

An Overview of Migration Story in Kerala: Analysing In-migration and Out-migration Trends Using Census 2011

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Introduction

The southern state of Kerala borders Tamil Nadu on the south and east, Karnataka on the north and northeast, and the Arabian Sea coastline on the west. The state's projected population is around 35.10 million in 2023; it was 33.40 million in 2011 (Census 2011). Kerala has around 17 million internal (within the state) migrants. Of these, 81.68 per cent, i.e., 13.90 million are intradistrict migrants and 18.32 per cent (3.1 million) are inter-district migrants. There are interstate in-migrants from other states, which are around 0.65 million (6,54,423 persons), whereas interstate out-migrants are 1.29 million (12,91,325 persons) (Census 2011, D-3). The interstate net migration in Kerala is negative, suggesting that more people are migrating from Kerala to other Indian states compared to the migrants coming from other states to Kerala: the difference between in-migration and out-migration is pegged at 6,36,902. A negative net migration mainly happens due to push factors such as lack of employment and business opportunities, infrastructure, and industries (Lee 1966; Sarkar 2014; Chandrasekhar and Sharma 2014). Since the formation of the state in 1956, Kerala has attracted migrant labourers from the bordering states, particularly Tamil Nadu and Karnataka. From 1961 to 1991, workers from Tamil Nadu and Karnataka complemented the local workers in filling up the requirements of workers in the state, especially blue-collar workers (Kumar 2016). While most of the labour migration was driven by the social linkages and networks of workers, multinational companies also contributed towards mobilising workers from the northern states such as Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Jharkhand, and West Bengal, using intermediaries to work on their projects in Kerala. The Government of Kerala has also noted the increase in the number of workers from states such as West Bengal, Bihar, Odisha, Chhattisgarh and Jharkhand (GOK 2009).

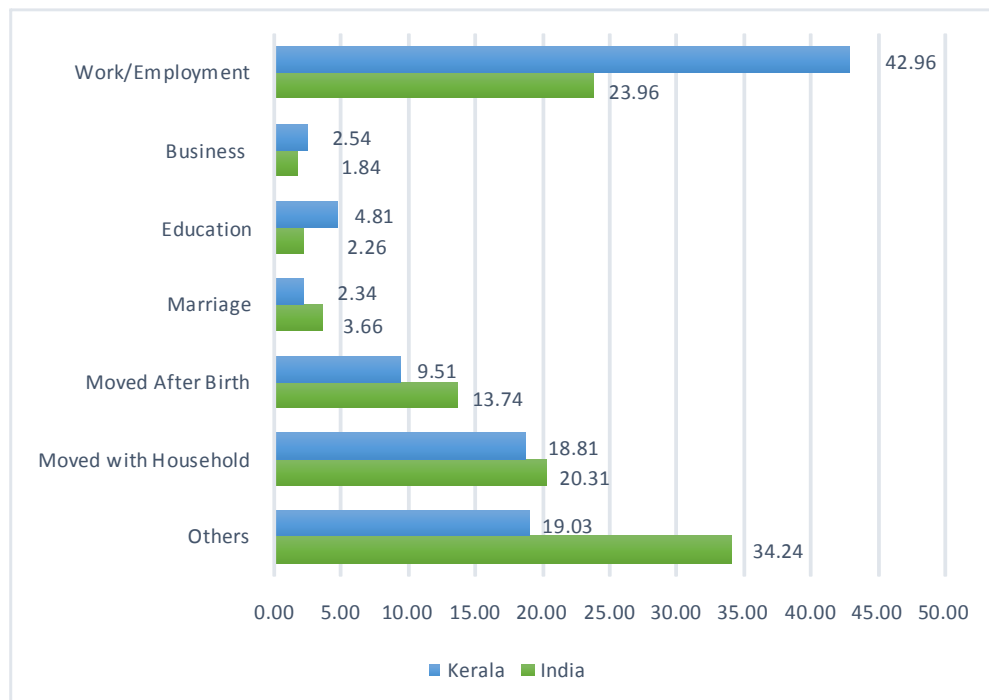
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Reason for Migration

Recent migration-centric literature in the Indian context suggests that the likelihood of out-migration for employment-related reasons is highest among the EAG (Empowered Action Group) states¹, where it has become a livelihood strategy for many (Sarkar 2019). However, it is not limited to the EAG states alone. States such as Kerala also witness a high propensity for economic migration.

This section compares the reasons for migration from Kerala with the all-India figures. The reasons for migration are analysed separately for male and female migrants because male migration is mostly dominated by employment-related reasons, whereas female migration occurs due to the combined effects of employment and marriage. An aggregate analysis in this regard may give biased results.

Graph 1: Reason for Migration among Males – All India and Kerala (in percentage)

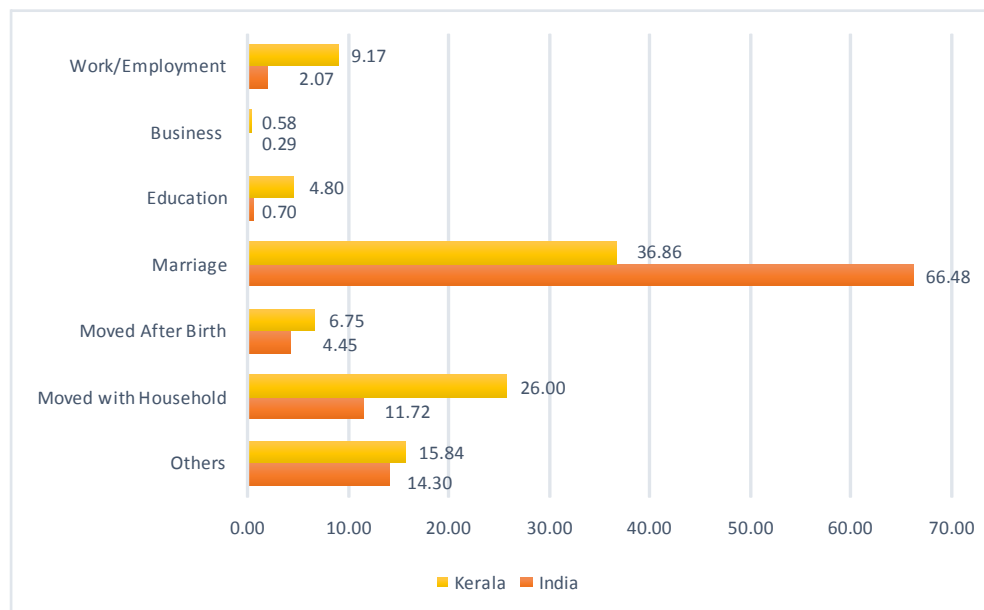


Graph 1 shows that, on average, 23.96 per cent of male migrants across India have migrated due to employment-related reasons. In the case of Kerala, the rate is 42.96 per cent, almost double the all-India figure. Such a trend suggests a very high economic dependence on interstate migration as a livelihood strategy among the people of Kerala. It is observed that the migration rate for business-related reasons is also higher for Kerala at 2.5 per cent than the national average of 1.84 per cent. Education is another important reason for migration. Literature suggests that education-led migration is mostly for attaining higher education, and

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those with higher education are more likely to get a higher economic return as they have an advantage in the job market, both at the destination and source regions (Kundu 2007; Kochar 2004; Lucas 1997). In Kerala, the proportion of education-led migration is almost double the national average: 4.81 per cent against the national average of 2.26 per cent, implying migration of a much larger number of youngsters for higher education and, therefore, larger additions to the high-skilled workforce. However, regarding reasons such as marriage, ‘moved after birth’ and ‘moved with households’, their proportion in Kerala is less than the national average.

Graph 2: Reason for Migration among Females – All India and Kerala (in percentage)



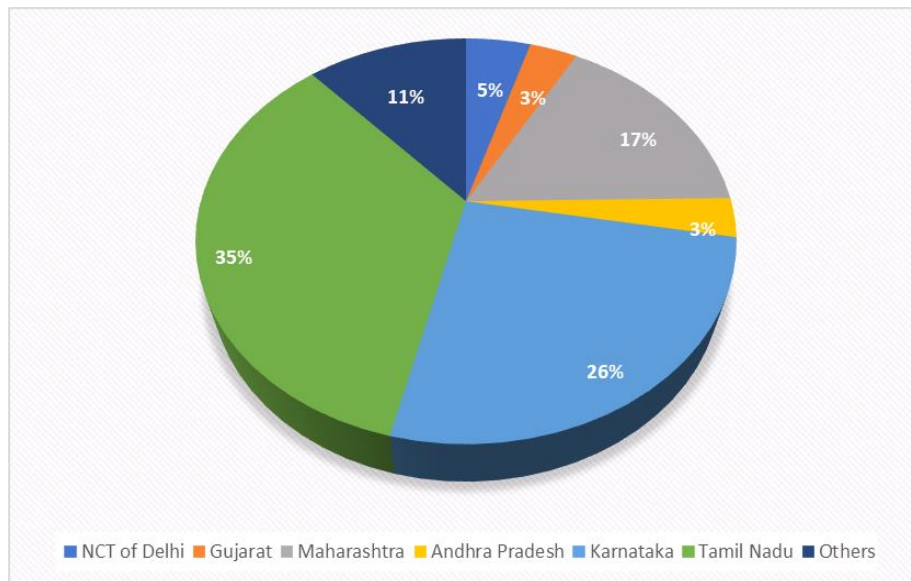
Graph 2 shows that for female migrants, the propensity to migrate for economic reasons such as employment is almost four times the national average: 9.17 per cent of female migrants from Kerala migrate for work/employment as against the all-India figure of only 2.07 per cent. For business, it is 0.58 per cent for female migrants from Kerala as against the national average of 0.29 per cent. These suggest a higher level of willingness or need to migrate for economic reasons among the state’s female population. It is observed that the propensity of female migrants from Kerala to migrate for education too is four times the national average.

Another important observation is that though the Census data show marriage as the most prominent cause of migration among female migrants in India, it is substantially lower for female migrants from Kerala compared to the all-India figures. Female migration due to marriage in Kerala is 36.86 per cent compared to 66.48 per cent at the all-India level. The reason for lower marriage-led migration among female migrants in the state can be attributed to a higher share of female migration in the ‘moved with household’ category, which is more than twice the all-India average. This implies that family migration from Kerala is also high.

Major Destination States for Migrants from Kerala

As already discussed, the interstate net migration in Kerala is negative, which implies more people going out of the state than coming in, and given the fact that the propensity for economic migration is very high in the state, it becomes important to identify the major destination states. Graph 3 shows that migration from Kerala is mainly directed to higher-income states with higher levels of industrialisation and urbanisation. The migration trend is consistent with the push-pull theory and earlier studies in India (Lee 1966; Chandrasekhar and Sharma 2014).

Graph 3: Major Destination States for Migrants from Kerala (in percentage)



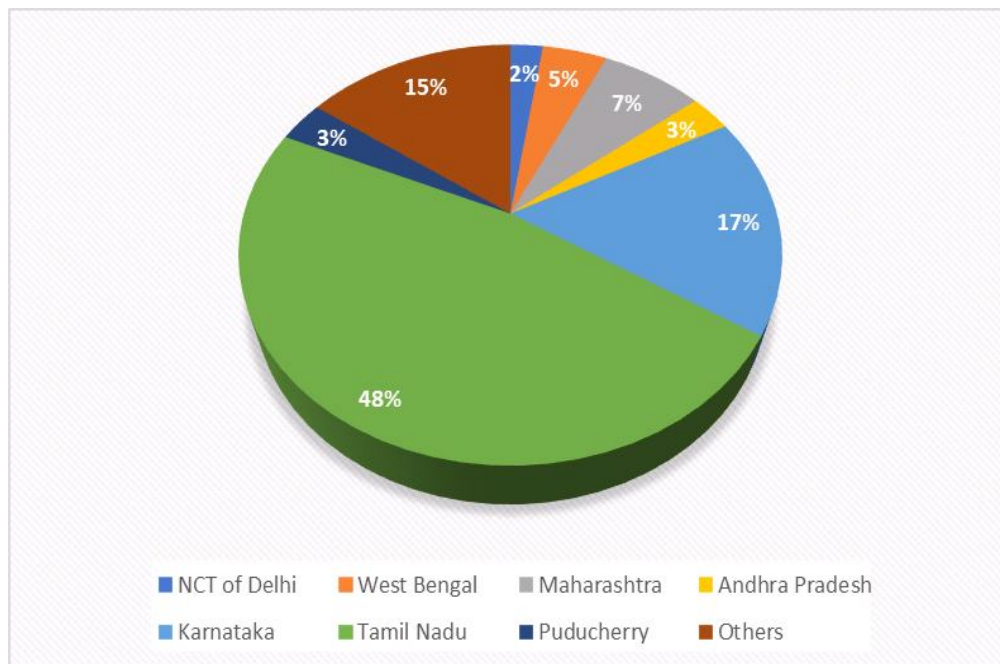
It is observed that around 35 per cent of the interstate out-migration from Kerala is directed to the neighbouring state of Tamil Nadu, which accounts for 4,47,701 migrants from the state. The other major destination state is Karnataka, which accounts for 26 per cent, i.e., 3,34,181 migrants, of the total out-migrants from the state. Another important destination state is Maharashtra, which accounts for 17 per cent of the migrants, i.e., 2,14,889 in numbers. These three states are higher-income states that provide good employment opportunities and are also important education hubs. Hence, they attract a lot of student migrants. Thus, these destination states are also gainers of human capital.

Interstate In-migration to Kerala from Other States

Kerala also attracts a lot of migrants, especially migrant workers who migrate to the state to earn higher wages. Kerala offers higher market wages, resulting in a large wage differential

between Kerala and other Indian states (NSSO 2013). Recent studies also suggest that Kerala offers the highest wages for migrant workers for jobs in the unorganised sector in the entire Indian subcontinent (Peter et al. 2020). In-migration of workers to Kerala has a long history. The migration in the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s was primarily from the neighbouring states of Tamil Nadu and Karnataka. Recent trends suggest migration from other faraway states such as West Bengal, Odisha, Bihar, Assam, Uttar Pradesh and Uttarakhand. Migrant workers in Kerala are engaged as construction workers, casual labourers, agricultural workers/plantation workers, carpenters, masons, plumbers, electricians etc. There is also a section of workers from West Bengal employed in jewellery making.

Graph 4: Migration from Other States to Kerala (in percentage)



Graph 4 shows that Kerala attracts the maximum number of interstate migrants from the bordering state of Tamil Nadu, which accounts for around 48 per cent, i.e., 3,11,347 migrants, of the total in-migrants. Studies suggest that from the 1970s onwards, migrant workers from Tamil Nadu have played a key role in the construction sector in Kerala. Limited employment opportunities in both agricultural and industrial sectors in Tamil Nadu intensified migration to Kerala. Another reason is the spurt of construction activity due to the high inflow of remittances from Keralites working in the Middle East, which triggered a migration flow (Peter et al. 2020). Another important source state for migration in Kerala is Karnataka, which accounts for 1,10,833 migrants, i.e., 17 per cent of the total in-migrants.

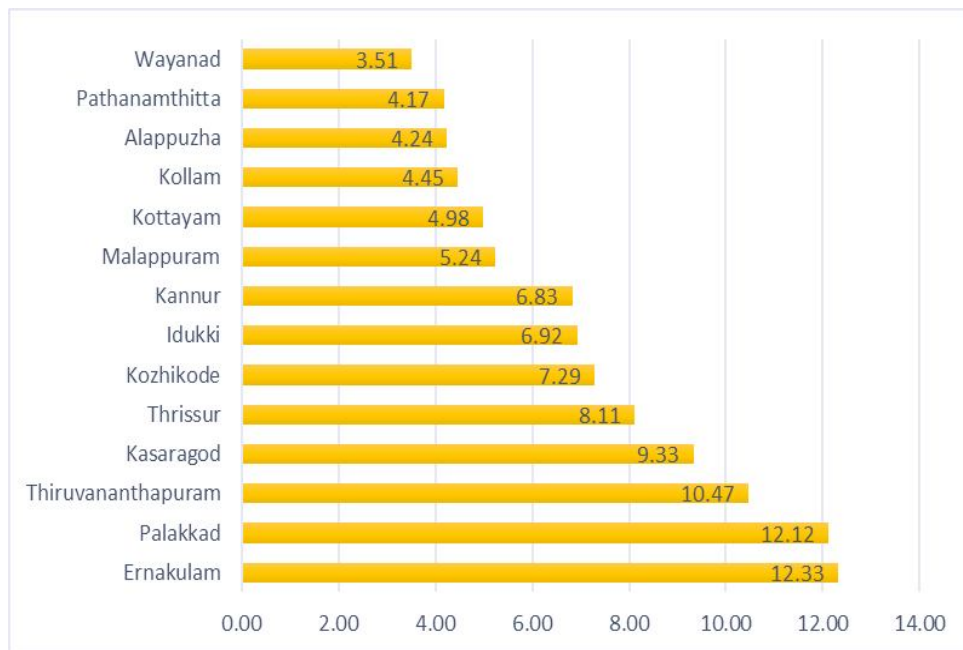
According to the estimates of NSSO (2013) 68th round, the average daily wages for male casual workers aged 15 to 59 years engaged in work other than public work in 2011–12 in

Kerala was 345 rupees (rural) and 335 rupees (urban). The wages in Kerala were much higher than in the migrant-origin states. For example, during 2011–12, the wages in Tamil Nadu were 196 rupees (rural) and 227 rupees (urban); in Karnataka the wages were 162 rupees (rural) and 192 rupees (urban); the wages in Maharashtra were 133 rupees (rural) and 173 (urban); in West Bengal they were 123 rupees (rural) and 134 rupees (urban); and the all-India average wages were 149 rupees (rural) and 182 rupees (urban). These wage comparisons suggest that higher wages in Kerala can be an important determinant factor for migration to Kerala for work.

InterState In-Migrants in the Districts of Kerala

From Graph 5, it is observed that there exists a high variation in migration flow when it comes to interstate in-migration across the fourteen districts of Kerala. The Wayanad district has attracted the least number of interstate migrants, i.e., only 3.51 per cent, accounting for only 22,995 interstate migrants. On the other hand, Ernakulam, which has a seaport and commercial establishments and is known as the commercial capital of Kerala, has attracted the maximum number of interstate migrants, i.e., 12.33 per cent, which is 80,675 interstate migrants. It is followed by Palakkad with a migration share of 12.12 per cent, accounting for 79,290 interstate migrants, and Thiruvananthapuram with an interstate migration share of around 10.47 per cent and 68,514 migrants.

Graph 5: District-Level Inflow of Migrants in Kerala (in percentage)



Migrants from Other Countries

Kerala also receives migrants from other countries (immigrants). According to Census 2011, there were around 1,55,479 international migrants in the state, of which 79.31 per cent were from Asian countries and 19.44 per cent were from other countries/continents.

Table 1: Migration from Other Countries to Kerala (in percentage)

Country Category	Persons	Percentage
Countries in Asia	1,23,318	79.31
Other Countries	30,227	19.44
Unclassifiable	1,934	1.24
Total	1,55,479	100.00

Summary

Census 2011 data clearly establish that the rate of out-migration for both males and females from Kerala for economic reasons such as work and employment is more than double the all-India figures, reflecting the economic dependence on migration in the state. It is well-known that migrants from poor and backward states prefer more industrialised and urbanised states, but their choice of destinations has also evolved in a historical process. For migrants from Kerala, states like Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, Maharashtra, Delhi, etc., are top destinations, as these states have the pull characteristics and factors such as employment opportunities, industry, infrastructure, higher per capita income, education hubs, etc. Kerala also receives migrants from other states, such as Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, Maharashtra, West Bengal, etc., who work across various sectors such as construction, agriculture, services, etc. One of the most important determining factors for in-migration to Kerala is higher wages than the state of origin. It is also important to note that in-migration to Kerala is not uniformly distributed across all the districts: it is mainly concentrated in Ernakulam, Palakkad, Thiruvananthapuram, Kasaragod, etc., which have better economic prospects and employment opportunities.

Notes

1. Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Bihar, Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh and Orissa are called EAG states based on development parameters.

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