

# Malabar Migration and Socio- economic status of migrants : A study in Taliparamba Block of Kannur District, Kerala

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**ABSTRACT:** Migration is a natural process and practice of humankind. The study of internal migration assumes special importance in any country in the process of development. By its nature, it is related to a process of change occurring within the social system. According to available literatures on Kerala migration, it is noted that Malabar migration had been an important phenomenon of internal migration which started in 1920s and continued upto late 1980s. People migrated from land scarce region of Travancore to Malabar region in the search of vast cultivable land. The present Kannur district being the part of erstwhile Malabar district also witnessed Malabar migration and underwent agricultural transformation and socio-economic development. Majority of migrant households are settled in the mid and high land of the region. Taliparamba Block has been taken as the study area in Kannur District and this study tries to determine the factors of Malabar migration and assesses its impact on socio-economic status of migrants. Descriptive research design has been followed in this study. Social survey technique and oral history method have been applied to collect pertinent information.

**Key Words:** Malabar migration, Travancore, Socio-economic, livelihood

## INTRODUCTION

Migration is a general social phenomenon that often appears as an inevitable part of life in the history of mankind. It is a spatial mobility of people, with change from their place of residence and socio-cultural environment. Migration usually involves abandoning one's social setting and entering into another. It is usually described as a movement over a significant distance.

Zelinsky, W (1966), explains that migration is any permanent or semi-permanent change of residence, more meaningfully; perhaps it is a spatial transfer from one social unit or neighborhood to another, which strains or ruptures previous social bonds. Ogden P. E (1984) interprets migration as a part of the wider study of population geography and as an important element in the understanding of the geographical organization of human society. Considering the overall concepts of migration, it can be generalized that migrants are those who move between the political units and movers are those who move within the political units. Thus at any given point of time the total population of a region can be divided into migrants and non-migrants, movers and non-movers. This classification establishes the mobility status of the population.

With the advent of capitalism, migration of people has been assigned an important role in initiating growth and development of an economy. One can identify two broad classes of migrations in this period. One class of migrants has moved out of the dominant agrarian/traditional economy to meet the demand for labour outside the village of origin (it could be to industry but in India it could also be within agriculture) with an intention to sell their labour power. These migrants are generally identified as labor migrations. The second class of migration is been from the rural-agricultural sector to rural-agricultural sectors in other areas with interest to organize production in the area they have migrated into and this migration is identified as peasant migration. These kind of migration are generally to use underexploited land resources at the destination and/or use the knowledge they acquired on the production process to organize production and derive income. Rural migration both spontaneous and forced which involves land settlement can be, and often a positive force in agriculture development. Rural to rural migration can lead not only to increase in food and agricultural production to keep pace with population and demand, but also increasing in the productivity of land or labour or both. (Mollett, 1991). Most of the migration studies deal with the wage difference labour migration towards urban areas and very little attention have been given upon rural to rural migration. The present study is significant in this perspective as it is an attempt to keenly understand the rural to rural migration in Kerala which took place during late 1920s to early 1980s for the purpose of acquiring land for survival, commonly known as Malabar Migration.

**TRENDS OF INTERNAL MIGRATION IN KERALA**

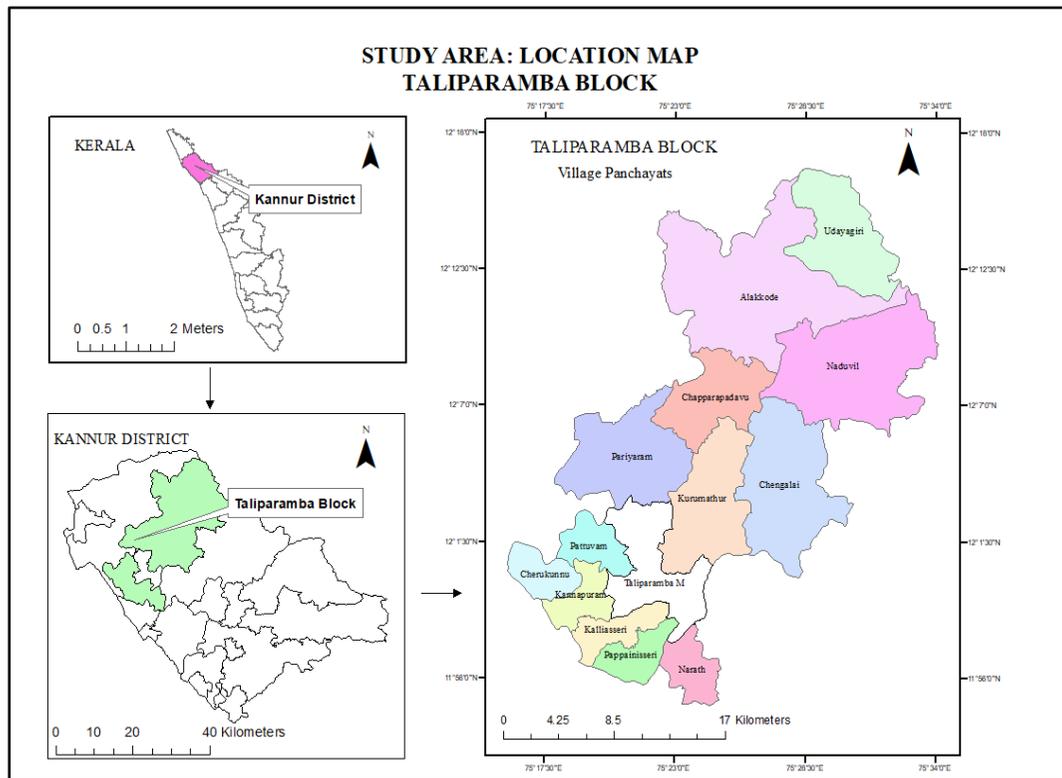
Kerala was a net in –migration state until world war II.Net out migration started after 1941-51 and before formation of the state the mobility was noticed mainly from Travancore to nearby high land areas and later towards Malabar region. This movement took place in two stages and the first stage was appeared towards high land of Idukki District to acquire land in the interior of forests from the populous and land scanty region of Travancore. Theanother stream of migration was noticed toward the mid and high land of Malabar region which was earlier a district under Madras Presidency.(Nair et.al, 1997)

**STUDY AREA**

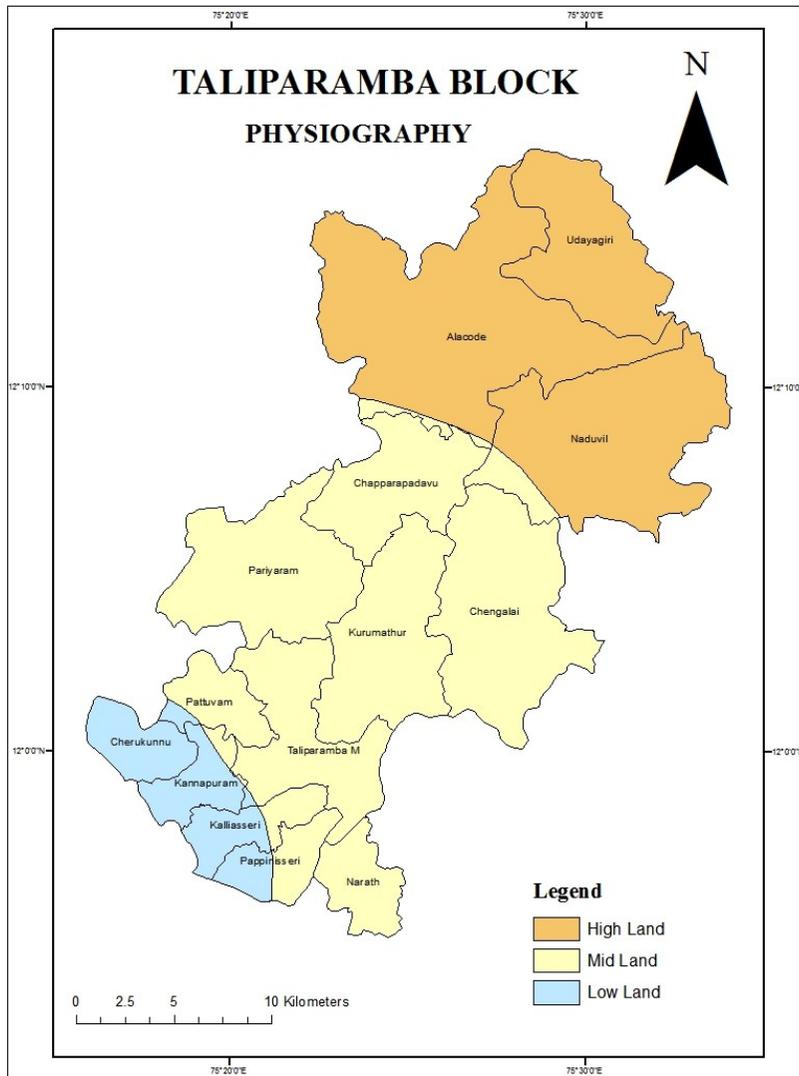
Taliparamba block has been selected for conducting the Preliminary study. (Map I) It lies between latitudes 11054’52.13”N to 12016’37.59”N and between longitudes 75015’48.77”E to 75034’6.08”E. It has the area of 556.10 sq.km. It consists of 13 gram panchayats and one municipality. According to census 2011 it has a population of 3, 54,208 persons which is comprised of 1, 66,664 males and 1, 87,544 females.

Most parts of this area are midland and highland regions composed of denudational structured hills, lower plateau, valley, residual hills and flood plains.(Kerala state land use board, 2012) This area has a humid climate with an oppressive hot season from March to the end of May. This is followed by the Southwest monsoon which continues till the end of September. October and November months get rainfall from the post Monsoon or retreating Monsoon season. The average annual rain fall is about 3300 mm and more than 80% of it occurs during the period of Southwest monsoon.

So total 120 migrant households have been taken from the four panchayats of the Taliparamba Block, namely Alakode,Udaygiri,Naduvil,and Chapparapadav( high and mid land areas) proportionately covering 30 migrant households in each of the selected Panchayats.(map II) The selection of study area for collecting migrant respondents is done due to the very fact that Migrants from early Travancore region were oriented to plantation economy and in hilly areas cultivable waste lands were available in comparative plenty.



Map I: location map of study area



Map II: Physiography map

## OBJECTIVES

The objective of this study is to analyse the socio –economic condition of Malabar migrants in the study area.

## DATA SOURCES AND METHODOLOGY

Primary field survey is the major source of information for this study. Since this study implies a retrospective design to understand the past phenomena, *oral history method* becomes the major tool of gathering information from the respondents. Open ended questionnaires were prepared based on the objectives taken for this study and 120 migrant respondents were asked about their living condition before and after migration with causes of migration. Gathered information were further tabulated and analysed with appropriate statistical tools.

The base map of study area was prepared using Arc GIS with the help of SOI Toposheet 1:50000. MS Excel and MS Word these two platforms were used for tabulation and interpretation work. For analysing socio-economic condition of the migrants, following indices were used.

- Economic status Index (ESI) =  $\sum wi \cdot fi \backslash m \times 100$  (Islam et.al, 2008, page.416)

Where,  $w_i$  = weightage given to various economic status

$F_i$  = frequency of respondents for particular economic status

$m$  = product of total assigned weight and respondents

- Social Status Index (SSI) =  $\sum wi. fi \backslash m \times 100$  (Islam et.al, 2008, page.416)  
 Where, wi = weightage given to various social status  
 Fi = frequency of respondents for particular social status  
 m = product of total assigned weight and respondents

**DISCUSSION**

**ECONOMIC STATUS OF THE MIGRANTS**

Economic status index of respondents is a modern approach to translate qualitative change in quantitative terms. Since this migration took place for acquiring more land for livelihood sustainability, the major economic indicator is taken as possession of land before and after migration. Agricultural transformation was the major impact of this Malabar migration as it progressively altered the subsistence agricultural activities to capitalistic way of farming. As a result of that one can found large estates of rubber plantation in these mid land and high land Panchayats of study area. Banana cultivation, areca nut,coconut, nutmeg are also found in larger area. Possession of vast land and further plantation activities made the way for prosperous and better livings. Following are the tables which show the economic status of migrants and the changes brought by migration to their lives.

Table1. Land possession by the respondent migrant households before and after migration

Size of land possessed	Before migration		After migration	
	No. of respondents	Percentage	No. of respondents	percentage
Less than 1 acre	30	25.0%	-	-
1-10 acre	68	56.67%	5	4.17%
10-20 acre	22	18.33%	35	29.17%
20-40acre	-	-	22	18.33 %
40-60acre	-	-	24	20.0 %
60-100acre	-	-	26	21.67 %
More than 100 acre	-	-	8	6.67 %
Total	120	100%	120	100%

Source: primary survey, 2017

Table 1 clearly illustrate the fact that land was possessed more after migration in Malabar area .The main reason was the availability of vast uncultivated land at cheaper price than Travancore . The majority of the migrants were marginal farmers. Land less persons or persons who had extensive areas of land were few. Migration was proceeded in most cases by the sale of the land owned by the peasants. However a few capitalist farmers who had ample savings were able to migrate to Malabar without selling their land property.

Transformation of agricultural pattern: from subsistence farming to plantation economy

In the early years of migration (from 1920-late 1950s) can be termed as first stage in which people first occupied forest land at very cheap prices and early settlements were created. Subsistence crops like paddy, tapioca and vegetables were grown first at this stage.

Once migrants got equipped with all necessary resources, they started looking for better avenues. It was the beginning of second stage of transformation with the advent of plantation economy during the decade of 1960s. Rubber crop was the prime focus with available resources, vast estates and suitable topography. Apart from this, coconut, areca nut, cashew, pepper were also started grown by the migrant families. Malabar migration has impacted the Land economy of Malabar region in manifold ways specially the agricultural transformation.

Table 2: Diversity of occupation before and after migration within migrant households

Types of occupation	Before migration		After migration	
	No .of respondents	percentage	No. of respondents	percentage
Agriculture	106	88.33%	24	20%
Business	2	1.67%	14	11.67%
Nursing	-	-	5	4.17%

Teacher	12	10%	11	9.17%
Gulf migrants	-	-	36	30%
Any other Govt. services	-	-	30	25%
Total	120	100%	120	100%

Source: primary survey, 2017

Agriculture was the main occupational activity for migrants. Table 2 shows that after migration the members of the other generation got engaged in diversified occupational activities apart from agriculture. Although agriculture was still the prime focus for the original migrants but as prosperity and development started taking place in the migrant family, literacy level and search for better livelihood opportunities also increased. The main attraction is gulf migration for the family members which again adds the accumulation of money in the migrant family.

Thus all the factors discussed in table 1 and 2 clarify that Malabar migration had a positive impact over migrant households to escape from poverty, shortage of land for subsistence and unsatisfactory living condition.

The extent of changes in economic status is presented in table 3 mentioned below. Five type of economic status has been taken for consideration like no change, little change, medium change, high change and very high change. Relative weightage is given to each of the status type and with the application of formula economic status index is calculated for the migrant households.

Table 3: Economic status for migrant households

Type of economic status	Weight	Number of respondents	Percentage of respondents
No change	0	0	0
Little change	1	2	1.67%
Medium change	2	15	13%
High change	3	77	64%
Very high change	4	26	22%
Total		120	100%

Source: primary survey, 2017

$$\begin{aligned}
 \text{Economic status index (ESI)} &= \sum wi. fi \setminus m \times 100 \\
 &= \frac{(0 \times 0) + (1 \times 2) + (2 \times 15) + (3 \times 77) + (4 \times 26)}{120 \times 4} \times 100 \\
 &= 76.45\%
 \end{aligned}$$

Thus the economic status index gives the result as 76.45% which clearly illustrates that migration has brought remarkable change in migrant's family. About 64% respondents reported about high change in economic status followed by 22% who reported about very high change.

### SOCIAL STATUS OF MIGRANT HOUSEHOLD

Migration involves not only the geographical but social mobility also. When economic upliftment takes place, it also results in better social status. There are various indicators considered for social development ranging from housing -amenities to the one's attitudes toward social life. Since this particular migration phenomena took place for better survival with an ultimate aim of acquiring more lands for sustainable agricultural livelihoods. This migration process had characteristics of stage development. For early migrants, settling in new destination was quite tough but with their strong will power and effort they served the motto of migration. To understand the change brought by migration in social status of migrant households, following indicators have been taken into consideration, house types, sanitary condition and sources of water and possession of prestigious goods.

Table 4: Type of house before and after migration for the migrant households

Type of houses	Before migration		After migration	
	No. of respondents	Percentage	No. of Respondents	Percentage
Kuccha house	34	28.33%	0	0%

Semi pucca house	47	39.17%	2	1.67%
Pucca house without roof	29	24.17%	8	6.67%
Pucca house with roof	10	8.33%	25	20.83%
Well-furnished pucca house	0	0%	85	70.83%
Total	120	100%	120	100%

Source: primary survey, 2017

Table 4 shows that the migration has the impact over housing condition of the migrant households, as about 70% of the respondents reported for having well-furnished pucca houses after migration. There are about 20% of the total respondents who lived in kuccha houses ,before migration. About 63% of the respondents had owned the houses of semi pucca and pucca house without roof condition. Better housing condition is the foremost indicator of social status and in this reference migration has positively impacted over owning of pucca houses among migratns.

Table 5: source of water condition before and after migration for the migrant households

Source of water	Before migration		After migration	
	No. of respondents	Percentage	No. of respondents	Percentage
River/pond	15	12.5	0	0
Wells/bore wells	105	87.5	120	100.00
Total	120	100	120	100.00

Source: primary survey, 2017

Table 5 gives the illustration that sources of water do not have much relation with migration as more than 87% of the respondents replied for better sources of water before as well as after the migration process.

Table 6: sanitary condition before and after migration for the migrant households

Sanitary condition	Before migration		After migration	
	No. of respondents	Percentage	No. of respondents	Percentage
Pit	60	50%	120	100%
Kaccha	55	45.83%	0	0
Open	5	4.17%	0	0
Total	120	100%	120	100%

Source: primary survey, 2017

Table 6 reveals the sanitary condition for the migrant households as before migration respondents partially reported for pit and kaccha sanitary condition. About 5% of the respondents used open type. But after migration pit was widely used among respondents as 100 % of the respondents in this way.

**Possession of prestigious goods**

Economic prosperity also brings a better social status for people. Accumulation of money always leads to possession of better housing amenities, goods and resources. In case of this study, migration brought opportunities for the migrant households to get a better living style. All the surveyed migrant households possess T.V, refrigerator, washing machine, Almirah and other housing goods. About 96% of the households reported for the possession of either two-wheeler or four-wheeler vehicles with them. It is true that the societal transformation in view of globalization makes the way to the search of better living standard. People’s way of living is the function of temporal and spatial change. It is inferred from the study that migrant’s living condition improved over time period after migrating to Malabar areas.

Table 7: social status for migrant households

Type of social status	Weight	Number of respondents	Percentage of respondents
No change	0	0	0
Little change	1	10	8.33%
Medium change	2	39	33%

High change	3	53	44%
Very high change	4	18	15%
Total		120	100%

Source: primary survey, 2017

$$\begin{aligned} \text{Social Status Index (SSI)} &= \sum wi . fi \backslash m \times 100 \\ &= \frac{(0 \times 0) + (1 \times 10) + (2 \times 39) + (3 \times 53) + (4 \times 18)}{120 \times 4} \times 100 \\ &= 66.46\% \end{aligned}$$

It is found from the aforementioned table 7 that, the value of weighted average index is 66.46 percent for social status of migrant households. Table 8 shows, social status of migrants rise “very high” by about 15 percent. 44 percent of respondents have “high change”, 33 percent respondents are “medium change” of their social status and about 8 percent have minor change.

## CONCLUSION

Migration is an important driver of the socio-economic development in most cases. People migrate to get rid of poverty or lack of services. Malabar migration also serves this purpose of obtaining better and sustainable livelihood. Although this migration happened primarily because of search for cultivable land which introduced plantation based agricultural set up in the places where migrants settled (mid and high land areas of Malabar). Agricultural transformation made the way for accumulation of capital and prosperity for these households in due course of time which led them toward better social and economic life. This study gives the result as almost all the migrant households are satisfied and reported for positive change in their life due to migration.

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