

Dynamics and Structure of Rural-Urban Migration in Semi-Arid South India

Year: 2007

Place of fieldwork: India

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- Research Background

The purpose of this study is to understand the mechanisms by which rural farmers migrate to urban areas. The method of this study was to conduct a station-based observation and interviews with the whole hamlet of one hundred and sixty households. Currently in the area concerned a rural-urban migration is a noticeable feature. Therefore, a range of field work has been conducted since 2007. According to the recent Census Data¹⁾, the village population has decreased by ten percent from that of 1981. For a thousand years tank-based labor intensive agriculture, such as rice cultivation on wet land as well as millet, grams, and cotton planting on dry land, has characterized the livelihood of semi-arid rural South India. However, in recent years, following on from economic liberalization which has been carried out since 1991, mobilization towards the non-agricultural sector and the increase of the real agricultural wage, as result, have served to motivate young labor to migrate to urban areas for higher education and well-paid white collar employment.

- Research Purpose and Aim

From previous studies in the village, we know that migration starts from the wealthy households for the purpose of increasing the chances of children's advancement to higher education and employment in the non-agricultural sector in urban areas. Parents of children who have migrated may either migrate to town or basically stay in the village and go to stay in town occasionally for living. Some households that migrated to urban areas for the purpose of non-agricultural employment became money lenders and helped sustain their fellow villagers by lending them money. Other households sent remittances to take over relatives' educational costs in the village, especially those for expensive higher education, whose parents engage in agricultural jobs in village.

The primary purpose of this study is to understand the role of migrated households in the lives of their fellow villagers and relatives in village, through such activities as sending remittances, fixing up job opportunities, and linking various networks. However, only the upper class households in the village had white collar employment in urban area which assured a solid source of income, helping to actualize the remittance. Migration to non-agricultural sector differs according to different economic strata in the village. The secondary purpose is to find out how the middle class households in the village without white-collar employment cover their college costs.

- Results and Achievements by Fieldwork

For this project research was conducted between 8 July 09 and 4 October 09. In the meantime, a literature survey was conducted at the *Institute of Française, Pondicherry (=IFP)* to gain materials and monographs for a better understanding of rural life in the various parts of Tamil Nadu. Also some village visits were conducted at festival times there for making comparison.

During the village survey in the studied area, the following questions were also asked. 1) How do poor class and middle class households in the village manage to pay educational costs such as college fees? 2) Why does such a high rate of widows exist in the poor class? 3) How much do agricultural products actually cost? 4) How does the kinship among households in the hamlet relate to each other?

Regarding question 1), middle class households, without non-agricultural employment in their family, use various financial sources to cover children's costs for higher education, combining such methods as borrowing from money lenders, relatives as brothers and sisters, and micro credit, together with their own savings from their agricultural income. For 2), in the poor class higher percentage of landless exists, widow or women headed separated household live on their labors such as agricultural coolie or homemakers at low wages. In terms of 3), agricultural costs are lower for the households with many livestock as they can utilize cow dung in order to minimize fertilizer cost. As for 4), it became apparent that the family of *Nattamai*, is the oldest and used to be the most influential family of the (dominant) caste in the village, apart from *Karai-karan*, the descendants of managers of village property. From previous studies only the descendants of *Karai-karan* drew attention. Whether he is in power or not, the family of *Nattamai* is identified.

As stated above, all the questions for this survey were satisfied. As result, a clearer image reflecting the realities of the studied village emerged.

- Implications and Impacts on Future Research

Together with the findings from this survey, the data of the village that has so far been acquired has made it possible to put together a research presentation entitled "Class Structure and Migration Process of Rural Village in South India – a Case Study from Madurai District, Tamil Nadu-". Nonetheless the data can be used from different perspectives still, in order to deepen our analysis and provide a holistic understanding of this rural village in a semi-arid area of Tamil which is going through a dynamic transition.

Note:

- 1) Census of India 2001, Series 33 Tamil Nadu, District Census Handbook, Part-B Madurai District, Village and Town-wise Primary Census Abstract, Government of India (GOI) (1981, 1991 version for reference)
- 2) *National Rural Employment Generation Scheme (=NREGS)* is one of Federal Government's policies in India to generate employment opportunities in rural areas. In the studied village, a project of constructing new tank (=agricultural pond) by hiring agricultural labors for digging purposes is in progress. According to this scheme, each participant gets one hundred days of employment per year and a daily wage of Rs.80 (equivalent to U.S. \$ 1.8).



1. A Scene of Rice Planting (S village, September '09)



2. *NREGS*²⁾ Participants (S village, September '09)



3. Buying Cow Dung for Fertilizer (S village, October '09)