

Gujarat Versus Kerala: Analysing Locational Factors in Internal Migrant Labour Destination Choices

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journals.sagepub.com/home/mla**Madhusudan Nag^{1,2}**  and **S. Irudaya Rajan^{1,3}** 

Abstract

The process of labour migrants' destination selection is a multifaceted journey, intricately shaped by a myriad of interconnected factors. In the Indian context, competitive federalism has amplified the pull factors that attract migrants to new destinations. While Maharashtra, Delhi and Gujarat continue to attract large inter-state migration, new corridors are emerging in traditionally less migrant-reliant regions. This study explores how destination location attributes influence migrant workers' choices when they have multiple options for destination places. Using primary data from Surat in Gujarat and Kochi in Kerala, we offer a comparative analysis employing exploratory factor analysis and qualitative methods to examine key destination attributes. The findings reveal that Gujarat attracts migrants primarily for its abundant job opportunities and ease of employment, whereas Kerala attracts migrant labour with higher wages. These variations stem from the distinct demographics, economic structures and cultural contexts of Surat and Kochi.

Keywords

Destination choice, migration decision, internal migration, urbanization of Gujarat and Kerala

I. Introduction

The decision to migrate is influenced by a complex interplay of push-and-pull factors (Lee, 1966). Push factors represent adverse circumstances or vulnerabilities that compel individuals to leave their place of origin. In contrast, pull factors

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are determinants that attract individuals to new destinations, often shaped by the characteristics of the destination location (Borjas, 1992). This study explores the impact of destination location characteristics on migrants' choice of destination when they have multiple options. Previous research has shown that some places are more attractive (Greenwood, 1971; Hu & Ritchie, 1993). Understanding the specific attributes that make a place relatively more appealing than others is valuable for explaining migration patterns and forecasting future trends (Fotheringham et al., 2000). In the Indian context, with its federal structure and multiple economic centres, the issue of competitive federalism has gained prominence (GoI, 2017b; Singh, 2007). Moreover, India has experienced a significant geographic dispersion of interstate migration in recent decades (Kone et al., 2018). While the states of Maharashtra, Delhi, Gujarat and Haryana still account for a higher percentage of interstate migrants, there has been a notable shift with new migrant corridors emerging in regions traditionally less reliant on migrants (Bhagat, 2016; Cashin & Sahay, 1995; GoI, 2017a).

Given the growing importance of interstate migration in India and its impact on host states, society and citizenship within a federal structure, this study explores interstate labour migration in two culturally and regionally distinct subnational states: Gujarat and Kerala. Gujarat has consistently experienced high migration rates, ranking among the top five states in India with a significant net influx of migrants (Hirway et al., 2014). Meanwhile, southern states, including Kerala, have witnessed a notable surge in their migrant population in recent decades, as revealed by Census 2011 data (GoI, 2017a). Kerala, in particular, has experienced rapid urban growth and is attracting migrants from other regions (C. S. & Nair, 2017; Parida & Raman, 2021).¹ Future projections indicate that this trend will continue as skilled individuals from the southern states migrate abroad, creating opportunities for immigration from other states. Improved healthcare and education facilities in the southern states also contribute to attracting migrant workers from other parts of India (Rajan et al., 2018).

Existing studies have individually analysed migration in Gujarat and Kerala; this article takes a comparative approach, examining interstate labour migration in both states from a destination perspective. The focus is primarily on the experiences of low, semi-skilled and unskilled migrant labourers in the urban informal sector (Bremas, 1996; GoI, 2017c; Hirway & Shah, 2011). Previous research on internal migration in India suggests that various push-and-pull factors determine migration patterns; however, limited research has been conducted to understand how the host location's characteristics influence migrants' destination choices, particularly in the case of interstate labour migration. This study aims to identify the key location-specific attributes influencing migrants' destination choices in these cities.

The remaining sections of the article are structured as follows. Section II provides a review of relevant literature on destination location attributes that influence migrant workers. Section III outlines the research methodologies. Section IV describes the study area identification and sampling frame used. Section V presents the findings from the exploratory factor analysis (EFA) and qualitative methods. Lastly, Section VI discusses the main findings of the study.

II. A Literature Review: Location Characteristics and Migrants' Destination Choice

The literature on internal migration destination choices, especially in South Asia, is limited, compared with the large literature on international migration determinants. International migration literature mainly stresses work prospects, GDP per capita, wage rates and the presence of non-local populations as important aspects determining migrants' destination choices (Geis et al., 2008; Pedersen et al., 2004). Language similarity, distance and migration policies also have a major influence (Mayda, 2007). Research like Borjas (1999) and Zavodny (1997) examine the 'welfare magnet theory',² highlighting how welfare provisions in destination nations impact migration patterns.

On the other hand, the study of internal migration in Asia has been rising but it is unexplored. Recent research, like Lai et al. (2022), stresses non-economic aspects such as language competency and acquaintance with the place of destination in the moving choices of persons within the Greater Bay Area. In India, Srivastava and Pandey (2017) emphasize that interstate migrants deal with issues similar to international migrants due to language, cultural and legal restrictions. Abbas and Verma (2014) and Ahmed (2018) further observe that these constraints result in considerable challenges in getting economic opportunities and welfare benefits in destination states.

Studies within Asia reveal that while economic factors such as work opportunities and wages are important, non-economic factors, like social networks and cultural connections, strongly impact internal migration choices, indicating intricate patterns particular to the area (Abbas, 2016; Aggarwal & Singh, 2020; Bhavnani & Lacina, 2018; Gaikward & Nellis, 2017; Pater & Narendran, 2017).

III. Research Methodology

Recognizing the multifaceted nature of the research questions, the study carefully selected and integrated research methods into its design. As advocated by Greene and Caracelli (1997), employing 'multiple methods' allows for a more holistic and nuanced understanding of complex socio-economical phenomena. This study adopts the comparative method along with both quantitative and qualitative approaches. Comparative migration research involves systematically analysing a limited number of cases to compare and contrast migrant groups, organizations, geographical areas and relevant factors (Bloemraad, 2013).

In the questionnaire of our survey, eight independent destination attributes were identified by examining existing literature (empirical studies covered in Section II) on what factors affect the destination choice of migrant workers. These attributes were then used to measure the factors which influence migrant workers' selection of destination. In the questionnaire, first, we have asked migrant respondents to rank those attributes accordingly, that those factors affect their choice of the destination location. Second, we have asked migrants to assess these eight attributes on a 5-point Likert-type scale where the level of importance of scale 1

is ‘not at all important’ and scale 5 is ‘extremely important’. EFA using STATA has been employed to identify the importance of factors influencing the decision-making of migrant workers in their current location (Surat and Kochi). Findings of important destination attributes from EFA analysis are explained through the qualitative data. Qualitative methods include Key Informant Interviews, case studies and focus group discussions (FDG). The analysis explains why the migrants chose Surat and Kochi as their current work locations.

IV. Identification of Study Area

To analyse interstate migration based on destination attributes and choices, we selected two urban locations: Surat in Gujarat and Kochi in Kerala, which are major migrant destinations. Using a multistage sample strategy (Table 1), we initially picked Gujarat and Kerala due to their strong interstate migration patterns, with Gujarat dominating in mobility and Kerala witnessing a rapid rise over the previous two decades. Further, notably, these states exemplify distinct characteristics and approaches within the realm of subnational governance (Parwez, 2016). Next focus on the Surat and Ernakulam districts, which draw 30% and 20% of urban interstate migrants, respectively, according to the 2011 census.

Within these districts, Surat and Kochi urban agglomerations (UAs) were identified as top migrant destinations. Next, we identified urban centres with a high concentration of migrant workers present within Surat and Kochi UAs based on existing city-level research and the cities’ administrative maps. Finally, a purposive random sampling technique was applied to identify interstate labour migrants in high-concentration urban centres, focusing on important industries: construction and hostel in Kochi and textiles and diamonds in Surat (see Table 2). The survey’s main aim was to examine the dynamics of migrant workers, considering occupational sectors and origin states, rather than to estimate the magnitude of migrants.

The analysis primarily focuses on current migrants who reside in the destination cities, ensuring that all individual and location-specific attributes are directly derived from their responses. Only male migrants were included in the survey.

Table 1. Multi-stage Sampling Procedure.

Stages	Outcome	Method
First stage	Identifications of states receiving high rates of Urban ISLM - Gujarat and Kerala	Purposive
Second stage	Identifications district which receives high ILSM: Surat and Ernakulam	Purposive
Third stage	Identifications of high concentration of ISLM cities: Surat and Kerala	Purposive
Fourth stage	Identifications of high ISLM urban centre	Purposive
Fifth stage	Identification of ISLM in the high concentration locations of cities	Systematic Random

Note: ISLM stands for Inter-State Labour Migrants.

A migrant is included in the sample if his duration at the destination is a minimum of one year: This criterion is applied to collect and retain information on the stable and longer duration of migrant groups rather than seasonal or short-move migrants who returned native place more often or make transition multiple moves. The survey also collects information on migrants' personal and social characteristics. Table 3 provides a detailed profile of the respondent migrants.

Table 2. Distribution of Sample Migrants According to Industries (%).

Industries	Surat	Kochi	All
Textile workers	137 (73)		137 (37)
Diamond workers	50 (26)		50 (13)
Construction workers		120 (64)	120 (32)
Hotel and rest workers		67 (36)	67 (18)
Total	187 (100)	187	374 (100)

Source: Field survey (2019).

Table 3. Profile of Respondent Migrants.

Indicators	Surat	Kochi	Total
Age (mean)	34	27	31
Unmarried (%)	41	56	49
Previous experience of migrations (%)	83	42	62
Education level (mean years)	8	14	11
Caste (%)			
Forward caste (FC)	20	28	24
Other backward caste (OBC)	41	44	43
Scheduled caste (SC)	27	19	23
Scheduled tribe (ST)	12	9	11
Religion (%)			
Hindu	64	47	56
Muslim	19	35	27
Christian	13	16	14
Others	4	2	3
Origin states (%)			
Odisha	30	27	26
Uttar Pradesh	22	21	22
West Bengal	25	25	26
Bihar	23	28	26
Duration (%)			
1–2 years	15	51	33
3–5 years	43	31	37
6–10 years	25	12	19
11–15 years	10	4	7
16 years to above	10	4	7
Total (N)	106	97	203

Source: Field survey (2019).

Table 4. Religious Composition of Kochi and Surat (Percentage).

Religion	Kochi	Surat
Hindu	43.78	85.31
Muslim	17.56	11.63
Christianity	38.12	0.25
Buddhist	0.04	0.28

Source: Census of India (2011).

Survey data analysis shows clear patterns of difference in the social-religious backgrounds of migrants in Surat and Kochi (see Table 3). The ethnic breakdown of migrants in Surat, a city where Hindus make up the majority (85%) (see Table 4), aligns with its religious dominance. Specifically, 64% of migrants reveal as Hindu, while 19% reveal as Muslim and 13% as Christian. In contrast, Kochi, considered for its religious variation, has a more even distribution of migrants, with Hindus comprising 47%, Muslims 35% and Christians 16%. The distribution of religious associations of migrants in the city is similar to the local religious structure, indicating that local social networks and cultural familiarity impact the flow of migrants (Nag et al., 2023).

The level of education obtained sets these two cities apart much further. The average level of education for migrants in Surat is eight years, whereas in Kochi it is 14 years (see Table 3). This disparity is consistent with the overall patterns found in internal migration in India, where migrants usually have lower levels of education (UNESCO, 2013). In addition, Kochi has a migrant community that consists of a larger proportion of persons with technical skills or diplomas than Surat. The data also show that migrants in Surat mostly come from rural regions and poorer socioeconomic backgrounds, as compared to their migrants in Kochi who have higher levels of schooling, and younger and better economic means.

V. Destination Attributes: Exploratory Factor Analysis

An EFA utilizing the principal component analysis (PCA) method was conducted to examine the impact of eight attributes on migrant workers' decision to select a destination location. The analysis revealed three primary dimensions that accounted for 74.39% and 75.69% of the total variance in Surat and Kochi, respectively (see Tables 5 and 6). The reliability of the variables was assessed using Cronbach's α , resulting in a value of 0.715 for Surat and 0.854 for Kochi. These values indicate satisfactory reliability, as a score of 0.70 or higher is typically considered acceptable (Nunnally, 1978). The suitability of factor analysis was evaluated based on Kaiser's measure of sampling adequacy (MSA), which yielded values of 0.712 for Surat and 0.869 for Kochi. These values exceed the recommended minimum of 0.60 (Tabachnick & Fidell, 1989), suggesting that the analysis was appropriate.

Moreover, all the attributes demonstrated factor loadings higher than 0.50, indicating a strong correlation between the identified factors and their respective variables (Hattie, 1985). To ensure meaningful results, factor dimensions with

Table 5. EFA of Variables Influencing Migrants' Choice of Destination (Surat).

Factor	Factor Loadings (Variables)	Communalities	Eigenvalues	Variance Explained	Cronbach's α
Factor 1	Labour market prospects		5.814	52.802	0.831
	Wage rate	0.517			
	Further opportunities	0.501			
	Easy-to-find jobs	0.827			
Factor 2	Quality of environment		2.103	14.446	0.762
	Working conditions	0.531			
	Living conditions	0.525			
	Social network	0.891			
Factor 3	Locational factors		1.076	8.145	0.681
	Distance	0.837			
	Language	0.855			

Source: Fieldwork (2019).

Note: EFA, PCA with Varimax (orthogonal) rotation was used and Kaiser normalization was also employed to decide the number of factors to be retained for rotation (all factors with eigenvalues greater than 0.73); total variance explained = 75.39%; overall MSA (KMO measure of sampling adequacy) = 0.841. Bartlett's test of sphericity is approximately $\chi^2 = 657.084$ (df = 91; significance = .000).

Table 6. EFA of Variables Influencing Migrants' Choice of Destination (Kochi).

Factor	Factor Loadings (Variables)	Communalities	Eigenvalues	Variance Explained	Cronbach's α
Factor 1	Labour market prospects		6.912	59.875	0.858
	Wage rate	0.895			
	Further opportunities	0.832			
	Easy-to-find jobs	0.551			
Factor 2	Quality of environment		1.952	9.446	0.702
	Working conditions	0.727			
	Living conditions	0.733			
	Social network	0.811			
Factor 3	Locational factors		0.0868	6.375	0.613
	Distance	0.655			
	Language	0.537			

Source: Fieldwork (2019).

Note: EFA, PCA with Varimax (orthogonal) rotation was used and Kaiser normalization was also employed to decide the number of factors to be retained for rotation (all factors with eigenvalues greater than 0.73); total variance explained = 75.69%; overall MSA (KMO measure of sampling adequacy) = 0.848. Bartlett's test of sphericity is approximately $\chi^2 = 578.021$ (df = 82; significance = .000).

eigenvalues exceeding 0.7 were considered important (Jolliffe, 1972). The three-factor solution for the eight variables in Surat and Kochi is presented in Tables 5 and 6, respectively. These factors were labelled as 'labour market prospects', 'quality of the environment' and 'locational factors'.

Important Factors That Influence the Choice of the Destination Location

This section analyses the results obtained from Tables 5 and 6. Labour market prospects emerged as a significant factor influencing migrants' choice of destination in both Surat and Kochi. The factor analysis revealed that wage rate, further opportunities and ease of finding jobs were highly loaded on the labour market prospects factor in both cities (Surat: factor loading 5.814; Kochi: factor loading 6.912). These findings align with previous research highlighting the importance of economic prospects and employment opportunities in migrants' decision-making processes (Chandrasekhar & Sharma, 2014; Malhotra & Devi, 2016). Higher wages and availability of job prospects act as pull factors, attracting migrant workers to both Surat and Kochi (Parida et al., 2020; Sahu & Das, 2008).

However, it is important to note that the factor loading for ease of finding jobs was higher in Surat than in Kochi, indicating that Surat is perceived as a more desirable job market destination for migrant workers. This disparity may be attributed to the large informal job market and small-scale industries like textiles and diamond factories in Surat, which offer a wide range of employment opportunities (Das, 1997; Desai, 2020; Kantor et al., 2006). In contrast, Kochi's job market may be relatively more competitive or limited (Thomas & Jayesh, 2019; Zachariah & Rajan, 2005). Interestingly, in Kochi, the factor loading for wage rate was higher (0.895) compared to Surat (0.517), indicating that migrants in Kochi are primarily attracted to the city due to higher wage rates (Kumar, 2014). Notably, in Surat, the wage rate is considered less significant, possibly due to the prevailing low wage rates but with abundant job opportunities (Kantor et al., 2006; Patel et al., 2012; Solanki & Zankharia, 2015).

The quality of the environment emerged as another important factor influencing migrants' choice of destination in both cities. Working conditions, living conditions and social networks were highly loaded on the quality of environmental factors in both Surat and Kochi. This finding underscores the significance of a conducive and supportive environment for migrants (Geis et al., 2008). Interestingly, in both cities, social networks play a significant role in attracting migrant workers to continue their work (Das & Sahu, 2019; Reja & Das, 2019). The impact of social networks is slightly greater in Surat than in Kochi.

In contrast, the third factor, locational factors, demonstrated the lowest influence on migrants' choice of destination in both Surat and Kochi. This factor primarily includes variables such as distance and language. While these factors still contribute to migrants' decision-making process, they appear to have less impact compared to labour market prospects and the quality of the environment. The proximity of the destination to migrants' places of origin and familiarity with the local language are important considerations (Kone et al., 2018).

Notably, while the distance had a relatively higher factor loading in Surat (0.837), indicating its importance as a location factor, it had a much lower loading in Kochi (0.655). This finding suggests that distance may be a more significant consideration for migrants choosing Surat, possibly due to geographical and regional factors. In contrast, migrants in Kochi may prioritize other destination attributes, such as labour market prospects and quality of the environment, over distance. Similarly, migrants in Surat find a positive impact due to the language aspect of the destination, compared to Kochi, which has minimal impact on migrant workers. This difference can be attributed to the fact that migrants in Kochi mainly come from northern and eastern states, whose languages differ considerably from that of Kerala, while Hindi, which is more prevalent in Gujarat and particularly in Surat, serves as a common language (Das & Sahu, 2019; Prasad-Aleyamma, 2018).

Reasons to Choose: Surat of Gujarat and Kochi of Kerala

The choice of Surat and Kochi as migration destinations is intensely affected by different economic prospects and social networks, as shown through our qualitative data from semi-structured interviews and FGD. In Surat, the main attraction for migrants is the availability of jobs, even if the wage rate is low. Migrant worker Sudarshan Sahoo (name changed), a 38-year-old worker from Odisha, emphasized the easy-to-find job in Surat attracted him, in contrast to other places where he could only secure shorter duration of work like ‘shutdown projects’.³ Similarly, Damodar (name changed), a 48-year-old migrant from Bihar, shared his experience, saying

I have worked in Surat, Ahmedabad, and even spent some time in Nagpur. I have been in Surat for 13 years. Despite the low wages due to the high number of migrant workers, I can earn a good income by working 12 h a day consistently. Unlike other places where you may only get good pay for a few days, in Surat, you can find continuous employment.

In contrast, Kochi has the issue of a lack of adequate employment opportunities, specifically for migrants from Odisha, Uttar Pradesh and Bihar. Unlike Surat, where jobs are easily accessed, migrants in Kochi usually depend on labour contractors to get work. An Odia worker observes the difficulty as his native friends encounter in searching for work on their own in Kerala, highlighting the crucial role of contractor connection in the state. Despite the obstacles, Kochi’s attraction lies in its higher wage rates, which are known among migrant classes, particularly those from distant regions like Odisha and West Bengal. Abdul, a 30-year-old migrant from West Bengal, and Pabitra, a 37-year-old migrant from Odisha, both recognize that the wages they get in Kerala are significantly more than what they could receive in their native states, even though they deal with cultural and language difficulties.

Abdul (name changed) expressed with the following words about the unmatched wage rate he receives in Kerala, ‘Nowhere else can I find the wage rate that I earn in Kerala. Even job holders in my village don’t earn as well as I do through hard

work here. Kerala is known in my village for higher wages; it's common knowledge'. Similarly, Pabitra (name changed) explains:

I have gone to Delhi, Nagpur, Chennai, Vishakhapatnam, and other places, but I earn higher wages in Kerala. Kerala is far from my home in Odisha. It's challenging to navigate outside of work alone because I'm not confident in English or Malayalam. However, I am here solely for the higher wages.

Social networks have a vital influence in choices migrants' decisions to move to Surat and Kochi. In Surat, these connections are reflected via community-oriented facilities like migrant schools providing teaching in native languages, cinema halls and various food-related alternatives. Migrants usually select Surat because of their close linkages with family and relatives, as observed by one migrant from Odisha who favoured Surat over different cities because of these connections (Nag et al., 2023). In Kochi, social networks are equally significant, particularly among religious and regional groupings. Migrants often get assistance through contractors from the same social or religious background, as revealed in the instance of a migrant from Assam who, along with others from his village, benefits from the support offered by a contractor who belongs to their religion. A migrant from Assam said:

In 2010, I arrived in Kerala with two friends. Our contractor, who shares our religion, has been instrumental in providing accommodation and support for us in Kerala. Currently, there are 15 individuals from my village, all from the same religion, working under the same contractor.

During fieldwork, similar responses were observed from migrants, especially from religious minority groups such as Christianity and Islam. Previous studies have also highlighted the influence of social networks on migration decisions (Munshi & Rosenzweig, 2016; Nag et al., 2023).

Surat and Kochi certainly provide migrants with options for future opportunities but through distinct means. For example, a migrant Rakesh (name changed) from Uttar Pradesh, along with other young migrants, is attracted to the diamond sector in Surat due to the allure of relatively dignified and higher paying employment opportunities, in contrast to industries such as power looms or embroidery. He said, 'It's not easy-to-find work in the diamond industry. In my workplace, there are workers mainly from Rajasthan, Maharashtra, and local places, few are from Uttar Pradesh and Bihar'. Furthermore, he emphasizes, 'Diamond factory owners require someone they can trust, unlike other industries'.

Our FGD revealed that diamond firms mostly employ workers from Gujarat's Saurashtra area, Maharashtra and Rajasthan, with Odisha and West Bengal immigrants in low roles. Security guards are largely from Punjab, Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh. This sector prefers workers affiliated with certain regional and social groups (Engelshoven, 1999).

On the other hand, the allure of future prospects in Gulf nations serves as an important attraction for migrants in Kerala, reflecting the ambitions of the local people. This well-established Kerala–Gulf connection serves as a motivating

factor for migrants of other states to continue working in Kochi (Zachariah & Rajan, 2020). Migrants in Kochi usually desire current work to act as a catalyst for greater opportunities in other countries; however, such hopes are not always fulfilled. This ambition is seen in the instance of Kiran Shah, an individual who migrated from West Bengal to Kerala with the expectation of ultimately moving to the Gulf, as assured by his job contractor. Notably, migrants also claimed that they came to Kerala to develop their skills and knowledge. Bablu (name changed), a worker from Bihar, migrated to Kerala particularly to improve his English despite working as a manual labourer. He plans to return home with better English-speaking skills and money to finance his college studies.

Earlier studies have shown that language influences destination choice (Srivastava, 2020). Our survey revealed that young migrants, especially social media users, adjust easily to communication in Hindi at work and in the local market in Surat. On the contrary, Kochi poses considerable language difficulties that restrict everyday communication for migrants. The usage of only Malayalam on public buses particularly makes challenging for the migrant workers. A migrant from West Bengal highlighted the difficulties in navigating the public transportation system. He said, 'In Kerala, travelling by bus is very difficult; it is challenging to know which bus goes where since the destination information is not provided in Hindi or English. We always have to depend on others to inquire about this'.

Besides the communication concerns, the language divide in Kochi creates a sense of social loneliness. Migrants describe a lack of interaction with the local community, resulting in sensations of exhaustion and unhappiness. This social separation causes others to consider leaving Kerala. As one Odisha worker revealed, 'I came last year, but I feel bored in Kerala. There's no interaction with others, and the natives don't socialize with us. I'm thinking of leaving for Mumbai or Pune'.

This observation aligns with the findings of a study conducted by the Gulati Institute of Taxation and Finance in 2013. According to the report:

The migrant labourers in the manufacturing units and big construction sites are under the surveillance of the supervisor/ contractor/ employer most of the time. In majority of the case, the project staff is not permitted to enter the sites or to interact with them. The employers and labour contractors are keen to keep the migrants away from such interaction with local community and authorities. Most often such restrictions are meant to hide the actual facts regarding the number of labourers engaged, their working conditions, wages and accommodation from the outside world. (Narayana et al., 2013)

Wage and Working Hours Comparison

Wages are significant indicators that show how far the state has progressed towards economic fairness and growth, as well as the living conditions of workers and their families. In examining wage levels and patterns among Indian states, Papola and Kannan (2017) explain the sharp difference between Kerala and Gujarat. According to the study, Gujarat has the lowest wages for casual workers for both men and women, despite the state's rapid economic growth. However,

Kerala emerged as the highest wage rate for the same group. In 1993–1994, Gujarat was at the bottom of the wage rate for casual labourers earning only ₹44. After over 20 years, Gujarat’s situation has not significantly improved, with casual labourers earning ₹68 in 2011–2012 despite the state’s rapid economic growth. On the other hand, in Kerala, wage rate of casual worker earnings increased significantly from ₹86 to ₹196 at the same time.

This wage disparity is further exacerbated by the National Minimum Wage. In sharp contrast to Kerala, where just 2.9% of casual workers earned less than the National Minimum Wage of ₹122.08, a sizable majority of casual workers in Gujarat (61.8%) did not get a minimum wage amount in 2011–2012. According to Kannan (2018), Gujarat represents a paradox wherein rapid economic expansion does not result in higher wages, especially for regular and casual workers, thereby leading to ‘starvation wages’ in the state.

Gujarat’s conditions, especially in cities like Surat, indicate a highly exploitative informal economy. Jan Breman’s longitudinal research on migration in Gujarat reveals a depressing situation in the Surat labour market, where migrant labourers from several states face harsh conditions at work and are often put in 12-h shifts in miserable environments (Breman, 2015). These labourers, who are primarily young guys, live in filthy, cramped quarters that create a hostile social atmosphere which is riddled with abuse and violence (Breman, 2015).

Our survey data supports these findings; when comparing the average wage per working hour between Kochi and Surat, exploitations are more evident. In Kochi, migrants get ₹519 for 8 h of labour, resulting in an hourly wage of ₹64.84 (see Table 7). On the other hand, migrants in Surat earn ₹290 for 12 h of work, which comes as an hourly wage of only ₹24.16. This stark difference indicates Surat migrants earn less than half per hour compared to migrants in Kochi. This disparity not only shows the stark difference in wage earnings of migrants but also reveals how the capitalist system exacerbates labour exploitation, particularly in urban locations like Surat where workers are compelled to accept such below ‘subsistence wage’ and harsh working conditions out of a need for survival (Breman & Das, 2000; Jain & Sharma, 2019; Jayaram & Verma, 2020). These suggest that more work opportunities in Gujarat that we discussed in the previous section are based on an extensive system of labour exploitation with long hours of work and low wages, among others.

Papola and Kannan (2017) point out that the disparity in working hours and wages between Surat and Kochi indicates variances in labour laws, economic situations and social policies between Gujarat and Kerala. This is because Kerala has a history of labour movements and high human development indices that have

Table 7. Wage and Working Hours Comparison of migrants.

Location	Average Wage Per Worker (₹)	Average Hours of Work Per Day	Average Wage Per Hour (₹)
Surat	290.0	12.0	24.16
Kochi	519.0	8.0	64.84

Source: Fieldwork in Surat and Kochi.

been effective in advocating workers' rights and progressive labour legislation (Chathukulam & Tharamangalam, 2021; Heller, 2020; Kannan, 2015a). On the other hand, Surat's longer hours of work and lower wages highlight a worrying attribute of the economic model that prioritizes growth over fair workers' welfare (Chacko, 2018; Hirway et al., 2014). The migrant labour force is unlikely to benefit from Surat's fast economic growth, despite the city's position as the hub for textile and diamond-cutting industries (Breman, 2019). The fact that migrants are expected to work longer shifts for such 'bellow subsistence' reflects a systemic form of exploitation. The informal nature of work in Surat, where workers often have no access to employment stability, social security benefits and legal safeguards, is open to harassment and exploitation (Breman, 2019; Kannan, 2015b).

VI. Conclusion

This study examines the location choices of labour migrants in Surat and Kochi, focusing on the factors influencing their decisions on the choice of destinations. Using both quantitative and qualitative analyses, we uncovered key findings that highlight the complex dynamics of migrant decision-making and experiences. The quantitative analysis, using EFA, highlights the significant roles of labour market prospects, environmental quality and location factors in shaping migrants' choices.

Labour market prospects, such as wage rates, job opportunities and ease of employment, have a considerable influence in both cities. Surat attracts migrants mainly due to its plentiful job opportunities and ease of finding work, while Kochi draws migrants with its higher wage rates. Social networks are also a significant factor in both cities. Although location factors like distance and language have a lesser impact on destination choices, they still play a role, with this influence being more pronounced in Surat than in Kochi. This difference is possibly due to the younger migrant population in Kerala, which helps them learn the language and manage long-distance travel more effectively.

These variations can be attributed to the distinct economic structures, industrial profiles and cultural contexts of Surat and Kochi. Surat's growing economy and large informal sector offer numerous job opportunities, attracting migrants from economically disadvantaged states like Odisha, Uttar Pradesh and Bihar. In contrast, Kochi's growing manufacturing units, service sector-led construction projects, small-scale manufacturing and hospitality sectors, along with strong labour unions and political influences, lead to higher wage rates. Despite the challenges associated with finding employment, these higher wages are a major attraction for migrants. In summary, these findings highlight the need for context-specific strategies to attract and retain migrant workers, promoting their well-being and successful integration into destination cities.

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Notes

1. Kerala is the recent entrants as one of the top destinations for internal migration. Kerala experienced a surge in its migrant population, with a 77% increase from 0.92 crores to 1.63 crores between 2001 and 2011. Currently, 49% of Kerala's total population identifies as migrants, compared to 28.93% in 2001 (Shaikh, 2016). Further, as projected by a study from the Planning Board of Kerala, 'in 8 years, migrant workers will be equal to one-sixth of Kerala's population' (for more details, refer to Parida & Raman, 2021; Kallunagal, 2021).
2. The welfare magnet hypothesis suggests that people's choices to migrate are influenced by the level of generosity offered by the welfare system in their destination country or region. This hypothesis proposes that the availability and extent of welfare benefits can act as a pull factor, attracting individuals to migrate to areas where they can access more favourable social welfare support.
3. A shutdown project in construction refers to an older project where workers are required for a brief period. This means that the construction activities on that project have temporarily stopped and workers will not be needed until the project resumes. This situation can impact the livelihoods of migrant labourers who rely on such short-term employment. They may have to find other sources of income or return to their home regions until work on the project recommences.

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