

**MIGRANT CONSTRUCTION WORKERS**  
**A Case Study of Tamil Workers in Kerala**

Dissertation submitted in Partial Fulfilment  
of the requirement for the award of  
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**1986**

I hereby affirm that the research for this dissertation titled "MIGRANT CONSTRUCTION WORKERS - A Case Study of Tamil Workers in Kerala" being submitted to the Jawaharlal Nehru University for the award of the Degree of Master of Philosophy was carried out entirely by me at the Centre for Development Studies, Trivandrum.

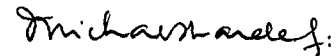
  
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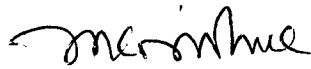


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## CHAPTER I

### **CONSTRUCTION WORKERS IN INDIA - A REVIEW**

- *Introduction*
- *Socio-Economic Origins of Construction Workers*
- *Recruitment of Workers*
- *Employment, Wages and Earnings*
- *Working and Living Conditions*
- *Migrant Tamilian Workers in Kerala's  
Construction Economy*



## CHAPTER I

### CONSTRUCTION WORKERS IN INDIA - A REVIEW

#### .0 Introduction

Construction workers in urban areas are the most visible of the poor. Almost always they are migrants — landless labourers forced out of their rural homes by poor employment and income and seeking a better livelihood in towns. Yet, in the towns they work and live at the construction site. Their shelter is often only the building under construction, they have no civic amenities and their children usually sleep and play at the site itself. More often than not they are unorganised and rarely are their rights for better working and living conditions championed by others. To a casual observer the kind of life they have opted for may seem to be only marginally better than what they earlier had in the villages they came from.<sup>1</sup>

They comprise a fairly large part of the workforce, a proportion which seems to have been increasing over the years.<sup>2</sup> (See Table 1.1).

In spite of their visibility and their importance in the workforce, it is surprising that few systematic studies of their working and living conditions have so far been done. Our attempt here is to study the working and living conditions of migrant construction labourers in Kerala's construction economy. As a case study we have chosen to look at the process of migration from one village in Kanyakumari District of Tamil Nadu to Kerala and the role the migrant construction labourers play in Kerala's construction economy.

Table 1.1

Construction workers in India (Rural + Urban)

Year	Male	Female	Total workers in construction	Construction workers as a % of total workers
1961	18,16,769 (88)	2,42,710 (12)	20,59,479 (100)	1.09
1971	20,15,272 (91)	2,03,829 (9)	22,19,101 (100)	1.22

Note: 1. Figures in brackets indicates percentage of the total.  
2. Provisional figures for 1981 do not give a breakup for construction workers.

Sources: Census of India: Registrar General; General Economic Tables, Vol.I, Part II-B (i) 1961 and 1971.

This is, hopefully, not just another case study. We will, for instance, try to bring out the fact that the migrant labourers while being forced out of their homes and earning a higher income in their new place of work remain poor with little scope for a substantial and sustained increase in income. On the other hand, their poverty is also taken advantage of by the builders. For though they receive a higher wage than before, it is yet lower than that paid to non-migrant workers. We will also look at how in particular periods like the contemporary 'building boom' in Kerala fluid situations obtain where- by traditional process of skilling breakdown and both workers and jobber/ contractors through short cuts attempt to raise themselves in the skill and income hierarchy.

But before proceeding to a discussion of migrant construction workers in Kerala, we must look at the available literature on construction workers elsewhere in India. Here we will bring out the similarities as well as

dissimilarities between the different case studies. We will look first at the socio-economic origins of these workers and how they came to be recruited, then at their employment and wages and finally at their working and living conditions. Our main sources will be 3 studies of construction workers in Delhi, Poona and Ahmedabad, supplemented by less substantive studies of construction workers in Bombay, Chandigarh and Tripura.

### 1.1 Socio-economic origins of Construction workers

Table 1.2 presents the more important socio-economic characteristics of the surveyed workers in the building Industry in the 3 cities of Delhi, Poona and Ahmedabad.<sup>3</sup>

The picture is a similar and comprehensive one: Construction workers are overwhelmingly rural landless migrants<sup>4</sup> compelled to seek employment in the construction sector due to indebtedness, inadequate employment and insufficient income. Very few of them were construction workers prior to migration<sup>5</sup> and most of the unskilled workers come from the socially backward castes and are usually illiterate. The data of Table 1.1 is also substantiated by the case studies — it is a male dominated sector. Each of the studies has adopted a particular classification of skill,<sup>6</sup> nevertheless the majority of the workers are either unskilled or semi-skilled.<sup>7</sup> That an overwhelming majority of the workers are in the young age group reflects the demanding nature of work in construction. In fact Johri and Pandey say that in Delhi, workers enter the building Industry at the age of 18 and are retired when they reach 50<sup>8</sup> (op.cit. p.22).

Two findings of these studies which are important for our own study are (i) while it is a male dominated industry, women are also employed in all the

Table 1.2

Socio-economic origins of Construction workers

Sl. No.	Origin	Delhi (1972)	Poona (1979)	Ahemedabad (1982)
I				
1.	Percentage of workers who are of rural origin	90	63	90
2.	Percentage of workers who are males	82	80	75
3.	Percentage of workers who are in the age group of 14-35 years	73	82	77
4.	Percentage of Unskilled workers	60	40	34
	" Semi-skilled workers	12	22	17
	" Skilled workers	28	38	49
5.	Percentage of unskilled workers who come from socially backward castes and communities	90	85	63
6.	Percentage of workers who are illiterates	63	61	47
II				
1.	Percentage of workers who are migrants	96	77	70
2.	Percentage of migrants who are males	82	N.A	77
3.	Percentage of workers from other states	96	25	27
4.	Percentage of migrants who are landless	N.A	58	73
5.	Percentage of workers who have migrated due to Indebtedness/Insufficient income, Inadequate/lack of work etc.	70	69	80
6.	Percentage of migrants whose occupation was other than construction in pre-migration period	N.A	91	85

N.A. denotes Not Available

Source: Delhi: Johri and Pandey, 1972.

Poona: Rao and Deo, 1979.

Ahemedabad: Subrahmanian, et.al., 1982.

cities and furthermore, there are female migrants as well, and (ii) inter-state migrants form a relatively small proportion of the migrant population in Poona and Ahmedabad, but for obvious reasons constitute most of the migrants in Delhi.<sup>9</sup>

'Push factors' seem to be the pre-dominant influence behind the migration of these workers. For example, as Subrahmanian et.al argue, only a little over a quarter (26.5 per cent) of the Ahmedabad migrants owned land (that too less than 5 acres) at the time of migration<sup>10</sup> (op.cit.,p.69). The enquiry into the Chandigarh construction workers revealed that indebtedness and *Adimai* (slave) work in the native villages induced the people to move out (Vidyasagar 1978,p.5). This is also the finding of a UNESCO survey which studied migration of labourers to big cities like Bombay and Delhi which underlined "economic hardship in varying degrees as the real reason for practically all migration" (UNESCO: 1956, p.IX). A more recent survey of migrants in Bombay city too finds the same: "the accounts emphasising push factors (viz. economic difficulties such as, insufficient land, low income or unemployment etc.) rather than positive attractions to the city (due to economic incentives, such as, better employment opportunity in the city etc.) accounted for over three-fourths of the 'economic reasons' for migration in the Lakdawala survey and half of the same in the Gore survey"<sup>11</sup> (Quoted in Joshi and Joshi op.cit., p.123).

## 1.2. Recruitment of Workers

The form of recruitment of construction workers seem to vary between cities as also between construction of large and small buildings. It also seems dependent on how the building industry is organised — i.e. whether

the work is carried out by the main contractor itself or sub-contracted out to a number of others. Yet some common features can be discerned.

Most of the workers, as we have seen, are migrant workers. But unfortunately none of the studies have made a systematic investigation of the process of migration. How do they come to work in the construction industry? Are they brought in gangs from villages or do they come on their own to the town/cities and overtime drift into the building industry? How much of this migration is 'associational migration', of friends and relatives? Rao and Deo are the only ones who touch upon this question and they found that the surveyed workers in Poona first came on their own to Poona and then slowly found work in the construction sector as unskilled workers<sup>12</sup> (op.cit.p.34). This important question of the process of migration and entry into the building industry we will discuss at length in our study of migrant Tamil workers in Kerala.

A common feature of recruitment of the migrant construction workers is that almost never are they permanent employees of any contractor or sub-contractor. In whatever form of organisation of the industry, the workers are always employed for a specific task or in construction of a particular building. The contractors obviously find it to their advantage to complement their labour recruitment with labour requirements. The nature of the industry and the fact that the workers are unorganised allows this to happen. This is more true of recruitment of unskilled workers than of skilled workers (Johri and Pandey, op.cit., pp.51-53; Rao and Deo, op.cit., pp.42, 109; Subrahmanian et.al., op.cit., p.76).

This temporary recruitment of workers and their employment in a number of work sites has given rise to the crucial role of the jobber/labour

contractor. Their actual position and role varies from city to city but particularly in the case of unskilled workers the construction worker is always employed only through a jobber/labour contractor (Johri and Pandey, op.cit., p.51; Rao and Deo, op.cit., pp.42, 109; Subrahmanian et.al,op.cit., p.76). Thus, in Ahmedabad 97 per cent of the unskilled workers are employed through a jobber who is only a labour supplier; supervision of the work is done by the contractor himself (Subrahmanian et.al., op.cit., p.76). The wage bill is handed over to the jobber/labour contractor who in turn makes payment to workers. In the case of workers in Poona, Rao and Deo argue that 78 per cent of the workers approached employers and secured jobs (op.cit., p.42). With respect to skill, they say that 84 per cent of unskilled workers approach the employers and obtain work; while the respective percentages for semi-skilled and skilled in this category stand at 73 and 74 (loc.cit.). However, the studies once again do not bring out very clearly the jobber system or the extent of control exerted by the jobber/labour contractor.

For instance, what function does the advance system play in recruitment? Does it lead to permanent indebtedness and tying of labourers to any particular labour contractor? Johri and Pandey touched upon this aspect. They showed that in Delhi contractors make advance payment to *Jamadars* and the latter make advances to workers; once the worker accepts *peshgi* (advance money), he is under the obligation to continue with that *Jamadar* and the chances of workers going away with the money are very remote for they are personally known to the *Jamadars* and in most of the cases come from the same village as the *Jamadar* (op.cit., p.52). Rao and Deo too touch upon this aspect and state that out of the 408 sampled workers only 64 had drawn advances (that too a maximum of Rs.50/-) from their employers<sup>13</sup> (op.cit., p.72). Does it lead to permanent

indebtedness and tying of labourers to a particular labour contractor? Who is the jobber? Is he a former construction worker himself? These particular questions we will look at carefully in our own study in the following chapters.

Where the jobber is relatively less important is in recruitment of skilled workers, and employment of workers from urban areas. Thus, in Delhi only 28 per cent of the urban workers got information about the jobs from the *mistri/jamadar* group (i.e. Jobbers) compared to 43 per cent of the rural workers and only 10 per cent of the skilled workers are recruited by *Jamadars/mistries* (Johri and Pandey op.cit., pp.51, 53).

### 1.3 Employment, Wages and Earnings

In a sense the construction Industry is seasonal. Work often comes to a standstill during the monsoon and there are occasional stoppages due to non-availability of raw materials as well. In spite of these difficulties, the available studies show that workers obtain fairly regular employment. Johri and Pandey found that 67 per cent of all the Delhi workers got employment for 24 or more days in a month: There are differences, with skilled workers (72 per cent) finding employment almost all days in a month; while only 58 per cent of the unskilled workers could find work for 9 and more months in a year (op.cit., p.35). In Poona, Rao and Deo show that, 84 per cent of the workers get employment for more than 300 days in a year; with respect to skill, they found that more semi-skilled (94 per cent) and a slightly lesser percentage of skilled (88 per cent) and unskilled (86 per cent) obtain work for 300 and more days in a year (op.cit., p.91). In Tripura 80 per cent of the skilled and 55 per cent of the unskilled workers found employment for a period of 9 or more months in a year (Guha Thakurtha, op.cit., p.37). Subrahmanian et.al.



found that 70 per cent of the workers in Ahmedabad got work for 16 - 20 days in a month; skillwise, they state that unskilled workers got a maximum of 25 days' work in a month; while 99 per cent of the semi-skilled and all skilled workers got work for 16 - 30 days in a month (op.cit., p.103).

The monthly earnings according to three main studies are as in Table 1.3.

Table 1.3  
Average monthly earnings of the construction worker

(in Rupees)

Skill	Delhi (1972)	Poona (1979)	Ahmedabad (1982)
Skilled	> 200	252	260
Semi-skilled	125-200	163	N.A
Unskilled	75-125	120	130

N.A denotes not available

Note: In the case of Delhi workers, since the average monthly wage is not available, only the range is given.

Source: Delhi : Johri and Pandey, op.cit., p.112.  
Poona : Rao and Deo, op.cit., p.67.  
Ahmedabad : Subrahmanian et.al., op.cit., p.129.

If the total family earnings are considered, the percentage distribution of different size classes of monthly earnings is as given in Table 1.4.

The wage system is closely associated with the recruitment system. The role of an intermediary with respect to wage payment is very important. It is understood that always skilled workers, who are generally directly recruited by the contractors, directly receive their wages while the opposite is true for unskilled workers. According to Johri and Pandey 79 per cent of

Table 1.4

Average Monthly Earnings of Construction workers' family -  
percentage distribution

Size class (Rs./month)	Delhi (1972)	Poona (1979)	Ahemedabad (1982)
< 100	22	7	21
101 - 200	49	23	
201 - 300	21	23	42
> 300	8	47	37
Total	100	100	100

Source: Delhi : Johri and Pandey, op.cit., p.114.  
 Poona : Rao and Deo, op.cit., p.64.  
 Ahemedabad : Subrahmanian et.al., op.cit., p.151.

the unskilled workers in Delhi received their wage from *Jamadars/mistris/supervisors* etc. while 89 per cent of the skilled workers received their wages directly from contractors (op.cit., p.116). A similar pattern was found in Ahemedabad also (See Subrahmanian et.al., op.cit., p.109). The system of wage payment through intermediaries is germane to malpractices and exploitation. The intermediary agencies are said to be making unauthorised deductions such as their own commissions, interest on the private loan given to the workers etc.

The method of wage fixation too affects the construction workers. Rao and Deo argue that for about 86 per cent of the Poona's building workers' (irrespective of the skill) wages are fixed by the employers, or the "so-called market wage rate" is accepted by the workers (op.cit., p.45). Understandably this is due to weak bargaining power of the construction workers.

The bargaining of the building workers does not seem to be strong vis-a-vis their employers. One sign of bargaining strength of the workers could be either individual or collective bargaining through the body of trade unions. But all studies show that the knowledge of unionism among construction workers is very limited. Rao and Deo show that trade union activity is almost absent in Poona's building Industry (op.cit., p.45). In fact they did not find even a single trade union for building workers in Poona (loc.cit.). In contrast, Johri and Pandey found some awareness among construction workers in Delhi: 18 per cent of the sampled construction workers were members of trade unions<sup>14</sup> (op.cit., p.138). Subrahmanian et.al analysed the factors which inhibit the growth of unionism among construction workers. According to them, "the discontinuous nature of employment prevents a direct and continuing relation between employers and employees and thereby inhibits the growth of unionism and collective bargaining in the labour marketing process" (op.cit., p.168).

The net result of the weak bargaining power is directly reflected in the workers' wage rates. All studies show that the majority of the workers did not even receive the notified legal 'minimum wages'. As is to be expected this was most prevalent among unskilled workers (see Table 1.5).

Table 1.5

Percentage of workers whose wages were below the Legal Minimum Wages

Skill	Delhi (1972)	Poona (1979)	Ahemedabad (1982)
Skilled	25	91	37
Semi-skilled	9	91	23
Unskilled	90	91	100

Source: Delhi : Johri and Pandey, op.cit., p.102.  
 Poona : Rao and Deo, op.cit., p.115.  
 Ahemedabad : Subrahmanian et.al., op.cit., p.111.

#### 1.4 Working and Living Conditions

The available reports and studies unambiguously show that, the working conditions of labourers in the building industry are poor. This has been a recurrent theme from 1950s onwards. In 1954 and 1959-60 the Labour Bureau went into the working and living conditions of workers in the building industry. Its 1954 Report said, "the various rules and regulations relating to labour in the building and construction industry are observed more in their breach than in their compliance" (Labour Bureau 1954, p.52). Another Survey by the Labour Bureau's in 1957 projected the Governments failures with respect to building workers' conditions. It states, "State Governments were advised to adopt rules; but it is more unfortunate that these rules remain almost a dead letter in Central as well as State public works undertaken by contractors" (Labour Bureau 1957-61, p.162). These findings are also confirmed by the Committee on Labour Welfare (Government of India 1969, pp.407-416) and also by the Report of the National Commission on Labour in 1969 (National Commission on Labour 1969, pp.113-115).

The various micro level studies' findings are also similar. Contractors do not follow any rules in terms of giving rest houses to workers, providing shelter or sanitation facilities for their families etc. (Johri and Pandey, op.cit., pp.74-81, Rao and Deo, op.cit., p.114; Subrahmanian et.al., p.138). Rao and Deo add that in Poona 43 per cent of the unskilled workers live at the worksites and workers are not paid anything for overtime work (op.cit., pp.113, 115).

#### 1.5 Migrant Tamilian Workers in Kerala's Construction Economy

With this overview of the available literature on building industry

workers in India, we can now present an outline of our own study. The immediate provocation for this study was the observation of large scale migration of Tamilian workers from Kanyakumari District to Kerala. We found that most of these migrants went to work in the construction sector in Kerala. Further examination showed that this phenomenon had not only become very large from the mid 1970s onwards but also that the migrant Tamilian workers had now come to occupy a crucial position in Kerala's construction economy. In this context, we set out to probe more deeply into their involvement in the construction sector of Kerala. Our intention was to begin with their working and living conditions in Kanyakumari District prior to migration and then trace the process of recruitment and manner of migration, employment and wages in Kerala, relations with contractors, skill acquisition and mobility and finally the impact on their homes in Kanyakumari District. To achieve this we felt the best way was to begin with a field survey of a sample of migrant labourers from a particular village in Kanyakumari District and then follow the various stages and steps in their employment in the construction sector of Kerala. In one major respect this study is different from all the available literature and that is that while the latter have been based exclusively on surveys at the worksites; we have begun with their original place of residence and ended with their places of work in Kerala. Hence this study is as much an exploration of the process of migration as on workers in construction sector.

One other feature that has not been investigated carefully in the other studies is the nature and process of skill acquisition and the related question of mobility.<sup>15</sup> These two aspects form an integral part of our study for, as we shall see, the nature of contractor — migrant labourers relation has much to do with the skill acquisition and mobility of workers.

Chapter II discusses in detail first the 'push' factors that operate behind migration from Kanyakumari District and then the 'pull' factors in Kerala that attract these migrants. Chapter III, based on our field survey, looks at the migration from Reetapuram (our sample village in Kanyakumari District) wherein the reasons for migration, background of migrants, the process and methods of recruitment, the reasons for exclusively male migration etc. are discussed. Chapter IV examines the migrants in Kerala. This lengthy chapter looks at the nature of construction activity in Kerala and the position Tamil migrants occupy. Based on our survey of worksites in Kerala, we also discuss the wage system of these migrants, the relation between contractors and labourers and the process of acquiring skills. In addition, the living conditions of these migrants in Kerala and the impact of their remittances on their homes is discussed. Chapter V contains the conclusions and some speculations on the future of these migrants.

## Notes and References

1. The Study Group of Construction Industry appointed by the National Commission on Labour points out how the industry is unique in several respects. In this connection, the study group makes the points that, "Since construction works are not located at definite points permanently" and "the place of work changes at varying intervals", it "has given to the work a certain seasonal character". See Report of National Commission on Labour (1968, pp.4-5) See also Johri and Pandey, (1972, pp.8, 73).
2. The Government of India's employment review of 1980-81 showed that employment in the organised sector (public and private) increased from 223 lakhs in 1980 to 229 lakhs in 1981. Of this, the construction sector alone accounted for 11.41 (5.1 per cent) and 11.61 (5 per cent) lakh workers respectively. (GOI: Employment Review, 1985, pp.17-18).
3. Sample in all studies includes not only civil construction but also plumbing, electrical etc. But the latter two normally constitute a smaller proportion. Only Subrahmanian et.al (1982) give a breakup and this shows that 5 per cent of total workers are employed in plumbing and electrical activities.
4. This seems to be the same pattern in other cities as well. For instance, 75 per cent of the construction workers in Chandigarh are migrants from Rajasthan, U.P., Bihar and Tamil Nadu (See Vidyasagar, 1978, p.5). In Bombay, Joshi and Joshi (1976) found that in construction most of the unskilled works are performed by migratory gangs from Andhra on a casual labour basis for a daily wage which is relatively low (p.50).
5. Another study of 30 migrant families in a small colony of Delhi too finds this occupational shift. It shows that, only 8 families were continuing the pre-migration occupations; about 1/3 of families joined in construction activity after coming to the city (Prasantha S.Majumdar and Th Majumdar, 1978, pp.130-131).
6. See Johri and Pandey, op.cit., pp.15-16; Rao and Deo, op.cit., p.15; Subrahmanian et.al., op.cit., pp.51-52.
7. Includes plumbing, electrical etc.; If we include only civil construction — the percentage composition will show an even greater proportion of unskilled and semi-skilled workers.
8. However a study of Tripura construction workers shows that, 83 percentage of the workers are from the age group of 20-59 years (Guha,Thakurtha 1980, p.117).
9. It is quite understandable that since Delhi is a small union territory an overwhelming proportion of migrants will be inter-state migrants.

10. In Ahmedabad 45 per cent of the migrant labourers were also indebted at the time of migration (Subrahmanian et al., op.cit., p.71).
11. However one cannot deny the contribution of 'pull factors'. In fact both forces were found to be almost equally responsible in effecting migration. (See Goswani 1963, pp.1827 - 1833; Gupta 1961, pp.73 - 100; and Connel et.al, 1976, p.196). Thus the push and pull forces are not independent of one another but are complementary. They do not work in isolation, rather they reinforce each other. (See Sovani, 1966, p.29. Quoted in J.P.Singh, 1980, p.47).
12. Vidyasagar found that migrant workers from Tamil Nadu were brought to Chandigarh construction sector, by *Mettukal (Jamadars)* (op.cit., p.8).
13. In Chandigarh, Vidyasagar op.cit. found that those workers who are recruited by labour contractors/P.W.D. officers with the help of *Jamadars/Mettukal* were paid *Koraki* (advance money) (op.cit., pp.6-7).
14. Other studies also show complete absence of trade unions. For instance, in Tripura, Guha Thakurtha projects, "the social security measures would be denied to the lowest paid construction workers because of the absence of any collective organisation among them" (op.cit., p.110).
15. Rao and Deo have touched on this aspect. They show that in Poona only 2 out of 23 contractors were building workers earlier and rose up to become contractors (op.cit., p.118).



## CHAPTER II

### THE 'PUSH' AND 'PULL' FACTORS UNDERLYING MIGRATION FROM KANYAKUMARI DISTRICT TO KERALA.

**Introduction**

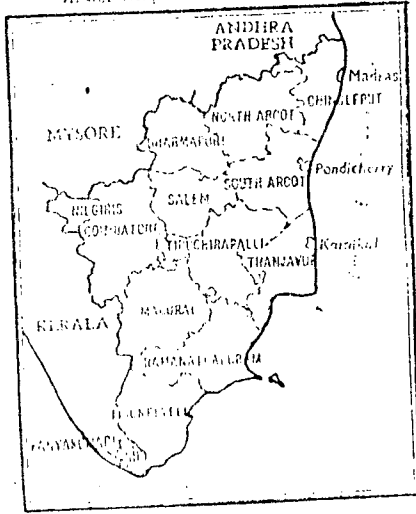
**Push Factors**

**Pull Factors**

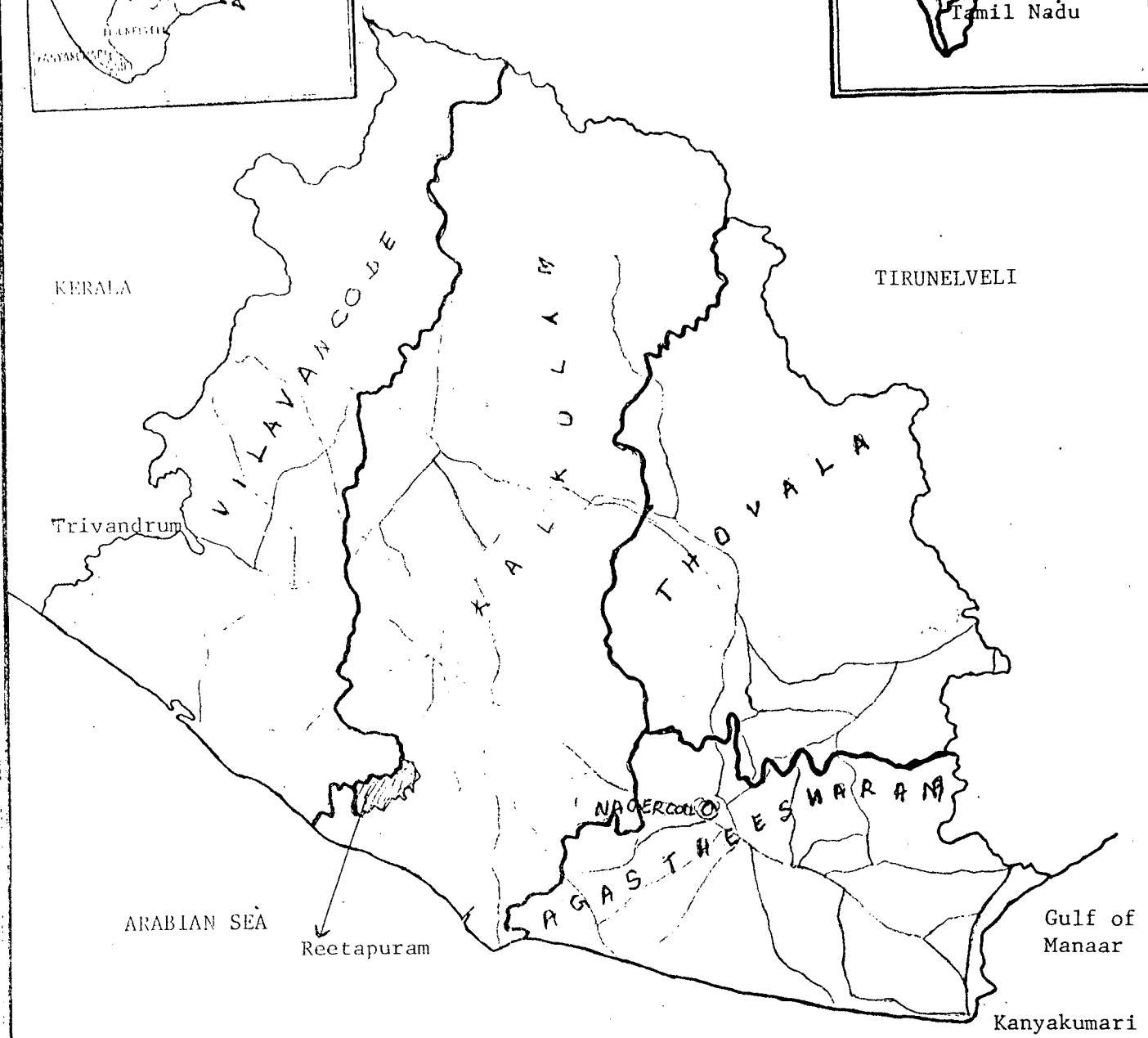
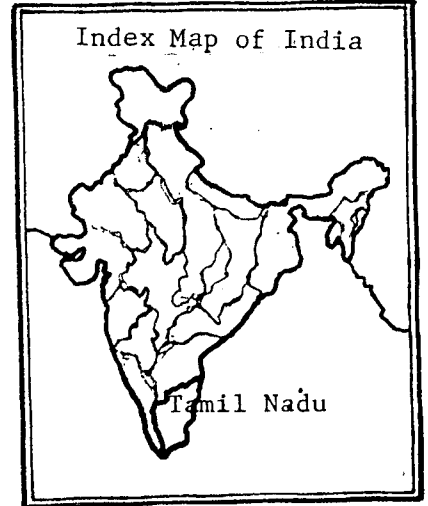
**Concluding Remarks**

MAP I  
KANYAKUMARI DISTRICT

Index Map of TAMIL NADU



Index Map of India



## CHAPTER II

### THE 'PUSH' AND 'PULL' FACTORS UNDERLYING MIGRATION FROM KANYAKUMARI DISTRICT TO KERALA

#### 2.0 Introduction

While it is well known that there is considerable migration from Kerala to other states as well as to other countries, the migration to Kerala from other states is largely ignored. According to 1971 census, there were 2.49 lakhs persons residing in Kerala who were born outside the state and they accounted for 1.6 per cent of Kerala's population in that year. This is of course a stock estimate of immigration and gives only a general idea of the extent of immigration.

The extent of immigration into Kerala is not large, but who are these migrants? It would appear that while migrants from Kerala include both highly skilled and unskilled workers, immigrants work mainly in unskilled occupations, especially in the plantations in the high ranges and as field labourers in Palghat district. In the more recent period, it has been found that "construction activity draws (a) fairly large proportion of migrants from outside of Kerala State" (Kamble, 1983, p.69).

The two states which border Kerala are Tamil Nadu and Karnataka, and as Tamil Nadu has a longer common border with Kerala, it is natural that most of the immigrants in Kerala (76 per cent in 1971) come from Tamil Nadu. How many of these immigrants are from Kanyakumari District one does not know as the census provides only state-wise origin of immigrants. However, Kanyakumari

District borders Kerala and historically it was part of the erstwhile Travancore State. Hence one can reasonably assume that a large proportion of these migrant Tamilians, especially in the non-plantation sector come from this particular district. In this chapter we will examine conditions at the macro level which induce this migration from Kanyakumari District, i.e., what are the 'push' factors operating in Kanyakumari District and what are the 'pull' factors in Kerala which attract the migrant labour. The emphasis here will be on the conditions from the 1970s onwards, the period of increasing migration from Kanyakumari District to the construction sector of Kerala.

## 2.1 Push Factors

Kanyakumari, the southern most district of Tamil Nadu, is bounded on the North by Trivandrum District of Kerala, on the East by Tirunelveli District of Tamil Nadu and on the South and West by the Indian Ocean and Arabian sea respectively. Prior to 1956 the area covered by the district was part of Travancore state. With the transfer of Kalkulam, Vilavancode, Agasteeswaram and Thovala taluks to Tamil Nadu, Kanyakumari District was constituted. With a total area of 1684 sq.km. it is the smallest district in the state.<sup>1</sup> It is, however, the most densely populated district in the state. The population density was 845 persons/sq.km. in 1981 compared to the state average of 372 persons/sq.km.

Kanyakumari District, in many ways, appears to be a unique district of Tamil Nadu. It seems to have many features which make it more alike to Kerala, so much so that it is often referred to as a 'Kerala type' district.<sup>2</sup> A cursory examination of its agricultural and non-agricultural sectors would suggest that an unequivocal statement of whether the district's economy is either

vibrant or stagnant is not possible. However, a careful examination of the various economic indicators does show that there are processes at work in the district which make for a 'push' of migrants in search of better employment and wages. Secondly, equally important are the differences between taluks. Of the four taluks the two northern most taluks (Kalkulam and Vilavancode) are the ones from which migration is apparently concentrated. Emigration data according to taluks are not available to substantiate this widely held view. However, our discussion of the economic conditions, particularly of agriculture in these two northern taluks vis-a-vis the southern taluks of Thovala and Agasteeswaram will show why it is highly likely that migration from these two northern taluks would be higher than from the southern taluks. The two taluks of Kalkulam and Vilavancode, as we shall see, are quite different from the other two taluks of Thovala and Agasteeswaram.

Let us first look at the district level occupational figures. Table 2.1 presents the occupational distribution in the district according to broad sectors.

In terms of employment, agriculture and non-agriculture seem to be equally important in Kanyakumari District. Compared to the state average, non-agriculture in Kanyakumari District appears to take up a slightly larger than average proportion of the male work force. Thus, in all of Tamil Nadu in 1981, 55 per cent of the male workforce was in agriculture and 45 per cent in non-agriculture, while the corresponding figures for Kanyakumari were 51 and 49 per cent.<sup>3</sup>

Let us first discuss the opportunities for employment in agriculture and then proceed to a discussion of the situation in the non-agricultural

Table 2.1

Occupational distribution of workers in Kanyakumari  
District 1951-81 (males only) - Percentages

Year	Primary	Secondary	Tertiary	Total	Agri- culture	Non-agri- culture	Total
1951	50	29	21	100	50	50	100
1961	44	18	38	100	34	66	100
1971	64	14	22	100	56	44	100
1981	-	-	-	-	51	49	100

- Note:
- (1) 1981 census data as presently available do not allow classification into primary, secondary and tertiary sectors.
  - (2) 1951 figures are for the four taluks which were then part of Travancore-Cochin and now constitute Kanyakumari District.
  - (3) Workers in agriculture includes only cultivators and agricultural labourers.

- Source:
- (1) For 1951, Census of India, 1951, Volume XIII, Travancore-Cochin; Part II, Tables 287 - 288.
  - (2) For 1961 - 81, Census of India, Tamil Nadu Series, District Census Handbook, Kanyakumari - various issues.

sector of the district.

Our argument, in brief, of employment in agriculture in Kanyakumari District from the 1970s onwards is that labour absorption in agriculture has not kept pace with population growth. In a period of increasing pressure on land, net cultivated area has declined, cropping intensity has also declined, the extent of irrigated area has declined, and the cultivation of paddy, the labour intensive crop has fallen. Population growth has also led to fall in the size of holdings, leading to a greater substitution of family for hired labour. Secondly, these features are more marked in the two northern taluks of Kalkulam and Vilavancode. Thus, faced with a possible decline and not

just stagnant per capita availability of employment, the pressure to migrate must have been increasingly present from the 1970s onwards.

Agriculture in Kanyakumari revolves primarily around paddy cultivation, though in recent years both rubber and coconut have become increasingly important. Net-irrigated area covers 35 per cent of net sown area and the cropping intensity is 1.30. Table 2.2 presents the aggregate district picture of sown area, irrigated area and the cropping pattern.

(1979)

Kurien and James in a study of agricultural performance in Tamil Nadu during the 1960s have estimated the decadal overall growth of agriculture in Kanyakumari District at 49.77 per cent, which was the lowest of all Tamil Nadu Districts. Decomposing this growth into real and monetary growth and further into area, yield, cropping pattern and interaction components<sup>4</sup> they show that the real yield effect has been negative, the real growth also negative with only the monetary growth positive<sup>5</sup> (See Table 2.3).

What have been the trends in area and yield of paddy in the 1970s? Since paddy remains the single most important crop, trends in this will be indicative of the overall trends in availability of employment in agriculture. Furthermore, paddy is a labour intensive crop and any movement away from paddy would have had adverse employment implications.

Before that, let us look at district-wise aggregate changes in the 1970s. Table 2.4 shows a striking picture of decline in net sown area, net irrigated area and cropping intensity between 1970/72 and 1982/85. Net irrigated area has also declined more than proportionately, so much so that the cropping intensity has declined and gross sown area has fallen even more than net sown area. Clearly, with rising population a fall in sown area must, other things

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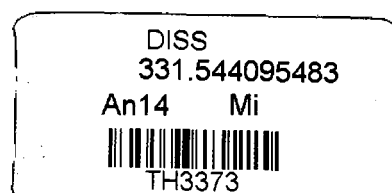


Table 2.2

Agricultural Situation of Kanyakumari District  
1984 - 85

Net sown area (ha.)	Gross sown area (ha.)	Cropping Intensity (GSA/NSA)	NIA/ NSA (%)	Cropping Pattern (as % of GSA)							
				Paddy	Banana	Tapioca	Total Food crops	Coconut	Rubber	Total non-Food crops	Total
81,622	1,06,180	1.30	35	46	2	11	69	16	13	31	100

Source: Season and Crop Report of Kanyakumari District 1984-85 - District Statistical Office, Nagercoil, Tamil Nadu (mimeographed).



Table 2.3

Decomposition of agricultural growth rates - Kanyakumari District and Tamil Nadu, 1960-62 to 1969-71 (in per cent)

District/ State	Overall growth	Area effect	Yield effect	Cropping pattern effect	Interaction effect	Real growth	Pure price effect	Price yield effect	Rice cro- pping pattern effect	Total inter- action effect	Monetary growth
1	2	3	4	5	6	7=3+4+5+6	8	9	10	11	12=8+9+10+11
Kanyakumari District	49.77	-13.60	-15.13	1.07	-0.20	-27.86	138.47	-11.97	1.70	-0.34	127.86
Tamil Nadu	101.47	- 0.49	7.29	0.96	0.46	8.22	86.57	3.75	1.25	0.21	91.78

Source: Kurien and James, op.cit., p.98.

Table 2.4

Agricultural Situation of Kanyakumari District, 1970-73 and 1982-85

Year	GSA (ha.)	NSA (ha.)	NIA (ha.)	Cropping Intensity (GSA/NSA)	NIA/NSA	Paddy/GSA	Food crops/GSA	Coconut/GSA	Non-Food crops/GSA	Total
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11=8+10
1970-73	1,22,192	83,644	33,442	1.46	39%	49%	78%	10%	22%	100%
1982-85	1,03,470	81,158	28,794	1.27	35%	42%	68%	16%	32%	100%

Source: For 1982-85, Season and Crop Reports of Kanyakumari District; District Statistical Office, Nagercoil, Tamil Nadu (mimeographed), various issues.

For 1970-73, Statistical Handbook, Kanyakumari District; Department of Statistics, Government of Tamil Nadu.

being the same, mean a fall in per capita employment availability in agriculture.

Within this overall decline the importance of paddy has also fallen from 49 per cent of sown area in 1970-73 to 42 per cent in 1982-85. Along with this decline there has been a rise in the area under coconut (from 10 per cent to 16 per cent). A movement in this direction must only mean a further decline in per capita availability of employment in agriculture, as the labour absorption in coconut cultivation is less than in paddy cultivation.

What of trends in productivity? Increases in productivity, again all other things being the same, could have been translated into greater labour absorption and therefore arrested the decline in per capita availability of agricultural employment due to a fall in GSA, area under paddy etc. Table 2.5 presents the productivity of paddy cultivation in Kanyakumari District. It shows quite clearly that over the decade yields have fluctuated sharply showing no consistently rising trend. In such a situation once again there would be little ground to expect any increase in per capita agricultural employment availability. Gross and net cultivated area have fallen, cropping intensity has also fallen, the cultivation of the labour intensive crop of paddy has declined, and productivity of the most important crop/<sup>-paddy</sup> shows fluctuations. All this in a period of rising population as well, leaving little doubt that the per capita agricultural employment must have declined, creating pressure on the population to search for other work in other areas.

Increasing population growth in a period of declining GSA has led not only to a decline in per capita GSA (GSA/male agricultural worker in the district has fallen from .65 ha. in 1971 to .58 ha. in 1981) but also to a fall in the average size of holdings: from 0.39 ha. in 1970/71 it fall to

Table 2.5  
Productivity of Rice in Kanyakumari District, 1970-71  
to 1981-82

Year	Productivity (in tonnes/ha.)
1970-71	1.7
1971-72	2.45
1972-73	2.24
1973-74	2.20
1974-75	2.01
1975-76	2.18
1976-77	1.42
1977-78	2.23
1978-79	2.11
1979-80	2.6
1980-81	2.4
1981-82	2.3

- Source: (1) From 1970-71 to 1978-79, Season and Crop Reports, of Tamil Nadu, Government of Tamil Nadu, various issues.  
(2) From 1979-80 to 1981-82, Agricultural Situation in India, various issues.

0.29 ha. in 1976-77 (Cruz Viagappan Ratnam, 1984, p.87). This decline must have had further adverse implications for wage labourers as family labour would have been increasingly substituted for hired labour.<sup>6</sup>

The picture we have presented is for the district as a whole. At the outset we have stated that outmigration from the two Northern taluks of Kalkulam and Vilavancode is apparently higher than from the southern taluks of Agasteeswaram and Thoivala. As far as agriculture is concerned the prospects for employment in these 2 taluks are likely to have been even poorer than that suggested by the overall district picture, forcing people to look

for work elsewhere. Table 2.6 presents the taluk-wise details.

It is very clear that the two taluks of Kalkulam and Vilavancode are quite different from the two southern taluks of Thovala and Agasteeswaram. In Kalkulam and Vilavancode the irrigated area is less, the cropping intensity lower and paddy a relatively less important crop while tapioca, rubber and coconut are more important. All these differences, make for a lower availability of per capita agricultural employment in Kalkulam and Vilavancode taluks compared to Thovala and Agasteeswaram taluks.

As far as changes over time are concerned, Table 2.7 gives the relevant details and shows that the decline in cropping intensity, irrigated area, and paddy cultivation is spread throughout the four taluks. However, its impact on employment availability is likely to have been greater in the already relatively less developed Kalkulam and Vilavancode taluks. The lower availability of employment in the Kalkulam and Vilavancode taluks is all the more stark in the light of a greater population pressure on land in these taluks (Table 2.8).

Following our discussion of agricultural performance in Kanyakumari District we can quite definitely say that over the past decade and more there has even been little expansion of agricultural employment. In fact, per capita availability of agricultural wage employment may even have actually declined from the 1970s onwards. In such a situation there would have been increasing pressures to migrate. But what of employment in industry?

The performance of the Non-Agricultural sector is somewhat less clear. For one thing adequate data are not available, either as the taluk or district level to permit as detailed an analysis as that of the agricultural sector.

Table 2.6

Agricultural situation of the Taluks in Kanyakumari District, 1984-85

Taluks	N.S.A. (ha.)	G.S.A. (ha.)	Cropping Intensity (GSA/NSA)	Proportion of cultivated area which is irri- gated (NIA/NSA) (%)	Cropping Pattern (as % of GSA)						Total
					Food Crops			Non-Food crops			
					Paddy	Tapioca	Banana	Rubber	Coconut	Others	
Kalkulam	29,247	36,759	1.26	32	38	10	3	18	17	14	100
Vilavancode	25,117	28,131	1.12	16	20	26	2	18	14	20	100
Thovala	9,695	14,968	1.54	54	64	3	2	9	7	15	100
Agastee- swaram	17,683	26,322	1.49	46	64	0.2	1	-	21	13.8	100

Source: Season and Crop Report of Kanyakumari District, 1984-85; District Statistical Office, Nagercoil, Tamil Nadu (mimeographed).

Table 2.7

Taluk-wise details - 1970-73 and 1982-85

Taluks/ Year	Cropping intensity (GSA/NSA)	Proportion of cultiva- ted area which is irrigated (NIA/NSA) (%)	Paddy/ GSA	Food crops/ GSA	Coconut/ GSA	Non- Food crops/ GSA	Total
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
KALKULAM							
1970-73	1.42	35	46	76	11	24	100
1982-85	1.23	32	36	62	17	38	100
VILAVANCODE							
1970-73	1.27	23	29	75	11	25	100
1982-85	1.12	16	20	66	14	34	100
THOVALA							
1970-73	1.70	55	59	77	03	23	100
1982-85	1.52	54	62	88	06	12	100
AGASTEE- SWARAM							
1970-73	1.55	57	69	85	11	15	100
1982-85	1.41	46	62	75	21	25	100

- Source: (1) For 1970-73, Statistical Handbook, Kanyakumari District, Department of Statistics, Government of Tamil Nadu, various issues.
- (2) For 1982-85, Season and Crop Reports of Kanyakumari District, District Statistical Office, Nagercoil, Tamil Nadu (mimeographed).

Table 2.8

Pressure on land in Kanyakumari District (taluk-wise)

Taluks	GSA/male agricultural worker (in ha.)		Population density (persons/sq.km.)
	1971	1981	1981
Kalkulam	.58	.53	803
Vilavancode	.46	.44	1062
Thovala	1.38	1.08	239
Agasteeswaram	.88	.70	1142

- Source: (1) Season and Crop Reports of Kanyakumari District, District Statistical Office, Nagercoil, Tamil Nadu (mimeographed).
- (2) Census of India, 1981, series 20, Tamil Nadu, Part II-B, primary census Abstract.

We have seen that the proportion of the labour force in the non-agricultural sector in Kanyakumari District is higher than elsewhere in the state. The problems of census data do not allow us to draw an inference of the trends since 1951. However the break up between the secondary and tertiary sectors in the larger non-agricultural sector show (Table 2.1 p.20) that it is the service sector which is more important and furthermore, the defective Census returns, while showing a declining trend in the proportion of male workers in the secondary sector between 1951 and 1971 show a fluctuating proportion in the tertiary sector.

Compared to other districts in Tamil Nadu, Kanyakumari has a poor industrial base. In 1985 it had only 4 large factories in the organised sector (General Manager, with a combined employment of only 1977 workers. / District Industries Centre. Action Plan for 1985-86 to 1987-88, p.11.). Of the 15 districts in Tamil Nadu



in 1979/80 and 1980/81, Kanyakumari had the lowest share of state wide total productive capital in the ASI Sector (Industrial Profile of Tamil Nadu, Department of Statistics 1983, pp.38-40). Productive capital per factory per worker and per employee in the same sector were the lowest in the state (loc.cit). Per capita value added in the manufacturing (registered) sector in the state at Rs.68.81 in 1980/81 compared poorly with the State average of Rs.264.99 (Socio-economic Indicators of regional development in Tamil Nadu, Commissioner of Statistics, 1984, p.36).

According to one study of industry in the State, Kanyakumari, when it was part of Travancore-Cochin, did not get any exposure to industrial environment; there is no mention of any significant industry as such in the early history of the district during the 18th and 19th centuries, except the mention made of the handloom industry of Vadaseri and Eraniel (Menon A.Sreedhara, 1962, p.388).

As far as the small scale sector is concerned, Kurien and James showed with the limited data available that, at least between that 1960 and 1970 the growth in employment in this sector in Kanyakumari was actually negative (-7.6 per cent): The absolute number of workers in the small scale sector actually declined in this period as the district's share in the state's small sector employment fell from 2.7 per cent to 1.9 per cent (op.cit., p.124).

In the 1970s, there was apparently a growth in the cashew processing industry as these factories moved out of Kerala to take advantage of low wage costs in Kanyakumari District (K.P.Kannan, 1983, pp.110-111). However, the implications for employment, particularly for those who are now migrant workers in Kerala was limited. Most of the workers in these factories are women and as

we shall see wives and women folk of those who migrate as construction labourers from Kanyakumari District belong to the Nadar community and Nadar women do not generally work outside their homes. The few men who are employed in these factories are specialist workers, most of whom are brought from Kerala.

So it is not surprising that this district which has few large industries and poor growth of small scale units has been declared a backward district to promote industrialization. If the service sector is the more important non-agricultural sector, we have unfortunately almost no information about its growth and performance in terms of employment generation. However, it is very unlikely that in the light of stagnant and perhaps even declining aggregate employment in the agricultural and poor performance of the industrial sector, employment in the service sector could have increased so much as to offset the poor performance of the other sectors. On the whole then, employment expansion in Kanyakumari District seems to have been sufficiently poor to pressurise workers to seek employment elsewhere. This is so in the same period when there has been a tremendous growth in Kerala's construction sector, to which we now turn.

## 2.2 The 'Pull' Factors

Having discussed the 'push' factors behind migration of workers from Kanyakumari District we shall now turn to the 'pull' factors operating in Kerala which attract these migrants. In a nutshell these factors are (i) the large scale migration from Kerala to the Middle East, the corresponding increase in remittances and investment in residential construction being a major avenue of utilisation of these remittances and (ii) a sharper than average increase in

the wages of construction workers in Kerala following this increase in construction activity and migration of construction workers from Kerala to the Middle East. These 'pull' factors are very relevant as migration of construction workers to Kerala from Tamil Nadu seems to have increased precisely in the 70s, the period when construction activity also registered a phenomenal increase in Kerala.

What is the scale of migration to the Middle East from Kerala and what is the scale of remittances from these migrants? Exact figures are hard to come by but the various estimates leave no doubt whatsoever that the magnitudes of both are considerable and increased tremendously in the 1970s.

Estimates of the total Indian workers in the Middle East range from one half to one million (External affairs Ministry, Lok Sabha, (1983); Quoted in Indian Express 1983 May 27.). Nair (1983) places the annual net outflow to the Middle East between 1971 and 1975 at 28,500, between 1975 and 1981 at 67,500<sup>7</sup> and between 1981 and 1983 at 220,000<sup>8</sup> (p.8). He estimates that this emigration from India arises mainly from the seven states — Kerala, Andhra Pradesh, Punjab, Gujarat, Goa, Maharashtra and Tamil Nadu and of these not less than 50 per cent is from Kerala alone (Ibid., p.9). A survey conducted by the Directorate of Economics and Statistics of the Government of Kerala (1980) put the number of Keralite workers abroad at 208,000 in 1980, with as many as 187,000 in the Middle East alone in early 1980 (See Directorate of Economics and Statistics, Kerala, 1982. Detailed Table 5). According to Gulati and Mody's (1983) estimation there were 350,000 Indian workers in the Middle East in 1979; of which, Keralites could be said to have formed about half of the Indian workers (pp.7,58).

Estimates of the scale of the remittances corresponding to this level

of migration are by no means accurate but it is quite clear that the absolute magnitudes as well as the rate of increase in the 1970s has been very large. Thus as Table 2.9 shows, total remittances from abroad are estimated to have increased from 310 million \$ in 1974 to 2930 million \$ in 1980; of which

Table 2.9

India's Remittances and receipts from the Middle East and other regions, 1974-1980 (million \$)

Sl. No.	Items	1974	1975	1976	1977	1978	1979	1980
1.	Total Remittances	310	550 (77)	770 (40)	1050 (36)	1310 (25)	1620 (24)	2930 (81)
2.	Remittances from the middle east	102	182 (78)	319 (75)	523 (64)	762 (45)	1045 (37)	2198 (100)
3.	Non-middle east remittances	208	368 (77)	551 (50)	527 -	548 -	575 -	732 (27)

- Notes: (1) Remittances from the Middle East have been estimated on the assumption that they were 33 per cent of the total in 1974 and 1975 and increased their share by 8.4 percentage points in each of the subsequent years.
- (2) Figures in brackets give annual percentage changes over the previous year.
- (3) Remittances equal to total Remittance receipts.

Sources: Table and Notes reproduced from Gulati and Mody, op.cit., p.68.

Middle East remittances alone increased from 102 million \$ to 2198 million \$ in the same period. That the remittances to Kerala showed a similar dramatic increase is clear from the estimates in Table 2.10 which show a more than five-fold increase in just 4 years from Rs.1500-1875 million in 1976/77 to Rs.7340-9175 million in 1980/81.

Table 2.10

Trend in Estimated Foreign Remittances to Kerala  
1976-77 to 1980-81

Years	Rs. (million)
1976-77	1500 - 1875
1977-78	2490 - 3110
1978-79	2775 - 3470
1979-80	4670 - 5835
1980-81	7340 - 9175

- Notes: (1) Kerala's share in the total remittances receipts of India as a whole has been arrived at on the assumption that (a) of the remittances received from the Middle East Kerala's share would be between 40 and 50 per cent and (b) of the remittances received from Non-Middle-East sources, Kerala's share may not exceed more than between 4 and 5 per cent (See Gulati and Mody, *op.cit.*, p.24 for the assumption underlying the calculation of remittances from the Middle East to India as a whole).
- (2) Remittance receipts of migrants from other states within India are not included.

Source: Gulati and Mody, *op.cit.*, Table 14, p.70.

Gulati and Mody also show that the remittances to Kerala have been growing faster than the domestic product of the state between 1976-77 and 1980-81. In 1980-81 remittances formed between 22-28 per cent of the Kerala's SDP (*Ibid.*, Table No.14, p.70).

What have these remittances been used for? Available micro-level studies as well as macro estimates show unambiguously that one of the most important, if not the most important avenues of investment has been in construction.

Numerous micro-studies have been done on the impact of the remittances from the Middle East. They all show that a major part of the remittances has been utilised for real estate construction.

According to one village study (of Chawghat in Trichur District) one third of the migrant household had built new houses within five years of migration of the worker; another 20 per cent had repaired and reconstructed their houses within that period (Prakash 1978, p.1110).

A study of two villages (Elakamon near Trivandrum and Koipram near Thiruvalla) by Raju Kurien (1978) shows 85 per cent of the emigrants (out of 50 sample households) from Elakamon and 76 per cent (out of 50 sample households) from Koipram are in Gulf countries; of this, 43 households received on an average Rs.7600 from abroad in the first village and 41 households received an average of Rs.65000 in the second village from abroad (pp.47-49). The study concluded, that, "this resulted in a shift in the expenditure patterns of remittance receiving households as reflected in the quality of food consumed, the size and value of land transactions, the spurt in construction activity, the rise in investment in consumer durables, and so on" (Ibid., p.49).

Mathew and Nair's (1978) study shows that in Perumathura and Puthukurichi in Trivandrum District, 74 per cent of the remittances was spent on land and buildings (Table 20 p. 1151). In contrast, the study observed that less than one per cent went into financing business or livestock investment; about 5 per cent was set aside for financing emigration of close relatives, 12 per cent for marriages and 3 per cent for jewelry and other durable consumer goods (loc.cit.).

Ibrahim and Radhakrishnan's study of Kadakkavur village in Trivandrum District in 1981 observed, "a lion's share of the inward remittances went into

land" (p.46). They also find a relatively steeper rise in prices of plots of land ranging between 20 and 300 cents and bulk of the demand for land in this group is for building construction and subsistence farming (loc.cit).

The Madras Agro Economic Research Centre's survey of chawghat block in Trichur District (1982) showed that while in investment of surplus funds left after meeting current consumption expenditure, remodelling and construction of dwelling houses was the most popular; acquisition of land was next in importance (p.452). The survey concludes, "as a result of large-scale construction activity undertaken by the remittance recipient households, wage rates of skilled and unskilled construction workers had gone up which was directly beneficial to them" (Ibid., p.453).

The Commerce Research Bureau (1978) studied four villages in four districts of Kerala from where emigration to the Middle East was heavy (Chirayankil in Trivandrum District, chawghat in Trichur District, Tirur in Malappuram District and Chengannoor in Alleppy District). They observe "Land, building and Jewelry are the major assets in which the emigrant households make their investment"; one respondent in the survey said, "our investment is in cement and paints" (p.11).

Thus all the field studies on the impact of Middle East migration on Kerala's economy show that a major part of the remittances are used for construction. The increasing importance of construction in Kerala's economy can also be seen from aggregate figures. A survey on household savings and investment carried out in 1977-78 showed that, "of the total savings of Rs.436 crores, as much as 190 crores (44 per cent) constituted savings in the form of various financial assets including currency holdings and the remaining Rs.246 crores (56 per cent) represented savings in the form of physical assets";

(Government of Kerala, 1981, Table 3.1, p.6). In the case of savings in physical assets the survey shows that more than 41 per cent (Rs.101.30 crores) has been accounted for by investments in construction as well as maintenance of buildings (Ibid., p.7).

The survey further says that of the total physical assets of Rs.245 crores, as much as 215 crores (more than 87 per cent) has been accounted for by the rural sector; investment on buildings alone would account for nearly 37 per cent of the investment by the rural households and in the urban areas nearly 70 per cent of the investment in physical assets is accounted for by expenditure on construction and maintenance of buildings (Ibid., Table 3.3, p.11). Thus the report concludes that in regard to savings in physical assets, both rural and urban households have been investing a good chunk of their savings in construction and maintenance of buildings. However, as far as the investment proportion is concerned, the urban households have been investing a much larger share of their savings on building construction (70 per cent) as compared to the rural households (40 per cent) (Ibid., p.12).

The most definite evidence of the growth of construction activity in Kerala can be gained from the movement of the share of the construction sector in Kerala's SDP. Table 2.11 presents these figures.

We can see quite clearly that though the importance of the construction sector in the SDP remains miniscub its share has doubled since the mid 1970s, showing the boom in construction activity. We shall see that this boom in the construction sector corresponds to the period when there has been an increase in migration flows of construction workers from Kanyakumari District to Kerala.



Table 2.11

Share of Construction sector in Kerala's GDP, 1960-61 to  
1983-84

Years	Construction's share as a percentage of total GDP	
	Current prices	Const. prices 1970-71
1960-61	2.3	2.3
1970-71	2.1	2.1
1975-76	3.31	3.33
1976-77	2.92	3.03
1977-78	3.47	3.44
1979-80	3.17	3.41
1980-81	3.66	3.45
1981-82	4.32	3.30
1982-83	4.30	3.48
1983-84	4.40	3.76

- Source: (1) For years 1960-61 to 1979-80, Statistics for Planning, Directorate of Economics and Statistics, Government of Kerala, various issues.
- (2) For the years 1980-81 to 1983-84, Economic Review (1984), State Planning Board, Trivandrum, Government of Kerala, Appendix 2.3, p.102.
- (3) Years 1981-82 to 1982-83 Provisional and 1983-84 Quick Estimate.
- (4) Calculated as a percentage of GDP at Factor cost.

One other factor underlying the attraction of migrant Tamilian workers to Kerala's construction sector is perhaps the emigration of Kerala's own construction workers to the Middle East precisely in the period when the construction sector in the state has experienced a boom. An occupational distribution of emigrants to the Middle East is not available though impressionistic accounts suggest that a large number of masons, helpers and carpenters from Kerala are presently working in the Middle East. What proportion of

Kerala's construction work force has migrated we do not actually know. Available studies are not very clear on this point. Micro studies of the occupational background of emigrants often use a classification which does not include 'construction' as a separate category (See Nair, op.cit., Table No.9, p.19). On the other hand two studies that do include construction as a separate category showed that 1-2 per cent of the emigrants were construction workers (Ibrahmim and Radhakrishnan, op.cit., pp.24-25; Commerce Research Bureau, op.cit., p.8).

However, Myron Weiner (1982) classified the Indian workers in the Gulf regions into five categories. They are, construction workers, employees in private firms, employees in the Government and other public sector institutions, traders and businessmen and domestic servants, and of this construction workers formed the single largest category (pp.8-9).

If the single largest category of Indian workers in the Middle East is of those in the construction sector, this is possibly true of migrants from Kerala as well. Even if Weiner's estimates are exaggerated one cannot deny the impact any emigration of construction labourers from Kerala would have had on the demand for outside labour in the state's own industry particularly in a period of increased activity.<sup>9</sup>

The increase in construction activity and a concurrent migration of a part of Kerala's own construction workforce to the Middle East shows itself in a rising wage rate for construction workers in Kerala. Table 2.12 presents the daily money wage rate for selected years from 1965-66 onwards. For purposes of comparison the wage rate of agricultural labourers is also presented in Table 2.13.

Table 2.12

Daily Money wages of masons, carpenters and unskilled workers in  
construction sector - Rural and Urban in Kerala  
1965-66 to 1981-82

(in Rs.)

Year	Skilled				Unskilled			
	Mason (Rural)	Mason (Urban)	Carpenter (Rural)	Carpenter (Urban)	Men (Rural)	Men (Urban)	Women (Rural)	Women (Urban)
1965-66	5.01	5.41	5.03	5.54	3.00	3.31	2.03	2.41
1970-71	8.20	8.73	8.19	8.63	5.40	5.71	3.68	3.92
1975-76	N.A.	13.80	N.A.	13.78	N.A.	9.31	N.A.	6.54
1976-77	N.A.	14.50	N.A.	14.50	N.A.	9.65	N.A.	7.15
1977-78	14.88	15.15	14.81	15.19	9.38	10.00	7.00	7.61
1978-79	15.37	15.68	15.23	15.70	9.86	10.42	7.32	7.91
1979-80	16.76	17.42	16.66	17.42	10.72	11.43	8.09	8.85
1980-81	18.75	19.36	18.66	19.33	12.30	13.07	9.62	10.22
1981-82	22.66	23.01	22.52	22.87	15.22	15.94	11.40	12.22

N.A indicates not available

Source: Statistics for Planning, Government of Kerala, The Directorate of Economics and Statistics, various issues.

Table 2.13

Daily wages of Paddy field Labourer in Kerala, 1965-66  
to 1981-82

(in Rs.)

Year	Male	Female
1965-66	3.20	N.A.
1970-71	5.09	N.A.
1975-76	N.A.	N.A.
1976-77	8.44	5.77
1977-78	8.67	5.89
1978-79	8.99	6.06
1979-80	9.58	6.68
1980-81	11.13	7.91
1981-82	12.74	8.83

Source: Same as above.

Table 2.14 presents the percentage increase of daily money wage of different categories of construction workers as well as of agricultural labourers between 1970-71 and 1981-82 and between 1977-78 and 1981-82.

It shows that the daily money wage rates of construction workers in Kerala has increased faster than that of agricultural labourers. It is well known that a strong trade union movement among the agricultural labourers of Kerala has contributed to a rising agricultural wage-rate. That the wage rates of construction workers in Kerala have increased even faster inspite of there being

Table 2.14  
for  
Percentage of increase in daily wage / skilled and unskilled con-  
struction workers and field workers in  
Kerala

Period	Skilled		Unskilled				Field Labour	
	Masons (Rural)	Masons (Urban)	Men (Rural)	Men (Urban)	Women (Rural)	Women (Urban)	Men	Women
Between 1970-71 & 1981-82	176	164	182	179	209	212	150	N.A.
Between 1977-78 & 1981-82	52	52	82	59	62	61	47	50

N.A indicates not available.

Source: Derived from Tables 2.12 and 2.13.

a relatively weaker trade union movement in the construction sector only reflects the great increase in the demand for labour in the construction sector in the 1970s — an added factor attracting migrant construction labour to Kerala.

### 2.3 Concluding Remarks

To sum up, it is clear that the stagnation of agriculture and the lack of employment opportunities in industry in Kanyakumari District pressurise the people to migrate to the neighbouring state of Kerala where the increase of construction activity attracts them. The simultaneous operation of all these 'push' and 'pull' factors causes the large scale migration of workers from Kanyakumari to Kerala. While we discussed the 'push' and 'pull' factors separately, a very obvious factor attracting migrants from Kanyakumari is the differential wage between Kerala and Kanyakumari.

As Table 2.15 shows, the daily wage received by a male agricultural labourer in Kanyakumari in the peak month of July is even less than that the annual average daily agricultural wage in Kerala. And important for our discussion of migrant construction workers from Kanyakumari, the wage differential between agricultural daily wage in Kanyakumari and the daily wages in construction in Kerala is even larger. This is the appropriate comparison, for as we shall see in the next Chapter, the occupation of labourers in Kanyakumari prior to migration is in different kinds of rural labour and very few of them are construction workers. The difference in wages which attracts immigration into Kerala will also be substantiated by the results of our survey.

Available studies on migrant construction labour in Kerala are few, though a visual impression shows the presence of large number of Tamilians in Kerala's construction economy. However, one micro level study showed that in the village Perumathura about 2000 outside workers were regularly employed. They included construction workers, farm workers, coir workers, etc.; Of this, the study found that more than 300 were construction workers, some of whom

Table 2.15

Daily Money wage rates in Kerala and Kanyakumari (males only)

(in Rs./day)

Year	Agrl.labour in Kanyakumari	Agrl.labour in Kerala	Construction labour in Kerala - Mason		Unskilled labour in Kerala	
			Rural	Urban	Rural	Urban
1970-71	N.A.	5.09	8.20	8.73	5.40	5.71
1971-72	3.67	5.43	N.A.	8.86	N.A.	5.96
1972-73	4.16	5.78	N.A.	9.56	N.A.	6.32
1973-74	4.83	6.67	N.A.	10.70	N.A.	6.93
1974-75	6.50	8.05	N.A.	12.08	N.A.	7.92
1975-76	6.53	N.A.	N.A.	13.80	N.A.	9.31
1976-77	N.A.	8.44	N.A.	14.50	N.A.	9.65
1977-78	5.50	8.67	14.88	15.15	9.38	10.00
1978-79	5.50	8.99	15.37	15.68	9.86	10.42
1979-80	N.A.	9.58	16.76	17.42	10.72	11.43
1980-81	10.00	11.13	18.75	19.36	12.30	13.07
1981-82	N.A.	12.74	22.66	23.01	15.22	15.94

N.A indicates not available

Note: Wage rates of Agriculture labour in Kanyakumari District are for peak months.

Source: (1) For Kanyakumari wage rates - Season and Crop Reports of Tamil Nadu, Government of Tamil Nadu, various issues.

(2) For all the other wage rates, Statistics for Planning, State Planning Board, Trivandrum, Government of Kerala, various issues.

belong to Kanyakukari District. (Nair and Mathew, op.cit., p.1152).

With this background of the 'push' and 'pull' factors let us see in the following Chapters the specific case of migration of construction workers from Reetapuram in Kanyakumari District.

Notes and References

1. Madras is not taken into account as a separate district.
2. Quoted in (a) Kurien and James, 1979, p.180.  
(b) Kamble, 1982, p.32.
3. This has received the attention of some commentators. The very high proportion of workers in non-agriculture according to the 1961 census has prompted Kurien and James to talk of an 'occupational shuttling'; 'when there is an increase in agricultural activity the labour force which is unattached to land and not part of organised industry (the foot loose population...) has the possibilities to shift back and forth between agriculture and non-agriculture occupations... (an increase in agricultural activity) will draw them into agriculture; when such occupations recede they search for non-agricultural occupations to eke out a living' (Kurien and Josef James, 1979, p.180). Kurien and James make such an observation by looking at the occupational distribution for 1961 and 1971 alone. But when one looks at the pattern from 1951 onwards there does seem to be a fairly stable pattern but for the 1961 distribution and it does seem that the 1961 figures represent an aberration which could be more census induced (from definitional changes and administration of the census) than representative of actual changes. One possible source of error is the enumeration of agricultural labourers (males) who numbered 23,358 in 1961 but as much as 116,795 in 1971. It is likely that many of these agricultural labourers in 1961 were enumerated in 'other services' which contain 76,773 males in 1961 but only 33,545 in 1971.
4. See pp.93-95 for their methodological discussions of decomposition of agricultural growth rates.
5. Another study for approximately the same period shows a different picture. Using a different methodology i.e. without making a distinction between real and monetary growth Bhalla and Alagh (1979) found that, Kanyakumari with a compound annual growth rate of 4.06 per cent between 1960-62 and 1970-73, belonged to the group of 'medium growth' districts (pp.46,212). In their estimates, the yield effect was the primary contributory factor (82.9 per cent) followed by area (15.65 per cent) and interaction term (1.72 per cent) with the cropping pattern effect negative (-0.27 per cent) (loc.cit).
6. In both years the average size of holdings in Kanyakumari District was the smallest in all of Tamil Nadu (Cruz Viagappan Ratnam, op.cit., p.87).
7. These figures are not to be taken as exact figures. Some reports place the total number of migrants during the two year period 1976-77 at 300,000; See Param Sharma, Biased propaganda Against Indians in West Asia, Commerce, July 1, 1978, p.20.

8. According to a press report , the magnitude of the annual flow of workers to the Gulf countries during 1980 was 236.2 thousand; in 1981 it increased to 276 thousand; in 1982 it slightly declined to 239.5 thousand. It is reported that during the first six months of 1983, more than 110 thousand persons migrated to the Gulf countries, Kerala Kaumudi, dated 29 August 1983.
9. Commerce Research Bureau found that only 2 per cent of emigrants were construction workers; they also said, "though the number of masons and carpenters is small, their exodus has left a void difficult to fill immediately. The foreign money which has stimulated a wave of building construction in Kerala has accentuated the demand for these workers. As a result of this disequilibrium in demand and supply the price of their labour has shot up very high in all parts of the State" (p.8).



## CHAPTER -III

### MIGRATION FROM REETAPURAM

- *Introduction*
- *Reetapuram -Some Charecteristics*
- *Background of Migrants*
- *Socio-economic background of Migrant Workers*
- *Reasons for Migration*
- *Recruitment of Workers*

## CHAPTER III

### MIGRATION FROM REETAPURAM

#### 3.0 Introduction

In the previous chapter we have outlined the boom in the construction activity in Kerala in the past decade which has created a demand for construction labour. We have also shown the sharp increase in the wage rate of construction labourer's in Kerala. Side by side with this increase in demand for construction labour and rising wage rates, we have outlined the low level of employment and wages in Kanyakumari District. With the working of these 'push' and 'pull' factors how has migration taken place? In this chapter we shall describe and discuss in detail the movement of the migrant workers from Reetapuram village in Kanyakumari District who are presently working in different construction sites in Kerala. We shall start our analysis with a brief introduction of the methodology of our study and profile of the village.

#### 3.1 Reetapuram — Some characteristics

Reetapuram is situated in the extreme southern part of Kalkulam Taluk in Kanyakumari District (Map I). As we have seen in the previous chapter, of the four taluks in the district, two taluks viz., Kalkulam and Vilavancode, which are different from other two southern taluks are located nearest to Trivandrum District of Kerala. According to the 1981 Census these two northern taluks accounted for nearly 65 per cent of the district's population.

Further, the 1971 Census shows that, of the four taluks, Kalkulam had

the largest number of construction workers.<sup>1</sup> (See Table 3.1). Of the villages in the District, Pommani and Colachel (both are in Kalkulam Taluk) ranked first and second in terms of the total number of construction workers. The Census of 1971 shows that these two villages account for nearly half of Kalkulam taluk's construction workers (40 per cent and 17 per cent respectively).

Table 3.1

Construction Workforce in Kanyakumari District in 1971 - A Taluk-wise distribution

Taluk/District	Workers as percentage to total population	Total construction workers	Construction workers as percentage of total workers	Taluk Construction workers as percentage to district workers
Kalkulam	28	4420	3.77	45
Vilavancode	28	2206	2.01	22
Thovala	32	298	1.19	3
Agasteeswaram	29	2905	3.04	30
Kanyakumari	29	9829	2.80	100

Source: Census of India 1971, series 19, Tamil Nadu - District Census Handbook - Kanyakumari.

The choice of villages from the census returns alone is faulty in as much as (a) migrant construction workers would not be included in the village returns unless they were present when the census enumeration was done. The census enumeration is done in February and as we shall see most of the migrants visit their homes only during major Christian festivals in April, August and December; (b) few of the migrant workers have, again as we shall see, worked as construction labourers prior to migration; so a village with a larger construction worker population or vice versa and (c) we have argued that the

migration of construction workers from Kanyakumari District has gained importance after the mid 1970s and provisional returns of the 1981 census do not provide disaggregated occupational data so a choice based on the 1971 returns alone has only a limited basis. However, in so far as in villages with a large construction worker population, the 'association effect' of migration could be important, census returns should be taken into consideration in choosing a village for study.

We decided to study Reetapuram, which is part of the larger revenue village of Colachel. The ultimate criterion for choosing Reetapuram was a familiarity with the village. We had earlier observed that there seemed to be a large number of migrants from this village and as we were familiar with Reetapuram, it would be that much simpler to obtain information. And as the larger village of Colachel had, according to the 1971 census, the second largest construction workforce in the district; our choice has that much more basis.

Reetapuram in Kalkulam Taluk is part of the larger revenue village of Colachel. Its population in 1981 was 11,929 and the village covered 865.05 hectares. An area of 597 hectares was being cultivated. However almost all of this is dryland, with irrigated area covering only 3 per cent of net sown area. Most of the dry land is used only for tree and fruitcrops, with coconut, cashew, palm, jackfruit and mango trees being the important tree crops. Tapioca is the other important crop on dry land. On the miniscube area irrigated, paddy and banana are the two crops grown. Where assured water from private irrigation sources is available, paddy is cultivated twice.

Worker participation rate in Reetapuram is 47 per cent for males and 7 per cent for females. The occupational distribution (Table 3.2) of the male

Table 3.2

Occupational distribution of the male workforce in Reetapuram,  
1971-81 (percentage of total)

Year	Sectors				Agriculture	Non-agri- culture	Total
	Primary	Secondary	Teritary	Total			
1971	56	32	12	100	55	45	100
1981	-	-	-	-	46	54	100

Note: (1) The 1981 census data presently available do not make possible a classification into primary, secondary and teritary sectors.

(2) Workers in agriculture includes only cultivators and agricultural labourers.

Source: Census of India, 1971 and 1981, series 19 and 20, Tamil Nadu - District Census Handbook, Kanyakumari.

workers of Reetapuram shows that it is similar to that of the overall district situation. A detailed classification of occupational distribution of the male workforce in 1971<sup>2</sup> (Table 3.3), shows that, after agricultural labour, construction is the second most important source of livelihood in Reetapuram. Workers in construction account for 17 per cent of the male workforce, higher than the taluk or district average (see Table 3.1 p.48).

Since we wished to begin our study with a survey of migrant construction workers from Reetapuram, we had to first ascertain the total number of migrant construction workers from Reetapuram. This we did by a detailed house listing in July 1985 of all households, from which we found that there were 947 migrant construction woekers (all males) presently in Kerala

According to the 1981 Census the male workforce in Reetapuram was 2810 persons. This would not include migrant workers as the census was conducted in

Table 3.3

Industrial Classification of the male workforce in Reetapuram,  
1971 (percentage of total)

Sl. No.	Categories	Workers
1.	Cultivators	13
2.	Agricultural labourers	42
3.	Livestock	0.5
4.	Mining and quarrying etc.	0.2
5.	Manufacturing, processing & repairing etc.	
	(a) Household industry	4
	(b) Other than Household industry	11
6.	Construction	17
7.	Trade and Commerce	4
8.	Transport and storage	2
9.	Other Services	6.3
	Total	100

Source: Census of India 1971, series 19, Tamil Nadu, District Census Handbook, Kanyakumari.

the first week of March 1981, and March is not one of those months when migrants visit home. Adding our own census of 947 male migrants to the male workforce of 2810 we arrive at a total of 3757 male workers from Reetapuram who are working either in Reetapuram or as migrants. Thus, Migrant workers constitute 25 per cent of the workforce. This gives clearly an order of magnitude of the importance of migration from Reetapuram.

We found that the migrants visit Reetapuram mainly on 3 occasions during Easter (April), Feast of Assumption of our Lady (August) and Christmas (December).

Since not all migrants visit their homes, our sample was purposive. We chose 80 households with migrant construction workers, and care was taken that all areas and localities of the village were covered. Even in households which had more than one migrant we interviewed only one, usually the head of the household.<sup>3</sup> So a total of 80 migrant workers from 80 households were interviewed. The survey was conducted during August-September 1985 with structured questionnaires. We also interviewed 7 'old' migrant (i.e. former migrants since settled in Reetapuram) construction workers from Reetapuram and 11 so called 'Contractors'.

The second stage of the survey was to visit some of the work-sites in Kerala where these migrants were presently employed. We found that almost all of them worked in Kottayam District (See p.69 below). We then visited 7 work-sites in Chengannoor, Thiruvalla, Kottayam, Changanacherry and Trichur to obtain qualitative information through discussion about their living and working conditions in Kerala. This was done in September-October in 1985.

### 3.2 Background of Migrants

While we have stressed the importance of the construction boom in Kerala in the past decade, it is important to note that, migrant construction workers from Reetapuram is not a phenomenon restricted to the past decade. We were told that in Reetapuram alone there are at present 45-50 persons who had migrated to what is now Kerala in the 1950s and 1960s (a few even in 1930s and 1940s) and have since returned. We met 7 of these former migrants to obtain an idea of the earlier conditions of migration.<sup>4</sup> This sample is undoubtedly small, but the purpose here is only to highlight the tradition of migration of construction workers from Reetapuram.

On an average these former migrants had spent 33 years working in construction sites in Kerala. All of them had worked in more than 5 towns in Kerala, largely in Central Travancore. The presence of this migration prior to the State's reorganization in 1956, of course does not make this an inter-state migration. But what is important is that even then a wage and employment differential between what are now parts of Kerala and Tamil Nadu attracted migrants. Some allowance must be made for 'recall error', but it is pertinent to note that 3 of these migrants who could recall the wage differential when they first migrated reported it to be of the order of 50 to 60 per cent; and the employment differential in terms of days of employment per week to be of the order of 60-100 per cent. This as we shall see is what obtains today as well. Three of them migrated when they were in their teens, three in their twenties, and one in his mid thirties. Only one of them had worked as a construction worker before migration and the others all reported that they initially worked as 'cooks' for construction gangs and slowly over the years worked first as 'helpers' or unskilled workers and then finally as masons. Five of them claimed to have been masons before they returned to Reetapuram. One was a stoneworker in a quarry and the seventh (who migrated in 1923 and returned in 1970) claimed that he was a 'minor' contractor at the time of return.<sup>5</sup> The next generation of these former migrants also comprise migrant construction labour; three of these old migrants reported that one person in their family (usually a son) was now a migrant construction worker in Kerala, two of them had two migrant members of the family and one had as many as three family members as migrant construction labour presently in Kerala.

What we must bear in mind from the experience of these earlier migrants is a remarkable repetition of these experiences among the more recent migrants,



a similarity which will be clear when we discuss in detail the present migrant labourers. The presence of this decades old migration, in whatever limited form it may have existed, is important in as much as the present migrants have with them the knowledge that earlier generations had successfully migrated in the past, working in the same occupations and in the same region now attracting labour from Reetapuram.

### 3.3 Socio-economic background of migrant workers

This section will give a broad picture of our surveyed 80 migrant's socio-economic background.

The economic status of the migrant workers shows 58 per cent of them came from landless households (not considering homestead land, which is uncultivable) and 42 per cent of the migrant households own some land. Further, 13 per cent of the sample migrant households do not even have homestead land. These families reside in waste land or some others' property. Among those who do own land the average landholding size is also very small; only 50 cents ( $\frac{1}{2}$  acre) of wet and dry land. Most of this is dry land, planted with Tamarind, Coconut, palm tree and Tapioca.

Further 93 per cent of our sampled migrants came from the Nadar community and 60 per cent were Christians.

Coming from predominantly landless households, the sampled 80 migrants from these households had undergone little formal education. As Table 3.4 shows, 13 per cent are illiterates, and only 7 per cent had completed their high school education. Most of the educated had studied only upto the primary/upper primary level.

Table 3.4Educational Status of the migrants

Level of Education	No. of persons
Illiterate	10 (13)
Primary Standard	33 (41)
Upper Primary Standard	27 (34)
Above middle	4 ( 5)
High School	6 ( 7)
Total	80 (100)

Figures in brackets represents the percentages.

Table 3.5 and 3.6 present the age distribution of the workers when they first migrated and current age distribution of the sampled population. This shows that, most of them are under 35, and moved out of Reetapuram at a very young age.

Table 3.5Age during first migration

Age (years)	No. of persons
10 - 15	20 (25)
15 - 20	39 (49)
20 - 25	16 (20)
25 - 50	5 ( 6)
Total	80 (100)

Figures in brackets represents percentage of the total

What was the traditional occupation of the families of these migrants?

This is relevant for finding out whether these migrants came from families which

Table 3.6

Present age of migrants

Age (years)	No. of persons
< 20	10 (13)
20 - 25	21 (26)
25 - 35	34 (42)
35 - 45	8 (10)
> 45	7 (9)
Total	80 (100)

Figures in brackets represents percentage of the total

were traditionally employed in construction. The concept of 'traditional' occupation does not appear to be relevant for this generation of workers;<sup>6</sup> but it would yet be instructive to have an idea of the reported 'traditional' occupation. Table 3.7 presents the reported traditional caste occupation of the sampled migrants.

Table 3.7

Traditional occupation of the migrant's families

Sl.No.	Traditional occupations	No. of persons
1	Palmyra climbing and related occupations	31 (39)
2	Cooly	43 (53)
3	Masonry/Construction	3 (4)
4	Tailoring, weaving etc.	3 (4)
	Total	80 (100)

Figures in brackets represent percentage of the total

It shows that only three of the 80 sampled migrants came from families which were traditionally involved in construction activity.

What were these migrants doing before they moved from Reetapuram? Table 3.8 presents their occupations prior to migration. This should be seen with Table 3.5 which showed that an overwhelming majority of the workers left home when they were young.

Table 3.8

Migrants' occupational status, prior to migration

Occupation	No. of persons
Coolie	56 (70)
Unemployed	15 (19)
Mason	2 ( 2)
Student	4 ( 5)
Other occupations	3 ( 4)
Total	80 (100)

Figures in brackets represents percentages.

Note: 'Coolie' consists of Agricultural labourers, brickworkers, palmyra rope workers and other sundry casual labourers.

As Table 3.8 shows, only two of the sampled migrants had earlier worked in construction and these two unlike others, were in their forties when they migrated. That the majority of the migrants reported 'coolie' labour as their earlier occupation probably reflects the fact that they were doing occasional work of various kinds when they were still in their teens. Likewise, that close to a quarter of the sample were unemployed or studying also reflects their young age prior to migration. Seen together with Table 3.7, Table 3.8 also shows that

the traditional occupations had broken down. The presence of the large proportion of 'coolie' or general labour also reflects breakdown of the traditional occupational structure.

Two aspects of migrant construction workers from Reetapuram which we have discussed earlier are confirmed by Table 3.9 which presents the distribution of the number of years these migrants have so far spent in Kerala:

Table 3.9  
Number of years as migrant construction worker

Years	No. of persons
1 - 5	28 (35)
5 - 10	27 (34)
10 - 15	8 (10)
15 - 25	12 (15)
> 25	5 ( 6)
Total	80 (100)

Figures in brackets represents percentages.

(i) that about 70 per cent of them have so far spent less than 10 years in Kerala confirms the fact that this migration has been of great importance in the past decade of heightened construction activity in Kerala and (ii) that 15 per cent of them have spent between 15 and 25 years, a few over 25 years as confirms construction workers in Kerala : / the additional fact that migrant labour from Reetapuram is not an entirely new phenomenon.

We have noted that all these migrants are males. We have seen that elsewhere in the country among migrant labourers there are normally both male and female migrants, with whole families migrating and working in construction

(See ch.I, Table 1.1). Yet, not just from Reetapuram but generally among migrant construction labour from Kanyakumari District to Kerala there are few female migrants. And the contractors we met were all definite that there are only males from Kanyakumari District working as construction labourers. However, among migrant construction workers in Kerala who come from other parts of Tamil Nadu, there are women workers.<sup>7</sup>

On enquiry, the migrants we talked to said it was not their 'social custom' for women to migrate and work as construction labourers. The contractors also do not make an attempt to recruit female migrants. A definite reason for the absence of females among migrants from Kanyakumari District we cannot easily offer, but one can suggest possible reasons.

One reason for this has very much to do with 'social customs' of the migrants. Most of the construction labourers from Kanyakumari District are Nadars. In our sample alone, over 93 per cent were Nadars. The Nadar community a traditionally socially backward community, has over the past century tried to improve its caste position through a process of 'Sanskritization'. Robert Hardgrave (1969) in his study of the Nadar community has tried to document this process which began from the mid 19th century. According to him, "among the communities of south India, the Nadars have perhaps most clearly evidenced the effects of change in the past 150 years, considered by the high caste Hindus in the early nineteenth century to be among the most defiling and degraded of all castes, the Nadars, as toddy tappers, climbers of the palmyra trees suffered severe social disabilities and constituted one of the most economically depressed communities in the country; their social and economic changes of the last century reflects that the Nadars have today become one of the most economically and politically successful communities in the south" (p.1).

This they have achieved through a struggle for over a century. He adds, "as the increasing wealth of the Nadar merchant community widened the gap between their economic status and their traditional position in the hierarchy of ritual purity, the Nadars sought to bring their social status to a level commensurate with their economic power through imitation of the Brahminical customs of the higher castes. Claiming high Kshtriya status, the Nadars, from about 1860's, began slowly to sanskritize their life style; men began to tie their dhoti in the manner of the Brahmin's, to crop their hair in the fashion of the Brahmin's tuft, and to abandon the heavy jewelry and ear pieces which had been common among them. The women adopted their jewelry and dress to the new style. It had been the custom for women to wear a conglomerate ear-piece composed of large bunch of studs and rings. These were once of lead, but with wealth, gold was used. Under the heavy weight of the jewelry the lobes were extended, often hanging to the shoulders — the length of the lobe indicating material prosperity. The custom, however, was limited to the lower range of castes, and as hardly fitting to Kshtriya status, the practice was opposed by Nadar leaders. Widows were permitted to wear only white sarees like the Brahmins, and remarriage of widows was forbidden. Nadar leaders decreed that women would cease to carry water on their heads and, like the higher castes, would carry the water pots against their hips. To enforce the order, men were stationed at the gates of the gardens where the wells were located" (Ibid., p.107).

This attempt to improve their social standing in what is now Kanyakumari District (at that time part of the state of Travancore) was a reaction to their oppression by Nair landlords (See Robert L.Hardgrave, op.cit., pp.56-59).

The process of sanskritization was aided by large scale conversion to Christianity and support from missionaries in their struggle. Commensurate with their

attempt to rise in the caste hierarchy, it was considered inappropriate for Nadar women to work outside their homes. This phenomenon continues even today. This attempt to climb up the caste hierarchy has manifested itself in a lower labour force participation of Nadar women. This clearly reflects itself in the aggregate labour force participation rates of females. The participation rates in Kanyakumari District are much lower than that for the state as a whole (Table 3.10). In Reetapuram also this rate is hardly 7 per cent (see p.49 above).

Table 3.10

Percentage distribution of Female workers to Total Female Population in Kanyakumari district and Tamil Nadu, 1961 - 81.

District/State	Year		
	1961	1971	1981
Kanyakumari District	17.6	6.1	9.34
Tamil Nadu	31.3	15.1	26.52

Source: For 1961 and 1971, Census of India, Govt. of India, 1971, Series 19. Tamil Nadu, Part I-A, General Report (First part).

For 1981, Census of India 1981, Series 20. Tamil Nadu, Part II-B, Primary Census Abstract.

Thus today in general Nadar women in Kanyakumari District rarely work as agricultural wage labourers. The activities they are involved in are all household based like lacemaking, weaving coconut palms for use in traditional roofing etc. A few do work as vegetable vendors but only old women. Also, outside their homes they work mostly in Church sponsored institutions engaged in handicraft production and more recently in cashew factories.



It is then perhaps the 'sanskritization' of the Nadars which has conferred a corresponding 'respectability' on women in terms of not working outside and this could be an important reason in their not migrating along with their households.

Secondly while women are employed in the building industry, it is dominated by males. Consequently, demand for female labour is relatively lower. In Kerala this smaller number of female labourers is employed from within the state itself. And while the migration of male construction labourers from Kerala to the Middle East is one reason for the migration from Kanyakumari District, women labourers of Kerala are not among the migrants to the Middle East.

Thirdly, women are in any case paid a lower wage than men and since their involvement in construction is relatively less than that of males, there may not be much of an advantage in persuading women from Kanyakumari District to migrate to Kerala.

#### 3.4 Reasons for migration

In the previous Chapters we have set out the context in which an increasing migration is taking place from Kanyakumari District to construction sites in various parts of Kerala, i.e. a low rate of increase of employment opportunities in agriculture as well as in non-agricultural activities in Kanyakumari District and a boom in construction in Kerala.

This is in fact substantiated by our survey of migrant workers from Reetapuram. On enquiry the most common reasons given for their migration were

- (a) greater availability of employment in construction work in Kerala and

(b) a higher wage as well.

An attempt was made to measure the magnitude of difference in wages and employment between Reetapuram and Kerala when each worker first migrated. Table 3.11 and 3.12 present these details. Even after allowing for some

Table 3.11

Wage differential when workers first migrated

Percentage of wage differential	No. of persons
0 - 50	22 (37)
50 - 150	18 (31)
150 - 200	6 (10)
200 - 200	9 (15)
300 - 400	4 (7)
Total	59 (100)

Table 3.12

Employment differential first migratory period

Increase in number of days of work/week	No. of persons
1	5 (8)
2	28 (48)
3	22 (37)
4	4 (7)
Total	59 (100)

Figures in brackets represents percentage of total.

Note: Tables excludes migrants who were unemployed, petty shop keepers and students during their pre-migration period.

'recall error' it is quite clear that, the differences in wages and employment are large enough to have induced migration. On the average a migrant worker when he first migrated found work for 2.4 more days per week and received a daily wage which was 131 per cent more than in Reetapuram.

The employment differential in terms of days/week alone may be misleading when we consider that for 2-3 months in a year during the monsoon as well as when adequate building materials are not available; work is highly irregular.

However, the workers whom interviewed were definite that even with these stoppages, year round total employment was greater in Kerala than what they would have obtained in Reetapuram.

The higher level of wages as well as employment available to a migrant worker when he first comes to Kerala conveys too simple a picture of the reasons for and process of migration, the actual one today is much more complex. The wage received by a helper<sup>8</sup> in Kerala today is about Rs.20/day, while the present agricultural wage in and around Reetapuram is as much as Rs.15-18/day during the peak season and Rs.13-15/day during the lean seasons for adult workers. One may then well ask whether this is enough of a differential to induce migration. The answer to this must be seen in terms of an expected future wage and skill that young migrants aspire for. Migrants in the beginning are employed as 'helpers' at Rs.20/day today but as we shall elaborate later, some of the helpers have overtime acquired skills and are now masons earning as much as Rs.37/day. While not all helpers can or will become masons, it is a fact that all of them aspire and expect to become masons. Hence what is perceived by the young migrant (or by his family) is an expected future income as well as expected upward mobility, neither of which is possible by continuing to do coolie or agricultural labour in Reetapuram. The second point is that the present high agricultural wage of Rs.15-18/day in Reetapuram during the peak season is very much the result of large scale outmigration. If 25 per cent of the male workforce in Reetapuram are now migrant construction labourers, then this is the main reason for this relatively high wage in Reetapuram during the peak agricultural season. Further this is only the peak wage and that which obtains in the lean seasons is only Rs.13-15/day.

In terms of employment as well, migrant workers claim that even today a larger quantum of employment is available in Kerala than in Reetapuram. The labourers perceived the greater availability of employment in Kerala as more important than the higher wage; arguing that even if the wage was lower, with an assurance of employment in Kanyakumari District they would not migrate. Thus the low level of employment and wages in Kanyakumari District force the people to move and the greater availability of employment and attractive wages in Kerala accommodate these migrants.

One important additional reason for migrants continuing to do work as construction labourers in Kerala which is not 'quantifiable' is their perception of greater freedom as migrants. This is particularly important for the young migrants who value highly their sense of freedom in being away from their homes and living and working with friends in Kerala. Thus the break from traditional social taboos among the majority of migrants appear to be another factor that induces the migrants to stay in Kerala for a long time.

### 3.5 Recruitment of workers

Recruitment of migrant workers is done by the 'contractor' himself or his agent. Anticipating our discussion of the nature of these contractors we may mention here that these 'contractors' who are also Tamilians do independently take up small scale construction activities, but they are more often than not little more than labour recruiters/supervisors. They do not merely arrange for labour, they do also supervise work on the worksite. But in no sense are they persons of considerable resources; in many cases they are former masons who have slowly managed to become independent labour recruiters as well as supervisors.<sup>9</sup>

The nature of the recruitment process can be of various kinds and differs according to particular situations. The following are the three broad

situations. Corresponding to each of these situations there is a particular process of recruitment.

- (1) First time recruitment
- (2) Repeat recruitment/change of employer
- (3) Recruitment by/for Keralite contractors.

Of these, the first two kinds of recruitment are done by Tamilian contractors.

(1) First time recruitment is almost invariably of boys or youth in their teens (See Table 3.5). Here the initiative is often taken by the parents or the family to have their sons employed in construction in Kerala. First time recruitment is always as 'helpers' in construction work. Either a contractor is approached to employ the youth or the contractor himself in need of helpers approaches the families concerned either directly or indirectly through one of his masons. No advance is normally paid in these situations.

(2) By repeat recruitment/change of employer, we refer to the situation where a helper or a mason, as the case may be, chooses to work with a new contractor. Recruitment of these workers takes place during one of the three occasions (Easter in April, Feast of Assumption of our Lady in August, and Christmas in December) when workers return home. On these occasions the workers have already settled their accounts with their current employer/contractor, and are free to work with another contractor if they so desire. In this repeat recruitment, an advance is given to the worker.

(3) Both the above two forms of recruitment refer to those done by Tamilian contractors. Recruitment by Keralite contractors takes a different form. Here rarely does the contractor himself visit the village and recruit the workers.

Where the Keralite contractor functions through a Tamilian 'sub-contractor'/recruiter, or supervisor, it is the latter who approaches the prospective employees. Here again an advance is given, through the supervisor-cum-recruiter to workers. A different situation, again with a Keralite contractor, is that when migrant workers already working in Kerala opt to work with Kerala contractors itself. In this case, no advance is provided.

An important aspect of the process of recruitment that needs to be discussed in detail is the advancing of part of the wage immediately after recruitment but prior to the migrant labourers beginning to work in Kerala. It is interesting to trace the importance over time of this system of granting an 'advance'. Before the mid 1970s, when there was migration from Kanyakumari District to Kerala an advance was given. But at that time migrants who were recruited were largely either relatives of the contractor or individuals known to him. The advance, to be adjusted against wages, was then seen as a 'favour' from the contractor to help the migrant provide some income immediately to his family. The role and importance of this advance changed considerably when the level of migration increased. When there was the rise in demand for labour, the granting of an advance became an attempt to secure and commit a migrant's labour to a particular contractor, lest he chose to work with another contractor. At present one sees the beginning of another phase, wherein workers themselves refuse to take an advance. This is particularly true of the younger migrants. They argue that receipt of an advance symbolises a kind of dependence which compromises their freedom and allows the contractor to abuse and ill-treat them. Thus, 21 per cent of our sampled respondents said that they had not taken any advance from their present contractor.

The advance received after recruitment is meant to allow the migrants to provide his family some income immediately and also to meet his travel expenses. This advance is later set off against his wage account. The manner of settling wages and the advance is discussed in detail when we examine the wage systems, as also whether the provision of an advance implies some kind of bondage or carries an implicit interest rate!

Is it common for workers to receive an advance and then not join for work in Kerala? This is rare, for in most cases the contractor himself comes from the same village as the migrant worker. Where this is not the case, the recruitment itself is done through the head mason and the advance is given in the presence of 'influential' persons of the village. In this manner, some form of implicit trust is understood by both the worker and the contractor. In a few instances, when the worker did not join work, informal pressure was brought on him to return the advance.

In granting an advance, as we have mentioned earlier, there are differences when a first time migrant is recruited as also between recruitment of helpers and masons. No advance is given to first time migrants who are boys and are beginning to work as 'helpers'. Normally, as the parents/family themselves are very keen that the boy begins to work as helpers no advance is given by the contractor.<sup>10</sup>

Among the workers who are not first time migrants, there is a difference in the quantum of advance received by helpers and masons. The average advance received by helpers and masons who had been working with the same contractor for the past two years was Rs.50/- and Rs.100/- respectively.

After recruitment and receipt of advance, the group of construction labourers working with a particular contractor travels to the construction sites

in Kerala.<sup>11</sup> It would appear that migrant workers from particular villages are regionally concentrated in particular parts of Kerala. Thus most of the (80 per cent) workers in our sample are presently working in central Travancore (in and around Changanecherry, Chengannoor, Tiruvalla and Kottayam). Migrants from another village in the same taluk Tiruvithancode, (which we are familiar with) are working largely in the Northern districts of Kerala (Malappuram, Calicut, Wynad etc.). Migrants from another cluster of villages around Thuckalai again in the same taluk are largely concentrated in the southern districts of Trivandrum and Quilon.



Notes and References

1. The provisional results of the 1981 Census do not give the number of construction workers as a separate category.
2. The 1981 Census do not gives a detailed classification of occupational workforce.
3. Information on other migrant family members was also obtained.
4. These seven former migrants - all males, constitute a heterogenous group, at one and one person having migrated in 1923 and returned in 1970, and at another one worker who migrated in 1965 and returned in 1976.
5. These former migrants reported that with their years of migrant labour they were able to buy at the most either some homestead land and build a thatched hut or merely modify their existing houses.
6. In fact the younger migrant respondents often said they had no idea of what their 'traditional' occupation was. It was only an persistent questioning that they provided an answer.
7. See for instance Madhura Swaminathan. 'On to pastures new' Frontline, September 7-20, 1985; pp.73-75. In this article which discusses construction labourers from Madurai District presently working in Ernakulam District. She points to the presence of whole families of migrants as well as solely male migrants.
8. The different kinds of workers in construction are discussed and described in detail later. A helper is usually an unskilled labourer, and a migrant begins work as a helper.
9. The following chapter discusses in detail the nature of these 'contractors'.
10. In the rare instances where a 'first-time' migrant is not a youth but one who has earlier worked as a mason in Kanyakumari District, an advance is given.
11. It is interesting to note that rarely does the contractor travel with the workers to the construction site. A mason or head-mason is asked to arrange for the travel of the workers. The contractor's refusal to travel with his workers is part of his attempt to socially distance himself from the workers.

## CHAPTER - IV

### MIGRANTS IN KERALA

- Introduction
- Tamil '**Contractors**' in Commercial complexes and Large Buildings.
- Tamil Contractors in Residential Construction
- Skill/Job description in Residential Construction
- Tamilians and Keralite workers on sites handled by Tamilian Contractors
- Wage System
- Skill Acquisition and Job Mobility
- Migrant Labourers and the Number of 'Contractors' they have worked with
- Working and Living conditions in Kerala
- Subsistence Remittance
- Annual Income

## CHAPTER IV

### MIGRANTS IN KERALA

#### 4.0 Introduction

In this chapter we will look at the kind of work done in Kerala by the migrant labourers from Reetapuram village, their wages, acquisition of skills and job mobility, living and working conditions and finally at the quantum of remittances. For this we will draw mainly on our survey of migrants from Reetapuram. But first one must ask who employs these migrant labourers and who supervises their work? Are there migrant contractors as well? If so, where do they fit in the organization of construction activity in Kerala and what role do they perform? Are they independent contractors or are they some kind of sub-contractors? Does their position and function differ in the kind of construction involved — larger commercial complexes *vis-a-vis* residential houses; within residential houses between small and large houses? To answer these questions we will draw on a small survey we conducted on Tamilian migrant contractors from Reetapuram as well as our discussions with construction firms in Kerala and visits to construction sites.

To begin with let us first make a distinction between contractors in commercial complexes and residential houses.

#### 4.1 Tamil 'Contractors' in Commercial Complexes and Large Buildings

Construction of a commercial complex is undertaken not by individuals but by construction firms which are in charge of not only civil construction but also all other aspects — electrical, sanitary and other activities. From our observation and to the best of our knowledge, contracts for commercial buildings are undertaken only by firms based in Kerala. There are no Tamilian contractors who independently take up construction of commercial buildings. In those instances where individuals as 'licensed contractors' take up civil contracts from the government, they are again almost always Keralite contractors. Though contracts for construction of commercial complexes and large buildings are taken up only by firms, they do not directly employ labour themselves. Various activities are informally or formally sub-contracted out while employees of the firms supervise the work being done. What is of relevance to us is the employment of Tamil labour in these construction activities. What we found is that Tamilian labourers are employed through a 'sub-contractor' who is always a Tamilian and these 'sub-contract' are always in the highly labour intensive and low skill activity of earth work.

In the case of construction of large buildings it is wrong to use the term 'sub-contractor' for the Tamilian contractor. It would be more appropriate to call him a 'gang leader' who recruits labourers, who works along with them as well as supervises the work being done and receives payment from the firm which he disburses among the labourers. The 'gang' normally consists of 10-12 workers, all of whom are migrant Tamil labourers and recruited by the gang leader. The 'contract' with the firm is an informal one and payment is based on a piece-rate. A daily disbursement is made to meet wage costs and a final settlement is made when the work is completed. Gang leaders, normally have a

long drawn out acquaintance with the firms which has been built-up over the years, and regularly approach them for work. The composition of the gang however constantly changes with new migrants replacing those who leave. It is apparent then that rather than occupying a very superior social and economic position, this Tamilian 'sub-contractor' in charge of basically earth work in construction of commercial complexes and large buildings is one who combines the functions of recruitment and supervision and also works along with other members of the gang in the labour intensive and low skill activity of earth work. The only difference is that over the years he has been able to establish contact with the firms, and obtain work for himself and his gang.

#### 4.2 Tamil 'contractors' in Residential Construction

The civil contracts for residential houses are always handed out on a squarefoot basis with the builder providing the necessary materials. The contracts are awarded by the builder in association/consultation with the civil engineer, and architect. Where migrant Tamilian labour are employed in construction, this is done through a Tamilian 'contractor'. They work under the supervision of the civil engineer/architect with the extent of supervision varying according to the size of the house — in larger houses the supervision is more than in the smaller houses. In residential house construction, migrant Tamilian labour are employed not only in earth work but also in all the activities of civil construction and they are employed both as helpers and masons.

The term 'contractor' in this instance is again inappropriate. This 'contractor' recruits migrant labour but at the same time he is not merely a recruiter or labour supplier. He is awarded the contract for construction of the house, supervises work and occasionally even works with his masons as well.

He is in essence a 'jobber-cum-contractor'. From our survey of the 11 Tamilian jobber-cum-contractors as well as from our visits to work sites it would also appear that these jobber-cum-contractors are again persons of limited resources who mainly take up contracts for construction of small 2-3 roomed houses. These contractors do at times have more than one contract in hand but most of the time they have only one contract in progress.

Of the 11 jobber-cum-contractors from Reetapuram whom we met, one did only carpentary work, one only church construction, one only stone work and the other eight jobber-cum-contractors civil construction of residential houses. (one of these eight was an exception: he had begun by taking up contracts in Tamil Nadu and had now expanded his activities to Kerala and he combined civil contracts with stone work). Of these eight civil jobber-cum-contractors, five had only one contract at the time of the survey, one had two contracts, another jobber-cum-contractor three and the large jobber-cum-contractor as many as six contracts on hand. The small sample size does not give a partial or distorted picture. We found this to be the same during our visits to work sites in Kerala as well. The Tamilian jobber-cum-contractors there were those who had single contracts on hand and undertaken construction of small residential houses.

That these persons are basically jobber-cum-contractors of limited resources rather than contractors with large groups of workers undertaking construction of large buildings is also evident from the number of labourers presently working with them. Thus, excluding the single large jobber-cum-contractor from our sample of 8 civil jobber-cum-contractors from Reetapuram, the average number of workers with the Tamil jobber-cum-contractor was only 12.<sup>1</sup> A very similar picture we observed during our visit to the work-sites in Kerala.

The kind of houses built by these jobber-cum-contractors shows that their activities are very much small-scale in nature. We do not have details about the plinth area of the houses they build but these are essentially small 2-3 roomed houses. The jobber-cum-contractors we met all took up independent construction (under supervision of the engineer/architect) of such houses. But this does not mean that the Tamilian jobber-cum-contractor is never engaged in construction of larger houses or in commercial buildings. However, when a Tamilian jobber-cum-contractor is engaged in larger construction, he is always a 'sub-contractor' under the overall supervision of an established Keralite contractor or Construction firm.

Yet another indication of their limited scale of their operations is the background of these jobber-cum-contractors. This again we will discuss in detail later when we deal with changes in skill. But the point to be noted here is that all these jobber-cum-contractors are former masons themselves. Thus all the eight civil jobber-cum-contractors we met had turned from masonry to taking up civil contractors. This is very much the usual phenomenon. The size of construction they can take up is limited not merely by their capabilities but by the resources they have.

To sum up, while the term 'contractor' is commonly used for the Tamil migrants in charge of construction, it could convey a wrong impression. First of all, he combines a number of functions: he himself recruits labourers but he is not merely a recruiter, he supervises the construction of houses but on occasion he also works along with his masons as well. Secondly, he is always a skilled mason who has now taken to contracting work. Finally, his limited resources confine his independent activities to construction of small residential

houses. When he is engaged in construction of larger buildings he is always a 'sub-contractor' and not in independent charge. The number of workers under him is also small, no more than 10-12 workers.

Before looking at the wages and living-working conditions one must first provide a brief outline of the kinds of work involved in civil construction. Since our discussion is based on our survey of migrants from Reetapuram and these migrants are almost entirely involved in residential house construction we will restrict ourselves to the nature of work in this activity.

#### 4.3 Skill/Job description in Residential Construction

Construction labourers do not form a homogenous group, they differ in terms of skill and wage payment and there are differences between men, women and children in the kind of work done.

Workers in construction are normally divided into two very broad skill categories, masons and helpers. Even among masons skill capabilities vary. Thus the skills for concreting the roof are of a very high order and highly specialised, compared to the skills for brick work. Among helpers as well skills vary. At the lower end there is the entirely unskilled labour in carrying and carting, and at the other end the semi-skilled labour of mixing cement and sand in the right proportions, plastering of walls etc. Helpers in all instances either assist the masons or work directly under their supervision. Regarding the sexual division of labour, only males are masons. Among helpers, the semi-skilled work is done by young men or youth in their teens. All of them aspire to be masons. In fact one can call these helpers 'apprentice masons'. The unskilled labour intensive work of earthwork and carrying loads is done by women and children (boys), with the heavier work done by women.



In this context, it is relevant to outline the activities involved in construction.

1. Excavation for laying foundation

Excavation is done by adult male unskilled labourers (helpers) and the removal of soil by women and boys.

2. Concreting of foundation

Semi-skilled helpers mix the mortar under the supervision of the mason/engineer and pour the concrete, with the levelling done by mason. The foundation is formed upto the surface with stones carried by women helpers. A crucial task performed by masons is the building of the corners.

3. Belt concreting

On the surface of the foundation a belt of concrete is placed. Here again semi-skilled helpers prepare the right mixture of cement, sand and water, it is carried by women and boys and laid under the active supervision of masons.

4. Construction of basement

Before the walls are erected, the foundation is raised to the floor level by building a basement. Formed with stones broken by adult male helpers and carried to the site by women helpers the basement is built, again under the supervision of the masons. The rest of the plinth area is brought to the floor level with soil carried by women and boys.

5. Erection of walls

Women and boys wet the bricks while a group of semi-skilled helpers mix the mortar, both are carried to the site by the women and boys, and the walls erected by the masons with the assistance of semi-skilled helpers.

6. Concreting of sunshades

Shades for windows are built only by skilled masons. It involves placing of the iron rods, erecting the shutters and pouring the concrete to form the shades. At times concreting of these shades is done by a separate group altogether of highly skilled masons who also concrete the roof.

7. Concreting the roof

This is the most important activity in construction. The actual concreting the roof is done by a separate group of highly skilled masons and bar-benders. It is only the large contractor who has these workers with him. Smaller contractors normally employ this group from others when the roof has to be built. Concreting of the roof has to be completed in one day and for this all helpers assist. Additional women helpers are also employed on that day to carry out the extra work of carrying the cement mixture which is prepared as usual by the semi-skilled male helpers.

8. Plastering of walls and the terrace

With the mixture prepared by the semi-skilled helpers, the walls and terrace are plastered by masons with the assistance of semi-skilled helpers. Normally the first coat is applied by the semi-skilled helpers and the next coat by masons. Where superior paints are used, this is done by painters separately employed for this purpose.

## 9. Miscellaneous activities

The above are the main activities. Besides this the miscellaneous activities of building staircases, erecting kitchen slabs, fitting of the closet, construction of compound walls etc. are all done by masons assisted by helpers. (All these are of course activities relating to civil construction. Plumbing and sanitation, electrical wiring etc. are all done by contractors specialising in these activities).

### 4.4 Tamilians and Keralite workers on sites handled by Tamilian contractors

With this outline of the work involved, the skill composition and the sexual division of labour we can now proceed to discuss the related issue of composition of Tamilian and Keralite workers on a work site handled by Tamilian jobber-cum-contractor in residential construction. While discussing this, we have to keep in mind the absence of female migration from Kanyakumari District to Kerala. Given the absence of female migrants the question then is, who performs the work normally done by women in construction? We have seen that the female specific tasks are almost entirely of carrying loads. This is done by boys as well but where the loads are heavy women are employed. Of course males could be utilised for these operations, particularly since a Tamilian adult male helper is paid Rs.20/day and a Keralite female helper is paid only a little less (Rs.18-20/day).<sup>2</sup> However, the work to be done by females is of a temporary nature, so it makes little sense to employ additional Tamil migrant male helpers who would be 'surplus' once these tasks are completed. Hence to meet these temporary incremental labour requirements, contractors prefer to employ women helpers from Kerala for short periods.

Based on the sampled migrants' answers Table 4.1 presents a percentage distribution of the worksites according to different ranges of the proportion of

total workers who are Tamilians in each site.

Table 4.1

Proportion of Tamil workers among total permanent workers on the work sites

Proportion of Tamil workers on work site	No. of worksites
30 - 50%	4 ( 5)
50 - 70%	18 (25)
70 - 90%	37 (51)
> 90%	14 (19)
Total	73 (100)
Average proportion of workers who are Tamilians	78

Figures in brackets represent percentages.

Note: Table excludes those workers working under Kerala contractors and individual workers.

It is self evident from Table 4.1 that in the overwhelming majority of houses which are being built by Tamil jobber-cum-contractors more than 50 per cent of the permanent workers are Tamilians. It should be noted that not all the Keralite workers are women. On occassion, to meet a temporary demand or even under pressure from local unions, Keralite masons or helpers are employed. But on the whole in most of the cases, the Keralite workers employed on work-sites under Tamil contractors are only women.

On worksites handled by Tamilian 'jobber-cum-contractors', Tamil workers constitute the predominant majority. A natural question is how important are Tamil migrants in all of civil construction in Kerala, both residential and commercial, handled by Tamilian as well as Keralite contractors? Without a census

survey or a scientifically designed sample survey an answer to this is not possible and beyond the scope of this particular study. It would be hazardous to make any speculation beyond stating that the employment of Tamil migrant labour in civil construction of both residential houses and commercial buildings has increased since the mid 1970s and that purely visual impressions suggest that in certain parts of Kerala (central and south) they seem to outnumber Keralite labourers.

With this outline of the nature of the Tamilian jobber-cum-contractors', and the composition of Tamilian and Keralite workers on sites controlled by Tamilians we can look in detail at the wage system, job-mobility and skill acquisition, working and living conditions etc. of migrant labourers from Reetapuram in Kanyakumari District.

#### 4.5 Wage Systems

Wage rates vary not only between helpers and masons among the migrants, but also among the helpers and masons itself. There is no 'standard' wage rate, it depends very much on the years of experience as well as the skill possessed by a migrant.

Tables 4.2 and 4.3 present the percentage distribution of the daily wage received separately for helpers and the different categories of masons (apprentice masons, masons and headmasons in our sample population) by our sampled migrants from Reetapuram. The average daily wage received by helpers and masons turns out to be Rs.37 and Rs.20 respectively.

Table 4.4 presents a comparative picture of the daily average wage received by a helper and mason in Kanyakumari District and what they receive in Kerala and what the ruling wage for Keralite construction workers is at present.

Table 4.2

Present daily wages for masons

Wage Rate (in Rs.)/day	No. of persons
20 - 30	7 (11)
30 - 35	19 (30)
35 - 40	28 (45)
40 - 45	7 (11)
45 - 50	2 ( 3)
Total	63 (100)
Average wage rate	Rs.37/-

Table 4.3

Present daily wages for helpers

Wage rate (in Rs.)/day	No. of persons
12 - 16	4 (24)
16 - 22	8 (47)
22 - 27	5 (29)
Total	17 (100)
Average wage rate	Rs.20/-

Figures in brackets indicate percentate of total.

Table 4.4

Comparative wage rates between Kanyakumari District and Kerala

Sl.No.	Workers origin	Daily wage of a male helper in Rs. (average)	Daily wage of a masons in Rs. (average)
1	In Kanyakumari	15	30
2	In Kerala (Tamilian workers)	20	37
3	In Kerala (Keralite workers)	23	40

Source: Survey data.

It is obvious from the Table 4.4 that, the wage rate received by migrant workers is higher than what obtains in Kanyakumari but lower than that normally paid to Keralite workers.<sup>3</sup> This also shows quite clearly that while the migrants earn more in Kerala, they are paid less than what a Keralite worker would get. That they provide a source of relatively cheap labour and are therefore employed by the Tamilian 'jobber-cum-contractors' is an obvious

point that does not need any elaboration.

Wages on worksites handled by Tamilian jobber-cum-contractors are not paid daily or weekly. Wage accounts are in fact settled thrice in a year — on the three occasions that workers return home. These three occasions are (i) Easter in April (ii) in August on the occasion of feast of Assumption of our Lady and (iii) in December for Christmas. However, on worksites a daily allowance to meet day-to-day expenses is paid. For our sample population this was on the average Rs.14/day for helpers and Rs.20/day for masons. The workers are expected to meet their food and other expenses from this amount.<sup>4</sup>

In addition to this, workers are given another 'advance' once in a month or once in two months to remit home. The amount varies (see the section on 'subsistence' remittances below) but on the average it is around Rs.150-200 per month. It must be noted that this is not an advance but actually part of his outstanding wage. These amounts are set off against the total wage payable at the time the worker visits his home thrice in a year.

In settling the outstanding wage payable, the advance given at the time of recruitment, if any, is also deducted. Other possible deductions include any loan or further advance to meet a migrant's emergency needs (an urgent request from home for example) as well as daily allowance.

With the adjustment of all these advances and ad-hoc payments against the total wage payable on three occasions in the whole year, there is enough scope for manipulation of accounts. What makes this almost a certainty is that the jobber-cum-contractor never maintains a proper system of accounts nor do workers sign any receipts for any payment made to them.

What is surprising is that the worker knows the daily wage he is going to be paid only at the time of final settling of accounts. At the time of

recruitment, this is not decided. The migrant enquires of others who have worked with the jobber-cum-contractor, the wage they are presently being paid. And where the jobber-cum-contractor is recruiting workers through intermediaries he gives a general idea of the wage he will pay. But the worker never knows what his actual daily wage is going to be. It is only when the final accounts are settled that the workers ask on what daily wage his dues have been calculated. Only highly skilled masons ask for and obtain the wage they want. Given this uncertainty over even the daily wage it is not surprising that disputes and quarrels often breakout and is the main reason why workers frequently change the jobber-cum-contractors.

The system of paying wages, manner of maintaining accounts are then all informal leaving sufficient room for disputes. In all this the worker is almost always in a disadvantageous position — not knowing what his actual wage rate is, being illiterate and not maintaining his own accounts. Therefore the workers often feels, perhaps not without sufficient cause, that he has been paid less than what he is entitled to.

One could reasonably speculate that with all these frequent advances and the absence of a proper accounting system, a situation may well arise where it is claimed that a worker has received advances which total more than the wage he is due, thereby being 'bonded' in some way to the contractor and being forced to work for him for years on end. However, we found no evidence of such relations between workers and jobber-cum-contractors. The total advances received at any point are always less than the wage he is entitled to upto that time. Another fact which suggests that workers are not permanently indebted to jobber-cum-contractors is their frequent shifting of the jobber-cum-contractors they work with. As we shall see later, workers rarely seem to stay with the same jobber-



cum-contractor for more than a year or two. If a process of permanent indebtedness is generated, the opposite would be the case, with workers being forced to remain with the same jobber-cum-contractor for years on end. But what cannot be denied is that with manipulation of accounts the workers do receive a wage which is less than what they are entitled to.

Regarding employment, workers claim to get 'continuous' employment throughout the year. Actual magnitudes are hard to come by but we do know that there are breaks between contracts, stoppages during the monsoon and when materials are not available. On all these occasions workers do not receive any wage. Not to mention Sundays and their visits home. An estimation of the possible average annual days of employment is made below (pp. 98-100).

#### 4.6 Skill acquisition and job mobility

We have seen that few migrants had prior experience in construction work and all begin working as helpers.<sup>5</sup> We have also argued that what prompts migration is not just the incremental wage that a worker gets when he first migrates, but the aspiration of acquiring skills and ultimately becoming a mason.<sup>6</sup>

The traditional system by which one becomes a mason was a long drawn out one. A migrant construction worker would begin by performing only simple tasks and was expected to observe and help the mason or headmason under whom he was placed. The process of learning masonry work was a slow one, being subjected to abuse by both the mason and the jobber-cum-contractor was seen as a part of this process; we were told that earlier it took as much as 8 to 10 years before a helper was recognised as being sufficiently skilled to be given masonry work. When a spade and plumbline were given to the helper for his own use it symbolised

a recognition of his skill and capability to independently do masonry work.

Yet, such a formal, rigorous and long drawn out process no longer exists at least among our sample migrant workers. We did find that of our sample of 80 workers from Reetapuram 63 (79 per cent) had changed their job once during their career, i.e. had become/considered themselves masons. This 79 per cent of our sampled migrants claimed to have acquired the skill of a mason, after an average of 4 years of work as helpers. The other 17 (21 per cent) were still helpers (these 17 helpers had on the average been working for only 2 years as helpers).

The 63 workers who called themselves 'masons' include older migrants who had gone through the earlier cook-helper-mason stages. Excluding these workers, Table 4.5 presents the percentage distribution of the number of years the more recent migrants took to become masons, on the average it has taken 3 years, while the older migrants had taken on the average 6 years.

Table 4.5

Number of years taken for acquiring masonry skill

No. of years taken	No. of masons
0 - 2	19 (44)
2 - 4	16 (36)
4 - 8	9 (20)
Total	44 (100)

Figures in brackets indicate percentages.

This reduction in the time taken to become 'masons' in some way reflects the breakdown of the traditional apprenticeship system. It is true that even now helpers are expected to assist and watch the masons at work and it is understood that overtime they will become masons. But in this period of increasing

demand for skilled construction workers, helpers after just a few years of apprenticeship claim that they are capable of masonry work. Of course, according to the traditional standards (not just in terms of the number of years as helpers but also in terms of the skills they possess) they would not be considered masons. But at present they are recognised as masons and are able to find work because there is a demand for masons. And helpers when they feel confident enough to work as masons switch contractors knowing that they will not get a mason's full wage with the present contractor. Furthermore, a process of 'deskilling' of work that has been taking place in the construction industry is an additional reason for a shorter apprenticeship period.<sup>7</sup>

Yet, the jobber-cum-contractors are all aware of the fact that in their eyes even before helpers are fully capable of doing independent masonry work they try and obtain work as masons. A need for masons makes these jobber-cum-contractors take them on but the wage that they pay would depend on their own evaluation of the quality of work. It is perhaps this uncertainty over the quality of masonry (in a period where skills are claimed quickly) that leaves the wage rate unsettled at the time of recruitment. Additionally, when a mason receives a wage which is lower than what he expected when he was recruited he does feel that his skills are not recognised enough and chooses to work with another contractor.<sup>8</sup> So one can argue that while the shortage of skilled construction labour has allowed an earlier and quicker recognition of skill, there is at the same time an awareness on the part of the jobber-cum-contractors that the traditional apprenticeship system has broken down. All this therefore creates an uncertainty over the wage rate and leads to workers frequently changing jobber-cum-contractors.

The same conditions of high demand for construction which have made more flexible and fluid the hierarchy of skills reflect themselves in another

phenomenon: the relative ease with which masons become 'contractors' themselves. In our sample of 11 jobber-cum-contractors all but one were former masons who were now acting as contractors.<sup>9</sup> What is required for a mason to become a contractor is not only knowledge and skill in construction but more important initiative, enterprise and bringing himself and his capabilities to the notice of the civil engineers/architects designing houses as also the people in that area who are planning to construct houses. It is when he is still a mason that the engineers/architects are able to observe his capabilities.<sup>10</sup> It is also common, perhaps less common than the former, for masons to become 'sub-contractors' to construction firms or labour recruiters/supervisors for Keralite contractors. In fact of the 10 masons turned contractors we met, 6 of them were doing independent work and 2 of them acting as sub-contractors and 2 were doing both kinds of work.

But it would be wrong to infer that this upward mobility is either widespread or is a once and for all unidirectional process. For one thing, these masons turned jobber-cum-contractors remain persons who can take up only small scale construction contracts.

Moreover, as we have already seen (p.74 ), our sampled jobber-cum-contractors had a very small work team, an average of 12 workers. In addition, these masons turned contractors do not merely supervise but actually work along with the others doing masonry work. This again reflects the essentially limited nature of their transformation into 'contractors'.

Since these masons turned jobber-cum-contractors are persons of limited resources it is only to be expected that at times they face severe financial difficulties or fail to obtain contracts on a regular basis. This results in these jobber-cum-contractors being forced to revert to their status as masons.

We ourselves met two such masons who had taken up contracts, then ran into debt and consequently given up such efforts and resumed working as masons.<sup>11</sup> Hence, if it appears relatively easy to turn from pure masonry to undertaking contracts, the dangers of independent work make a 'downward mobility' equally likely.

The frequently shifting position and status also shows itself in the degree of respect implied in the terms used. Thus, earlier contractors particularly those engaged in church construction, were known as *maistries*<sup>12</sup> in Kanyakumari District and a certain respect given for their skills as contractors as well as masons. Now that respect and regard is no longer there. Workers as well as other inhabitants of the originating villages refer to these masons turned contractors/jobber-cum-contractors as *condraks* or worse '*podi-condrak*' (literally meaning petty contractors' with a certain contempt implied in the term). The use of this word *condrak* rather than *maistry* also signifies a new kind of contractor, one who is different from the traditional contractor in Kanyakumari District.

#### 4.7 Migrant Labourers and the number of 'Contractors' they have worked with

One important aspect of the migrant's work in Kerala which we have already mentioned is the frequent shifting of the jobber-cum-contractor they work under and also the number of places in Kerala where they have worked. Among our sampled migrants from Reetapuram the phenomenon of frequently changing their employer is common. Table 4.6 presents the size class distribution of the number of years that the sampled migrant workers have been with the present jobber-cum-contractors.

Table 4.6

Years of employment with present contractor

Years	No. of migrants
0 - 1	33 (45)
1 - 2	20 (27)
2 - 3	6 ( 8)
3 - 4	2 ( 3)
> 4	12 (17)
Total	73 (100)

Figures in brackets indicates percentages.

Note: The Table is derived without taking into account those who are working under Kerala contractors and individual workers (80-7 = 73).

As it is self-evident from Table 4.6, a predominant majority seem to have been working with the present contractor for 2 years or less.

Table 4.7 gives a cross classification of the years as migrant labour with the number of contractors each migrant has so far worked with. This table gives a more complete picture and shows very clearly that migrants frequently shift contractors and stay with a particular contractor for no more than 1.8 years on the average.

We have already touched upon some of the reasons for workers choosing to shift contractors. They are:

(1) Disputes over the wage rate and accusations of manipulation of accounts: We have seen that at the time of recruitment the actual wage rate is not stated and is precisely known only when the accounts are settled before the worker visits home. Dissatisfaction over the wage finally paid as well as suspicions

Table 4.7

Distribution of migrants according to Number of years as migrants and number of Contractors worked with

Number of years as migrants	Number of Contractors worked with	Number of Contractors worked with				Total No. of migrants	Average No. of years as migrant	Average No. of Contractors worked with	Average No. of years with a contractor
		1	2-4	4-8	>8				
0 - 5 years		13	10	2	-	25	2.8	2.1	1.3
5 - 10 years		2	15	4	2	23	7.7	4	1.9
10 - 15 years		-	3	3	2	8	12.9	7.9	1.6
15 - 25 years		1	-	1	10	12	20.3	14.4	1.4
25 - 35 years		-	-	3	2	5	31	8.6	3.60
	Total	16	28	13	16	73	10.2	5.8	1.8

Note: Table excludes those who are working under Kerala contractors and Individual workers.

regarding the accounts of the total days worked, amount given as daily expenses, 'advances' given etc. all contribute to a migrant's decision not to return to the same contractor. This must be seen as a form of protest against the conditions of work and wages.

(2) A migrant worker's attempt to 'jumb' his skill position is another reason for choosing to work with a new contractor. When he knows that his present contractor is either aware of his limited capabilities or is unwilling to recognise his skills, the migrant attempts to switch to a new contractor.

(3) A related reason is a worker's desire to acquire more skills. Fearing that continuing with one particular contractor he will have to do only a particular kind of work, he shifts to another contractor in the hope of acquiring a diversity of experience.

(4) A fourth and final reason has got to do with the expected duration of employment with the present contractor. If the present construction activity is nearing completion and the workers fears that there will be a gap before the jobber-cum-contractor obtains another contract, the worker would seek a new jobber-cum-contractor during his visit home.

Thus partly as a result of the migrants frequently shifting contractors, we find that they do not work in one area alone. As Table 4.8 shows, half of the sampled workers have worked in 4 or more towns in Kerala.

However, we must note again that though they move around they are still concentrated in central Travancore, in and around the towns of Tiruvalla, Chengannoor, Changanacherry and Kottayam.

To repeat what we had earlier argued, this evidence of workers being with contractors for only short periods confirms our observation that while there is



Table 4.8

Distribution of number of places where migrants have worked  
in Kerala

No. of places	Persons
1	10 (12)
2	12 (15)
3	19 (24)
4	12 (15)
5	27 (34)
Total	80 (100)

Figures in brackets denotes percentages.

short payment of wages, workers are not bonded in any sense to their jobber-cum-contractor/employers. If there was such a bondage one would hardly find that on the average our sampled migrant workers remain with a contractor for no more than 1.8 years.<sup>13</sup>

#### 4.8 Working and Living conditions in Kerala

We visited 7 construction sites in Kerala in Chengannoor, Tiruvalla, Changanacherry, Kottayam as well as in Trichur to obtain an idea of the living conditions of these migrant workers. What we did find was a dismal picture of their poor living conditions and a complete isolation from the local population.

Workers either live on the site itself (mainly where large buildings are constructed) or in dilapidated and run-down houses which resemble sheds more than houses and which are taken on a monthly rent of about Rs.60-70. Crowded into a small area, there are no beds or mattresses. They sleep on the

floor using their small suitcases as pillows. There are absolutely no sanitation facilities at all. As one worker put it "we live like dogs here". The jobber-cum-contractor normally does not live with the workers. Even if he was himself a mason just a few months earlier, he is careful to maintain his distance from the workers and what he sees as a superior social and economic position. The jobber-cum-contractor usually lives in a rented room in a small lodge. On occasion when he does live with his workers, at times this need to maintain his separate identity goes to the extent of making a partition in the rented house, with the workers crowded in one part and the contractor in the other.

For the workers the day begins at 6 in the morning and they are in the worksite by 7.30 am. The working day extends upto 6 in the evening with an hour's break in between for lunch. All in all the migrant workers put in almost 10 hours of work. On sites where Tamil and Keralite workers are together it is quite apparent that while the Tamil workers are on the job for 10 hours the Keralite workers put in no more than 7-8 hours and yet receive a higher wage.

Most of the time they have two meals a day, lunch and dinner and almost always in hotels. Where there are no hotels in the vicinity, lunch is provided by the builder-owner. This is in fact one of the conditions of the jobber-cum-contractor to save on the time needed to go out and take lunch. Dinner they always have outside in hotels.

This is the routine for six days in the week. Sundays are special days particularly for the younger migrants. They demand and receive a higher daily allowance that day, which is spent on visits to the heart of towns for films, restaurants and liquor.

While the workers themselves are definite in their preference for living in Kerala, free from traditions and strictures of their own village, their daily lives in Kerala present an unenviable picture. For one thing they have almost no relations or social contact with the local population. In fact a Tamil migrant worker is referred to by Keralites disdainfully as a '*pandy*', figuratively meaning a 'dirty person'. They are known for working hard but in this acknowledgement is also contempt for the fact (which is of course made use of) that they work at lower wages. In the Keralites contempt for these workers is also the feeling that the migrants are 'meek and submissive'. Living in such an environment, it is also not surprising that all adult workers seem to spend a larger amount of their income on alcohol with some of them drinking everyday. In fact the only workers who do not drink are the child workers. Amongst these child workers, the sign of independence is smoking. It is not surprising to find 12-13 year olds who are habitual smokers.

Five of our sampled migrants had married Keralite women, settled down in Kerala and yet made yearly visits to Reetapuram. Normally all of them visit home thrice a year — Easter in April, on the occasion of the feast of Assumption of our Lady in August and Christmas in December. In addition, visits are made during emergencies. Thus in a year these migrants hardly spend on the whole one month at home.

The younger migrants claim to have sexual relations with Keralite women, particularly women who work with them. But this must be seen with some caution, for there may well be a fair element of exaggeration in their statements, seeking as they are to assert their independence away from home.

As we have seen earlier these migrants get a higher wage than what they received in Kanyakumari yet it is less than what Keralite workers are paid. This is

clearly due to weak bargaining power of these migrants. Trade Unionism is completely absent among these migrants.

#### 4.9 'Subsistence' Remittances

What is the magnitude of the amount of money they send home and what use is this put to? The reported annual average money sent by masons in our sample was Rs.2280/- and Rs.937/- from helpers. In a sense it is surprising that the amount sent is as low as Rs.200/- per month, hardly enough to meet the family's needs in Reetapuram. The high level of expenditure of workers in Kerala, almost half of their daily wage, naturally reduces the amount available to send home.

However, while this is the average annual amount sent, there is often more than one migrant worker from a family.<sup>14</sup> Secondly while the average annual money sent by masons is Rs.2280/- 17 of them (mainly heads of households) sent Rs.3000/- and above. Thirdly, this money does not always constitute the sole source of income for the family in Reetapuram. Women members of the households often work as vegetable vendors and lace making for export is an important source of subsidiary income. Fourthly, in the case of helpers, this money always constitute only a subsidiary source of income as these helper migrants are mainly youngsters.

How often is these money sent home? Table 4.9 presents the data for the sample population.

As Table 4.9 shows, majority of migrants sent home some money every month (Rs.150 by masons and Rs.75 by helpers) while the next largest category is only at the time of visits home. The latter mostly comprise of helpers. Those making weekly and fortnightly remittances and also those sending money

Table 4.9

Periodicity of Amount sent

Sl.No.	Periodicity	Persons
1	Weekly + Fortnightly	4 ( 5)
2	Monthly	45 (56)
3	Once in two months	6 ( 8)
4	On visits home	25 (31)
Total		80 (100)

Figures in brackets indicates percentages.

once in two months take some part of their income with them when they visit their homes.

With this small amount of money sent home it is hardly surprising that the majority of migrants could only meet consumption requirements. Thus as Table 4.10 shows, 64 per cent of our sampled migrants said income earned was sufficient only to meet consumption requirements of the family. Expenses for marriages and repayment of debt was the next largest item.

Only 10 of the migrants were able to make any capital investment: 2 had bought land and 8 (all of whom were migrants of many years) had been able to construct houses for themselves.

All in all inspite of all the attractions of employment in Kerala, the income earned is enough to meet little more than the subsistence needs of the family at home and the workers' needs in Kerala.

Table 4.10

Utilization of money sent home

Sl.No.	Items	No. of persons
1	Consumption requirements only	51 (64)
2	Repairs and modification of houses	7 ( 9)
3	To meet family problems (sisters/daughter's marriages, and debt repayment)	12 (15)
4	Purchase of land (10 - 15 cents)	2 ( 2)
5	Built small houses (migrants of many years)	8 (10)
Total		80 (100)

Figures in brackets denotes percentages.

4.10 Annual Income

We can attempt to make a rough estimate of the average annual income of our sampled migrant workers from Reetapuram, separately for helpers and masons. We can also breakdown this income into (i) Total Daily Allowance received (ii) Amount sent home (iii) Other expenditure.

For this, we do have the (a) average annual daily wage (b) average daily allowance and (c) average annual remittances. What we do not have is the actual annual days of employment. Our respondents talked only in terms of 'continuous' employment throughout the year. In the first instance one must deduct Sundays which are non-working days and the visits home approximately thrice a year. In addition there are the work stoppages due to (1) the monsoon, (2) gaps in employment between contracts/contractors and (3) non-availability of materials. Since we have no precise quantitative information on any of these we can only make a rough estimate or arrive at a range of annual employment. We put this at 220 to 260 days/annum. The latter assumes (a) 3 weeks

for visits home thrice a year, with each visit (including time for travel) being of a week's duration which is what we observed in August '85 (b) 40 holidays (Sundays) for which no wage is paid but a daily allowance provided during the period of employment and (c) non-availability of work for 40 days due to factors (1) - (3) as mentioned above. This upper end of the range, 260 days of employment, can be seen as the maximum possible employment. One must allow for at least 40 days of non-availability of materials, gaps between contracts etc. In the lower, estimate of 220 days (a) and (b) remain the same but (c) is assumed to be 80 days i.e. double the earlier estimate of the number of days on which work is not available.

This range of 220-260 days of annual employment is a reasonable estimate. It does provide an order of magnitude.

Based on the reported wage, daily allowance, remittances and our estimate of the annual days of employment, Table 4.11 below presents the average annual income and its composition.

Three points should be made in conclusion. The first is that inspite of the attraction of migration, even for a skilled worker like a mason the annual income is only Rs.8140 - Rs.9620, or Rs.678 - Rs.802 per month. For helpers, of course, it is even lower: Rs.4400 - Rs.5200/year and Rs.367 - Rs.433/month. Secondly, as far as the family in Reetapuram is concerned, the 'footloose' nature of life as a migrant which makes them eat in hotels etc. consumes as much as 60-61 per cent of the annual income for masons and 77-78 per cent for helpers, leaving only — (net) Rs.3140 - Rs.3820 and Rs.1000 - Rs.1140 in a year for the families of masons and helpers respectively. Thirdly, one aspect of migrant worker's expenditure that we have not mentioned so far is their purchase of minor consumer items like watches, clothes, bags etc. for themselves and

Table 4.11

Estimated Average annual income of the migrants

Sl.No.	Components of Income	Mason	Helpers
1	Average daily wage (Rs./day)	37	20
2	Average number of days of employment/year	220-260	220-260
I	Estimated total average annual income (Rs.)	8140-9620	4400-5200
3	Average daily allowance (Rs./day)	20	14
4(a)	Average annual amount received as daily allowance (Rs.)	5000-5800	3400-4060
	(b) Percentage of annual income received as annual allowance	60-61	77-78
5	Average amount of money sent home (yearly) (Rs.)	2280	937
II	Total (4a + 5) (Rs.)	7280-7480	4337-4997
III	Average net expenditure on other items (Rs.) (I - II)	860-2140	63-203

Note: Daily allowance is paid on working days plus on Sundays and also during work stoppages. Hence annual amount received as daily allowance is computed at Rs.20 x 250 and 290 working days for masons and Rs.14 x 250 and 290 working days for helpers.

Source: 1. Daily wage : Chapter IV p. 82  
 2. Daily allowance : Chapter IV p. 83  
 3. Money sent home : Chapter IV p. 96

for their family. This they do so just before their visits home. This is given under the item 'average net expenditure on items' in Table 4.11. This also assumes that if there is any "saving" it comes from the amount sent home.

On the whole their annual income is not very high. Secondly, since they are constantly on the move and have no settled housing or kitchen facilities a major part of even this income is consumed in daily expenditure.



Notes and References

1. The large jobber-cum-contractor with 6 worksites on hand who had as many as 70 workers with him is a more correct representative of contractors than of jobber-cum-contractors.
2. The wages for various categories of workers will be discussed later.
3. There is yet another distinction and that is the differences in wage received by a migrant worker when he works for a Tamilian contractor and when he works directly (and not through an intermediary Tamilian supervisor/recruiter) for a Keralite contractor. The wage in the latter case is always about 10 per cent more. In such instances the Keralite contractor does not recruit the migrant himself in Tamil Nadu, but the worker switches employment after coming to Kerala (we are talking here of a minor or small Keralite contractor who cannot afford to employ a Tamilian supervisor/labour recruiter.. The larger contractors do of course almost always recruit Tamil workers through this intermediary). Where a Kerala contractor is directly supervising such construction, Keralite workers form a predominant majority of the construction group and when they are paid the ruling wage, the migrant worker refuses to work at a lower wage. Still the contractor prefers the migrant workers as he is 'docile' and not militant like his Keralite workers and so does not mind paying the ruling wage. (It is only workers who have lived for sometime in Kerala, who are already familiar with their new environment and who have some initiative who 'switch' employment. Furthermore, this is very much a new phenomenon: the five migrants in our sample who had switched employment had all done so in the past year. Another phenomenon is that of migrants choosing to work independently doing repairs and other forms of minor construction work. These 'individual workers' again are migrants of considerable skill and initiative).
4. This amount varies from worker to worker as well as during the week - it is higher on Sundays. When there is no work and on occasions when work stops for a while due to non-availability of building materials, a daily allowance is provided though the particular days are (while settling the final accounts) considered non-working days.
5. A couple of decades ago, when it was common for construction gangs to cook and eat together, migrant workers would begin as cooks. Boys in their teens would begin this way and were called '*Kusinipayyan*' (kitchen boys). Today in fact jobber-cum-contractors frequently refer to this earlier process when they say, "*Karichatti khaluvinal thani kaye vallayum*" meaning only with the experience of cleaning the vessels will your wrist become flexible enough to do masonry work.
6. This shows itself very clearly when parents decide to send their sons as migrant workers, they try and see that their sons work with a contractor whom they know or is one of their relatives in the expectation that the contractors will take an interest in imparting the necessary skills for becoming a mason.

7. See for instance Harilal K.N. Organization of production and Labour Process in building construction Industry in Kerala - M.Phil thesis, Centre for Development Studies, 1986.
8. Another source of resentment is from comparison of his wage with other workers of the same contractor.
9. The loan exception was following his father's occupation who himself a contractor.
10. A dramatic case of this is the type in which two of our sample contractors turned from masonry to contracting work. According to them when they were yet masons and the house owner was unhappy with his contractor, the latter was asked to leave and the mason asked to continue and complete the work.
11. In the contemptuous words of a brick-kiln owner in Reetapuram who was earlier a mason in Kerala, 'these migrants go as helpers, after a couple of years of working with different contractors they claim to be masons, then after some time they ask themselves why they can't become contractors, they get hold of a few workers and take up contracts. But within a year or so these *podi* (small) *condraks* unable to obtain contracts, are forced to give it up and start working as masons again.
12. This has a different meaning in Kerala where a mason as well as small contractor is called a *maistry* at present.
13. In response to our specific questions of whether jobber-cum-contractors impose rules and obligations over the duration of employment, one migrant worker's response was "we are not *adimais* (slaves), we leave his employment whenever we want to!"
14. About 58 per cent of our sample population came from single migrant families, and a substantial proportion (36 per cent) had more than one migrant with a few (6 per cent) as many as 4 migrants in each family. This only confirms the pressure on family members to migrate as well as the attraction of earning more in the future and the promise of a sense of freedom in a different environment.

CHAPTER V

*SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS*

## CHAPTER V

### SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

5.0 We set out to investigate the phenomenon of migrant workers from Kanyakumari District in Tamil Nadu to Kerala's construction sector. We hoped to cover the entire gamut of issues beginning from the socio-economic background of the migrant workers and their recruitment right up to their living and working conditions in Kerala.

5.1 First of all we demonstrated in Chapter II the operation of the push factors in Kanyakumari District and the pull factors in Kerala that has made for this migration. A low and perhaps even stagnant per capita availability of employment in both the agricultural and industrial sectors in Kanyakumari District in a period of rising population forced people to look elsewhere for work. At the same time, beginning from the mid 1970s, there was a boom in construction activity in Kerala. This arose from the high inflow of remittances from the Keralite workers in the Middle East, a large part of which, according to all available evidence, was used for construction of houses as well as channelled into other forms of real estate construction. We also showed that in addition to a greater demand for labour in construction there has been a differential in the wage rate that obtains in Kanyakumari District and the average wage rate in Kerala. It is in this context of simultaneous operation of these push and pull factors since the mid 1970s that workers have moved out

of Kanyakumari seeking better employment and wages in the hitherto thriving construction sector of Kerala.

5.2 For studying these migrant workers we decided to carry out a survey of one village in Kanyakumari District and also follow these workers to their places of work in Kerala. In Chapter III we looked at the migrants from Reetapuram village. How important this migration has become in recent years is obvious from our estimate of migrants at as much as 25 per cent of the male workforce in our surveyed village of Reetapuram.

5.3 The first thing to be noted is that while the pace and magnitude of migration has increased in the past decade, it is by no means of new phenomenon. In Reetapuram itself we found former migrants who had earlier not only worked in Kerala but had also worked in the construction sector of Kerala. However, it was quite clear from the sample data on period of migration and year of first migration that this has increased dramatically in the past decade.

5.4 Of the migrants' socio-economic background, we found that they were (i) predominantly landless (ii) had little education and (iii) they no longer worked in their traditional occupations but mainly in various kinds of 'coolie' or general labour. We also found that almost all of them had no experience of working in the construction prior to migration and that almost all of them had first migrated when they were still in their teens.

5.5 From our survey we were also able to bring out the process of recruitment wherein Tamilian jobber-cum-contractor 'gathered' together youngsters who themselves or their parents sought work in Kerala. 'Advances' prior to joining work were sometimes given and sometimes not given. But what is particularly

interesting is that in recent years migrants, particularly the younger workers, have refused to take an advance.

5.6 In Chapter IV we began with trying to delineate the position of the Tamil contractor in Kerala's construction sector, both in civil-residential construction as well as in construction of commercial complexes and large buildings. We showed that the term 'contractor' is a misnomer as he is essentially, particularly in civil residential construction, no more than a jobber-cum-contractor. He is a person of limited resources with a team of an average of 12 workers, who even when in independent charge of construction can handle only small scale activities. In larger construction he is only a sub-contractor working under a firm based in Kerala or under a Keralite contractor. From our small survey of the jobber-cum-contractor from Reetapuram we substantiated these observations. It is these jobber-cum-contractor who recruit the migrants, pay their wages and supervise the work, sometimes even working along with them.

5.7 The macro observations of a differential in wage and employment between Kanyakumari and Kerala was substantiated from our survey wherein we found that on the average the migrant workers when they first migrated found 2.4 days of work more per work in Kerala and received a wage which was 131 per cent higher than in Kanyakumari District. We also argued that this was not the only reason which sustained migration. The skill aspirations and expected future job mobility of these workers was an important factor in this process, prospects which would not have been available for them as coolie labour in Kanyakumari District. Once again our survey found that migrants usually began as helpers and overtime became masons. Thus 79 per cent of our sampled migrants claimed to have acquired the skills of a mason, after an average of 4 years of work as helpers.

5.8 An important aspect of this skill acquisition and job mobility is that the workers now take a much shorter duration to claim greater skills and find corresponding employment. Thus of the 79 per cent of migrants who had turned from helpers to masons, the older migrants had taken on the average 6 years to become masons while the more recent migrants had taken only 3 years. In an occupation in which the tradition has been one of long and arduous apprenticeship, this has been possible due to two factors (i) a great demand for labour so much so that even 'quasi-skilled' workers are able to find employment as fully skilled workers and (ii) a process of deskilling in the construction sector in recent years which now demands lesser skills.

5.9 The other aspect of mobility is that masons hope to and at times do become contractors or rather jobber-cum-contractors. However, we saw that as common as this process was downward mobility back to masonry, when contracts were unavailable or resources were too limited.

5.10 We showed how contractor-labourer relations were always strained and full of animosity in spite of the fact that more often than not the jobber-cum-contractor had the same social and economic background as the workers. Wage accounts were never maintained properly, short payment of wages common, and workers terminated their employment quite frequently as a sign of protest against working conditions and moved elsewhere knowing that in a period of high demand for construction labour work would be found. One interesting feature of the wage relation was that the actual wage to be paid was known to the worker only at the time of final settling of accounts, done usually thrice a year. This we argued was used by the jobber-cum-contractor to first evaluate the workers real skill capability in a period when workers often claimed greater skills than they actually possessed. This uncertainty over the wage was one common factor behind

workers changing their contractor-employer. Thus our sampled migrant workers were with a jobber-cum-contractor for no more than 1.8 years on the average.

5.11 We also found that though there was a system of granting advances this did not lead to 'tying' or any form of bondage wherein the worker was forced to be with the same jobber-cum-contractor for years on end. Indirect evidence for this was the low average duration of employment with a jobber-cum-contractor. Secondly while there was no explicit rate of interest on these advances, the adhoc system of settling of accounts did give rise to suspicions of manipulation of accounts.

5.12 Information on the remittances sent home by the sampled migrants indicated that they were no more than 'subsistence' remittances. Most of this could meet little more than consumption needs of the family at Reetapuram and capital investment in terms of acquisition of land or building new homes was rare.

5.13 On the annual income of these migrants, we attempted to make estimates. While these estimates are by no means accurate they do provide an order of magnitude. They revealed that while income earned was undoubtedly more than what they earned or could hope to earn in Reetapuram, it still left little margin beyond subsistence. The nature of a migrant worker's life in Kerala — frequently on the move with no proper housing has meant that a large proportion of annual income (60-61 per cent in the case of masons and 77-78 per cent in the case of helpers) goes to meet daily expenses. This naturally reduces the money available for sending home.

5.14 It is also fairly obvious that almost all legal provisions for these migrants are observed more in the breach than in their compliance. The only



exception is the wage received. The legal daily minimum wage, as notified in 1983, was Rs.20.85 for masons and Rs.13.85 for helpers (See Kerala Gazettee Vol.XXVIII, Government of Kerala, Labour (E) Department, March 1983, p.2.) Our sampled migrants in 1985 received on the average Rs.37 and Rs.20 respectively. Even, after accounting for inflation between 1983 and 1985 this is undoubtedly higher than the notified minimum wage. However, one must first of all note that this has been possible not because of enforcement by trade union pressure but because of the boom conditions in the construction sector which has greatly increased the demand for both skilled and semi-skilled labour.

Second and more important, in all other respects the migrant workers do not enjoy any of the fruits of legislation. Thus while the prescribed hours of work are 8 hours a day, our sampled migrants worked on the average a minimum of 10 hours every day.

The Revised Minimum Wage Act (1983) further stipulates that contractors have to pay Dearness allowance (D.A), Hilly tracts allowance, etc. to workers (p.3-4). None of these legal provisions have been effected.

Apart from the Minimum Wage Act, the Inter-State Migrant Workmen Act of 1979 has laid down certain rules and regulations to be afforded to migrant workers (IMWA, Regulation of Employment and Conditions of Service, 1983). For example, an inter-state migrant workmen is entitled to displacement allowance and journey allowance in addition to his wages (Ibid., p.7). According to this Act, employers must (a) ensure regular payment of wages (b) provide and maintain suitable residential accommodation to such workmen during the period of employment and (c) provide free medical facilities to the workmen, etc. (Ibid., pp.6-8). None of these rules are followed by our sampled contractors.

5.15 An equally distressing aspect of the migrant worker's life in Kerala is that he is completely cut off from the local population with no social contact whatsoever. The local population also see these migrant workers with disdain, as workers who are docile and willing to work longer hours at lower wages. Not surprisingly they are not part of the mainstream trade-union movement either.

5.16 Two aspects of this migration must be stressed. The first is an obvious point and is a quite common feature of unskilled and semi-skilled migration — the use of migrant labour as a source of cheap supply of labour. It is quite clear from our study that while the migrant workers earn more in Kerala than what they could possibly earn in Kanyakumari, they are paid wages which are lower than what Keralite workers receive and they work longer hours than Keralite workers. In a state where workers are highly unionised and militant, the use of these 'docile' migrants is an obvious strategy by builders to minimise the wage bill. The jobber-cum-contractor is only an agent in this process.

5.17 The second aspect of migration from Reetapuram is the complete absence of women. We know that elsewhere in India migrant construction workers include women usually wives of the male migrants. While it is true that 57 per cent of our sampled migrants were unmarried, the married migrants' wives did not work as construction workers. Secondly, this exclusively male migration is not unique to Reetapuram but apparently true of all migrant construction workers from Kanyakumari District. We do know, however, that migrant construction workers from other parts of Tamil Nadu include women. The reasons for the absence of female migrants seem to lie in the caste composition of these migrants. Almost all migrants came from the Nadar caste. This caste has had

a history of trying to raise itself in the caste hierarchy. One form of this process of 'sanskritization' has taken is a kind of social taboo on women working outside their homes. In Kanyakumari District where Nadar predominate, female participation is much lower than the state average. Hence, it is not merely that women do not migrate as construction workers but that in general female participation in Kanyakumari District is low.

5.18 One must also refer to two major limitations of this study. Firstly, while we have talked of increasing Tamil migration from Kanyakumari to Kerala, and increasing participation of migrant workers in the construction sector in Kerala, we have been unable to provide actual magnitudes. Thus, while we did find that in construction of houses which were handled by Tamil jobber-cum-contractor, Tamilian migrant workers constituted on the average 78 per cent of the work team, we have no idea what proportion of the total construction work-force in Kerala consists of Tamilians and of these how many are from Kanyakumari District. Nor do we have an idea of how many worksites are handled by Tamilian jobber-cum-contractor and the trends over time. These aspects are however outside the scope of this study as they would require either a census survey or an estimation from a sample drawn of all Kerala. Moreover, our focus is more on the living and working conditions of migrant workers than on estimation of aggregate magnitudes.

5.19 The second major limitation of our study is that we have discussed in detail only Tamilian workers in residential construction. We have indicated that Tamil workers are employed in other forms of civil construction as well and that the organisation there is different. This limitation has arisen largely because we began from the originating village in Kanyakumari District and then proceeded to worksites in Kerala, and there seems to be not only a regional

concentration of migrants from particular tracts of Kanyakumari working in particular parts of Kerala but also of specialization of work done by migrants from particular villages. If we had drawn our sample from all construction sites in Kerala we would have had an idea of the organisation of work in all kinds of construction activity. However, this limitation was inevitable as a choice had to be made between beginning with a survey in Kanyakumari or with a sample survey in Kerala. If the latter choice was made then one would not have been able to profile the migrants' background from a particular area. Instead we would have had a heterogenous profile of migrants not only from Kanyakumari District but also from other parts of Tamil Nadu and perhaps from other states as well. We began from an observation of migration from Kanyakumari District and we wished to trace the process from an originating village. Hopefully a future study that begins from Kerala will complement this study.

5.20 In conclusion one must offer some speculations on the future of these migrants. - The past decade has been a boom period for construction in Kerala. But as reports of a slow down in economic activity in the Middle East become increasingly common, there will be a corresponding decline in the extent of Keralite migration to that region and ultimately to a decline in remittances.\* When that happens and unless there is a continued upswing based on other sources of growth, construction activity will decline and the demand for Tamilian migrant labourer will fall. In that eventuality, the migrants' only options will be (i) to return to Kanyakumari District and seek work in construction there or revert to 'coolie' labour (ii) seek to migrate elsewhere in Tamil Nadu or even other states or (iii) stay on in Kerala and adjust to lower employment and/or lower wages. In any of these possibilities, the prospects seem dismal.

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\* According to press reports, thousands of Indians and other Asian expatriates are leaving the Gulf countries for home every month and the latest study states that nearly 2 million expatriates will leave the region in the coming five years (Indian Express, April 21, 1986).

Appendix - ASchedule for Old Migrants(A) Personal Data

1. Sample No. :
2. Ward No. :
3. Name of the Respondent :
4. Name of the Head of the Household :
5. Caste :
6. Age :
7. Educational Qualification : ILL P UP HS M AM
8. Marital Status : M UM W

(B) Family Data

Name	Age	Sex	Relation- ship to Respondent	Educational qualifi- cation	Occupation	Place of Residence

(C) History of Migration

1. Father's/Family's traditional occupation :
2. When did you first migrate :
3. When did you return permanently :
4. Reasons for migration : (1)
- (2)
- (3)
- (4)
- (5)

5. Places of work in Kerala  
 (No. of Names of atleast 5) : (1)  
 (2)  
 (3)  
 (4)  
 (5)
6. Kind of work done before migration:
7. (a) What was the daily wage in the  
 work you did in Kanyakumari Dis-  
 trict when you first migrated: :
- (b) What was the wage you received  
 in Kerala when you first migrated  
 (specify allowances etc.) :
8. (a) How many days of employment in  
 a year (approx) did you have  
 before migration? :
- (b) How many days of employment  
 (approx) did you find in your  
 first migration? :
9. (a) Kind of work done when first  
 migrated? : Helper  
 Bricklayer  
 Mason  
 Carpenter  
 Contractor
- (b) Kind of work done before Returning : Mason  
 Contractor  
 Others
10. Present Occupation :

(D) Origins of Migration

1. How first migrated? (Description,  
 method of Recruitment, advances,  
 allowances etc.) :
2. Reasons for Return : (1)  
 (2)  
 (3)  
 (4)

(1) Did you others in your family go as migrants?

Yes/No

(a) If 'Yes'

Name	Relationship to respondent	Year of migration/return	Present residence	Kind of work

(b) When you first migrated did you go alone or did any others in your family also go with you? :

(c) Occupation of non-migrant of family :

With Income from migration did you

- |                           |                    |
|---------------------------|--------------------|
| (i) Purchase land         | (a) Wet (in acres) |
|                           | (b) Dry            |
|                           | (c) Homestead      |
|                           | (d) Others         |
| (ii) Build Houses         |                    |
| (iii) Modify house        |                    |
| (iv) Others (specify)     |                    |
| (v) Education of Children |                    |

(H) Assets

- |   |                       |
|---|-----------------------|
| 1. Total Land (in acres)                  | (a) Wet               |
|   | (b) Dry (Garden Land) |
|   | (c) Homestead         |
|   | (d)                   |
|   | (e) Others (specify)  |
| 2. What are the other sources of income : |                       |
|   | (1)                   |
|   | (2)                   |
|   | (3)                   |

Appendix - B

Schedule for Migrant Construction Workers

A. Personal Data

- 1. Sample No. :
- 2. Ward No. :
- 3. (a) Name of the Respondent :
- (b) Name of the Head of the Household :
- 4. Caste/Traditional occupation :
- 5. Age
- 6. Educational Qualification : ILL P UP US M AM
- 7. Marital Status : M UM W
- 8. Family Data

Name	Age	Sex	Relation to Respondent	Educational	Occupation	Place of Residence

C. History of Migration

When migrated (year)

(i) Alone

(ii) Others in family

Name

Year

(a)

(b)

(c)

(d)

(e)



- D. (i) Earlier Occupation  
(before migration) :
- (ii) Father's/Family's traditional  
occupation :
- E. Why did you migrated  
(Reasons) :
- (i) Low employment in Kanyakumari/  
High employment in Kerala
- (ii) High wage in Kerala
- (iii) Family problems
- (iv)
- (v)
- (vi)
- F. Did you begin as a short duration migrant : Yes/No
- (a) If Yes, when and how did you become  
a long duration migrant?
- G. Present Occupation
- (a) Kind of work (i) Helper
- (ii) Brick layer
- (iii) Mason
- (iv) Carpenter
- (v)
- (vi)
- (b) Is the present work you do different from  
what you did when you first migrated? Yes/No
- (i) If 'Yes' what was work done first :
- (ii) When did you start doing present work :
- (c) (i) What was the daily wage in the work you  
did in KK when you first migrated : Rs. Ps.
- (ii) What was the wage you received in  
Kerala when you first migrated  
(specify allowances etc.) : Rs. Ps.
- (d) (i) How many days of employment in a year  
(approx) did you have before migration:
- (ii) How many days of employment (approx)  
did you find in your first migration :

- H. (a) Number of places in Kerala where you have worked? At least 5 names : (1)  
(2)  
(3)  
(4)  
(5)
- (b) Payment of wage : Daily  
Weekly  
Monthly  
Time of return  
Others (specify)
- (c) (1) What is your present daily wage : Rs. Ps.
- (2) Does this exclude : (i) Allowances Yes No  
(ii) Food expenses  
(iii) Rent  
(iv) Recovery of Advance Weekly Monthly
- (3) If 'Yes' what is the amount for (1) Allowances: Rs. Ps.  
(ii) Food Expenses:  
(iii) Rent :  
(iv) Recovery of Advance :

I. Wage Rate (Past)

	Wage Rate	Kind of Work	Place of work
1 Year Ago			
5 Year Ago			
10 Year Ago			

J. Duration of work in a year (approx)

- K. Normal Returning of home (specify the dates) : (i) once in a year  
(ii) twice in a year  
(iii) Thrice in a year  
(iv) four times a year  
(v) more than a year

L. Method of Recruitment

- (1) Are you working under a Contractor : Yes/No
- (2) Sub/Main Contractor : SC MC
- (3) Known person/Unknown person : K UK
- (4) Do you change your Contractor frequently  
(Reasons) : Yes/No
- (1)
- (2)
- (3)
- (4)
- (5)
- (5) How long you are working under the present Contractor :
- (6) When you migrated, did you go alone/  
accompanied with your contractor : Alone Together
- (7) From now onwards, going with same contractor/Another contractor : (i) Same  
(ii) Another one
- (a) If (ii) Reasons (i)  
(ii)  
(iii)
- (8) Do you get Advance :
- (a) How many times in a year
- (9) Normally how much do you get : Rs.
- (10) How much did you get the last time : Rs.
- (11) Does it depend upon (i) kind of work  
(ii) distance of the place  
(iii) Experience  
(iv) Others (specify)
- (12) After you get the advance, do you (i) go immediately  
(ii) later date fixed by the contractor
- (13) Is your (a) Recruitment (b) Receipt of Advance in a written contract : Yes/No
- (14) How is your advance Recovered by the contractor :
- (15) Does the Contractor charge any interest on the advance : Yes/No
- (a) If 'Yes' rate? :

- (16) Where do you stay? (1) Lodge  
 (2) Rental House  
 (3) Owners plot free of cost  
 (4) Owners plot nominal cost  
 (5) Others

(17) (a) How many workers are therein group:

- (b) Nature of work site present : (1) Residential House  
 (2) Commercial Buildings  
 (3) Roads  
 (4) Bridges  
 (5) Churches  
 (6) Others

- (c) Nature of construction done since migrated : (1) Residential Houses  
 (2) Commercial Buildings  
 (3) Roads  
 (4) Others  
 (5)

(d)

	Nos.	Work done by Tamil Workers	Work done by Kerala Workers	Wage Received by T.W.	Wage Received by K.W.	Hours of work	
						T.W.	K.W.
No. of Tamil Workers in site							
No. of Kerala workers in site							

- (18) When there is not enough work with your Contractor, does he arrange employment with other contractors? : Yes/No
- (19) If Yes, do you got your wage directly from the second contractor? : Yes/No
- (20) Is this wage less or more than the usual/agreed wage : Yes/No
- (21) If Yes, why? (1)  
 (2)  
 (3)  
 (4)

- (22) In general if you don't like your contractor, will it be possible to leave him permanently : Yes/No
- (23) Suppose you are indebted to your contractor, is it possible to leave him permanently and work under some other contractor : Yes/No
- (24) Do you sign for receipt of wages : Yes/No
- (25) Are you a member of Construction Workers' Union : Yes/No
- (a) If 'Yes', at Migrated Place/Native Place (Also details of nature of leadership, party affiliation etc.) : Kerala Tamil Nadu
- (26) When you come home, normally how many days do you spend there :
- (27) Are you having any stipulated time period to join your duty :

M. Family Migration

1. How many others in your family are construction workers? :
- (a) How many migrants?
- (b) How many non-migrants?
2. Kind of work
- |  | <u>Migrants</u> | <u>Non-migrants</u> |
|--|-----------------|---------------------|
|  | Helper          | Helper              |
|  | Bricklayer      | Bricklayer          |
|  | Mason           | Mason               |
|  | Carpenters      | Carpenters          |
|  | Others          | Others              |
3. How many of them working as Short-duration or Long-duration workers? (a) S.D.  
(b) L.D.
4. Time of their return home?
- Weekly  
Monthly  
Once in two months  
Once in three months  
Once in a year  
More than a year
5. Did they migrate with your help? (through your Contractor)  
Specify :

6. Are they presently working (i) with you  
(ii) separately

- (a) If (ii) list various places
- 1.
  - 2.
  - 3.
  - 4.
  - 5.

N. Remittances

- (1) How often do you spend money home:
- (i) Monthly
  - (ii) Once in two months
  - (iii) Returning time
  - (iv).
  - (v)
  - (vi)

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(2) Did you purchase any land/  
other property since you migrated Yes/No

Items

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.



O. Assets

1. Total Land (in Acres)

- (a) Wet
- (b) Dry (garden)
- (c) Homestead

2. What are the other sources of your Income? (1)  
(2)  
(3)

P. Do you want to settled down there permanently/  
want to come back after sometime.

Appendix - CSchedule for Contractors (sub/main)A. Personal Data

1. Sample No. :
2. Ward No. :
3. Name of the Respondent :
4. Caste/traditional occupation:
5. Age :
6. Educational Qualification : ILL LP US HS
7. Marital Status : M UM W

B. Family Data

Name	Age	Sex	Relation to Respondent	Education	Place of Residence

C. History of Contracting

1. How many years have you been doing Contracting work ? :
2. (a) How many years in Kerala? :  
(b) How many years in Tamil Nadu? :
3. Before contracting labour, what work were you doing? :
4. If occupation has changed, how did you change? :

5. When and how did you start contracting work in Kerala? :

6. Places in Kerala where you have done work, kinds of work : Places Kinds of work

C. Present Situation

1. Recruitment

(a) How do you recruit workers? :

(b) Do you recruit workers from particular villages only or from different villages? :

(c) How many persons are presently working under you?

Places of their work	Type of work	From which villages	Number of workers

2. Employment and Wages

1. Why are Tamilian workers preferred?

2. Why are Tamilian women workers not employed?

3. Present wage rate for:

- (i) Helpers
- (ii) Masons
- (iii) Carpenters
- (iv) Stone workers
- (v) Others (specify)



## Past wage Rate

	Helpers	Masons	Carpenters	Stone workers
1 year back				
5 year back				
10 year back				
More than 10 year back				

3. Supervision

1. Do you also supervise work at site? Yes/No

- (a) If 'Yes' what kind of work do you supervise?
- (1)
- (2)
- (3)
- (4)
- (5)

- (b) Of whom you supervise
- (i) Only Tamilian workers
- (ii) Kerala workers
- (iii) Both (i) and (ii)

(c) Are any Kerala workers employed on site? Yes/No

(a) If 'Yes'

No. of Kerala workers	Kind of work	Sex	Wages (per day

3. Do you recruit these (Kerala) workers as well? Yes/No

- (a) If 'Yes', how many at present :
- (b) How do you recruit workers from Kerala?

4. If No, who recruits and supervise them?

D. Organisation

1. Do you take the workers with you to work site : Yes/No
2. Do you employ Accountants : Yes/No
  - (a) If Yes, how many? :
  - (b) From where? :
3. Did you employ head masons? : Yes/No
  - (a) If 'Yes', what kind of work they do?
4. (a) How much advance is given for:
  - (1) Helpers
  - (2) Masons
  - (3) Carpenters
  - (4) Stoneworkers
  - (5) Others (specify)
  - (b) How will you recover this advance money?
  - (c) Do you give allowance to workers : Yes/No
    - (i) If 'Yes',
      - (i) daily
      - (ii) weekly
      - (iii) monthly
      - (iv) others
5. Are you providing food for workers : Yes/No
6. Are you providing accommodation : Yes/No
  - (a) If 'Yes', how much is the rent? (Total/per worker) :
7. How did you get the work
  - (a) From owner?
  - (b) From other contractor?
8. Kind of work contracted
  - (1) Big contracting work
  - (2) Daily wage work
  - (3) Both (1) and (2)
  - (4) Others (specify)

E. Can a worker leave your employment before the work is over?

- F. What is your criteria wage payment? (i) work to be done  
(ii) Experience  
(iii) Age  
(iv) Type of work

G. Remittances

- (1) Did you purchase any land/other property since you started contracting work? : Yes/No

<u>Items</u>	<u>Year</u>
1.	
2.	
3.	
4.	
5.	

H. Assets

1. Total Land (in acres) (a) Wet  
(b) Dry (garden)  
(c) Homestead
2. What are the other sources of your income?  
1.  
2.  
3.  
4.

- I. Do you want to settle down there permanently/want to come back after some time?  
Want to settle?  
Want to come back?

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