

MIGRANT CONSTRUCTION WORKERS IN GOA

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The upsurge of socio-economic activity in Goa following its liberation from Portuguese resulted in an enormous growth in construction activity in the state. This led to a massive influx of migrant workers in the construction sector in Goa. The paper presents a socio-economic profile of migrant workers engaged in construction activity in Goa, and analyses the impact of those workers on the Goan economy.

The great upsurge of socio-economic activity that occurred in Goa in the wake of its political liberation resulted in a massive influx of migrant labour. The migratory inflow of population was maximum in the first decade from 1961 - 1971 and stabilised in later decade (1971 - 81). Available statistics reveal that during the decade, 1961-1971, migratory increase in population was 1.43 per cent per annum and the natural increase was 1.6 per cent per annum. In the latter decade (1971-1981) migratory increase in population was 0.88 per cent per annum and the natural increase in population 1.5 per cent per annum.

This paper is a study of the migrant construction workers in Goa. A significant proportion of the total migrant labour in Goa comprises construction workers from other states who come in large numbers following the construction boom in Goa in the eighties. Goa depends heavily on migrant workers for its construction activity. This paper seeks to examine the socio-economic characteristics of these workers, the causal factors (push and pull factors) leading to immigration of these workers in Goa and the impact on the Goan economy.

I. A CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK OF MIGRATION

The decision to migrate is undertaken either by an individual or a household and depends on the relative dissatisfaction with the present place and/or on perceived opportunities at the place of destination, commonly known as "push" and "pull" factors. It is observed that most studies try to explain migration in terms of wages/income differentials between the place of origin and destination. Todaro (1969) in his seminal paper, tried to explain migration behaviour in developing countries in terms of "push" and "pull" factors, respectively. The Harris-Todaro model (1970) described the difference between rural earnings foregone and the expected value of urban income as the driving force behind migration. Dandekar and Rath (1971) treated rural poverty as a "push" factor.

Construction workers, by and large, belong to the lower strata of society. Many of them may have no productive asset to fall back on, which induced them to migrate, when they needed a job. Some, though, may have a productive asset in the form of a patch of land, may still be forced to migrate as cultivation may no longer be economically viable, due to commercialisation of agriculture. In the former case, the surplus labour situation in rural areas, is sufficient to encourage out-migration of the unemployed and underemployed (Joshi and Joshi, 1976), even if urban areas back home, do not offer sufficient employment

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opportunities. Theoretically, in this case there is a greater probability that the entire family will out-migrate, possibly after a time-lag. Even those who are employed may out-migrate, if the wage rate at the place they intend to migrate to, is high enough to compensate for the cost of moving (Oberai, Prasad, and Sardana, 1989).

There are three possible ways of out-migration. The first is a situation where there is no surplus labour in the region, but higher wages paid outside the region attracts out-migrants. Secondly, out-migration may occur during certain periods when the regional labour demand falls and thirdly, out-migration is observed when the labour is surplus to the region, as well as, the land holding (Gill, 1984).

II. METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY

The study covered certain areas in Goa where there is a concentration of construction workers, namely, Mapusa (Dattawadi, Peddem), Porvorim, Margao, Vasco, Bambolim. A random sample of 100 workers was selected representing all the areas and questionnaires were filled up after informal discussions. Questions were asked with regard to sex, age, hometown, level of education if any, nature of job performed in construction (i.e. whether they were simple labourers, masons, carpenters, plumbers, electricians, tile fitters etc), income per day, reasons for leaving hometown, reasons for migrating to Goa, etc. The data collected on the basis of this information was then analysed.

III. SOCIO-ECONOMIC PROFILE OF MIGRANT CONSTRUCTION WORKERS

1. Age and Sex Distribution of Migrant Construction Workers

Table 1 shows that a high percentage of male construction workers (35.36 per cent) were in the 22-30 age group, followed by 23.17 per cent in the 31-40 age group, 21.95 per cent in the 14-21 age group; 14.63 per cent in the 41-50 age group and 3.66 per cent in the 51-60 age group. Construction work involves hard physical labour and this explains why most of the workers are in the 22-30 and 31-40 age group. Among the female workers the table reveals that the highest percentage of females is found in the 14-21 and 31-40 age group (27.78 per cent in each group) followed by 22.22 per cent in the 41-50 age group and 16.67 per cent in the 22-30 age group. The lower percentage in the 22-30 age group among females is probably due to the fact that this is also the normal child bearing period for a woman and this may prevent many of them from undertaking hard manual work. The percentage is higher in the 14-21 age group, as women in this age group have fewer family responsibilities since most of them may not be married. The percentage of women in the 31-40 age group is higher, as, by this age the child bearing period is over for most women and their children are also grown up. Thus, we find that most construction workers (total figure) fall in the 22-30 age group, closely followed by the 31-40 and 14-21 age groups respectively.

2. Education Level

As per the data collected, (Table 2) we find that 64 per cent of the construction workers are illiterate, 11 per cent have completed primary school, another 11 per cent middle school; 12 per cent high school and 2 per cent higher secondary. Amongst the male workers 57.32 per cent and amongst the female workers 94.44 per cent were illiterate.

Table 1
Age and Sex Distribution of Migrant Construction Workers

Age group	Male	Female	Total
14 - 21	18 (21.95)	5 (27.78)	23
22-30	29	3	32
31-40	19 (23.17)	5 (27.78)	24
41-50	12 (14.63)	4 (22.22)	16
57 - 60	3 (3.66)	-	3
Does not know	1 (1.23)	1 (5.56)	2
Total	82 (100)	18 (100)	100

Source: field survey.

Table 2
Education Level of Migrant Construction Workers

Construction Workers	Illiterate	Primary School	Middle School	High School	HS	Above HS	Total
Males	47 (57.32)	11 (13.41)	11 (13.41)	11 (13.41)	2 (2.44)	-	82 (100)
Females	17 (94.44)	-	-	1 (5.56)	-	-	18 (100.0)
Total	64	11	11	12	2	-	100

Source: Field survey.

3. Place of Origin

Table 3 shows that 77 per cent of the migrant construction workers come from Karnataka, followed by 10 per cent from Maharashtra. The percentages from other states are insignificant. As these are neighbouring states, the large percentages coming from them is understandable. With regard to sex distribution, we find 78.05 per cent of males and 72.22 per cent of females come from Karnataka as against 8.54 per cent of males and 16.67 per cent of females from Maharashtra.

Table 3
Construction Workers as per Their Place of Origin

Construction workers	Karnataka	Maharashtra	Rajasthan pradesh	Andhra	Tamil nadu	Others	Total
male	64 (78.05)	07 (8.54)	02 (2.44)	01 (1.23)	02 (2.44)	06 (7.32)	82 (100)
female	13 (72.22)	03 (16.67)	-	01 (5.56)	01 (5.56)	-	18 (100)
total	77	10	02	02	03	07	100

Source: Field survey.

4. Type of Work Performed

The Table 4 shows that 61 per cent of the workers (male and female) work as simple labourers in construction activity implying that a large percentage of such workers is unskilled. Amongst males 58.54 per cent work as simple labourers followed by 17.07 per cent as masons, 9.76 per cent as painters, 8.54 per cent as carpenters etc. (table 4). Amongst females 94.44 per cent work as simple labourers and 5.56 per cent as masons. Thus, more females are engaged in unskilled work than males. Thus, a relatively large number of male and female workers work as simple labourers.

Table 4
Type of Work Performed in Construction Activity by Sex

Sex	Carpenters	Simple Labourers	Masons Fitters	Tile	Painters	Lab Contr.	Plum-Totals	Distribution
Males	07 (8.54)	48 (58.54)	14 (17.07)	02 (2.44)	08 (9.76)	02 (2.44)	01 (1.22)	82 (100)
Females		17 (94.44)	1 (5.56)	-	-	-	-	18 (100)
Total	07	61	15	02	08	02	01	100

Source: Field Survey.

5. Wages and Type of Work

The Table 5 shows the wages paid per day for different categories of work for both males and females. We find that for males work that involves some skill, is paid between Rs. 100-150/- per day and unskilled work is paid Rs. 50-100/- per day. As against this females receive below Rs. 50/- per day for the same type of work, which implies sex discrimination in the wage scales.

Table 5
Wages and Type of Work in Construction Activity

Type of Work	Wages per Day	
	Males	Females
Carpenters	Rs. 100-150/-	-
Simple labourers	Rs. 50-100/-	below Rs. 50/-
Masons	Rs. 100-150/-	below Rs. 50/-
Tile fitters	Rs. 100-150/-	—
Painters.	Rs. 100-150/-	—
Labour		
Contractors	Rs. 50-100/-	—
Plumbers	Rs. 100-150/-	-

Source: Field survey.

6. Monthly Family Income of Construction Workers

The data (Table 6) reveals that 80 per cent of the workers receive a monthly income above Rs. 1,000, 13 per cent between Rs. 500 - 1,000 per month and only 4 per cent below Rs. 500 per month. In a family, if both husband and wife offer themselves for work, they earn a decent wage, provided they are employed for the whole month. It is observed that, during the contract period, they earn well, but, once the contract is over and if they are not contracted for the next job, they stand to lose and then they have to find odd jobs on their own.

Table 6
Monthly Family Income of Construction Workers

<i>Monthly income</i>	<i>No. of construction workers</i>
Below Rs.500	4
Rs.500-1000/-	13
Above Rs.1000/-	80
Not revealed	3
Total	100

Source: Field survey.

7. Size of Family

Table 7 shows that 43 per cent of the migrant construction workers have a family consisting of 3 - 5 members, 25 per cent have 6-8 members, 17 per cent have above 8 members and 15 per cent below 3 members. Very often, it is the size of their families that eats up their income especially if there are a large number of children below 14. However, if there are more adult members and each one offers himself/herself for work, the total family income rises.

Table 7
Total Family Members of Construction Workers

<i>No. of Family members.</i>	<i>No. of construction workers</i>
Below 3	15
3 - 5	43
6 - 8	25
Above	817
Total	100

Source: Field survey.

II. REASONS FOR LEAVING HOMETOWN

The migrant construction workers listed the following factors which served as 'push factors' in their hometown forcing them to migrate. (Tables 8 and 9)

Table 8
Reasons for Leaving Home Town

Construction workers	Lack of empt.	Low wages	Drought	Famine	Other Reasons	Total
males	42 (51.22)	31 (37.80)	03 (3.66)	05 (6.1)	01 (1.23)	82 (100)
Females	06 (33.33)	07 (38.89)	02 (11.11)	02 (11.11)	01 (5.56)	18 (100)
Total	49	38	05	07	02	100

Source: Field survey.

Table 9
Reasons for Migrating to Goa

Construction workers demand	Better working wages wworkers	Higher demand to	Higher Reasons	Proximity Hometown	Other	Total
Males	13 (15.85)	21 (25.61)	28 (34.15)	12 (14.63)	08 (9.76)	82 (100)
Females	02 (11.11)	06 (33.33)	05 (27.78)	05 (27.78)	—	18 (100)
Total	15	27	34	17	08	100

Source: Field survey.

- i. *Lack of employment*: Forty nine per cent of the migrant construction workers said that it was lack of employment in their native place that brought them to Goa. 51.22 per cent of these males and 33.33 per cent of females attributed their migration to this factor.
- ii. *Low wages*: Thirty eight per cent of the respondents attributed their decision to migrate to this factor. 37.80 per cent of males as against 38.89 per cent held this factor responsible for their migration.
- iii. *Drought*: Five per cent of the respondents who were generally workers from Karnataka; attributed their decision to migrate to this factor. 3.66 per cent of the males and 11.11 per cent of females attributed these factors to their migration.
- iv. *Famine*: Seven per cent of the respondents (11.11 per cent females and 6.1 percent males) said that they migrated due to famines.
- v. *Other reasons* like family problems, high cost of living, at the native place, prospect of enjoying a better standard of living at the place of destination etc. were cited by 2 per cent of the respondents. Women sometimes migrated because they had to accompany their spouse.

The following were the 'pull factors' listed by them, which induced the workers to leave their native place and attracted them to Goa.

- i. *Better working conditions*: Fifteen per cent of the respondents responded that the working conditions in Goa were better than those in their native place thus motivating them to migrate to Goa.
- ii. *Higher demands for construction workers*: The construction boom witnessed by Goa in 1990's led to an escalation of the demand for construction workers. Since very few

Goans offered themselves for construction work the resultant gap had to be filled by the migrant workers. Unlike other states, - the migrants did not face any competition from the locals/natives for getting jobs. Goa offered a clear ground for migrant workers — which some respondents (27 per cent) felt was the 'pull factor'.

- iii. *Higher wages*: Thirty four per cent of the respondents felt that in Goa, due to the shortage of such workers they could earn higher wages as compared to their native place. Infact, the largest percentage of respondents attributed this factor as the 'pull factor' for them.
- iv. *Proximity to hometown*: Table 3 indicated that the largest percentage of workers came from the neighbouring states of Goa i.e. Karnataka and Maharashtra. Seventeen per cent of the respondents attributed their migration to this factor.
- v. Other reasons cited by 8 per cent of the respondents were presence of relatives nearby, or merely following the others who had earlier migrated to Goa.

V. IMPACT ON THE GOAN ECONOMY

Migrant construction workers have had a positive as well as a negative impact on the Goan economy. Both these impacts are discussed below.

1. Positive Impact

- i. These workers have provided Goa with the much needed labour for construction activity. It is observed that till the late eighties Goan labourers worked along with these migrants in the construction activity, but, rapid industrialisation and the subsequent development of the tourism industry, led to an increase in the white collar and technical jobs, which attracted the Goans, as these jobs did not involve hard work. This boosted the demand for migrant workers, who were absorbed in these jobs. Building of bridges, tunnels, and dams in Goa could not have been possible without these workers. In particular, the laying of the Konkan railway line and digging of tunnels in Goa could not have been completed without these workers. Thus, we can conclude that developmental projects in Goa were possible entirely due to the availability of the migrant construction workers.
- ii. Sometimes, once the work is over the contractor deserts these workers who are then left with no money to go back to their native place. More often than not these jobless workers end up taking odd jobs for their survival. This is a boon for Goa where there is always a dearth of labour to do menial jobs such as those of coolies, domestic servants, plumbers, carpenters etc. The migrant workers who fill this need tend to be cheaper than Goan labour.

2. Negative Impact

Once these workers come to Goa, they very rarely go back to their native place which brings a myriad of problems in its wake. These are discussed below.

- i). They prove to be a strain on the limited infrastructural facilities in Goa e.g. transport, water, fuel, power etc. making life very difficult for the common man.
- ii). These migrant workers have to be provided with minimum living conditions by their employers including proper sanitation facilities. More often than not, this does not happen, with the result that such workers are forced to live in filthy

conditions lacking basic sanitary facilities. Not surprisingly such settlement areas then become the breeding grounds of a number of diseases. Infact, during the malaria outbreak in Goa, the local government had identified the areas occupied by migrant workers as the main cause of spreading the disease. This was confirmed by the doctors from the Directorate of Health Services (DHS) in Goa.

- iii). The presence of migrants, who often do not return to their village, inflates the total population of Goa.
Worse still, as most of these workers are illiterate, as per the available data they are unaware of family planning methods. Sex is sometimes a form of recreation for them, adding to the population problems. Many of the workers have already acquired ration cards and enrolled their names in electoral rolls with the help of crafty politicians who look upon them as vote banks.
- iv). Many of these workers have illegally built their huts on 'Comunidade land' 1 and even developed their own colonies resulting in the spread of slums. Needless to say this is an impediment to Goa's efforts to promote itself as a tourist destination as it can adversely affect the flow of tourists in the state.
- v). Children of migrant workers often loiter around begging or indulge in pick pocketing and thus become a nuisance for the locals and the tourists. This can further impair the image of Goa as a tourist destination.
- vi). Finally a large percentage of the child labour in Goa, comprises of children of these migrant labourers, as many of them take up jobs to either supplement their family's income or for sheer survival.

VI. CONCLUSION

We can conclude that migrant construction workers have come to stay in Goa as long as the locals are averse to doing construction work. This is not a phenomenon that can be wished away. However, some steps need to be taken to check an indiscriminate flow of such labour into Goa, which cannot support a very large population with the existing infrastructural facilities.

Note

1. Land belonging to the village community.

References

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