

*'Michhil'*, Migrants and Making of the Urban: Ethnography of a Migrant-led Protest March in Angamaly, Kerala

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Recent survey published by The Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU) named three Indian cities among the top 10 fastest growing urban areas in the world, all of them are in Kerala. Other cities in the top 10 include three cities in China, and one city each from Oman, Vietnam, UAE and Nigeria. Even a cursory glance at this would demand multi-disciplinary, in-depth analyses of particular contexts, issues and narratives from the Global South which can immensely contribute to global scholarship on the 'urban'. This Kerala Story, of high emigration levels of people and low rate of population growth, generates conditions that have made it a prominent migrant hotspot in India's migration story. Several scholars and think tanks have placed Kerala as one of the most labour friendly states in the country. But what are the conditions of the 'guest workers' in the state. Recent predictions by Kerala's State Planning Board forecast that by 2030, migrant workers would constitute one sixth of the population of the state. With a growing reliance on migrant workers for building the cities that Keralites are congregating to, it becomes of paramount importance to understand the stories and narratives of the migrant workers in the state.

This paper follows the form of an ethnographic case study of a protest march organized by migrant workers from Murshidabad district, West Bengal in Kerala. This protest march, a first of its kind, organized by migrant construction workers in Angamaly opens an avenue through which one can look at the complex relationships between different actors and forces that shape up the urban milieu. What was the reason that forced these workers to organize a protest march? How did migrant workers who do not have organizational capacity or social capital mobilize for the protest? What was the response of state machinery like police when these 'invisible' 'unorganized' workers threatened to become a political entity and took to the streets? What are some of the lessons that this march gives for the potential organization of migrant workers in the Global South? These are some of the questions that the author tries to answer through this paper. The paper begins with an overview of the context within which migrant workers' issues emerged in Angamaly, and how the emergent issues were dealt with by the protesting workers, bureaucracy as well as the state machinery. Following this discussion, the paper looks at the results, reception, and reasons thereof, to argue that the protest march was as much an expression of unrest against a contractor as it was an expression of the workers' ethnic identity. Taking the march as an epistemic tool the paper tries to touch upon a variety of questions that urban scholars and scholars of migration deals with. Questions of identity, organizing, right to the city, inaccessibility of state machinery to the migrants, state (especially police) and media responses to migrant's attempts at organizing, xenophobic attitudes of host communities and the inadequacy of legal mechanisms to address the worker's concerns all arise in this ethnographic narrative. Rather than presenting any solutions, the paper tries to open and contribute to a nuanced discourse on migration and the urban experience, especially for the migrant workers that build the city.