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A STUDY ON LABOUR MIGRATION IN AGRICULTURE SECTOR IN CHENGALPATTU DISTRICT OF TAMIL NADU

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ABSTRACT

Labour migration has become an important livelihood strategy for rural households whose income is threatened by declining agricultural employment. This study explores the push and pull factors of migration and its impact on employment conditions and household indebtedness among agricultural households in Chengalpattu district of Tamil Nadu. The district was purposively selected due to its seasonal agricultural employment, low farm wages, increasing rural indebtedness, and its proximity to the metropolitan city of Chennai, which creates significant rural to urban migration flows. The research adopts an ex-post facto research design based on primary data collected from 120 migrant households in Maduranthakam block through a structured interview schedule using descriptive statistical tools like frequency and percentage analysis were used for data interpretation. The research shows that migration is mainly motivated by push factors like low agricultural wages, seasonal unemployment, and rising household expenditure, and pull factors like better employment opportunities, higher wages, and increased working days at migration destinations. The results further indicate that migration has substantially improved employment stability among agricultural households and contributed to addressing households indebtedness.

KEYWORDS: Labour Migration, Push and Pull factors, Employment, Rural Livelihoods, Indebtedness, Agricultural Laborers.

1. INTRODUCTION

Migration is a fundamental demographic phenomenon referring to the movement of individuals or groups from one place to another, often undertaken to improve social or economic conditions. It involves a change in the usual place of residence and is distinguished from temporary visits or short-term travel, because migration typically implies a change in residence rather than short-term mobility like community or tourism. Migration can be classified in several ways, many of which are relevant to the study of labour migration in rural areas: In this study, Migration is based on direction which is, Rural-to-Rural, Rural-to-Urban, Urban-to-Urban and Urban-to-Rural Migration, because the study area fully depends on a rural economy, where agricultural work is seasonal and limited, and non-farm employment opportunities attract labour to towns and cities.

Labour migration in the agricultural sector refers to the movement of workers from one geographical region to another for the purpose of engaging in agricultural work, either seasonally or permanently. Agriculture, being highly dependent on climatic conditions, labour cycles, and peak seasons, often faces fluctuations in labour demand. As a result, many rural households engage in migration as a livelihood strategy to cope with income insecurity and land constraints (Srivastava, 2020). The agricultural workforce today depends heavily on migrant labour, particularly in labor-intensive farming systems (Poeschel and Anderson 2021). At the same time, labour migration has also contributed positively to rural development through remittances, skill transfer, and diversification of household income sources (Deshingkar, 2020)

The labour migration, particularly in rural and agricultural contexts, is a key socio-economic process shaping labour markets and household livelihoods. Their systematic review shows that migration is mainly driven by rural-urban structural imbalances such as limited non-farm employment, low rural wages, and income uncertainty in agriculture, which compel workers to migrate in search of better livelihood opportunities (Gowri et al., 2025)

Agriculture has traditionally been the backbone of rural livelihoods in Tamil Nadu, but its capacity to provide stable employment has declined due to shrinking landholdings, rising cultivation costs, climatic uncertainty, irregular rainfall and the seasonal nature of farm work (Govt. of India, 2022). These challenges have particularly

affected agricultural laborers and small and marginal farmers, leading many rural households to depend on labour migration as an important livelihood strategy (FAO, 2023).

In Chengalpattu district, rapid urbanization, industrial expansion, and close proximity to the Chennai metropolitan area have increased non-farm employment opportunities in industries like manufacturing, construction, services, and informal activities. This has accelerated the migration of agricultural workers from rural to urban areas. Migration raises issues with agricultural labor shortages, job insecurity, wage disparities, and the social vulnerability of migrant workers, even though it can also improve income prospects (IOM, 2022). However, there is limited local-level evidence on how declining agricultural activities and wages influence migration decisions and the employment conditions of migrated workers, highlighting the need for the present study, with these background following objectives are focused: To identify the Push and Pull factors for the migration in perception of migrant households and to understand the impact of migration on the employment conditions of the migrated workers in the study area.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Asiimwe, F. M., & Musinguzi, D. (2024) states that migration is influenced by pull factors like better jobs, higher wages, living conditions, education, and healthcare. Social networks at the destination also attract migrants. Migration results from combined economic, social, and environmental factors, as households move to improve livelihoods and well-being.

Neeraj Kumar (2022) found that inter-state migration in India is driven by both push and pull factors. Key economic variables such as per capita NSDP (Net State Domestic Product), tertiary sector share, and wage rates positively influence migration. The study also shows that higher education, social expenditure, and infrastructure development can increase out-migration, as growth may motivate people to seek better opportunities elsewhere. It concludes that service-sector-led growth and social development are important for livelihood creation, skill development, and policy planning.

Debnath and Nayak (2022) studied remittance use among rural migrant households in Bankura district, West Bengal. Based on 185 sampled households, the study found that over 92% received remittances, with landless households receiving more than small landholders. Most remittances were sent through banks, while unskilled workers often used

middlemen. Remittances were mainly used for food consumption, loan repayment, and purchase of household and farm assets, highlighting their key role in rural livelihoods.

Urbanski (2022) emphasizes that migration is rarely caused by a single factor. Households often move due to multiple adverse conditions in their place of origin, including unemployment, low income, poor infrastructure, lack of basic services, and environmental stress such as droughts or floods. These “push factors” interact to create pressures that drive households to seek better opportunities elsewhere, making migration a strategic response to economic, social, and environmental challenges.

Peter, B., & Narendran, V. (2017) analyzed construction labour migration in Kerala and found that unemployment, poverty, low wages, and poor living conditions at the place of origin were major push factors, while higher wages and year-round employment at destination areas acted as key pull factors. The study concluded that migration is primarily driven by the need to improve living standards and escape poverty.

Wilson et al. (2020) states that urbanization is a key result of structural transformation from agriculture to industry and services. Census data show that India’s urban population increased from 286 million (28%) in 2001 to 377 million (31%) in 2011, growing faster than the rural population. This reflects a rapid rise in urbanization, largely driven by migration to urban areas.

Khanna (2020) notes that rural economic crises have reduced migration flows and remittances, disrupting migration systems. The Economic Survey (2016–17) estimates that over 9 million people migrate annually in India, mainly to cities like Delhi, Bangalore, Mumbai, and Chennai, largely from states such as Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, West Bengal, and Assam. Census 2011 shows that most migration is intra-state, with about one-fourth inter-state, and predominantly directed toward urban areas for employment.

Thakur (2020) states that the agrarian crisis has intensified due to declining farm output, falling rural wages, reduced credit, and weak mechanization since 2013–14. These factors lowered agriculture’s employment capacity, led to negative employment elasticity, pushed millions out of farming (2004–2016), and increased migration to non-farm sectors.

De Brauw (2019) reviewed rural–urban migration and its implications for rural livelihoods and agricultural households. The study explains that migrants from agricultural regions are typically from low-income households with small landholdings, low education levels, and limited local employment opportunities. Migration is often used as a household income diversification strategy, and remittances play an important role in improving household welfare and investment decisions.

2. STUDY AREA

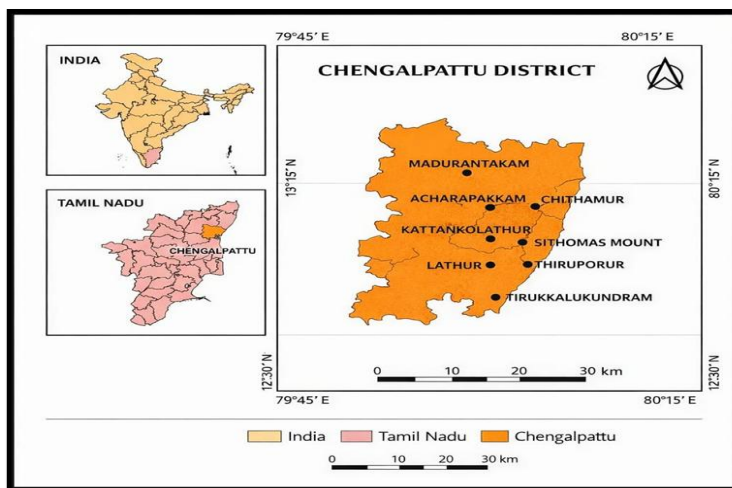


Figure 1: Geographical location of the study area

Chengalpattu District is located in the northeastern part of Tamil Nadu and was formed in 2019 after being divided from Kancheepuram district. It covers a geographical area of about 2,945 sq.km and is bounded by Chennai District to the

north, Kancheepuram to the west, Villupuram to the south, and the Bay of Bengal to the east. The district experiences a tropical climate, receiving an average annual rainfall of around 1,200 mm, mainly from the northeast monsoon. Agriculture continues

to be an important livelihood activity, although rapid urbanization and proximity to Chennai have led to increasing non-farm employment and labour migration in the district (Government of Tamil Nadu, 2023).

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1. Research Design

The present study adopts an ex-post facto research design. Ex-post facto design is appropriate when the researcher investigates the effect of independent variables on a dependent variable after the events have already occurred, without manipulating the variables (Kerlinger & Lee, 2000). In the context of this study, migration is a past event that has already taken place, and the study aims to examine its causes (push and pull factors) and consequences (impact on employment conditions and livelihoods). Therefore, this design is well-suited for analyzing socio-economic characteristics, migration patterns and outcomes of migration among agricultural households.

3.2. Population and Sample selection

The study was conducted in Chengalpattu district, Tamil Nadu, specifically focusing on Maduranthakam block, which are predominantly agricultural and have a history of labour migration due to seasonal farming and non-farm employment opportunities. The target population includes households in Maduranthakam block, focusing on Kattudevadur and Nallambur villages, with at least one member engaged in labour migration, either seasonally or permanently, for non-farm employment. These villages were selected purposively because of their high prevalence of rural-to-urban migration. A total of 120 respondents were selected for the study. The sample selection was based on **Purposive sampling**, a non-probability technique, to ensure that households with experience in migration were included. The sample size is distributed

proportionally between the two villages according to the size of migrant households in each village.

3.3. Data Collection Method

This study is primarily based on primary data collected from the sample households who have migrated leaving their agricultural occupation. **Primary Data:** Collected using a Structured interview schedule and questionnaire covering; Socio-economic characteristics (age, gender, education, family size, landholdings), Push factors (e.g., low farm wages, seasonal unemployment), Pull factors (e.g., non-farm employment opportunities, higher wages in urban areas), Impact of migration on income, employment condition and household livelihood) **Secondary Data:** Sourced from; Government reports (Government of Tamil Nadu, 2023), Published literature on agricultural migration, Census and district-level reports

Data Analysis: Simple Percentage and Mean. The data were computed with the help of MS Excel, Clustered Diverging Stacked Likert bar plots and Alluvial plot chart were created using R 4.5.1 Studio Software.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In this chapter the social background of the migrant labourers, source of motivation for migration, Source of money for migration, reason for migration (push and pull factor), Impact of migration on employment conditions, role of migration on indebtedness have been described.

4.1. Socio-Economic Background

It is important to mention the social background of migrant labourers in Chengalpattu District. The social background has been studied as age, education, sector of employment, family type, annual income from all the sources.

Table 1: Distribution of respondents according to Socio Economic Status

Variables	Categories	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Age	Up to 30	20	16.67
	31-40	52	43.33
	41-50	24	20.00
	Above 50	24	20.00
Education Status	Illiterate	4	3.33
	Functional Literate	14	11.67
	Primary (1-5 th)	16	13.33
	Middle (6-8 th)	44	36.67
	Secondary & Higher (9-12 th)	24	20.00
	Diploma	8	6.67
Sector of employment	Collegiate	10	8.33
	Construction	46	38.33
	Manufacturing	20	16.67
	Hotel & Trade	22	18.33

Place of Migration	Transport	32	26.67
	Chennai	38	31.67
	Coimbatore	34	28.33
	Maharashtra	8	6.67
	Mysore	12	10.00
	Nellore	4	3.33
	Singapore	16	13.33
	Uttar Pradesh	8	6.67
Type of Family	Joint	26	21.67
	Nuclear	94	78.33
Annual Income from all the sourced	Rs. < 1L	4	3.33
	Rs.2.1L-3L	48	40.00
	Rs.3.1L-4L	20	16.67
	Rs.4.1L-5L	36	30.00
	Above 5L	12	10.00
Influence for migration	Friends	58	48.33
	Parents	12	10.00
	Relatives	20	16.67
	Self	30	25.00
Source of money for migration	Money lenders	34	28.33
	Friends/Family	36	30.00
	Gold loan	50	41.67

(Source: Primary data)

Age: The table, indicates that the nearly half-off the (43.33%) of the respondents are in the age group of 31-40 years, whereas the lowest proportion (16.67%) of respondents are in the age group of up to 30 years. This shows that most of the migrant wage labourers fall within the middle age group, signifying that individuals in the 31-40 years age category are more actively involved in migration for wage labour due to various reasons. This finding in line with the study of Srivastava (2020), internal migrants in India are mostly young and middle-aged adults who move in search of productive employment opportunities.

Education status: This distribution indicates that a larger proportion of the migrant's labourers (36.67%) have falls under middle school level, showing a moderate level of basic education among most respondents. However, the presence of illiterate and functional literate groups together (15.00%) suggests that a significant portion still lacks adequate formal educational exposure. The comparatively lower proportion of diploma holders and college- educated respondents implies that higher educational attainment among migrant labourers is limited, which may influence the type of work they are engaged in, often restricting them to manual or low-skills employment opportunities in the agricultural sector.

Sector of employment: The Table No.1 shows that the highest percentage of migrant workers (38.33%) is working in the construction sector, whereas the lowest percentage of respondents (16.67%) is working in the manufacturing sector, which indicates that a large share of migrant labourers is employed in the construction sector.

Type of family: The findings show that nearly half (78.33%) of the migrants workers hail from nuclear families, whereas a relatively smaller share (21.67%) is from joint family systems, suggesting that the economic pressure may be higher on nuclear families, leading to higher migration for wage employment.

Annual income from all the sources of migrants: The income categories used in the table are commonly adopted in socio-economic and migration studies in India because they reflect typical low-to-middle-income groups observed among rural and semi-urban migrant households. These ranges align with the income distribution used by agencies such as NSSO (National Sample Survey Office) and various migration research studies, which classify households into income brackets of Rs.1 lakh intervals for analyzing livelihood security, remittance behavior and economic vulnerability.

The one-third of the respondents (40%) falls into the middle annual income category of Rs.2.1 -3 lakh, with fewer households (3.33%) earning below Rs. 1lakh and only 10% earning above Rs.5 lakh. When compared to Chengalpattu districts high per capita income (~₹6.48 lakh), this distribution indicates that most rural households in the study earn significantly less than the district average, reflecting limited rural income opportunities that may drive labour migration to urban areas (Economic Study of Tamil Nadu 2025; Chengalpattu per capita income ₹6.48 lakh)

Influence for migration: The table indicates that the nearly half of the (48.33%) of the respondents were influenced by their friends to migrate,

whereas the lowest proportion (10.00%) were motivated by their parents. This suggest that peer networks plays a major role in encouraging migration among individuals, reflecting the significance of social ties in migration decisions.

Source of money for migration: The table indicates that one-third of the (41.67%) of the migrants use gold loans to meet their migration-related expenses. The lowest share (28.33%) depends on money lenders. This reveals that migrants rely more on household assets such as gold rather than informal credit sources when financing their migration process.

4.2. Conceptual Linkage to Push and Pull Factors

The results are in line with the Push-Pull Theory of Migration, which describes migration as the outcome of positive forces drawing people to the destination (pull factors) and negative forces acting at the place of origin (push factors). The economic and livelihood pressures that force people to relocate are exemplified by push factors like unemployment, low wage rates, decreasing agricultural activity, rising household expenditure,

and growing loan burden. By decreasing income stability and restricting opportunities for livelihood, these circumstances produce a strong push away from the origin. On the other hand, attractive opportunities at the destination are represented by pull factors, which include better employment, higher wages, the availability of numerous jobs, more days of guaranteed work, the potential to earn and save more, and the ability to invest in agricultural land. These factors encourage migrants to move places that provide more stable finances, steady work, and opportunities to build long-term assets.

As a result, the combined data supports the Push-Pull framework's conceptual underpinnings by demonstrating how opportunities at the destination and pressures at the origin interact to influence migration decisions. People migrate when the opportunities for employment and economic advantages at their new location exceed the limitations and difficulties they face at home.

4.2.1. Push and Pull factors for the migration in perception of migrant households.

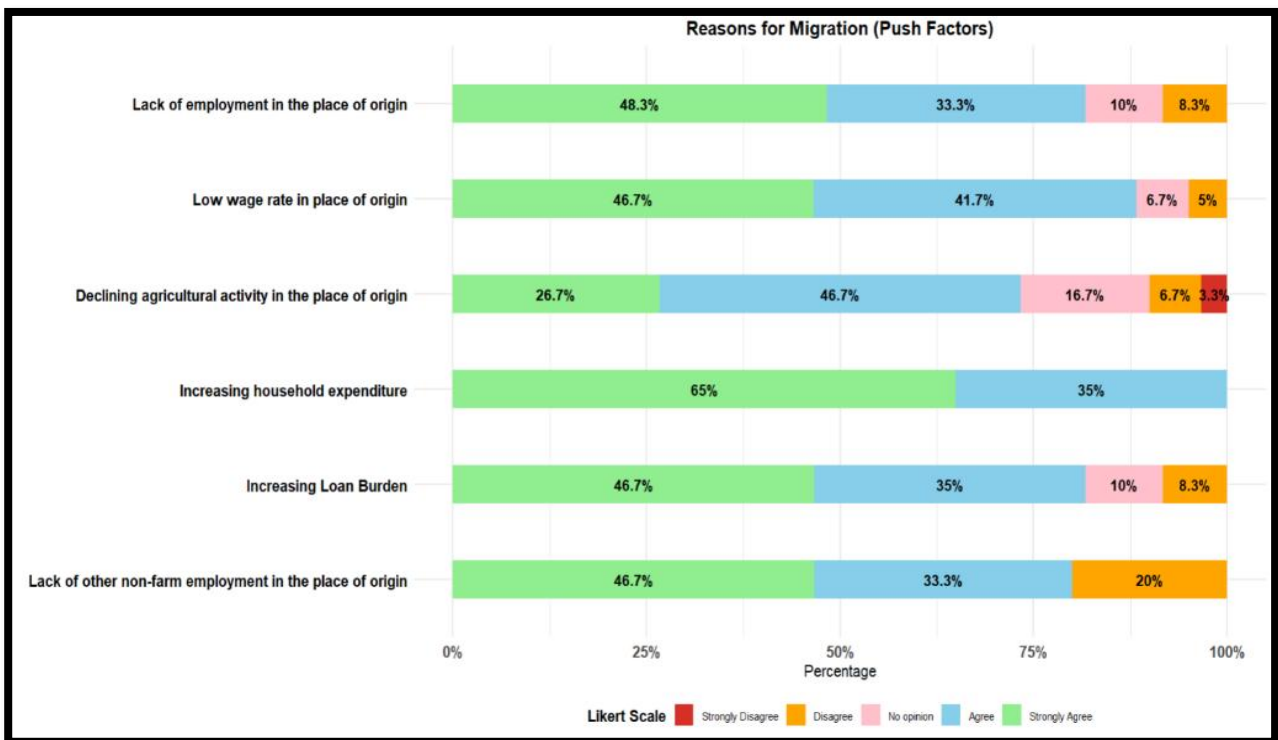


Figure 2: Reason for Migration (Push Factor)

Fig 2, shows the distribution of respondents according to their level of agreement on various push factors that influenced their migration. Concerning increasing household expenditure, a majority of 39(65.00%) respondents strongly agree and 21 (35.00%) agree that rising expenses forced them to migrate.

Thus, the results indicates that economic pressure, limited employment opportunities, low agricultural returns and rising household expenses are the major factors pushing individuals toward migration for livelihood.

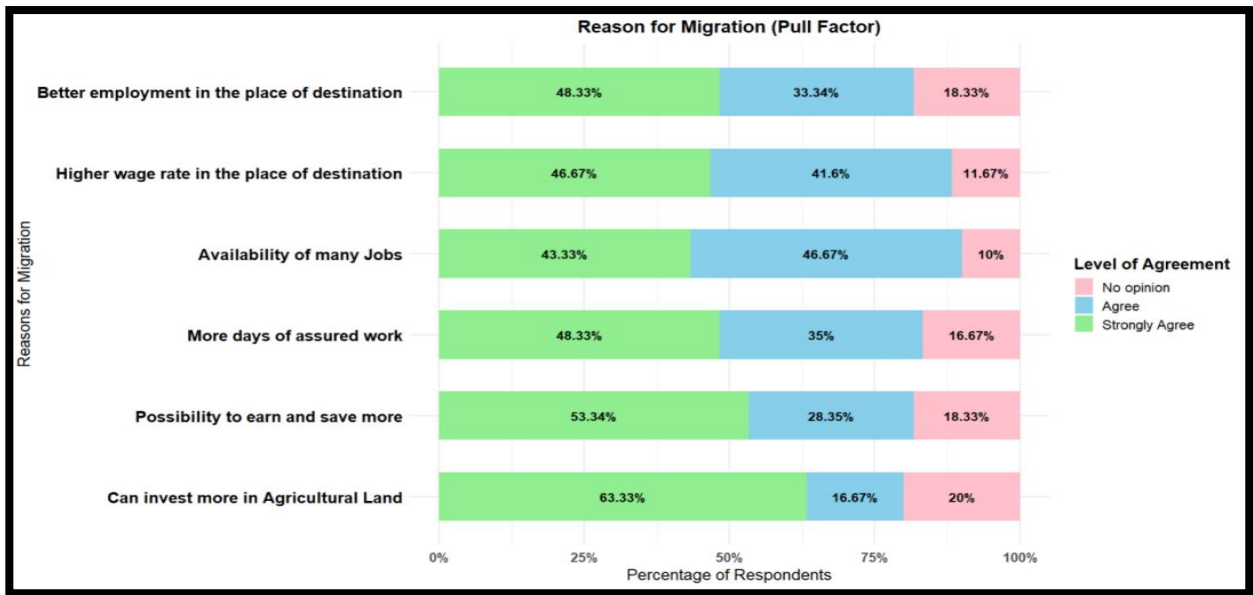


Figure 3: Reason for Migration (Pull Factor)

Fig 3, shows the distribution of respondents based on pull factors influencing their migration decision. Of the total 60 (100.00%) ,29 (48.33%) strongly agreed and 20 (33.34%) agreed that better employment opportunities at the destination acted as a major pull factor. It is also observed that 38 (63.33%) respondents strongly agreed and 10

(16.67%) agreed that migration provided opportunities to invest more in land.

The results clearly indicates that the majority of respondents strongly agree that better employment, higher wages, more job availability, increased working days, higher savings, and the possibility of investing in land are the major pull factors motivating migration.

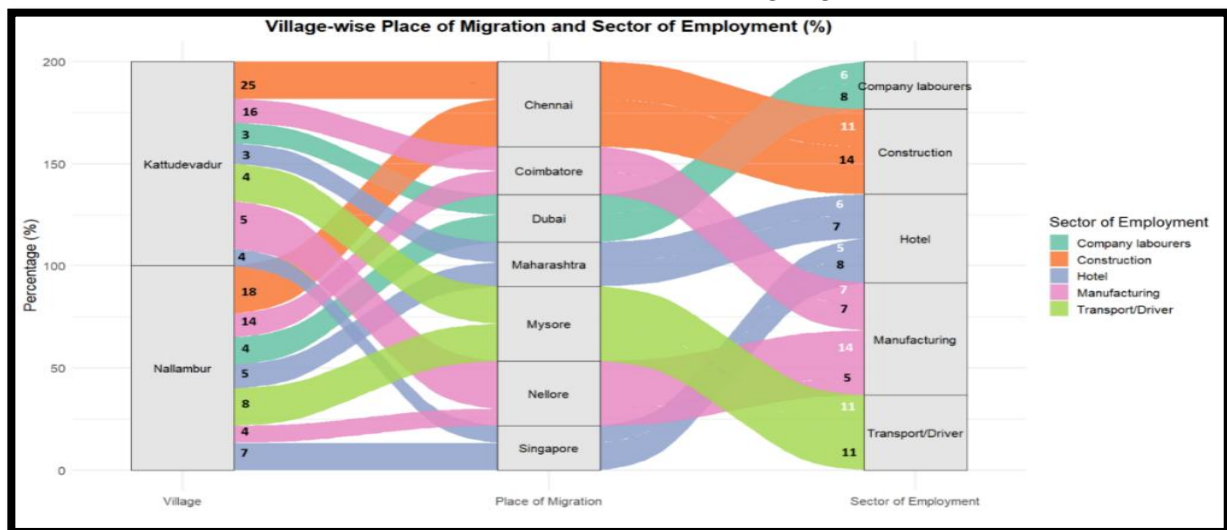


Figure 4: Village wise migration pattern and Sector of employment

Fig 4, represents that migration pattern from two villages (Kattudevadur and Nallambur) to various migration destinations and the associated employment sectors is depicted in the chart. It gives a clear picture of the spatial distribution and absorption of migrants from each village into particular occupational sectors. A smaller percentage of Kattudevadur migrants reduce migrants relocate to Dubai, Mysore, Nellore and Singapore, while the majority settle in urban and

industrial areas like Chennai, Coimbatore and Maharashtra. There is a need for manual and semi-skilled labour, as evidence by the large percentage of these migrants working in the manufacturing and construction industries. A smaller percentage of migrants works in the transportation and driving industries, which reflects limited access to skill-based jobs, while some are also employed as company laborers and hotel employees.

Nallambur migrants, on the other hand, exhibit a somewhat more varied migration pattern. A smaller percentage relocate to Mysore and Nellore, then to Chennai, Coimbatore and Maharashtra. In contrast to Kattudevadur, Nallambur migrants are more dominant in the manufacturing and transportation / driver industries, indicating comparatively greater occupational mobility or skill acquisition. While company labor employment is still moderate, employment in hotels and construction is also noticeable.

Across both villages, construction and manufacturing emerge as the dominant employment sectors, absorbing the largest share of migrants. For migrants from Nallambur, the transportation and driving industries are especially significant because they offer better access to licenses or experience in driving -related jobs. For migrants from both villages, jobs as hotel and company laborers provide a secondary but reliable source of income.

Table 2: Impact of Migration on Employment Conditions (Perspective towards Household members)

Impact of Migration on Employment Conditions (Perspective towards Household members)	SA		A		N		DA		SDA	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Migration has improved our employment opportunities	48	40.00	52	43.33	12	10.00	8	6.67	0	0
We get regular and stable employment after migration	56	46.66	50	41.67	14	11.67	0	0	0	0
Working conditions in migrated areas are better than in our village	32	26.67	56	46.66	20	16.67	12	10	0	0
We are satisfied with the wages at migration destination	78	65.00	42	35.00	0	0	0	0	0	0
Migration has provided opportunities to learn new skills	16	13.33	36	30.00	48	40.00	20	16.67	0	0
We face exploitation(wage cuts, long hours, unsafe work) at migration sites	0	0	0	0	24	20.00	54	45.00	42	35.00
Migration has reduced our dependency on agriculture	36	30.00	24	20.00	22	18.33	20	16.67	18	15.00

Table 2, refers that migration has had a predominantly positive impact on the employment conditions of migrant households. A very large proportion of respondents (83.33%) agreed that migration has improved their employment opportunities, while an even higher percentage (88.33%) felt that migration provides regular and stable employment. This indicates that migration significantly reduces employment insecurity faced by households in their native villages.

Similarly, about 73.33 per cent of the respondents reported that working conditions in migrated areas are better than those in their villages, highlighting improved work environments at migration destinations. Wage-related outcomes are particularly strong, as 100 per cent of the respondents expressed satisfaction with wages earned at migration destinations, emphasizing that better remuneration is one of the most important benefits of migration.

In terms of livelihood diversification, 50 per cent of the household members agreed that migration

has reduced dependency on agriculture, while the remaining respondents were neutral or disagreed. This suggest that migration encourages partial diversification rather than a full abandonment of agriculture. With respect to skills, 43.33 per cent agreed, 40 per cent were neutral, and 16.67 per cent disagreed, suggesting that skill development through migration is low for many households. Concerning adverse experiences, only 20 per cent agreed that they experience exploitation at migration sites, whereas 80% disagreed or strongly disagreed, and 20 per cent were neutral, which suggests that exploitation is not widely experienced, but neutral responses may represent underreporting or indirect experiences. Thus, the findings indicates that migration is generally perceived to be a positive livelihood strategy because of higher wages, more stable employment, and better working conditions, although its effect on skill development and full replacement of agriculture is moderate.

Table 3: Role of migration on Indebtedness (Perspective towards Household members)

Role of migration on Indebtedness (Perspective towards Household members)	SA		A		N		DA		SDA	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Migration income has helped in reducing households debts	56	46.67	52	43.33	12	10.00	0	0	0	0
Migration has increased our capacity to repay loans	54.	45.00	52	43.33	14	11.67	0	0	0	0
Despite migration, household debt remains high	0	0	0	0	24	20.00	52	43.33	44	36.67
Migration earnings are often insufficient due to high living costs at destination	0	0	0	0	10	8.33	68	56.67	42	35.00
Migration has led to taking new loans for travel, accommodation, or work arrangements	0	0	0	0	48	40.00	52	43.33	20	16.67
Migration has improved our access to credit facilities	0	0	0	0	24	20.00	54	45.00	42	35.00

Table 3 clearly shows that migration has helped migrant households pay off their debts and make more money. A large majority of respondents

(90.00%) agreed that migration income has helped them pay off their debts, and 88.33 per cent said that migration has made it easier for them to pay

back loans. This means that money makes homes much more stable and able to pay off their debts. Most People still believe that they will be in debt for a long time. None of the people who answered said that household debt stays high even though people move. Instead, 80 per cent disagreed or strongly disagreed with this statement, and 20 per cent stayed neutral. This suggests that migration has made it easier for most households to pay off their debts.

Similarly, concerns about migration earnings being insufficient due to high living costs at destination place were not widely supported. Majority of the respondents (91.67%) disagreed or strongly disagreed, indicating that, despite higher living expenses, migration income is generally adequate to meet households needs and debt burdens. With regard to borrowing for migration-related expenses such as travel, accommodation, or work arrangements, 60.00 per cent of respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed that migration led to new loans, while 40.00 per cent were neutral. This suggests that although some households may initially rely on borrowing, migration does not significantly increase long-term indebtedness.

Finally, migration does not appear to have significantly improved access to formal credit facilities. While 80.00 per cent disagreed or strongly disagreed that migration improved access to credit, 20.00 per cent expressed neutral views. This indicates that reductions in indebtedness are mainly due to improved income flows rather than expanded access to institutional credit. Overall, the table demonstrates that migration contributes to debt reduction and improved loan repayment capacity, while concerns related to persistent debt, high living costs, and increased borrowing are minimal from the household perspective.

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5. CONCLUSION

The study concludes that declining Agricultural employment opportunities and income instability has forced Agricultural households in Chengalpattu District to adopt labour migration as a livelihood strategy, that the socio-economic profile of migrants is that of middle-aged people with moderate levels of education who are employed in the construction and other non-farm sectors, that peer influence and social networks are important in making migration decisions, and that gold is the most commonly used household asset to fund migration. The results are consistent with the push-Pull model of migration, where economic factors such as low farm wages, seasonal unemployment, and increasing household expenditure are drivers of out-migration from rural areas while better wages, regular employment, and improved working conditions are factors that attract migrants to urban areas. Although migration has led to some livelihood diversification by reducing reliance on agriculture, its effect on skill development is limited. Importantly, migration income has reduced household indebtedness and increased loan repayment capacity, showing greater financial resilience of migrant households; and debt, high living cost, and exploitation at the migration destination are minimal from the household perspective. But migration has not led to greater access to formal credit facilities, suggesting that income gains rather than institutional support drive financial improvements.

Overall, the study shows that labor migration can improve working conditions and lower debt levels for rural families. It also stresses the need for policy changes, policy implications and Government programmed schemes to help migrant workers develop their skills, get social protection, and get institutional credit.

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