Chapter 7

MIGRATION AS COLLECTIVE BEHAVIOUR

An Overview

This thesis was an exercise in the sociological, analysis of migration between rural areas. Attention was focused on the migration of peasants from Travancore (an erstwhile Princely State) to Malabar (a part of the British-Indian empire). This was a 'biographic' study of an unexplored but important variety of human migration which B.H. Farmer has called "pioneer agricultural colonization". The study highlights the point that the undue importance given to rural-urban migration has tended to blur the dimensions of geographical mobility and social change in rural areas under the unwarranted assumption that all inter-rural migration is marriage migration having no impact on society's social and economic arrangements. "Pioneer" or "spontaneous" migration of peasants have been taking place in different parts of India across distinct cultural, linguistic and political units. They have changed rural settlement patterns, extended area of cultivation, increased agricultural production and encouraged the growth of rural entrepreneurship. In sum the rural migrants have been critical carriers of social change in rural areas. However, the details are hardly known.

As discussed in Chapter 2 the neglect of such an important field of research is due to the limitations of classical economic
and demographic models which posit a dichotomy between rural areas which are supposedly stagnant, offering no scope for maximization of income and employment and urban areas which have limitless resources. The traditional models do not succeed in explaining satisfactorily even rural-urban migration since they do not take into account non-economic factors. Though the classical models have suggested a heterogeneous array of factors which may influence the decision to migrate, they do not specify the combinations in which those determinants affect migration.

This basic dissatisfaction with the traditional explanations led us to explore alternative models of explanation. Smelser's value added approach to the study of collective behaviour offered the best promise. The basic assumption of the model was that a unique combination of certain necessary determinants was the sufficient condition for a unique outcome to result. Collective behaviour, in Smelser's view, was the result of social mobilization based on certain deprivations, strains, conflicts and ambiguities in their definitions of every day life situations. However, these social factors, strains, beliefs and mobilization operated within the limits set by facilitating conditions (conduciveness) and social controls.

Migration may look far removed from collective behaviour since it is based on numerous individual decisions taken by individuals at different geographic locations. This may be
true about the migration of certain pioneering and adventurous individuals who set the trail for later migrants. For example, a Malayalee in the nineteenth century, after having received basic education in his home town goes to Great Britian to receive training in medicine. After getting his medical degree he sets up a practice in Britian and settles down there permanently. His migration can in no way be characterized as collective behaviour. However, if the success and prosperity of this individual migrant impel many of his fellow villagers, co-religionists, relatives etc. also to migrate and if this movement is undertaken by numerous individuals based either on well-defined or vague beliefs about objective possibilities in Britian or subjective evaluations of those possibilities, we do have a truly collective behaviour. The collective aspect has been evident in several mass migratory movements which historically occurred on vast areas of the globe - the migration of the Polish peasant to North America, the Jewish 'diaspora' to Palestine, the American conquest of the wild west, British emigration to South Africa, Canada and Australia.

In India we see concentration of certain regional, linguistic and cultural inmigrant groups in metropolitan areas who duster around certain pockets in those areas. The collective character of migration is most marked, however, in peasant migration for agricultural colonization. In the Indian situation the collective aspect should be taken into account in any satisfactory explanation of migration since it is not the individual
but the group - the kin, the family, the village or territorial group-which is the unit of decision making.

Our attempt in this thesis was to apply the model of collective behaviour to peasant migration from Travancore, a relatively developed agricultural area to Malabar, a relatively underdeveloped agricultural area. The exposure of the model to field data, however, has revealed that the model needs certain modifications before it can be used to study migration as a form of collective behaviour. In the following pages we attempt to highlight the similarities as well as points of departure between migration and collective behaviour.

The collective character of migration was evident from the very regional and religious composition of migrants. We found that an overwhelming majority of the migrants were drawn from certain contiguous, geographically, culturally and economically homogeneous villages in Central Travancore and were composed mostly of Syrian Christians. Moreover there was the tendency for out-migrants from specific original villages to concentrate in specific in-migrant villages in Malabar.

After having noted this we enquired what were the permissive factors which made these regions, and religious groups migration-prone? In order to find an answer to this question, in the third and fourth chapters we probed into the historical process. This was a basic departure from Smelser who tends to
dismiss such enquiries as "natural history". However, in our view this is not natural history but sociological interpretation of history. Smelser's caveat against natural history is the result of his fear that it will make the interpretation of collective behaviour space-bound and time-specific. However, as Smelser himself concedes, the presence of certain historical conditions are necessary condition, though they may be activated only when certain other conditions are present. The historical account will be necessary to understand the conducive factors which is only the first stage in explanation. Smelser's own study of social change in the industrial revolution is an excellent example of sociological interpretation of history and economics.

The findings of our sociological interpretation of the historical process in Kerala may be summarized as follows:

1. At the advent of British rule, though politically divided, the Malayalam speaking region had some amount of cultural unity based on the hierarchical organization of society which influenced all aspects of social life - intergroup relations, ownership of land, agrarian relations and access to power and privilege. However, due to the absence of a vaishva community, a glaring lacuna in the traditional functional division of society, certain groups like the Syrian Christians of Travancore and Noplah Muslims of Malabar, who were outside the pale of caste Hinduism, filled the vacuum by adopting occupations avoided by caste Hindus such as trade and commerce.
2. With the advent of colonialism certain basic features of traditional Hindu society and economy broke down but the patterns and directions of change in Malabar and Travancore were different. In Malabar the agrarian policy of the alien rulers patronized a class of parasitic landlords who were only interested in extorting rent and traditional payments from tenants in gross violation of customary rights and duties of different sections of the people, such as the landlord, intermediary and tenant. This led to concentration of land in a few hands, insecure tenancies for tillers of the soil and unprecedented landlessness. In Travancore, on the other hand, the progressive policy of the government was instrumental in converting scores of tenants into proprietors thereby freeing forces of production from feudal fetters. Cash values were imparted to land and land transactions took place to an unprecedented scale.

3. Though production of cash crops for the market occupied a crucial sector of the agrarian economy of the Malayalam speaking region even before the advent of British colonialism it received added momentum under British influence to a greater degree in Travancore than in Malabar. The penetration of British capital into Travancore opened up new avenues for employment to Syrian Christians such as estate supervision, clerical jobs, transport and communications and trade and banking. There emerged an indigenous bourgeoisie, particularly from among the Syrian Christians, who monopolized trade, banking and journalism. They invested their surplus in
backwater cultivation, opening up of estates in the High Ranges and so on. The peasantry among the Christians (there was hardly any other 'peasant' caste in Travancore) took advantage of these developments and the state encouragement to the reclamation of waste-land and started extending area under their control by occupying cultivable waste in the frontier areas.

4. This happened at a period when among the landowning-rent receiving caste of Nairs, their traditional family organization was experiencing considerable strains in adjusting to an expanding cash economy. Their family organization was eminently suited to a situation when they could enforce their will on other sections of the population by virtue of their being local chieftains. They could extort services from traditional slave castes. When slavery and forced labour were abolished and cost of rice began to increase, and cost of education exerted additional pressures against tarwad resources as well as sentiments, it was inevitable that the Nair tarwad system should crumble. In the process Nair properties were alienated on an alarming scale to Syrian Christians and the Ezhava elite who had become prosperous due to the boom in coconut price, akbari trade and education. Similar developments took place in Malabar also where Theeyas and Moplahs became prosperous.

5. English education, introduced initially into both Travancore and Malabar by the British provided new resources to different sections of the population. The Nairs of Travancore,
found in it an opportunity to preserve their traditional hold on Travancore society by monopolizing government employment. The lower castes, through education and conversion to Christianity (Protestantism) began to question traditional caste rules and prescriptions. The religious organization and interdenominational competition among Syrian Christians prodded them on to establish a chain of educational institutions through which literacy among Christians, even in remote rural areas spread rapidly. The Ezhavas also began to take to education on a wide scale. In Malabar also literacy rates increased, but was limited to Nairs and Theeyas in urban areas. The Nairs, displaced from the militia and bureaucracy adopted education as a means of getting employment outside Malabar.

6. The discrimination in recruitment to government service in Travancore against Christians, Ezhavas and other lower castes forced these sections to agitate for equal opportunities. Through their communal organizations they began to agitate for constitutional and political reforms and this occupied a major part of political developments in Travancore in the first half of the twentieth century. The Nairs, particularly the educated lower class sections among them also formed their communal organizations and attempted first to reform Nair customs and mores, second resist the Christian domination in diverse social spheres and third began to emulate Christian entrepreneurship by establishing educational institutions, acquiring estates, starting industries etc.

In Malabar political developments in the 20th century
was less marked by communal interests than by economic interests. First was the agitation by the Moplah tenants against their land lords. The second was the agitation by Nair 'Superior' tenure holders for protecting their interest. The third was agitation by 'lower' tenants under the leadership of the Communist party.

7. Population mobility also was influenced by developments in the social, political and economic spheres. Initially the population in all parts of Kerala were geographically immobile. The first to become mobile were the Shanar converts of Travancore who went to Ceylon, Burma and other places through missionary patronage. Then the Nairs of Malabar began to go to Madras and other parts of Madras presidency for education and employment. A large number of Theeyas got themselves recruited in the British army. The Moplahs of Malabar also went to distant places such as Bombay as petty businessmen, workers on barges etc. Then the elite from among the Syrian Christians also went for professional education in other parts at a point when they prospered economically. After the Second World War emigration from Kerala caught on involving all sections of the population, culminating in the migration to the Gulf countries in recent years. However, alongside this increasing trend towards emigration, a significant rural-rural movement was taking place within Kerala. This was the "pioneer" colon-ization of agricultural waste by the peasants of Central
Travancore first to the High Ranges of Travancore and then to the jungles of Malabar.

As is be evident from this discussion many of the conducive factors for peasant migration from Travancore to Malabar emerged during the historical evolution of society in Kerala. Chief among the conducive factors were the following:

The out-migrant areas constituted the agricultural heartland of Travancore specializing in cash crops where peasant and capitalist production methods coexisted. They were dominated by Syrian Christians, a community endowed with entrepreneurship, strong religious organization and a tradition of migration. The family system of the Christians was another conducive factor. The individual factors consisted in their being landowning small peasants (within the context of the institutional factor that land was a free marketable commodity), with scarce resources, but large manpower.

Here we may note another departure from Smelser's model. The collectivity involved in migration is a primordial, historical collectivity while the collectivity relevant for elementary collective behaviour is a spontaneous collectivity, like a crowd; or a reformist group as in social movements. These transcend regional, linguistic or other primordial loyalties which play a crucial role in migration.

Our analysis of the causal factor in migration then explored the situations of strain which motivated Travancore peasants to migrate to Malabar. These consisted in the following:-
1. The tremendous pressure of population on the agricultural resources of Travancore resulting in a net increase in the number of people depending on agriculture. Though there was a shift of the labour force into other sectors of the economy the absolute member of people depending on agriculture was on the rise throughout the twentieth century.

2. This was reflected in the large size of migrating households. The system of inheritance prevalent among the Christians encouraged subdivision and fragmentation of holdings through successive generations.

3. The adoption of cash crops by peasants exposed them increasingly to fluctuations in the world market breaching down village autonomy and isolation, making the dichotomies between rural and urban areas blurred. The capitalist sector of cash crop economy co-existing with peasant production was largely insured from the fluctuations.

4. The crisis in the peasant cash crop sector was never more acute than during the Great Depression during which large number of peasant households became impoverished. It was during this period that migration emerged as a significant factor in rural economy.

5. Since the emerging agricultural capitalist class was co-religionists and even kin of the would-be migrants, the latter experienced acute relative deprivation. Moreover, the economi-
cally weaker sections among their kinsmen were rising economically through petty employment, and remittances from the urban sector.

6. A large number of the would-be migrants became indebted to moneylenders since they had no other avenue of credit since banking companies advanced credit according to land value and size of holding. A major reason for indebtedness among migrants, particularly Christians, was the dowry system.

7. The size of holding of most migrants was extremely small and was getting smaller due to subdivision. Even those small areas were devoted to cash crops and the principal staple diets such as rice and tapioca had to be purchased from the market. From the second World War onwards the price of rice showed an upward trend and thereafter never showed any slump. This upset the subsistence portfolio of the peasants.

8. The widespread disease of cash crops like coconut, arecanut, pepper etc. coupled with the loss of fertility of the soil, non-availability of pest-control measures, fertilizers etc, diminished the income generating capacity of land. Since most of the coconut, pepper and arecanut gardens had reached their prime, the peasants had to replant them. For this they did not have the capital, nor could they last through the long waiting period between planting and yielding.

9. Some of the households who used to cultivate tapioca, ginger etc. on other's fields on share-cropping basis, found this avenue blocked as an unanticipated consequence of the agrarian
legislation embarked upon by successive governments after the formation of the Kerala State.

10. Some of the impoverished would-be migrants were unwilling to do manual labour for others in their 'home' villages due to social reasons. But they were willing for it in an 'alien' environment.

11. At certain historical periods the supposed anti-Christian policies of the then Travancore Government had an indirect impact on migration, by forcing Christian capitalists to invest their surpluses in a less hostile environment. The peasantry also was affected to some extent since their spiritual leaders used to harp on the alleged anti-Christian policy of the government during their Sunday sermons in the church.

12. The non-Christian migrants were chiefly motivated by the demonstration effect of the Christian migrants. For some of them the chief strain producing factors were blockage of opportunity to practice traditional occupations such as artisanry (carpenter, barber etc.), weaving and toddy tapping (a few Ezhavas).

In the final analysis, we may that the penetration of capitalism into the agrarian economy of Travancore, initial State encouragement to reclamation of waste land etc. coupled with the entrepreneurial nature of sections of Syrian Christians, and the demonstration effect it offered to the peasantry among the Christians were crucial factors causing relative deprivation to the would-be migrants.
Here we may point out another crucial departure between migration and elementary collective behaviour. The latter is sporadic, spontaneous group action taken at the spur of the moment. But peasant migration from Travancore continued unabated for over half a century from the 1920s to the 1970s. Thus the factors in migration develop historically over a period of time, affect different households and individuals differently. The decision is taken not at the level of a large collectivity like a crowd but at the level of the individual household located in geographically dispersed regions though the factors develop and assume meaning at the level of the larger collectivity.

The conducive and strain factors by themselves are unable to offer a complete explanation of migration. The strains and deprivations gain meaning to individual migrants to the degree that generalized beliefs spread, mobilizing agencies emerge, precipitating factors operate and social controls dictate. In the present case in the early phases of migration no such belief had developed. The early migrants were adventurous young men, profit seeking land speculators or desperate individuals. In the early phases the migrants used to be considered not quite mentally balanced and Malabar as the nether region of rebellion (the Moplah riots) and epidemics (malaria). However, as time went on the success of the early migrants gave a new hope to the pauperized peasantry of Central Travancore and Malabar became the land 'flowing with milk and honey'. This is all the
similarity between the 'beliefs' in collective behaviour and in migration. The belief in migration crystallizes as resultant of 'demonstration effect'. In contrast, in collective behaviour it is crowd psychology (as in elementary collective behaviour) or belief in an ideology (as in social movements). If at all there is an ideology in migration, it is the achievement motive and entrepreneurship. Those who migrate are considered by society as people with push and drive, and hence somehow to be emulated.

In mobilization for migration no apparent role was played any charismatic leader. The chief mobilizing agencies seemed to be family, kin, friends, employers etc. Religious agencies played an indirect role by providing scope for easy adjustment of migrants at point of destination. Thus, in migration, long standing primordial ties are more important than the entirely transient ties of a crowd or the civic ties of workers and peasants agitating for a common purpose. In migration common consciousness is given objectively while in collective behaviour success of mobilization depends on the ability of leaders to develop common consciousness of people drawn from various backgrounds.

In collective behaviour precipitating factors are necessary conditions. In migration, however, the precipitating factors need not be present, though they may facilitate the decision.
Peasant migration to Malabar was characterized by lack of any social control worth the name. It seemed as if governments both in Travancore and Malabar had hardly any policy regarding migration. This spontaneity may perhaps account for both the haphazard manner in which it developed as well as to its success especially when we consider the failure of government sponsored colonizations like the Wynad ex-servicemen scheme.

The second stage of migration, the actual migratory process, was concerned with decision making, planning and making the final move. Here again we noted the importance of collective factors but also the differences with Smelser's model of collective behaviour. In migration decision making was dependent on the structure of familial authority which often vested in the eldest male. Intuitive collective behaviour the 'leader' had to transcend the limits of the family, kin or territory. Village and regional ties were also important in migration indicated by the number of people coming in groups and settling down in Malabar. The collective aspect in migration was evident even in such purely economic transactions such as disposing off land at the native place. Land tended to be sold to members of the same community to which the migrants belonged, preferably to relatives.

Our enquiry into the patterns of migrant adjustment in Malabar revealed that the adjustment of migrants was aided by the assistance offered by religious authorities in establishing
schools, colleges, places of religious worship, developing roads and communication etc. It was perhaps lack of organization of this type which was the most important reason why migration of people belonging to other communities did not take place to a scale comparable to the Christians. Thus success of migration depended on building infrastructures and institutions. In collective behaviour, institution building is said to slow down the tempo of mobilization.

Another interesting aspect of migrant adjustment in Malabar was the tendency to replicate the original village structure as exemplified by bringing artisans and other service castes from native villages, clamouring for religious facilities akin to those which obtained in home villages etc. The tendency was noted even in urban settings both in other parts of India and elsewhere. The rural migrant tends to bring to the city structures and behaviour patterns which obtained in the original villages, thereby giving rise to 'urban villages'. This tendency for replication of structures in contrasted by the attempt to alter existing structures by participants of a social movement.

This does not imply that the structures at point of destination remain unaltered. As we noted in our discussions the Travancore migrants acted as crucial carriers of social change in the rural areas of Malabar. Extending the area under cultivation the Travancore migrants aided in the agricultural development of Malabar by introducing new and improved varieties of
crops; numerous plantations, both small and large, of rubber, cardamom, coffee etc. sprang up in Malabar. The cultivation of tapioca on a wide scale helped the region face a difficult food situation caused by skyrocketing price of rice and other food items. By organizing themselves against the feudal land owning aristocracy of Malabar, the migrants unleashed new forces of production making agricultural capitalism a way of life. Sparsely populated regions hummed with human activity. Through their network of institutions the migrants revitalized the educational and cultural life of Malabar. Their hardwork and industriousness had a demonstration effect on the peasantry of Malabar and they also have begun to take to entrepreneurial activities.

However, as a result of migration some depressed sections such as the hill tribes have become dispossessed of their land. The local labourers look at the migrants as an emerging capitalist class and this may lead to clashes between the local labourers on the one hand, and the migrants on the other. This may become a regular feature of the rural scene in Malabar and unless correctives are taken at an early stage an essentially class conflict may be merged into a variation of the sons-of-the soil agitation.
Notes and References

I. B. H. Farmer distinguishes "pioneer", "spontaneous" colonization of agricultural waste land from government sponsored agricultural colonization schemes like the Dandakaranya scheme. See his work cited in previous chapters.

