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**Bengali Migrant Workers  
in South India**

**An inquiry into their earnings and living**

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# **Bengali Migrant Workers in South India**

## **An inquiry into their earnings and living**

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### **Abstract**

For the past couple of years, the south Indian states are the major destinations for male migrant workers from West Bengal. Though a few studies exist on migrant workers in south India, especially in Kerala, no attempt has been made focusing on the earning and non-earning aspects of migrant workers from West Bengal engaged in different types of work in multiple locations of South Indian states. This study is an attempt to bridge that evidence gap. The study is based on interviews (with a semi-structured questionnaire) of 111 Bengali speaking male migrant workers from West Bengal living in multiple locations of Thiruvananthapuram and Thrissur in Kerala and Bengaluru in Karnataka. In addition, 4 in-depth interviews and 2 focus group discussions were conducted among the workers. The study has found that all the sample migrant workers are in their early or mid-thirties, although they first migrated from source locations in their early twenties. Most of the migrant workers landed in

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south India after working in Kolkata, northern or western Indian cities. Majority of the workers are currently working under labour contractors, and most of them came to know about the job opportunities in south India from their fellow villagers or friends. On an average, they earn Rs. 1.7 lakhs [Rs. 1.52-2.03 lakhs] annually and their earnings depend on experience, education, type of work and place (state). They are able to send almost two-thirds of their earnings as remittances. Except the rag pickers in Bengaluru, all other migrant workers live without their families at destination locations. The living conditions of the migrant workers, especially the rag pickers, are poor. Their reported consumption of alcohol and tobacco seems to be lower than estimates from National Family Health Survey 4 (2015-16) for rural West Bengal. Lack of regular employment opportunities and low wage rate in rural as well as urban West Bengal are the dominant reasons for their migration. Hostile social environment and increasing earning uncertainties in northern and western Indian cities along with higher wage rate in South India are reasons for the migrant workers shifting to South India. Except the rag pickers, others do not have opportunities to bring their families. Continuous inflow of migrant workers from eastern and north-eastern India is now a challenge for the incumbent Bengali migrant workers in south India. However, almost 80 per cent of them (even those who are staying without families) do not want to return to West Bengal in future.

**Keywords:** migration, migrant workers, migrant labour, construction workers, rag pickers, West Bengal.

## **Introduction**

In India, there exists large regional disparities in employment opportunities between the states and across different districts within a state (Mukherji, 1991; Deshingkar and Akter, 2009). This results in mobility of people from one place to another in search of employment, with the hope of ameliorating their family circumstances through increased household income and financial stability (World Migration Report, 2015; International Organization for Migration, 2015). In India, migration for economic reasons has increased over time and appears to drive the internal migration of men (Nayyar and Kim, 2018). According to the Census of India, 33 million people had migrated for employment related reasons in 2001 which further increased to 51 million in 2011 (Census of India, 2001; 2011). The annual growth rate of labour migration has nearly doubled, rising to 4.5 per cent per year between 2001 and 2011, from 2.4 per cent during the previous decade (Census of India, 2011). The National Sample Survey Organization estimated that 32 million people migrated primarily for employment-related reasons in 2007-08, of which 80 per cent were males (NSSO, 2007-08). In 1992-93, 41.5 per cent urban male migrants cited economic reasons for migration which was 51.9 per cent in 1999-2000 and 55.7 per cent in 2007-08 (NSSO, 1992; 1999; 2007). Studies have found that migrating males work as semi-skilled and unskilled workers and mostly as contractual labour at various service sectors and informal sectors (Kar, 2019).

Migration for work within India is highly circular, which emerges as a dominant form among poorer groups (Deshingkar, 2006b) working in multiple destinations during their lifetime, and returning back to their native places (Deshingkar and Anderson, 2004). As per the Economic Survey of India 2016-17, there are over a hundred million migrant workers in India, of which most are circular migrants. They work in precarious worksites in sectors ranging from construction and brick kilns to rural harvesting operations (ILO, 2017). These migrant workers are brokered by

contractors, often tied with debt (Mosse et al., 2002). In India, long term circular or semi-permanent migrants who usually own some land back home form the bulk of work-related migrations (Srivastava and Sutradhar, 2016).

In rural India, agrarian crisis has depleted the scope of employment (Mukherji, 2013). Out-migration from rural areas is greater in the poorly developed agricultural areas and particularly high among the landless agricultural labourers (Keshri and Bhagat, 2012; Parganiha *et al.*, 2009; Panda, 2016). The gradual decline of agricultural activities, indebtedness and farmers' suicides have resulted in marginal peasants abandoning agriculture, landless workers being unemployed and seeking out opportunities in other parts of the country for survival (Gopalakrishnan and Sreenivasa, 2009; John and Liji, 2014). Historically, West Bengal was once a major recipient of migrants since the late nineteenth century (Ghosh, 2013). Over the past two-three decades, with the relative slowing down of the economy, West Bengal has experienced higher intensity of male out-migration from economically and agriculturally depressed areas (Das *et al.*, 2016). The literature abounds with evidence that the increased number of out-migrants from West Bengal, mostly from rural areas to other states over the decades is due to shortage of work opportunities (Debnath and Nayak, 2018). There exist several migration streams and a greater diversification in occupations, ranging from construction to cultivation, and in regions as diverse as Gujarat and Kerala. Bengaluru forms the common node of booming cities which increasingly draw in-migrants from the eastern and north-eastern states (Remeingam, 2016).

The level of economic development, job opportunities and daily wages in the southern states are considerably higher (Reja and Das, 2019; Prakash, 1999:141). Thus, the vacuum created in the market for manual labour and other works is filled by the migrant workers from northern and eastern states (Martin and Philip, 2019). Kerala, which thrives on the remittances of its more than

2.5 million strong diaspora in the Gulf and Western countries, has become a haven for migrants from other Indian states (Zachariah and Rajan, 2012). Between the 1970s and 1990s immigration in Kerala was primarily from the neighbouring states of Tamil Nadu and Karnataka (Reja and Das, 2019). But now Kerala has become a lucrative job market for workers coming from distant states, especially West Bengal, Odisha, Assam, Uttar Pradesh and Uttarakhand to fill the void in segments of the labour market left vacant by the upwardly mobile Keralites. According to a study by Gulati Institute of Finance and Taxation (GIFT, 2013), there were around 2.5 million internal migrants in Kerala. A higher wage rate in the unorganized sector and suitable job opportunities have fabricated the state as one of the most desired destinations for migrant labourers. There are about 25 lakhs migrants in Kerala with four states – West Bengal, Assam, Bihar and Orissa accounting for 62 per cent of the migrant workers, with West Bengal at the top (20 per cent). It is estimated that the number will go up to 40 lakhs by the end of the decade (GIFT, 2013).<sup>4</sup> Karnataka is also a recent entrant among net in-migration states (Martin, 2017). Apart from specific sectors i.e. IT and public administration, Bengaluru has absorbed the lower rungs of the migrant workforce along with the vast informal economy associated with it (Sridhar *et al.*, 2010). In the last few years, Bengaluru has also witnessed a boom in the real estate sector, mostly supported by the humongous migrant population from the different states of India (Sridhar *et al.*, 2010). As per Census 2011, migration from other states like West Bengal, Bihar, Orissa, Tamil Nadu has been noticeably increasing in recent times (The Hindu, July 28, 2019). Moreover, in recent years Bengaluru has seen significant rise in the number of migrants from various parts of the country to work in the construction industry (Zabeer *et al.*, 2019; Sridhar *et al.*, 2010).

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4. The share of West Bengal, Bihar, Assam, Uttar Pradesh, Odisha and other states in total migrant workers in Kerala are 20 per cent, 18.1 per cent, 17.28 per cent, 14.83 per cent, 6.67 per cent and 23.13 per cent respectively.

According to Census 2011, population of Bengaluru was 96.2 lakhs of which 44.3 lakhs were migrants (The Times of India, Aug 4, 2019).

Against this backdrop, the present study aims at understanding the nature and causes of migration of Bengali workers to south India; and understanding their earnings-spending-remittances and living conditions. By Bengali migrant workers we mean Bengali speaking male migrant workers from West Bengal.

### **Materials and methods**

We interviewed Bengali migrant workers found in select pockets in two southern states – Kerala and Karnataka. In Kerala, the survey was conducted in the state capital of Thiruvananthapuram and another town Thrissur and in Karnataka, the survey was confined to a few areas of Bengaluru. We considered only those workers who were staying at least for three months in the place of migration in the last one year.<sup>5</sup> We surveyed 111 Bengali migrant workers (62 in Kerala and 49 in Karnataka). We found both Hindu and Muslim workers from 13 districts of West Bengal (Table A1). Survey pockets included road junctions, construction sites, scrap collection centres and manufacturing units. The selection of sample workers could not be made purely random but there was no bias by design. A semi-structured questionnaire was prepared with both open ended and closed ended questions. The questionnaires were pretested in sites other than the study sites and was then finalized and administered among the study participants. To complement the quantitative and qualitative information collected through the questionnaires, 4 in-depth interviews (IDIs) and 2 focus group discussions (FGDs) were also conducted. All FGDs and IDIs were recorded and transcribed. The survey took place in two

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5. The operational definition excludes all short-term migration of less than three months and all migrations which did not occur due to income earning activities.



phases – January- February 2019 and June-July 2019. The analysis has been mostly descriptive. All original names have been changed in the analysis and presentation of qualitative information.

### **Characteristics of Sample Migrant Workers**

We found that the Bengali migrant workers were engaged in twelve varieties of work. The type of work, average and range of age, mode value of education and average and range of yearly earnings are presented in Table A2. Although we could find good number of construction workers, rag pickers and helpers, the number of workers for the remaining types of work was low. We, therefore, put all other types of workers (except the three categories) as a residual category '*others*.' *Others* is a heterogeneous group of workers and includes light manufacturing workers, petty shopkeepers, painters, car drivers, carpenter, pipeline worker, marble worker, scrap sellers etc.<sup>6</sup> The construction workers include masons, helpers to masons and others who are entirely involved in construction work. Helpers include those workers who are not primarily involved in construction work but can be hired for any unskilled work including temporary helpers in construction work. The sample characteristics of the reclassified migrant workers are presented in Table 1. Except *others*, on an average all types of workers are in their early/mid-thirties. The average age of the *others* category of workers is 29 years. Education-wise, more than three-fourths (78.6 per cent) of the rag pickers are illiterate and little more than half of the *others* workers are educated up to secondary level and above. Almost two-thirds (65.0 per cent) of the helpers are literate but below secondary level. Most of the *rag pickers* are

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6. Though migrants who are currently petty shopkeepers or scrap sellers should ideally be considered as self-employed and not workers/labourers. But they all came to south India as workers and their current status of self-employment is not stable or permanent. If one looks at their hard work, earnings and standard of living, they are perfectly comparable with other migrant workers.

Muslims (89.3 per cent), but in our sample among construction workers, helpers and *others*, Hindus dominate. The majority of the construction workers and helpers in our sample work in Kerala whereas all rag pickers in our sample work in Karnataka. The average age of migration of the current construction workers, rag pickers and helpers is early-twenties and for *others* it is 19 years. The average years spent in the current place is highest for the construction workers (6.4 years), followed by *others* (6.2 years), helpers (4.1 years) and lowest for rag pickers (3.4 years).

The network of friends and villagers helped them get the jobs (Table 2). In more than 70 per cent cases (73.0 per cent), it was their fellow villagers or friends (who had already migrated) informed them about the opportunity of work and helped them to get work. For another 19 per cent (precisely 18.9 per cent), it was the labour contractors who directly got in touch with them. Getting a job through a network of friends/villagers is highest for the helpers (90 per cent), followed by construction workers (77.8 per cent). A large section of the *others* (27.8 per cent), who are relatively better skilled or equipped with more capital than the rest of the workers, seem to find the jobs without depending on villagers, friends or contractors. Almost one-third (32.1 per cent) of the rag pickers found their job only through contractors. Though majority of them got their jobs through the network of villagers or friends, later most of them became part of different contractors' workers group. This is evident from the fact that a majority of them (63.1 per cent) are currently working under contractors (last row of Table 1). All the rag pickers are working under contractors and only a quarter of the helpers are working under contractors.

### **Earnings, Expenses and Remittances**

The annual earnings, expenses and remittances sent back home are presented in Table 3. The *others* category of workers has the highest annual income (Rs. 2.03 lakhs), followed by helpers (Rs. 1.70 lakh), construction workers (Rs. 1.68 lakh) and rag pickers

have the lowest average income (Rs. 1.52 lakh).<sup>7</sup> The annual earning of the migrant workers is nearly Rs 25,000 higher in Kerala than in Karnataka. The Hindu workers are found to be earning more than the Muslim workers.<sup>8</sup> The workers who are staying alone are found to earn more than the workers who are staying with the family at the destination place. The distribution of earnings for different types of workers, by destination state of the workers i.e. Kerala and Karnataka, workers belonging to two religious groups and workers' living arrangement status are presented in Figure 1. Although *others* group has higher median earnings, the inter-worker disparity in earning is also high for them. Only among the rag pickers and helpers, there are upper outliers (i.e. workers earning exceptionally high compared to the rest of the workers in their respective worker groups). Although median earning is higher in Kerala compared to Karnataka, the latter is characterised by higher range of earnings and presence of upper outlier. Compared to the Hindu workers, Muslim workers have higher range and also presence of upper outlier. If we exclude one upper outlier, the range of earnings are found to be substantially lower for the workers who are staying with their families.

To have a closer look at the earning pattern of the migrant workers, we have estimated an earning equation (a linear

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7. It is worth noticing that on an average, helpers earn higher than the construction workers because construction workers in our sample is a mix of both mason and helpers to the masons. Though mason always earn higher than their helpers, it was difficult to isolate them at the time of interviews because some helpers to the mason reported to have worked as masons too whenever demand for masons remained high.
  8. This is not to indicate that there is religion-based wage discrimination for the migrant workers in south India. It is because of large section of the Muslim workers are engaged in low earning jobs such as rag picking. Our multivariate analysis also clearly shows that religion does not make any difference in earnings when other characteristics are controlled for.

regression model using OLS) by considering experience, educational level, type of work, religion and location of work as predictors. The annual earning of the worker is considered as the dependent variable. All the predictors are considered as categorical variables. The variable 'experience' has been categorised into three values – no or short experience (0-4 years), moderate experience (5-10 years) and long experience (10 years & above). Educational level of the worker is divided into three categories – illiterate, literate but below secondary level and secondary level or above. The results of the regression are presented in Table 4. Compared to short experience, only having long experience makes a significant positive impact on earnings. Compared to an illiterate migrant worker, having education (literate but lower than secondary; secondary and above) results in significant increase in earnings and the impact is incremental indicating that higher educational level contributes to higher earnings. With reference to a construction worker, being a rag picker and other type of worker increases the earnings. The finding might look surprising, especially for the rag pickers since we know that the average earnings of the rag pickers is the lowest among all types of migrant workers. However, it must be noted that the positive coefficient we observe for the rag pickers is a net effect when we control for the linear effects of all other predictors. A closer look at all characteristics of rag pickers reveals that they are mostly workers with short experience, illiterate, living in Karnataka and are Muslims. A worker having all or most of these characteristics earn less as construction workers, helpers or *others* worker and only earn higher when do rag picking. As it should be the case, religion does not make any difference in earnings when all other relevant predictors are considered. Compared to Kerala, a worker earns significantly lower in Karnataka.

On an average, the migrant workers spend roughly one-third of their earnings as living expenses. For obvious reason, living expenses are higher for those who are staying with their

families. It is mostly the rag pickers who live with the families.<sup>9</sup>

For rag pickers, the total household income is much higher than what is reported by the individual earning of the rag pickers because in most of the cases, their wives are also working as maid servants in nearby localities. Table 3 also presents annual expenses and remittances reported by the workers. Since the questions on earnings, expenses and remittances were asked independently, there are discrepancies in remittance figures when we look at remittances as reported by the workers and remittances calculated by taking a difference between earnings and expenses. The reported remittances are always lower than the residuals of reported earnings after deducting reported earnings. For most of the sub-groups, remittances as a percentage of earnings calculated by alternative ways differ by 6-9 per cent. Going by both measures, the migrant workers in Kerala are able to send higher remittances than migrant workers in Karnataka.

### **Non-earning Dimensions of Life**

We have seen that majority of the sample workers live without their families. For a worker, living far from the family members definitely inflict a cost, though it may be more psychological in nature. If such psychological costs are strong enough, they would have preferred to bring their wives and children to their current place of residence provided they have opportunities at work place and favourable situation at home. The nature of work, type of accommodation provided and living environment do not allow most of the workers to bring their families. Only little less than a quarter of the workers (26 out of 111) have reported any scope for bringing their wives and children to their current work places (Table 5). These workers are mostly rag pickers (19) or living in Karnataka (22). For construction workers,

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9. Of the 28 rag pickers in our sample, 11 are found to be living with their families. The total number of migrant workers living with families at destination places is 12.

helper and *others* types of workers, there is very limited scope for bringing wives and children to their current work places. Not all workers who reported scope for bringing wives and children have actually brought them. Of the 26 who reported opportunities for bringing wives and children, only 17 have actually brought them at some point. The 17 cases of migrant workers who have ever brought their wives and children, all happened to be in Karnataka and 15 of them are rag pickers.<sup>10</sup> Workers in Kerala report little scope for bringing their wives and children, and nobody in our sample has brought them so far.

How they spent their leisure time can be a revealing dimension of a person's life as migrant workers outside their own state where culture and language are different. Are they only engaged in idle socialisation with the fellow migrant workers (such as gossiping, chatting) within their own groups? Or do they have a life beyond their work and work place? The picture is not very rousing. More than 60 per cent of the workers do not even watch television (Table 6). Only a quarter of them have gone to some place for sightseeing or pleasure trip in the last three months. Rarely (only 7 out of 111) have they gone to a movie theatre to watch a movie. It looks like construction workers and helpers or workers in Kerala are better off in these dimensions. One may argue that a sense of loneliness in the absence of family, feeling guilty for missing the family-responsibilities and lack of opportunities for meaningful engagement with others may lead to frequent smoking or even drinking on a regular basis. About 42-43 per cent of the workers have reported smoking or chewing tobacco and a relatively lower percentage of the workers (18 per cent) have reported drinking (Table 7). One may point out that drinking has been under-reported, which is a possibility. If one expects that drinking would be lower among the workers who are alone and away from families and lower among the Muslims

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10. Out of our sample of 111, only 12 migrant workers are living with their families on a permanent basis.

due to religious taboo, our survey data just show the opposite. Prevalence of drinking is found more among the rag pickers, in Karnataka, among the Muslims and those who are staying with family. Careful observations during the survey made us believe that under-reporting of drinking have been probably lower when wives of the migrant workers were also present during the time of interviews. This would probably explain why rag pickers or Muslims or workers in Karnataka or workers living with wife have reported higher prevalence of drinking. However, higher prevalence of drinking among the rag pickers can also be linked with the type of job they are engaged in as most of the time they deal with waste, garbage, rotten items and work and live in environment full of pungent smell. Altogether the rag pickers look very different from the rest of migrant workers in terms of their earnings, nature of work, living arrangement and locations, which requires us to further explore in depth about their earnings and living scenario separately through qualitative tools.

At a destination place, a migrant worker lives a life which is very different from the life he could have spent at his own village in West Bengal. Most of the days of the year, he lives alone, far from his family members, relatives, friends. His higher earnings might have improved the financial situation of his family at home but that has come at a cost – the cost of missing his own people, many festivities and other occasions of social gatherings. The lives of the unskilled and semi-skilled migrant workers at destination places are different from the lives of the educated and skilled migrants in many aspects. The latter often have the freedom and opportunities to bring their immediate families to the destination places, which is almost absent for the former. Further, the educated and skilled migrants may not experience a huge change in the quality and standard of life in the new destination places. This cannot be said for the unskilled and semi-skilled migrants. In response to the question of preferred relocation from their current place of work, two-thirds of the migrant workers clearly revealed their strong preference for staying back at their

current places (Table 8). Only one-fifth of the migrant workers want to return to West Bengal whereas another 13.5 per cent want to move to other locations if that provides them better opportunities. The preference for staying back in the same place by a large segment of the migrant workers only indicates that they are neither hopeful nor certain about their job prospects (quality of job, job stability, wage rates) in West Bengal. Their preference for staying back also indicates that they are ready to bear the psychological costs of being far away from families, friends and culture in order to have secured, stable and higher earnings.

## **Findings from the Qualitative Survey**

### ***Thiruvananthapuram***

Between 5 to 7 in the morning, Ulloor junction in Thiruvananthapuram turns into a place with people conversing in Bengali and other eastern Indian languages. They are migrant workers waiting for contractors to take them to the construction sites or to be hired by individuals who need their service. The place appears vacant within an hour. It gets overcrowded again in the evening with the migrant workers taking tea or doing chores. Unemployment, irregular employment and poor wages in West Bengal are cited as major reasons for migration by them. Even migration to Kolkata for job did not fetch them regular employment with high wages. The workers who were getting only Rs 150 to Rs 200 a day in West Bengal had strong incentive to leave as they were offered Rs 500 to Rs 900 a day in Kerala. Moreover, shortages of unskilled workers due to high education levels and emigration to foreign countries make Kerala an attractive job destination for workers from outside the state. (Zachariah and Rajan, 2012)

Subir Majhi (34, from Purba Medinipur), a construction worker, who landed in Thiruvananthapuram in search of livelihood recalls '*...previously I was working in my native place as an agricultural*



*labourer where I was paid Rs 200 a day. The work was not on daily basis ... the wage was not enough to run the household... I have three children... two of them are in school now. I have to feed them ... have to bear their educational expenses... I also went to Kolkata where I worked as a mason... but I was underpaid. Sitting back home for days was not a rare incident there... One of my village friends informed me about Kerala ... I came here with him a year back. Here the wage rate is high... they pay me Rs 800 a day ... now I can send a considerable amount of money to my family also.'* Afzal (31 years), a migrant worker before moving with the contractor to his work place, recounts '...there is always work available in Kerala.'

Though earning is high in Kerala, the cost of living is also high. However, the migrant workers are still left with good amount of money to send back home in West Bengal. Satya Das (28, Uttar Dinajpur) narrated '*...even though wage rate is high here, the cost of living is also very high. We have to pay Rs 1000 per month per head for house rent apart from spending for maintenance and food. We have a minimum expense of Rs 200 a day. The remaining amount I send is not enough for the household. But what to do!*'. Some of the migrant workers told that the local workers were paid more for the same job than migrant workers. Ismail Sheikh (34, from Malda) complained '*... local workers are paid Rs 1200 a day...we are paid Rs 500 to Rs 900 a day... the rest is taken by the contractors.'*

The migrant workers in Thiruvananthapuram live in cramped shelters, mostly in shared rooms where sanitation is a big issue. In many cases, the room are overcrowded. Maniul Sarkar (24, from Jalpaiguri) narrated that '*...I am living in a small room with 30 others. We cook food in the corner of the room and use shared toilets ... we do not have space in the room to breathe.'* On the other hand, we found a number of health benefits are provided to the migrant labourers in Kerala. In 2017, the government announced a health insurance scheme (Aawaz

Insurance Scheme, Labour and Skill Department, Government of Kerala) for migrant labourer which includes free treatment worth Rs 15,000 per year and insurance coverage of Rs 2,00,000 for accidental death. However, Aawaz enrolment is found to be problematic and full of impediments. In spite of the efforts by the government, it has been pointed out that the enrolment is still incomplete due to a variety of reasons. (Sreekumar 2019).

Though Kerala offers much higher earnings to the migrant workers compared to Bengal, even compared to Chennai, there are new challenges cropping up due to continuous inflow of migrant workers from different parts of the country. Moreover, the psychological cost of staying away from family with limited opportunities to visit home and see the children is an aspect of life which one cannot ignore for a long period. Jaidul Ali (a 31 years old man from Murshidabad) narrated that *"...previously I was working in Chennai as a mason. I came here four years back with the contractor and some of my village friends to make money. Here wage rate is high... Even after spending for living, I use to have Rs 10,000 to Rs 15,000 left with me from where I can send a considerable amount to my family...Now, as the number of migrants is increasing continuously, we are getting lesser working opportunities than before... You can find lakhs of migrants from West Bengal in Thiruvananthapuram... But still the money I earn is enough to pay for things here and to send money to home.'* Dhiren Halder (29, from Purba Bardhaman) narrated *'...who wants to stay alone in this place leaving families behind? I have two daughters. I cannot look after them and my wife has to handle all the situation alone. Now she even does not let me know about their needs and problems. What can I do from here? Nothing. If I would get something better in West Bengal, I will definitely go back there. But now the time is hard. The employment scenario in West Bengal is getting difficult'*

### **Bengaluru**

The story of Bengaluru is somewhat different. In the last few

years, Bengaluru has witnessed a boom in the real estate sector, majorly supported by the humongous migrant population from various states of India (Ramalingam, 2016). Migrants from the eastern and north-eastern regions of the country gradually find Bengaluru as migration destination both for males and females (Sridhar *et al.*, 2010). As one delves deeper in the major construction sites of Kempapura, one can see the tin barracks which are new to the migrant workers from various districts of West Bengal.

Deepu Saha (42) from Malda, West Bengal recalls how he landed a job as a construction worker. After having worked as a painter and waterproofing mechanic in various sites of Kolkata and Delhi, he arrived at Bengaluru via connections made in previous jobs. He earns Rs 400 per day and works for 22 days a month. His wife Minati (40) also works with him and receives Rs 200 per day. Minati reveals '*..here everything is costly, but the company provides the accommodation for free. The rest we have to buy from the market. We have a son who studies in school and my daughter takes care of him. We want to earn more money so that they can have a good life*'.

Munul Sheikh from Murshidabad district also recalls how the company contractor brought him along with other fellow villagers to work in the construction site. Though his family still resides in the village, he is able to send them a considerable amount of money. When asked about his whereabouts on weekends, Munul blushes and says '*.....I go to the nearby mall.*' It's probably a luxury for him which he could never dreamt of in his village life. We come across a one room school cum day-care centre, which is also stacked with utensils on the rear end. We come across Malati (27) and Banani (35) who work in the canteen of the construction company. Malati's child stays in her village back in West Bengal along with her parents. Banani cooks and does other odd jobs in the canteen while her 10-year old boy studies in the school run by the company. The school provides meal for the children as well.

## **Bengali Ragpickers in Bengaluru: a different story**

As we have argued that the rag pickers' story is very different from the stories of the rest of the migrant workers. They are different in many ways – earnings, nature of work, hazards associated with the work, quality of life, living arrangement, religious composition and their locations of stay. In the last decade Bangalore's population has increased enormously from 6.5 million in 2001 to 9.6 million in 2011 (Census, 2001; 2011). Along with that the production of solid waste in the city has doubled. The city currently produces 5757 tonnes of waste per day, which was 2500-3000 TPD in 2014-15 (BBMP, 2019). However, only 68 per cent of the wastes generated are collected by municipal bodies and the rest is scavenged by the rag pickers (Ramachandra, 2016). The activity of rag picking which require no skill is a source of income for a growing number of urban poor as well as for people who are migrating from rural areas in the absence of alternative livelihood (TidkeNone, 2014).

### ***Migration for rag picking?***

Landlessness, unemployment, uncertainty of work, indebtedness and poor wage rate in the source region is the usual impetus streaming through the saga of migration of the rag pickers. The workers who were earning only Rs 150 to Rs 200 a day in West Bengal get attracted to shift to Bengaluru when they see opportunities for more regular and much higher income, even though the nature of work is different and not very attractive. In this sense, one can say that shifting to Bengaluru by many Bengali migrant workers is quite a planned move.

Saiful Sheikh (age 32) a migrant from Nadia district of West Bengal, who is engaged in rag picking for the last 2-3 years rued '*...previously, I used to work as an agricultural labour in West Bengal where I was paid Rs 200 per day, which was not sufficient to run a household of 6 members. One of my fellow villagers who used to work here informed me about this work and as a consequence I accompanied him to Bangalore. Although*

*this work is not of my choice, but they pay me Rs 250 to Rs 500 per day; I can thus send more money to my family...'* Sambhu Das (age 30) who is a rag picker and have migrated from Nadia district of West Bengal have a different story to narrate, *'...we have lots of debt in our village and the thikadar's (the scrap contractor) home is just adjacent to our home in the village. So, we came with him and started working here...'*

When asked about the reasons behind choosing rag picking and not any other informal works, the respondents reported that they make more money by rag picking. This can also be supported by quantitative evidence where it was found a person as a construction worker or helper with similar characteristics as rag pickers (short experience, low education, living in Karnataka) would earn less in their work compared to a rag picker.

In an FGD with 7 members of both men and women at Hebbal in Bengaluru the respondents revealed *'...we can easily work in the construction sites, but in kabaddi (rag picking) income is more. Here, we can earn Rs 500-700 per day... sometimes, if we get good scraps, we can earn up to Rs 1000.'* Furthermore, certain advantages in rag picking such as no need to work every day and provision to take advance money are stated as the reasons by some of the rag pickers behind choosing rag picking as a job. In another FGD with 10 members of both men and women at Hebbal in Bangalore, the rag pickers stated that *'...the work is very dirty as we have to select the materials out of rotten things and carcass. Although, work is available in the construction sites, the work is not of our choice as we live with our families. ... income is higher in this line of work and work timings are flexible as well. ... we can take advance from thikadar in amount of Rs 50,000 to Rs 1,00,000 and pay him back as per our capacity by collecting and providing the materials...'*

Generally, a rag picker has greater opportunity for income as he can bring his wife with him for work. Mahiful Manna (age 37)

from Murshidabad, West Bengal recalls how bringing his wife for rag picking has doubled his family income. He stated '*...earlier I used to earn around Rs 10,000 by rag-picking. Now both of us together make about Rs 20,000 in a month and after spending around Rs 6000, we can send a considerable amount of money to our children in the village.*' Papiya Dey (age 24), wife of a rag picker and a domestic worker in profession stated '*.....I used to live in the village, but then I heard that other women are earning Rs 15000 by working as domestic servants in the nearby apartments in Bengaluru and hence have migrated here...*'

### ***Bengaluru, a better choice than Delhi***

In our study, we have found that most of the migrant workers from West Bengal who were previously working in Delhi as rag pickers or were engaged in any other informal work have moved to Bengaluru for work as rag pickers. When asked about the reason behind moving to Bengaluru , they all stated that '*Bengaluru is far better than Delhi*' and the reasons that they have mentioned for preferring Bengaluru are quarrels, physical and verbal aggression by the natives and social exclusion among religious groups where the Muslims are usually not hired as domestic workers. Rehana (31 years), the wife of a rag picker who is from Nadia district of West Bengal) recalls,'*... in Delhi, there was a lot of problem in the rag picking business such as fights, quarrels and verbal aggression...then we heard that income is more in Bengaluru and thus have shifted here*'... Parveen (age 29), the wife of a rag picker who is now engaged as a domestic worker in Bengaluru stated '*...religion is not an issue here. In Delhi, domestic servants were engaged in correspondence with the religion of the household owner... Muslim domestic servants could get work in Muslim households and Hindu domestic servants worked in Hindu households... in Bangalore, such scenario does not exist... here the owners give us similar food that they consume and even give food in their utensils...*'

In an in-depth interview with Kalipada Das (age 51, from Nadia district of West Bengal), a rag picker contractor, it is found that most of the workers who have migrated in Bengaluru for rag picking are Muslims and they have brought their families with them whereas most of the migrant rag pickers who are Hindus have migrated here alone. This is also supported by our quantitative data which shows that about 89.3 per cent of the rag pickers are Muslims. Mote *et al.* (2016) also found similar results in favour of this pattern.

### ***How does the rag picking business operate?***

Rag picking entails collecting, sorting and selling of waste materials found at dump sites, street corners, beside railway tracks, residential areas etc which has an exchange value (Majumder and Rajvanshi, 2017). The rag pickers make their living by sifting through the mounds of garbage, roving from one place to another collecting scrap from unbound and undefined economic spaces they unearth. The rag pickers then segregate, weigh and handover the materials to their contractor/dealer under whom they are working. The rag pickers are paid according to the weight and type of the materials that they bring. The contractor sells those materials to the scrap dealer (usually local people) at different prices per kg based on types of materials.

**Selling price of the scraps:** Coconut-Rs 6/kg, cardboard –Rs 5/ kg, glass bottle- Rs 0.5 /kg, plastic bottle – Rs 5/kg, tyre- Rs 2/kg, iron (commercial and non-commercial): Rs 10-15 per kg, foam (cut- Rs 3/kg; uncut- Rs 10/kg), beer bottles: Rs 1.5/kg and alcohol bottles: Rs 0.5/kg.

The contractors reported that the profit margin is falling as the scrap dealers are not ready to pay them more than earlier. However, in spite of falling profit they want to stay here as the amount they still get here is higher than what they used to get in their native place and earlier occupation. Asraful Seikh,

a contractor of the rag pickers who have migrated from Nadia district of West Bengal rued '*...nowadays, the profit margin has reduced....the dealers are not ready to pay the earlier prices as they argue that the prices of the materials have reduced drastically over the years....earlier the cardboard boxes were sold at Rs 6-7 per kg, which reduced to Rs 3-4 in the current period.*'

### **Living conditions**

They usually live in the same premises, in *jhupris*<sup>11</sup> provided by their contractor. The living conditions of the rag pickers are unsafe and unhygienic. They do not have proper toilets and have to adjust through make-shift toilets and live in a constant insecurity of being dislocated by municipal authorities. With a lack of basic services such as electricity and water, their living conditions are quite deplorable.

Gyanendra Roy (age 41) one of the contractors of rag pickers, from Nadia, West Bengal describes the condition as precarious and shaky. He revealed '*...whenever there will be orders from the municipal authorities, we have to vacate the area. There are no proper toilet facilities and water is available from the tankers once in a day...nothing is permanent here but we have to adjust to make things work for us*'. Jharna Das (age 27) wife of a rag picker and a domestic worker, from Murshidabad, West Bengal stated '*... we had problems in staying at this place as it is surrounded by dirt all over...a pungent smell is always present in this area... we had problems in making arrangements for food and water.... there is water shortage in this area, so water has to be spent very carefully... after working here for a month and making Rs 700-800 per day, we are slowly adjusting to this place.*'

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11. Settlement of impoverished building often known as shanties or sacks.



Kalipada Das (the contractor) stated '*... in Bangalore, the type of work that I am engaged is shrouded with anxiety and uncertainty...the owner of the land can ask me to vacate the property at any given time ... for the last 9 years, I am staying in Hebbal and till now I had to change places for 3-4 times ... with every shift, my labourers also shifted with me*'. He revealed '*... at present, I have 35 labourers who have migrated along with their families and collect scraps for me ... these squatters are constructed by me and it costs around Rs 3000 for constructing each worker's shelter... I do not take any rent from the rag pickers ... for this entire plot of land, I pay a rent of Rs 30,000 to the owner...*' He stated '*...to start this business I had to sell my land in the village. Now I have 29 vans which the rag pickers use to carry materials... all the rag pickers working under me are from my village or adjacent villages and they were either brought by me or by other rag pickers...*' He further stated '*... employment scenario in the village is very dismal. As the village is located near India-Bangladesh border, large number of young people used to earn through 'black marketing' activities. .... in earlier days, sugar was one of the commodities being traded in the black market....other than sugar, there were enclosed sacks which used to get carried across the borders by local youths... now-a-days police and BSF becoming very strict, those opportunities of earning no longer exist....Going out to work is now the only options for the villagers.*

### **Occupational hazard**

The rag pickers stated that they were often harassed by the public officials during their work. Since the rag pickers move around the city for collecting materials, in some cases of theft they are often suspected by the local people. However, with CCTV cameras being increasingly installed these days, the matters get resolved easily and their innocence is proved. Police also visit the godown and inspect the collected materials by the rag pickers.

Montu Das (age 37, a rag picker, from Nadia, West Bengal) stated '*... sometimes at night, when we go to search and collect materials, local goons harass us and take our money. At times we are harassed by police. ... one of our people brought an auto but some local people complained against him...the police started harassing him and he had to pay Rs 5000 to the police. ... such harassments are not faced by the women who work as maids in the apartments and the working conditions are very safe and secure*' Nafisa (age 29, a domestic worker, from Nadia, West Bengal) revealed '*...the policeman comes here regularly; sometimes twice/thrice a day and the thikadar pay him Rs100 every day. Sometimes policeman takes Rs 2000 in a month*'

### ***Schooling of the accompanied children in Bengaluru***

The respondents stated that, most of the children do not go to school as the native children harass them and the teachers also do not pay any heed to their complaints. In an FGD, with 10 members, both male and female, at Hebbal, Bengaluru the respondents stated '*...here some of the kids used to go to government schools but the Kannada children used to beat them, so we do not send the children to schools. They are very scared to go back there*' Malati (age 28, wife of a rag picker and a domestic worker, from Nadia, West Bengal) stated '*...I have admitted my son in a government school in Bangalore...he left the school after few months ... for admission to private schools, we have to pay half of the total fees i.e. Rs 12000 per year and the NGO pays the other half ... the children go, play and come back ... my son can speak in English now and it's good as English speaking is very essential nowadays.*'

Rag pickers who had migrated to Bengaluru after working in Delhi narrated a similar story, '*... I have 4 children ... three of them are enrolled in private schools in Bengaluru. In Delhi, they were enrolled in Anganwadi centres, but they refused to go there as they used to get beaten by local kids at the centres*' stated Rahnuma Khatun (age 28, domestic worker, from Murshidabad,

West Bengal). We found many rag picker families moved to Bengaluru along with their children. Initially, they used to send the children in a Government school but after 2 or 3 months because of the fear of getting beaten many discontinued the school. Their daughters also stay with them unless they reach 12 or 13 years ago and then they are sent back to villages as they feel the place not safer for the girls. Another reason for sending the girls back to their village once they become teenagers is that they now need to learn household chores and look after the left behind older members of the family. In most of the cases, the girls are not engaged in any study in Bengaluru.

Other studies also find that children in the age bracket 5 to 17 of years living in similar conditions are often deprived of education, excluded from child care and live in jeopardy. They are often forced to engage in work to supplement their household income (Mazumder and Rajvanshi, 2017). Anwar Ali (age 12, a migrant from Murshidabad, West Bengal) who is living in Hebbal, Bengaluru as rag picker for the last one year with his mother who is a domestic servant recalled how he was forced to get engaged in this work for money and his hatred for this work. He rued '*... my father left us 2 years before and married someone else.... my mother and I came here along with some of the villagers for earning... we don't have any land and there was no one to feed us back in the village... here I started working as rag picker and mother started working in nearby apartments as domestic servant... I don't like this work ... the foul smell is present everywhere... I feel like I am in hell... after working here for 4 months I went back to my village ... but the need for money pulled me here again.... although the amount I get here is good, I will definitely move to other job if I get any... who wants to stay with scraps all around?*'

### **Medical care**

Rag pickers are always at a higher risk of being affected by numerous infectious diseases as they spend most of their

time in the dumping sites sifting through the mounds of rotten, unhygienic and germ rich scraps which is not only a source of daily bread for them but also a source of diseases. We found that most of the rag pickers as well as their children are having skin disease like scabies. When asked about medical care, Aznarul Seikh (age 34, a rag picker, from Nadia, West Bengal) said *'sometimes medical vans come and conduct check-ups ... they come once in a month.....they also provide free immunization for the children ... but if we fall ill in between, for seeking regular medical care, we visit a nearby private doctor who takes a fee of Rs 100 and the total cost of the medicines prescribed by him accounts for Rs 600-700 approximately. In our village, the doctor takes only Rs 30 and we used to get well after having his medicines. Here, even though income is high, expenditure is also high'*

### ***Do the rag pickers want to return to West Bengal?***

We have seen in our quantitative analysis that most of the respondents (77.8 per cent) have reported that they do not want to go back to West Bengal. Mahirul (age 37, a rag picker, from Nadia, West Bengal) stated *'...as we have been living here for 11 years, we know a lot of people and we have no plans to shift anywhere else... few years down the line, when we will get old and cannot work further, then we would like to return back to the village'*. However, some of the respondents have reported that they would want to return to their native places as their families were left behind there. Pankaj (age 41, a rag picker, from Nadia, West Bengal) rued *'...we want to stay here for a maximum period of 3-4 years and then return to village and spend time with our parents and in-laws for the rest of the life.'* Sohail Seikh (age 39, a contractor of rag pickers, from Nadia, West Bengal) rued *'I will not continue this work for long... after I get back the money in circulation, in a few years I might return to the village as my family still resides in the village.'*

## Summary and Conclusion

The case of long-distance migration from West Bengal and other eastern and north-eastern states to Kerala and Karnataka indicates that even when the physical, linguistic and cultural distance is more, there exists a strong network in the destination region which cuts across the barriers of moving. The major reasons for migration of the Bengali workers from rural West Bengal are found to be unemployment, lack of regular employment and low wage rate. The nearby urban pockets, even Kolkata could not provide them opportunities to earn regular and adequate income which could probably have prevented their migration. Migration to southern states became an attractive option because of the huge growth in urban pockets of these states. The growth of urban population and real estate boom have created large demand for unskilled and semi-skilled labour. Given the limited supply of local labour to meet the increasing demand, this has hiked the wage rate making it attractive for the workers from regions of the country with lower wage rates. The data published by Labour Bureau also confirm the high wage differential between West Bengal and Kerala. Kerala offers higher wage rates compared to other southern states. A large section of Bengali migrant workers has come to South India after working in North, Central or Western India.

Majority of the migrant workers are currently working under contractors. However, they came to know about the work opportunities in south India from their friends and fellow villagers. The *other* category of the workers is the highest earner as they comprise mostly skilled workers (such as driver, electrician, marble workers etc.). Rag pickers earn least compared to other three types of workers. On an average, earnings are higher in Kerala. Our empirical analysis shows that earnings of the migrant workers depend on type of work, educational level and experience of the worker and place of work. On an average, migrant workers send two-thirds of their earnings as remittances.

The living conditions of the migrant workers are poor. Most of them do not have any opportunity to bring their families to their current work places. However, it is found that the scope for bringing family (wife and children) is higher in Karnataka, especially for the rag pickers because of the nature of their staying arrangement. The wives of the rag pickers find employment in nearby buildings as maid servants or helpers and earn reasonable amount of money. This has created strong incentives for the rag pickers to bring their families (at least wives) to their current place of work. The living conditions of the rag pickers are unhygienic with mounds of scraps all around. They live in constant insecurity. The reported consumption of alcohol and tobacco is found to be higher among rag pickers. Access to health care is mixed but seems to be better in Kerala. Majority of the migrant workers do not want to return to West Bengal.

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## Tables

**Table 1. Characteristics of the migrant workers by type of work**

Background characteristics	Construction workers	Rag pickers	Helpers	Others	Total
Sample	45	28	20	18	111
Average age (years)	34	32	36	29	33
Education					
<i>Illiterate</i>	28.9 (13)	78.6 (22)	20.0 (4)	11.1 (2)	36.9 (41)
<i>Literate but lower than secondary</i>	46.7 (21)	21.4 (6)	65.0 (13)	33.3 (4)	41.4 (46)
<i>Secondary and above</i>	24.4 (11)	0 (0)	15.0 (3)	55.6 (10)	21.6 (24)
Religion					
<i>Hindu</i>	53.3 (24)	10.7 (3)	75.0 (15)	61.1 (11)	47.8 (53)
<i>Muslim</i>	46.7 (21)	89.3 (25)	25.0 (5)	38.9 (7)	52.2 (58)
State of Current residence					
<i>Kerala</i>	77.8 (35)	0 (0)	95.0 (19)	44.4 (8)	55.9 (62)
<i>Karnataka</i>	22.2 (10)	100 (28)	5.0 (1)	55.6 (10)	44.1 (49)
Mean age of first migration	22	24	23	19	23
Average number of years in the current place	6.4	3.4	4.1	6.2	5.3
Migrant workers under contractor	68.9 (31)	100 (28)	25.0 (5)	33.3 (36)	63.1 (70)

Note: Figures in the parenthesis indicate frequencies

Source: Primary survey (2019)

**Table 2. Source of current job**

	Villagers/ friends	Contractor	Others
Type of work			
<i>Construction worker</i>	77.8 (35)	20.0 (9)	2.2 (1)
<i>Ragpicker</i>	60.7 (17)	32.1 (9)	7.1 (2)
<i>Helper</i>	90.0 (18)	5.0 (1)	5.0 (1)
<i>Others</i>	61.1 (11)	11.1 (2)	27.8 (5)
Destination state			
<i>Kerala</i>	87.1 (54)	11.3 (7)	1.6 (1)
<i>Karnataka</i>	55.1 (27)	28.6 (14)	5.2 (3)
Religion			
<i>Hindu</i>	41 (77.36)	6 (11.32)	6 (11.32)
<i>Muslim</i>	40 (68.97)	15 (25.86)	3 (5.17)
Total	73.0 (81)	18.9 (21)	8.1 (9)

Note: Figures in the brackets show frequencies

Source: Primary survey (2019)

**Table 3: Average annual earnings, expenses and remittances sent home (Rupees lakhs)**

	Earnings	Expenses <sup>1</sup>	Remittances <sup>2</sup>
Type of work			
<i>Construction worker</i>	1.68	0.59 (35)	0.99 (59)
<i>Rag picker</i>	1.52	0.65 (43)	0.61 (40)
<i>Helper</i>	1.70	0.61 (36)	0.99 (58)
<i>Others</i>	2.03	0.55 (27)	0.99 (49)
Destination state			
<i>Kerala</i>	1.81	0.61 (34)	1.06 (58)
<i>Karnataka</i>	1.56	0.59 (38)	0.69 (44)
Religion			
<i>Hindu</i>	1.77	0.58 (33)	1.02 (58)
<i>Muslim</i>	1.63	0.62 (38)	0.78 (48)
Living arrangement			
<i>Without family</i>	1.72	0.58 (34)	0.92 (54)
<i>With family</i>	1.55	0.79 (51)	0.68 (44)
Total	1.70	0.60 (35)	0.90(53)

Note: 1. Figures in the parenthesis show reported expenses as percentage of reported earnings. 2. Figures in the parentheses show reported remittances as a percentage of reported earnings.

Source: Primary survey (2019)

**Table 4. Factors associated with yearly earnings (Rs. '000) of the migrant workers (OLS estimates)**

Background characteristics	Coefficient	P-value	[95% Confidence Interval]
Experience (Ref: 0-4 years)			
<i>5-10 years</i>	19.7	0.106	-4.3, 43.7
<i>More than 10 years</i>	39.3**	0.001	16.4, 62.2
Education (Ref: Illiterate)			
<i>Literate but less than secondary</i>	23.6*	0.049	0.1, 47.1
<i>Secondary or above</i>	50.1**	0.001	20.5, 79.7
Occupation (Ref: construction worker)			
<i>Rag picker</i>	38.3*	0.027	4.5, 72.2
<i>Helper</i>	-1.4	0.914	-27.9, 25.0
<i>Others</i>	46.3**	0.002	17.2, 75.4
Religion (Ref: Hindu)			
<i>Muslim</i>	5.6	0.599	-15.6, 26.9
State (Ref: Kerala)			
<i>Karnataka</i>	-38.4**	0.004	-64.5, -12.2

Note: \*\*, \* significance at 1 and 5per cent level respectively.

Source: Primary Survey (2019)

**Table 5. Opportunity to bring family (wife and children) to destination place**

	Total worker	Opportunity to bring family <sup>1</sup>	Actually brought family <sup>2</sup>
Type of worker			
<i>Construction worker</i>	45	4 (8.9)	1 (2.2)
<i>Rag picker</i>	28	19 (67.9)	15 (53.6)
<i>Helper</i>	20	2 (10.0)	0
<i>Others</i>	18	1 (5.6)	1 (5.6)
Destination state			
<i>Kerala</i>	62	4 (6.5)	0
<i>Karnataka</i>	49	22 (44.9)	17 (34.7)
Religion			
<i>Hindu</i>	53	6 (11.3)	2 (3.8)
<i>Muslim</i>	58	20 (34.5)	15 (25.9)
Total	111	26 (23.4)	17 (15.3)

Notes: <sup>1</sup> worker reporting opportunity; <sup>2</sup> workers actually brought family. Figures in the parentheses show percentages.

Source: Primary survey (2019)

**Table 6: Recreational activities of the migrant workers  
(percentages)**

	Watch movie in cinema hall	Going somewhere for sightseeing	Watch television
Type of worker			
<i>Construction worker</i>	8.9 (4)	31.1 (14)	46.7 (21)
<i>Rag picker</i>	3.6 (1)	14.3 (4)	21.4 (6)
<i>Helper</i>	5.0 (1)	30.0 (6)	45.0 (9)
<i>Others</i>	5.6 (1)	22.2 (4)	33.3 (6)
Destination state			
<i>Kerala</i>	8.1 (5)	32.3 (20)	45.2 (28)
<i>Karnataka</i>	4.1 (2)	16.3 (8)	28.6 (14)
Religion			
<i>Hindu</i>	5.7 (3)	24.5 (13)	37.7 (20)
<i>Muslim</i>	6.9 (4)	25.9 (15)	37.9 (22)
Living arrangements			
<i>Alone</i>	6.1 (6)	24.2 (24)	40.4 (40)
<i>With family</i>	8.3 (1)	33.3 (4)	16.7 (2)
Total	6.3 (7)	25.2 (28)	37.8 (42)

Note: Figures in the parenthesis indicate show frequencies

Source: Primary survey (2019)



**Table 7: Reported addiction to drinking, smoking and chewing tobacco (percentages)**

	Drinking	Smoking	Chewing tobacco
Type of worker			
<i>Construction worker</i>	15.6 (7)	37.8 (17)	42.2 (19)
<i>Rag picker</i>	32.1 (9)	75.0 (21)	67.9 (19)
<i>Helper</i>	5.0 (1)	30.0 (6)	40.0 (8)
<i>Others</i>	16.7 (3)	16.7 (3)	11.0 (2)
Destination state			
<i>Kerala</i>	9.7 (6)	32.3 (20)	37.1 (23)
<i>Karnataka</i>	28.6 (14)	55.1 (27)	51.0 (25)
Religion			
<i>Hindu</i>	13.2 (7)	32.1 (17)	39.6 (21)
<i>Muslim</i>	22.4 (13)	51.7 (30)	46.6 (27)
Living arrangements			
<i>Alone</i>	14.1 (14)	38.4 (38)	40.4 (40)
<i>With family</i>	50.0 (6)	75.0 (9)	66.7 (8)
Total	18.0 (20)	42.3 (47)	43.2(48)

Note: Figures in the parenthesis indicate show frequencies

Source: Primary survey (2019)

**Table 8: Opinion of the migrant workers regarding moving from the current place of work (state)**

	Going back to West Bengal	Staying in Same place (State)	Others
Type of worker			
<i>Construction worker</i>	11.1 (5)	71.1 (32)	17.8 (8)
<i>Rag picker</i>	32.1 (9)	57.1 (16)	10.7 (3)
<i>Helper</i>	20.0 (4)	65.0 (13)	15.0 (3)
<i>Others</i>	22.0 (4)	72.2 (13)	5.6 (1)
Destination state			
<i>Kerala</i>	17.7 (11)	69.4 (43)	12.9 (8)
<i>Karnataka</i>	22.5 (11)	63.3 (31)	14.3 (7)
Religion			
<i>Hindu</i>	18.9 (10)	69.8 (37)	11.3 (6)
<i>Muslim</i>	20.7 (12)	63.8 (37)	15.5 (9)
Living arrangements			
<i>Alone</i>	18.2 (18)	67.7 (67)	14.1 (14)
<i>With family</i>	33.3 (4)	58.3 (7)	8.3 (1)
Total	19.8 (22)	(66.7) 74	13.5 (15)

Note: figures in the parenthesis show frequencies

Source: Primary survey (2019)

## Appendix Tables

**Table A1. Sample migrant workers by district and religion.**

Districts	Hindus	Muslims	Total
Nadia	4	27	31
Murshidabad	2	23	25
Purba Medinipur	13	2	15
Malda	9	0	9
Jalpaiguri	7	0	7
Purba Bardhaman	6	0	6
Uttar Dinajpur	0	5	5
Alipurduar	4	0	4
Cooch Behar	2	0	2
North 24 Parganas	2	0	2
Paschim Medinipur	2	0	2
Purulia	1	1	2
South 24 Parganas	1	0	1
Total	53	58	111

Source: Primary Survey (2019)

**Table A2: Age, education and yearly earnings of migrant workers by type of workers (detailed classification)**

Type of worker	Average and range of age (years) <sup>1</sup>	Education (mode value) <sup>2</sup>	Mean and range of early earnings (in lakh Rs) <sup>1</sup>
Construction worker (45)	34 (22-55)	1 (21)	1.68 (0.66 - 2.64)
Rag picker (28)	32 (22-50)	0 (22)	1.52 (0.90 - 3.00)
Helper (20)	36 (21-55)	1 (13)	1.70 (0.96 - 2.52)
Light manufacturing worker (6)	25 (22-28)	2 (6)	1.53 (1.08 - 2.28)
Shopkeeper (3)	24 (18-30)	0 (1), 1(1), 2 (1)	1.76 (0.96 - 2.64)
Contractor (2)	38 (34-41)	0 (1), 2 (1)	2.76 (2.52 - 2.76)
Painter (2)	31(29-32)	2 (2)	2.58 (2.16 - 3.00)
Car driver (1)	27	1 (1 )	3.00
Carpenter (1)	36	1 (1 )	3.00
Pipeline Worker (1)	30	1 (1 )	2.02
Marble worker (1)	39	1 (1 )	1.50
Scrap seller (1)	26	1 (1 )	1.80
Total (111)	33	1 (46)	1.70 (0.66 - 3.00)

Notes: <sup>1</sup> Figures in the parentheses show range; <sup>2</sup> 0, 1 and 2 stand for illiterate, literate but below secondary and secondary or above respectively. Figures in the parentheses show frequency/number of workers.

Source: Primary Survey (2019)

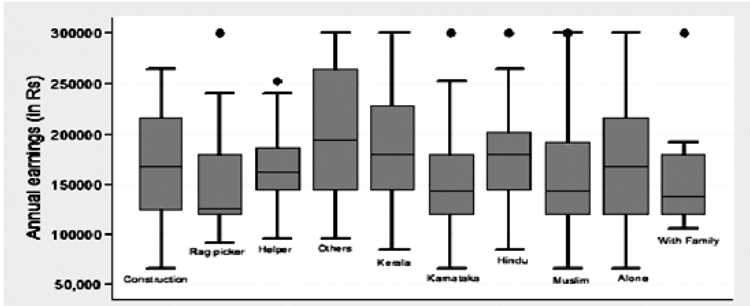
**Table A3. Average daily wage rates for agricultural and non-agricultural occupations in Rural West Bengal, Kerala and Karnataka (December, 2018).**

	<b>West Bengal</b>	<b>Kerala</b>	<b>Karnataka</b>
Ploughing/Tilling workers – Male	329.4	765.5	368.5
Ploughing/Tilling workers – Female	-	-	238.5
Sowing including planting/ transplanting/ weeding workers – Male	259.3	758.5	334.4
Sowing including planting/ transplanting/ weeding workers – Female	231.8	544.7	231.7
Mason – Male	381.4	858.4	473
Construction worker – Male	291.9	839	345.6
Construction worker – Female	211.47	-	221.7
LMV and Tractor drivers – Male	338.9	775	393.3
Plumber – Male	461.1	772.7	381.7
Carpenter – Male	352	855.7	449

Source: Labour Bureau (2018) [[http://labourbureaunew.gov.in/WRRI\\_OCT\\_2018.pdf](http://labourbureaunew.gov.in/WRRI_OCT_2018.pdf)]

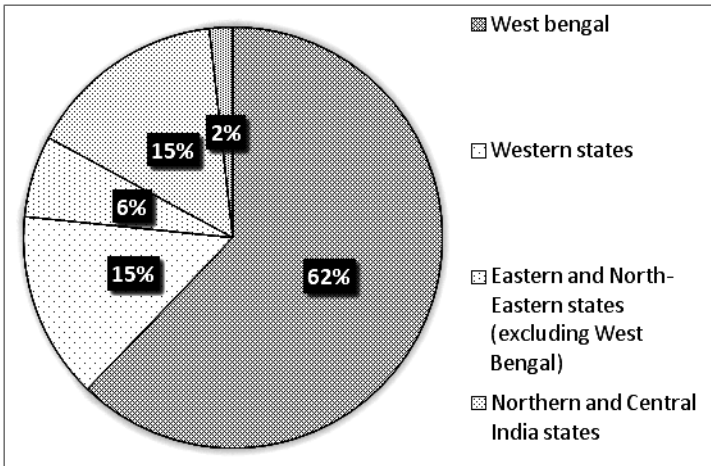
## Figures

**Figure 1: Box plots showing the distribution of migrant workers' earnings**



Source: Primary Survey (2019)

**Figure 2: Distribution of places where migrant workers worked before shifting to South India**



Source: Primary Survey (2019)

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