

Marginalization Among In-Migrant Construction Workers in Kerala: Exploring the Socio-Economic and Political Dimensions

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ABSTRACT

An attempt was made to understand the extent of marginalization among in-migrant construction workers in Kerala, and the socio-economic and political dimensions associated with this marginalization. Data mainly came from an individual survey conducted among 600 in-migrants working in construction sector in Thiruvananthapuram and Ernakulum. In-depth interviews were conducted to understand the socio-economic and political dimensions of marginalization in Kerala. A composite index was constructed to understand the extent of marginalization among workers. Logistic regression models were used to understand the socio-economic correlates of marginalization among the migrants. Around 77.7 percent of the in-migrants working in construction sector experienced severe marginalization. Of the 16 issues listed for accessing the marginalization, they had 11 or more problems. Age and education were statistically associated with the marginalization. Young aged in-migrants were more likely to experience marginalization as compared to others. Migrants aged less than 25 years, and 25-34 years were respectively 2.86 times and 2.55 times more likely to report marginalization as compared the in-migrants aged 35 years.

Keywords: *Marginalisation; In-migrant workers; Construction sector; Marginalisation index*

INTRODUCTION

Decreasing availability of farmland among marginal farmers and the lack of agricultural-related labour are the leading causes of the increased migration to the urban centres. Owing to the unshaped nature of urban settlements in medium-sized and large cities, there is barely any accommodation available for those migrants searching for employment. Once they come to the city, migrants usually live in vulnerable conditions (Agarwal, 2016). Further, the marginalisation highlighted by the highly disorganized and unstable nature of the interstate migrants in Kerala owing to the different character resulted from the different regional, religious and cultural and varied work settings and constant work related seasonality and mobility (Chitra, 2019). Migrant workers continuously face difficulties in becoming a full part of the economic, social, political, and cultural lives of society (Soni, 2013).

The living and working conditions in which migrant workers carry out back-breaking work to support the Indian economy have hardly remained hidden from the public view. Not only did the state demonstrate total abandon of the marginalised migrants, but it also provided them stateless, further unveiling them to a world of insecurity and humiliation (Kumar, 2020). According to the recent survey conducted between 8 and 13 April 2020, 90 percent of the migrant workers in various states did not get paid by their employers, 96 percent did not receive ration from the government, and 70 percent of migrant workers did not get cooked food (The Hindu, 2020). Marginality is usually used to describe and analyse socio-economic, political and cultural spheres where disadvantaged people struggle to gain access to the resources and full participation.

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The prejudiced or neglected book 'Personality and Ideology' by Peter Leonard defines social marginality as being outside the mainstream of productive activity and social reproductive activity (Burton, 2005) This includes two groups firstly, similarly small group of people who are voluntarily marginal to the social order-migrants, certain religious groups, communities etc. However, the second group is concerned with those who are involuntarily socially marginal. In terms of social exclusion, the consequences of marginalisation are similar, whatever the origin and processes of marginalisation, irrespective of whether these are to be located in social attitudes or social circumstances (Burton, 2005).

According to the study conducted in the state planning board, Govt. of Kerala, there are over 31.4 lakhs inter-state migrant workers in Kerala as of 2020. The construction sector tops the rank. It is observed that about 17.5 lakhs of the total migrant population in Kerala are engaged in construction sector itself. The migrant workers representation in each and every sector is fruitful and it needs much attention from the local community and government. Better education standards as Kerala's labour force are moving out of the country for better employment opportunities; the in-migrant labourers are an inevitable part of our economy today. The benefaction of migrant workers to the state economy is limitless but remains down in return for their security and well-being.

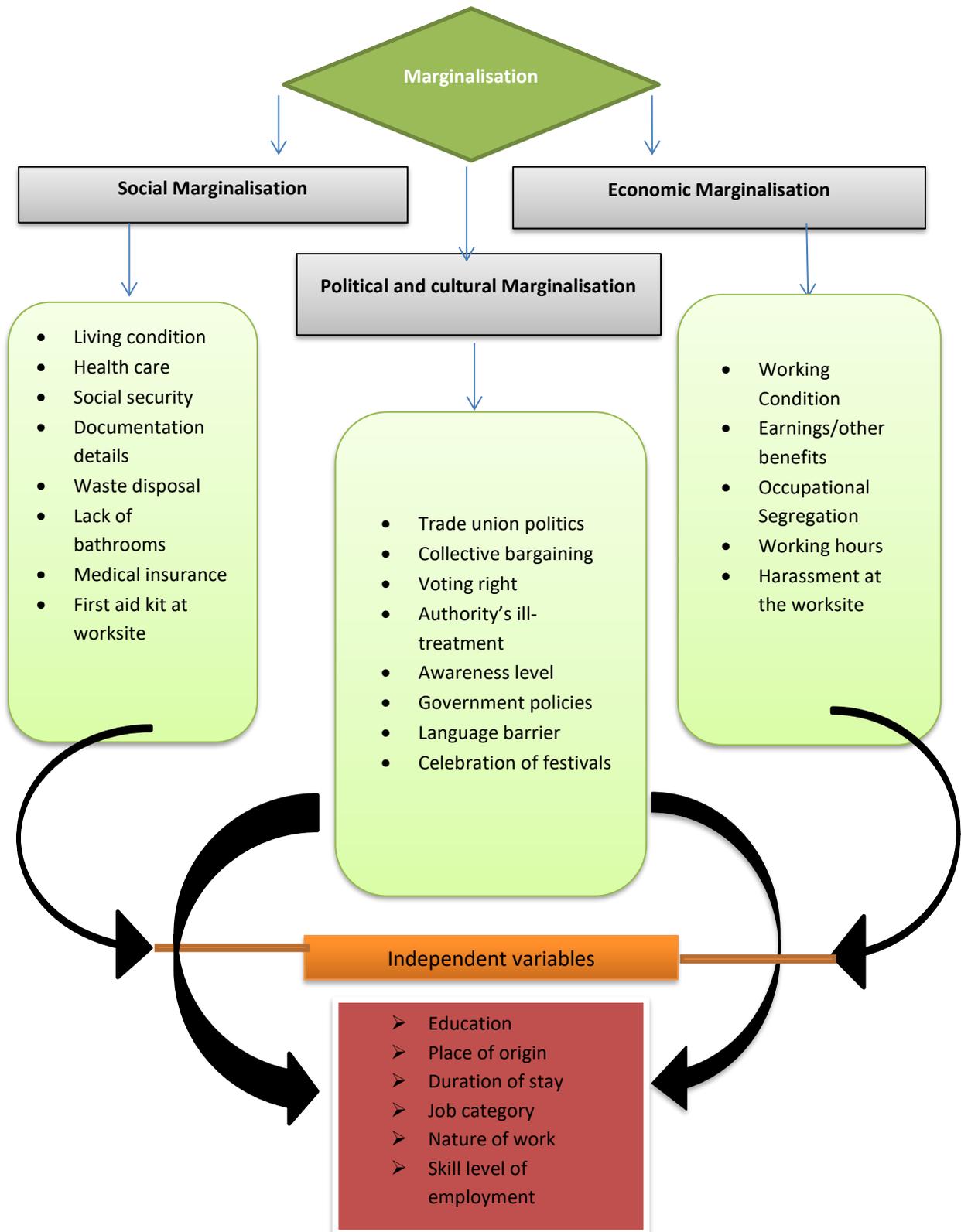
DATA AND METHODOLOGY

Data came from an individual survey conducted among 600 migrant construction workers were selected with stratified random sampling from Ernakulam and Trivandrum districts. For the convenience of the study, the construction workers were broadly classified into big construction workers and scattered construction workers. Total 600 samples were collected, of which 300 were collected from each district, and among the 300 samples, 150 were identified as big construction workers, and another 150 were identified as scattered migrant workers from each district. In each district, for selecting the group of big construction workers, firstly, the construction sites were identified, and from there, a group of workers identified with the help of supervisors and then interviewed them accordingly. These two districts of Kerala are the most prominent construction hubs expected to accommodate a relatively more significant number of migrant construction workers from other states in India.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Figure 1 shows the conceptual framework used for the study. It is visualised that marginalisation mostly occurs in the socio-economic and political domains. To identify social marginalisation, the indicators like living conditions, health care, social security, documentation details, waste disposal, lack of bathrooms, medical insurance, and first aid kit at the worksites were used. Moreover, to identify economic marginalisation, working conditions, earnings/other benefits, occupational segregation, working hours, and harassment at the worksite were used. For identifying political and cultural marginalisation, the indicators such as trade union politics, collective bargaining, voting right, authority's ill-treatment, awareness level, government policies, language barrier, and celebration of festivals were used for analysis. All these factors are influenced by education, place of origin, duration of stay, job category, nature of work, and skill level of employment. This framework made use for predicting marginalisation.

Figure 1 Conceptual Framework used for the study



Marginalisation Index

A composite index was constructed to understand the extent of marginalisation among workers. Logistic regression representations were employed to understand the socio-economic correlates of marginalisation among the migrants. Around 77.7 percent of the in-migrants working in construction sector experienced severe marginalisation. Of the 16 issues listed for accessing the marginalisation, they had 11 or more problems. Age and education were statistically associated with the marginalization. Young in-migrants were more likely to experience marginalisation as compared to others. Migrants aged less than 25 years, and 25-34 years were respectively 2.86 times and 2.55 times more likely to report marginalisation as compared to the in-migrants aged 35 years.

Methods: A **marginalisation index** was constructed using selected 16 variables from the in-migrant survey. The variables used to construct the marginalisation index are as follows

Economic marginalisation

- Not getting the same wage (that native speakers are getting)(Yes=1, No=1)
- Inadequate remuneration (Yes=1, No=0)
- Overtime work (Yes=1, No=0)
- Forced to perform work(Yes=1, No=0)
- Verbal abuse from the contractor(Yes=1, No=0)
- Delayed payment(Yes=1, No=0)

Social Marginalisation

- Lack of bath room(Yes=1, No=0)
- No waste disposal(Yes=1, No=0)
- No medical insurance(Yes=1, No=0)
- No first Aid Kit in the worksite(Yes=1, No=0)
- No social insurance(Yes=1, No=0)
- Not register by the employer (lack of accountability) (Yes=1, No=0)

Political and cultural marginalisation

- Impossible to raise voice any concern or complaint about employment or working condition(Yes=1, No=0)
- ill-treatment of the employer(Yes=1, No=0)
- face language barrier(Yes=1, No=0)
- Not able to celebrate festival here. (Yes=1, No=0)

The above variables indicate the chances of marginalisation among the in-migrants and they are dichotomous in nature. In order to construct the index, a value of 1 is assigned for the presence of a marginalisation indicator/issue, and a value of 0 for the absence of marginalisation indicator. The composite index was created by adding all the coded values of these selected variables. Theoretically, the value of composite index range from 0 to 16. A value 0 means no marginalisation and a value near to 16 means high marginalisation.

This can be also mathematically expressed as

$$\text{Marginalisation Index (M1)} = X_1 + X_2 + X_3 + \dots + X_{16}$$

whereas the $X_1, X_2, X_3, \dots, X_{16}$ are variables indicating the marginalisation.

Out of the 16 problems/variables, migrants who have reported more than two third of problems were considered as migrants with severe marginalisation.

Logistic regression were employed to understand the socio-economic correlates of severe marginalisation. In the analysis of regression model, the dependent variable is marginalisation index. This index variable is continuous in nature and thus converted into dichotomous variable (as a value of 11 or more coded as 1, and all other values as 0) for the model building.

The general equation of the logistic regression model is

$$\log\left(\frac{P_i}{1 - P_i}\right) = b_0 + b_1 \text{Age} + b_2 \text{Education} + b_3 \text{Place of Origin}$$

Whereas P_i is the probability of odds for the severe marginalisation, b_1, b_2, b_3 are the regression coefficients to be estimated.

Correlates of Marginalisation

In this section, an attempt is formed to understand the demographic and socio-economic correlates of marginalization of in-migrant workers in Kerala. The following Table shows that workers aged 25-34 were more likely to work over time than people aged 35 years. However, the association between age and overtime work was not statistically found significant. Irrespective of the education level, most in-migrants in the construction sector worked overtime. No statistical association was found between the level of education and the overtime work. The in-migrants from West Bengal were more likely to work overtime than those from other states. Again, place of residence and overtime work were found to be statistically significant, implying a strong association between these two variables.

Table 1 Socio-demographic correlates of overtime work among in-migrants in Kerala, 2022

	Overtime work		Chi-square	P-value
	Yes	No		
Age Group				
<25	84.9	15.1	1.046	0.593
25-34	86.7	13.3		
35+	82.6	17.4		
Total	85.3	14.7		
Level of Education				
Never went to school	84.4	15.6	2.248	0.814
Knows basic reading and writing	85.3	14.7		
Lower Primary	81.4	18.6		
Upper Primary	87.4	12.6		
High School	87.0	13.0		
Higher Secondary	85.4	14.6		
Total	85.3	14.7		
Place of Origin				
West Bengal	91.9	8.1	15.417	0.000
Bihar	77.8	22.2		
Others	88.5	11.5		
Total	85.3	14.7		

Source: Field study, 2022

Note: Computed by Author

RESULTS

Levels of Marginalisation

To understand the extent of marginalisation among in-migrants, marginalisation index was constructed. Table 2 shows the distribution of marginalisation index value computed from 16 indicators. The index value range from 6 to 16. The mean value of the index is 11.6 and the standard deviation is 1.6. Operationally, migrants who reported more than 2/3rd of the marginalisation indicators (11 out of 16 indicators) was taken as migrants experienced severe marginalisation. It is seen through the table that around 77.7 percent of the migrants have reported 11 or above problems. Thus, we conclude that around 77.7 percent had the severe marginalisation.

Table 2 Distribution of marginalisation of index value

Index Value	No of Migrants	Percent	Cumulative Percent
6	2	0.3	0.3
7	6	1.0	1.3
8	20	3.3	4.7
9	32	5.3	10.0
10	74	12.3	22.3
11	132	22.0	44.3
12	164	27.3	71.7
13	92	15.3	87.0
14	54	9.0	96.0
15	20	3.3	99.3
16	4	0.7	100.0
Total	600	100.0	

Source: Field Survey 2022

Note: Computed by the author.

Table 3 Association of Marginalization, Age, Education and Place of origin

	Marginalisation				Chi-square	p-value
	Severe*		Medium/Mild/No			
	%	No	%	No		
Age of the migrant						
<25	82.6	142	17.4	30	19.81	0.000
25-34	80.9	246	19.1	58		
35+	62.9	78	37.1	46		
Total	77.7	466	22.3	134		
Education						
Never went to school	66.7	36	33.3	18	28.2	0.000
Knows basic reading and writing	85.0	34	15.0	6		
Lower Primary	68.5	100	31.5	46		
Upper Primary	83.5	132	16.5	26		
High School	87.5	126	12.5	18		
Higher Secondary	65.5	38	34.5	20		
Total	77.7	466	22.3	134		
Place of origin						
West Bengal	75.8	226	24.2	72	1.173	0.42
Bihar	80.8	160	19.2	38		
Others	76.9	80	23.1	24		
Total	77.7	466	22.3	134		

Note: Computed by Author; * persons who reported 11 problems or more.

Source of Data: Survey Data 2022

However, in the Chi-square test, the variables, age and education were statistically associated with the marginalisation. Even though, in-migrants from Bihar reported relatively higher levels of marginalisation, it was found statistically insignificant in the Chi-square test. We have fitted a logistic regression to understand the way age, education and place of origin predicts the level of severe marginalisation among the in-migrants. Table 4 comes out with the results of logistic regression. In-migrants who are in the age of <20 years and 25-34 years were respectively 2.86 times and 2.55 times more likely to report a severe marginalisation as compared to the in-migrant in the age group of 35 years

and above, controlling the effects of education and place of origin. Similarly, for the other variables, education and place of residence, in-migrants from West Bengal and Bihar were respectively 0.96 times less likely and 1.44 times more likely to report severe marginalisation as compared to in-migrant from the other states.

Table 4 Logistic regression predicting the severe marginalization of in-migrant workers in Kerala, 2022

Variable	B	Ex(B)	Sig
Age of the migrant			
<25	1.052	2.86	0.001
25-34	0.934	2.55	0.001
35+ (ref)	0.000	1.00	
Education			
Never went to school	0.602	1.83	0.175
Knows basic reading and writing	1.468	4.34	0.008
Lower Primary	0.403	1.50	0.249
Upper Primary	1.045	2.84	0.004
High School	1.425	4.16	0.000
Higher Secondary(ref)	0.000	1.00	
Place of origin			
West Bengal	-0.037	0.96	0.896
Bihar	0.366	1.44	0.238
Others (ref)	0.000	1.00	
Constant	-0.381		0.372
-2 Log likelihood	592.330		

DISCUSSION

The marginalisation of migrant workers in the state is deep-rooted: it has a history and continuity since the colonial period, and demonstrates itself in the absence of data and information on how many migrant workers work and live outside their birth place. The host states, whether Kerala or any other states in India having a good number of migrant labourers, have continued to take the circular migration for granted, providing minimal facilities and security for its workers.

An assessment of the source of interstate migration to Kerala reveals the inflow of workers from almost all regions, namely, South, North, East, Northeast, Central, etc. West Bengal ranks first in the state as have majority workers. An assessment of the category of in-migrant workers indicates that most of the sample respondents are recruited to work as helpers. These workers have a low level of education and they are unskilled, and the majority of the helpers are from Bihar. The majority are helpers in the construction sector who do not need any specific skills. However, the helpers will become the mason after a long run based on their experience. The data for the present study reveal that the vast majority of masons are from West Bengal. However, the states like Jharkhand, Odisha represented very few labourers in this job category.

The study found that the Bengali migrant experiences a low level of marginalisation compared with the other state migrant workers. The strong network of Bengali migrants, the core work they are assigned to do in the construction sector, and the Bengali people's political bases are the primary reasons for their mild experiences. Education is the essential determining factor in most migration decisions. Migration typically requires at least some level of literacy. But this requirement is not met in most internal migrations. The majority of the ISM workers serving in the informal sector are less educated. The skill level and expertise are not necessary to get recruited; they acquired skills through work or experience. The illiterate people experience low marginalisation because they are ignorant and unaware of their rights and work benefits to knowing the exploitive tendency of the area or the job sector they are working in. Only by getting benefited or through better awareness regarding the welfare measures and support, it will be easy for them to identify where they missed the benefits. It happens because they blindly work without any problem related to wages and other social and employment-related benefits and supports.

Moreover, the study's findings also emphasize that the younger group of migrants is experiencing severe marginalisation. The study found that the problems related to accommodation and works are very much visible among the newcomers to the state. The high level of dependency on the coworkers, supervisors, language barriers and intermediaries' exploitation caused the delay of payment or wage theft, improper accommodation and facilities, forced labour conditions, and arduous work. However, their concern and dream about the destination state were different before they came, and they undertook risky works because of the fear of losing their job. The respondents, especially the young migrants, directly or indirectly show their dissatisfaction with their current work situations.

Language is an essential factor determining the efficiency and transparency of migrant's life and works in Kerala depending upon communication. The language reflected the intensity of their freedom of work and included/excluded from the community. The data reveals that 72.3 percent of the migrant construction workers in Kerala do not know Malayalam and face language barriers to some extent. The migrants can still not handle Malayalam except a few workers with more than three to four years of work experience. This is one of the relevant issues for their marginalisation.

The poor language proficiency and low literacy level of interstate migrant workers compromise their access to social security schemes. At the same time, many migrant workers in the construction sector not aware of any of the legal provisions that offer social security for their well-being. The communication gap and language problems make each provision unclear to ensure their inclusion through various schemes and programmes. Linguistic barriers further add stigmatisation, low level of cultural activities, religious activities to involve in the local community, and even they face exploitation and discrimination. However, this situation pushed them aside from mainstream society and made them vulnerable for a long time.

The integration policies are important to achieve inclusive economic development in the destination and the migrants' well-being. It can be practiced through the implementation of language skill training for the workers, regularizing their legal status under defined welfare schemes and conditions, and penalties for employers of migrants in an irregular situation. Many American and European countries implemented these aspects or methods while employing international or internal migrants. This method can also be helpful for the interstate migrants in Kerala while appropriately implemented.

Kerala is known for its high material quality of life, dedicated political leaders, a high level of political participation and political activism, and a socially empowered society, the marginalisation of migrant workers in Kerala is very high. According to the data and analysis conducted among the interstate migrant construction workers in Kerala, 77.7 percent of the workers in the construction sector experienced severe marginalisation. One of the identical and core reasons for their marginalisation is lack of political participation, no voting right in the destination state, and lack of trade unionism and collective bargaining power among them. The study found that the migrant workers in the state are not having trade union affiliations and cannot exercise their voting right.

Worker rights organizations and trade unions have an essential role in safeguarding migrant workers' access to rights at par with local communities, thereby minimizing discrimination between local and migrant workers and the propensity to utilize migrant workers to undercut local workers (ILO, 2020). The Representation of the People Act (section 20) permits people to record as a voter in any of the constituencies where he or she is an 'ordinarily resident.' The majorities of the migrant workers are not aware of the Act or are not interested in registering into a new constituency (Indian Express, 2019). This is why many sample migrants in the construction sector leave for their homes every election.

CONCLUSION AND POLICY SUGGESTIONS

Based on recent evidence and historical facts, this study delineates some of the concerns of migrant workers and offers insights into their lives and works in Kerala. The marginalisation of migrant workers is perhaps only peripheral. The state needs scientific studies and surveys to make fruitful interventions for the inclusion of its labour force from other states in India. However, the socio-economic and political dimensions of marginalisation of migrant workers, the disadvantages consequent to the dearth of living and working conditions and the strategic policy interventions explored in detail are worthy of taking note. An unexplored area of interstate migration research was pointed out for the attention of policy makers and non-governmental organisations. Regarding the situation, the transformation in the institutional arrangements and supports must be considered. The authorities shall have to visualise and plan the interventions to incorporate the evidence from the state and also adapt the changes implemented in other parts of the nation or even abroad.

The process of in-migration assumed a greater importance recently, and an acknowledgment of the increasing role and the involvement of the in-migrant labourers. The interstate migrant workers dominated almost all sectors in Kerala, such as agriculture, construction, and service. The construction sector represents a large number of migrants from other Indian states. They are the potential workforce in the construction sector, and the state needs them more

than the workers' needs. Implementing policies for their welfare can reduce the problems of marginalisation; it is essential at the governmental level and should be implemented locally and nationally. The integration policies may be opposed from every part, especially from the side of the local trade union leaders. The government must integrate the migrant people into society by recognizing their labour force. Suppose the government can overcome the opposition of the local leaders, it will be better for them to be included in the community and decrease their level of marginalisation at all levels.

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