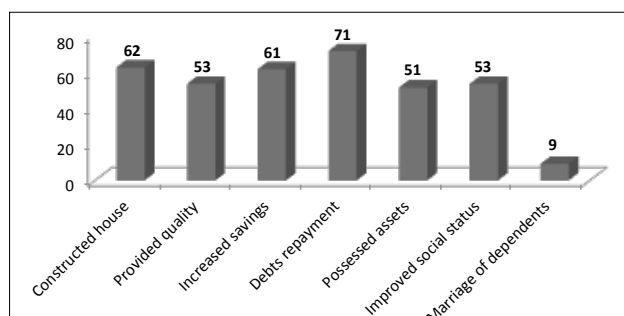


Fig. 5. Major achievements through migration.

About 53 percent of them are able to provide quality education to their children while an equal amount of migrants had improved their social status. Nine percent of the respondents had done the marriage of their dependents through the savings possessed by migration. All these details highlight the socioeconomic improvements attained by the workers through migration. The respondents were not having any pitfalls or negative effects to mention as a result of migration.

The study indicated that there is an in-flux of migrant labourers in the fisheries sector of Kerala due to dearth of labourers within the state, with a greater part of them working in the mechanized sector. The etiology on the labour mobility indicated that low income at the native place is the primary reason for the labour migration followed by seasonality of employment, debts and financial commitments, disguised unemployment, interest towards travelling, persuasion by friends, low level of education, lack of technical knowledge, etc. The study revealed that regardless of their nativity, the workers are earning and saving much better through migration and are leading a peaceful life with minimal financial liabilities. Over the period of years, debt repayment along with construction of houses and increased savings were detected as the major achievements of the migrants. Through migration, the labours had improved their social status, possessed assets and are able to provide quality education for their children.

Competition amongst the migrants and the indiscrimination in revenue sharing are the only major problems found out. Hence it needs to provide proper policy measures to protect the rights of the migrants working in both the boat and the harbor. Proper training programs over the newly evolving fishing methods also

have to be provided to build up the capacity of the workers. Even though the migrants are experiencing many problems, the benefit that they enjoy outweighs most of the costs.

In a state with dearth of quality manpower for fisheries sector coupled with younger generation weaning away from fishing and other related activities, labour migration is a necessary phenomenon. Currently, the migrant workforce is contributing much for the fisheries sector and the economy of Kerala and hence is found favourable for the economy as a whole. Still, over period of time it can create some social pressures. In the long run, there could arise the chances of wage losses and conflicts between the local and migrant labour. The readiness of migrants to work at lower wages might affect the standard of living of the fishermen over years. Consequently, there is an immediate need to ensure that fishermen especially the younger generations of the local fishers are to be motivated coupled with technology support so that the attrition can be kept under control. Hence, sufficient measures have to be taken for skill development and other measures in order to attract the younger generations to fisheries.

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