Preface

It is expected that development of an economy will lower the proportion of labour force engaged in agriculture. Greater employment opportunities are generated in the non-agricultural activities as economic development occurs. In India it is also necessary to relieve agriculture from the pressure of excess labour in order to arrest further decline in land-man ratio and thereby increase in labour productivity in agriculture. It is unexpected that urban areas can absorb the growing rural labour force since absorption of even the natural increase of urban labour force in urban areas is going to be difficult task in future. Due to above contentions promotion of non-agricultural employment in rural areas is advocated for enhancing the level of living of the rural population. In fact the non-agricultural activities in India have attracted attention in recent years as performing a significant role in providing employment opportunities to poor wage earners in rural areas.

While agriculture is unquestionably the dominant source of employment in rural West Bengal, non-agricultural activities are by no means insignificant. During the last two decades, West Bengal has experienced a high growth rate in agricultural production, particularly in rice production due to several institutional and technological developments. Agricultural surplus generated through higher production is being spent, along with others, on construction activities in rural areas. Again urbanisation and urban development has also boosted up the construction and construction related activities in rural areas.

The Census and NSS data provide an overall picture of the level and the sectoral compositions of rural non-agricultural employment and their variations across space and overtime. Most of the earlier studies in this field were based on these data. These studies help us to identify patterns in the variations and also provide some insights into the determinants of non-agricultural employment. The available secondary data, though they do provide considerable insight into the macro-economic characteristics, do no shed adequate light on the micro-dynamics of the situation.

In my M. Phil dissertation paper, I selected sand-lifting activity as one non-agricultural activity for my study. In that study I tried to explore different aspects of sand-lifting activity and the beneficial effects of the occupation on the economic conditions of the
poor sand-lifters. I tried to analyse the level of living of the sand-lifters and suggested possible welfare measures for the poor sand-lifting households.

In the present study, I have extended my discussion to one more non-agricultural activity prevalent in a selected area. Particularly my interest lies on construction workers along with the sand-lifting workers. This study is an attempt to see the economic conditions of the households engaged in sand-lifting and construction activities in comparisons to the households in agricultural activity. To what extent these occupations helped the poor households to raise their economic conditions above the poverty line compared to the households engaged in agricultural activity. In a broader sense how does the occupational diversification in rural areas help poverty removal? What are the relative advantages and disadvantages of different occupations and how do the casual workers respond to the growing non-agricultural activities in rural areas? For this empirical study, I have selected a particular area of Bankura district where such non-agricultural activities are prominent. A field level survey has been carried out for collection of primary data. We will thus analyse micro level data at the household and individual level, statistically or econometrically, to understand the rationale and process of participation in such non-agricultural activities.

This paper is submitted to the University of Burdwan as a dissertation for Doctoral Degree in Economics. I am totally indebted to my supervisor, Dr. Kalyanbrata Bhattacharyya, Professor of Economics, Burdwan University for his kind guidance and extensive help in preparing this paper. Without his all-time inspiration and constant guidance I could not be able to complete this work. My respect to him is beyond expression.

I would like to express my gratitude to all the respected teachers and non-teaching staff of the Department of Economics, Burdwan University for their sincere help and co-operation.

I also like to thank Sri Arunkanti Roy for his sincere co-operation in typing this paper.

I am also grateful to the staff of Block Development Office and Agriculture Development Office, Kotalpur Block for their sincere co-operation in course of collecting data about the Block.
I am very much grateful to the head of the families of the representative households and the concerned labour contractors and other concerned people. In the process of collecting primary data through personal interview they helped me a lot.

My thanks are also due to the authors of the books I used for preparing the base of this study and to staff of different libraries wherefrom I got books for this thesis.

I want to give my gratitude to my parents Sri Ganapati Roy and Mrs. Mamata Roy without whose blessings, I could not be able to reach this stage in my life.

Mrs. Asima Roy, my wife was always in the mood of providing me with the much required co-operation for the completion of this work. My deepest gratitude is owed to her. My two sons, Bodhisattva and Bhumitra have sacrificed their time with father. Actually thanks are not sufficient for their sacrifice. I also like to thank my brother Nilkantha Roy, his wife and their two sons, Himanish and Snehashis for their good wishes extended to me in conducting this work.

The use of computer was impossible to me without the help of Avijit Samui, my friend. I am grateful to him and also like to thank him.

Sri Abirlal Chakraborty, my student in Netaji Mahavidyalaya has helped me sometimes in checking the numerical values I have calculated. He is subject to my thanks also.

Finally, I would like to thank all my friends and relatives for their help and co-operation. In course of my journey I got helps from numerous persons. I can not name them all. But they need to be thanked.

I would like mention in the end that I have tried to give a shape of this dissertation with the best of my knowledge and efforts. Despite my sincere efforts in all fronts in making this thesis, there may be some mistakes for which none but me is solely responsible.

Burdwan,
October 8, 2007.

Tarak Nath Roy