



**GREEN KUPPAM**  
REPORT ON GRANITE  
INDUSTRY IN KUPPAM

**P. MADHAVAN**  
SONUMADHAVAN@GMAIL.COM

# KUPPAM GREEN

## INTRODUCTION

About 25 % of the world granite reserves are in India according to 'Indian Bureau of Quarries,' a Government of India organisation. Recoverable reserves are 1027421 million cubic metres in the total reserves at already identified areas (as on 1-4-1995) with Maximum concentration of deposits in Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu and Kerala. Deposits are also identified recently in Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Gujarat, Maharashtra, Orissa, Bihar, West Bengal. There are many more vast areas of reserves yet to be identified and tapped. Reserves are also in numerous types, colours and patterns; over 100 varieties identified so far and more varieties are being explored and search for new varieties is a continuous process. India is amongst the leading exporter countries of stones in the world, being a close competitor to China and Italy who are the leaders. In Million rupees, Indian Stone exports amounted to 34 Billion Rupees in 2003-04, with Granite alone accounting for 26 Billion Rupees. Sandstones are fast emerging as a leading export segment with an 11% share in exports.

INDIAN GRANITE PRODUCTION (In thousand tons)										
	1995-96	1996-97	1997-98	1998-99	1999-2000	2000-01	2001-02	2002-03	2003-04	2004-05
Granite	4555	4550	4950	5000	5300	5900	6205	6710	7059	7759

GRANITE EXPORTS FROM INDIA (Million Rupees)									
Product	1995-96	1996-97	1997-98	1998-99	1999-00	2000-01	2001-02	2002-03	2003-04
Granite and Products thereof	10827	11388	9577	10130	16712	19540	20463	24606	26538

Andhra Pradesh is one of the hotspot with the granite-estimated 107242 million cubic meters. The world-renowned Kuppam green and gray, black galaxy granite, Srikakulam blue, Warangal and Khammam black, Tan Brown of Karimnagar, Tiger Skin of Chittoor etc. occur in plentiful quantities. Granite worth about Rs.3000 million (US \$ 60 million) is being exported. There are significant opportunities for making novel products with polished granite, which have a good demand in the international market.

## KUPPAM - LAND AND PEOPLE

Kuppam is a census town in Chittoor district in the Indian state of Andhra Pradesh. It is 105km from Bangalore and 250km from Chennai. It is famous for its granite quarries, so much so that a granite variety is named after the town, viz. Kuppam Green. Kuppam shot to fame after the ex AP Chief Minister and the TDP supremo N. Chandra Babu Naidu won the elections from this constituency. Kuppam was also the site of an interesting experiment by ██████████ which founded the i-community there. As of 2001 India census, Kuppam had a population of 18,803. Males constitute 51% of the population and females 49%. Kuppam has an average literacy rate of 69%, higher than the national average of 59.5%: male literacy is 75%, and female literacy is 62%. In Kuppam, 14% of the population is under 6 years of age.

- Kuppam area is part of DPAP block and chronically drought affected

- Eighty-five percent of the population in the area live below the poverty line
- Only 10% of the gross cropped area is under assured source of irrigation
- Saline lands
- Soil is composed of gravel and stones of varying sizes with low level of organic matter

#### **KUPPAM - HIGHLY PAMPERED TOWN**

Kuppam is the electoral constituency of ex Chief Minister Mr. Chandrababu Naidu. He is Member of Legislative Assembly (MLA) for almost 20 years. He was chief minister of Andhra Pradesh for 9 years continuously and highly influential Chief Minister of that time. When he was chief Minister he wanted to make Kuppam as the model village with ultra modern communication facilities, educational facilities and modern agricultural projects. HP -I community which was initiated by HP international was highly published programme through out the world. Kuppam project was the innovative agricultural initiative taken at that time. The fact is both the programmes were a miserable failure but to the world it was a great success.

Mr. Chandrababu Naidu and his dedicated followers are very keen not to bring bad name to the Kuppam so that his Image, which he built over time, should not be damaged. There is a very strange and interesting incident, which proves the above claims. On July 4, 2003 her brother beat a women to death and her relatives since she was diagnosed HIV positive. This incident was not reported by any of the journalists, except one bold person. Once the journalist published the report it became national news immediately. Despite of this fact no arrest or enquiry was made rather a defamation case worth of Rs 20 lakh has been slapped on the journalist for writing the story by the local TDP outfits. The journalist is still fighting the case in the local court.

#### **MINING AND PROCESSING**

Quarrying in Kuppam started some 50 years before by a businessman Mr. Basha, who found a huge market for the Kuppam green internationally and he setup his first quarry and processing plant in Kuppam in the name of Evershine. Now there are some 4 internationally known companies operating in extracting the Kuppam Green and gray granite. There are 21 legal quarries operating.

All quarry owners are politically powerful and well connected to the Telegu Desam Party (TDP) and to the ex chief minister Mr. Chandrababu Naidu. Some of them from Tamil Nadu and some from Bangalore setup the processing units in kuppam for [REDACTED] [REDACTED] has the headquarter in Chennai and Evershine has the office in Bangalore. The locals own the quarry and the outsiders own the processing units. The possessing units buy the raw granite cubes according to requirement and process it. Quarry licensing is usually for 20 years and maximum allowed area is not more than 2 hectares.

Mine owners get lease license from the government to mine a certain area. In Kuppam and other parts of Chittoor, mine owners are not involved in retail selling or processing or exporting of granite. The mined granite are sized or trimmed as per the specification of buyers, who are generally traders with collection centres or warehouses in Chennai, or in Bangalore. The traders sell the crude or roughly trimmed sandstones to either domestic or international customers.

There are several processing units in Kuppam engaged in processing and polishing of granite for international customers. These industrial units have agents in Kuppam quarries areas and they buy the approved quality of granite. Then they are sent to these

processing units for the final works. Some granite exporters act as agents with purchasing offices in Kuppam and export directly from the quarries.

Around 80% of quarrying are illegal, as there is no control from the government the quarry owners blast the stones wherever they like. It is evident once one travels around the village and can easily see the places readily quarried for the stone. According to people the quarry owners mine non-leased area first and then only the leased area which is in violation of existing laws. The other reason for the above illegal mining is growing demand from the western countries in order to complete the orders they mine the granite illegally without permit from government.

### **DEEP BORE BLASTING THREATENING FOR MINING WORKERS**

In total disregard of the law, untrained miner workers of Kuppam quarries detonate explosives to break down the rocks. The vibrations caused by detonations, apart from generating noise, are opening up joints, fractures and fissures already there in the hill slopes. The deep bore blasting in Kuppam quarries is done even during the nights and early mornings.

### **PROCESSING UNITS IN KUPPAM**

India exports quality granite products since 1949. The pioneer and the oldest granite industry existing for three generations owned by [REDACTED], the founder of [REDACTED] and his sons [REDACTED], are looking after the group. Other Group companies are:

[REDACTED] With export turnover over 200 million rupees and exporting to Australia, Austria, Belgium, Canada, China, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Hong Kong, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Japan, Malaysia, New Zealand, Norway, Singapore, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Taiwan, Province Of China, United Kingdom, United States.

[REDACTED] This company is also owned by one of the son of [REDACTED]. Company is also exporting natural/ processed granite products all over the World since 1947 to USA, Hawaii, Canada, UK, Scotland, Ireland, Italy, Spain, France, Switzerland, Germany, Belgium, Austria, Sweden, Finland, Denmark, Norway, Middle East, Israel, Japan, Hong Kong, China, Singapore, Taiwan, Malaysia, Australia, New Zealand, etc.

[REDACTED] Started in 1984 at a time when the Portuguese held sway over the world markets in a near monopolistic stronghold on the industry. The company specializes in landscape granite stones and has an annual production of 200,000 tons of cobblestones and kerbstones. [REDACTED] is the largest supplier of cobblestones to the US and Europeans. They have a processing unit in Kuppam. They have 6 ships sailing over the world under the name [REDACTED]. The company also owns 10000 acres of land in Gujarat for salt production biggest in Asia in the name of Jakhau Salt they also mine Iron ore and Bauxite and has mines In Orrisa, Jharkand and in Gujarat.

[REDACTED]

It was established in the year 1987 with [REDACTED]. Subsequently by acquiring [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] and increasing export of raw blocks to about two thousand CBM per year to ITALY and other European Countries, the company specializes in exports of Gravestone and Tombstone to Austria, Belgium, France, Germany, Italy, Netherlands, Poland, and Spain. They have their own quarry and processing house in Kuppam

#### **WORKING CONDITION INSIDE THE STONE PROCESSING UNITS**

All visited stone polishing units share a common practice of violating the laws of the safety of labour (sans gloves, eye class, gum boots, mask, uniforms etc.). The house keeping is very pathetic with stones and wastes littered everywhere with huge dust all over the place including the air. Poor ventilation is a very common phenomenon with the processing units irrespective of brand and status of the company. Even though labour is not found inside the factory, there are more in the camps.

#### **CAMPS**

There are more than 1500 small and big camps in and around Kuppam area. These camps are the places where the stones are hand processed. Almost all rough granite which is used in pavements, garden, and other public places are processed in the camps. The camps can be small or big housing one person to 100 people at a time. All the processing units outsource the service of the camp for their raw cut granite or rough granite. This is the major place where child labourers are employed. One can walk through the camps and easily see the children breaking the stones or shaping the stones. The camp are usually owned by the local people who know the stone work like shaping, carving etc.. Even some companies like R.R granite from Bangalore own a big camp. All most all people working in the camps know where the stone is going. Because they are informed for whom they are making and what for. One can talk to them and know for which country they are making the stones.

#### **TRANSPORTATION OF STONES**

The stones are transported in many ways, the legal stones are sent to either Mangalore (Karnataka) port or Chennai (Tamil Nadu) port and illegal stones are sent to Tuticorin (Tamil Nadu). The illegal ones are taken from small roads escaping the road authorities and Tax officers and enter Tamil Nadu border which is 10 KM and go to Tuticorin port which is 450 Km with the same purchase order used for the legal stones i.e. one purchase order is used for two shipments. The polished stones are packed in wooden boxes and sent to port through the containers. The raw stones are carried openly in the big tucks.

Tuticorin port handled around 335382 tons of stone from April 2006 to December 2006 while the Chennai port handled 10.88 lakh tonnes of granite blocks during 2005-06



#### **LABOUR IN KUPPAM**

Under the Constitution of India, labour is on the Concurrent List. This implies that both the Central and State governments can enact legislation in the benefit of the workers.

The Quarries Act, 1952, regulates safety, health and welfare of workers in quarries. Employment in quarries, trade union rights and liabilities, dispute resolution, contract labour are also regulated under different Acts and Rules. Despite all these safeguards, labourers are one of the most-exploited segments of the mining industry in Kuppam and in other areas.

Some of the reasons for exploitation of labour are:

1. Consecutive drought for seven years in Kuppam region made people poor and absence of alternate livelihood forced people of Kuppam to take the quarry related jobs.
2. There are around 2000 people who migrate from Kuppam to Bangalore in search of job every day.
3. Illiteracy among the people is also another issue that makes the labourers vulnerable.
4. The politicians and district administrations safeguards mine owners.
5. Low media penetration - There is not even one negative story from Kuppam in the local media and in the national media which prevents these issues to get highlighted to get desired attention.

### **WAGES IN KUPPAM**

The wages system varies place to place but the minimum wages for people working in mining operations are from 80 rupees to 150 rupees and at processing units it varies from 2500 to 4000 rupees/per month. In the camps it depends upon the person's capability to finish the stone, however the labour employed in camps earns more than other people in mining operations. In the processing units even a child labour earns not less than 200 rupees while a good stone breaker can earn around 250 to 300 rupees a day.

### **KUPPAM AND ALCOHOLISM**

The growing trend of alcoholism has brought more misery to the lives of labourers and their families. Women and children are the worst affected. As much as 85% of the mineworkers are alcoholics it includes male, female and children. A local brand called **■■■■** (Palm wine, also called palm toddy or simply toddy) is an alcoholic beverage created from the sap of various species of palm tree. The drink is particularly common in parts of South India (particularly Andhra Pradesh, Kerala and Tamil Nadu, where it is known by the name of **■■■■**), manufactured and sold by the local people. The drink being cheap and affordable makes it very popular among the workers.

### **HEALTH STANDARDS IN KUPPAM**

While death is sudden in accidents, it can be slow and painful for miners afflicted by occupational diseases. Silicosis, tuberculosis and bronchitis due to inhalation of dust are common among mineworkers. Mechanization generates dust and finer particles, which remain suspended in the air for longer periods and is inhaled by the miners. The absence of safety equipment also increases the vulnerability of the workers.

### **SILICOSIS, THE KILLER DISEASE**

Workers in quarries belong to the high-risk group. They inhale minute dust particles (varying in sizes from 0.1 micron to 150 microns). The average life of a mineworker is estimated to be between 40 to 50 years. Inhalation and deposition of silica particles in the lungs result in silicosis, which leads to pulmonary fibrosis and premature death. Mine owners are insensitive to the situation and not keen on providing safety equipment to the workers. Lack of awareness and poor nutritional status worsen the situation.

The problem is serious in Kuppam and surrounded mining area because there is no hospital or healthcare center to diagnose and treat Tuberculosis (TB) and Silicosis. There is one Government general hospital with 100 beds in Kuppam but it does not have treatment facility for Silicosis, Cancer or TB. This is reflected from the figures received from only one primary health care center which houses 180 TB, 60 Cancer, 48 Asthma and 28 AIDS patients. In the absence of qualified doctors, the people of Kuppam including the mineworkers have to rely on unqualified local doctors for treatment. Mine owners or the contractors are not responsible for any treatment or healthcare facility either in case of any minor or major accidents. Labourers pay for their own medical expenses. Workers are not paid for the days they are absent from work due to accidents or sickness. The vulnerability of mineworkers, reflected in the accident rate, is compounded by the fact that the mine owners do not adhere to the Workmen's Compensation Act.

#### **WOMEN WORKERS**

The women have a less presence among the workforce in these quarries. Women workers are mainly employed in making granite granules used in roads. These are made from the waste granite stones. One can see these women breaking stones into small pieces with a small hammer on the roadside. They earn according to the amount of stone they break every day. Their average earning for the day comes around 75 rupees to 100 rupees. In quarries increasing mechanization has affected the livelihood of women since most of the work done by them like loading of waste rocks and clearing of place in quarries is being increasingly taken over by machines.

#### **CHILD LABOUR**

Children are considered to be the most important asset of a nation, yet they are often the most exploited segment of the population. The economic exploitation of children in India has increased markedly in recent years. The UNDP's Human Development Report puts the number of child workers in India at about 10% of the total labour force. India has the largest number of non-school going children workers in the world.

The Constitution of India prohibits the employment of children below the age of 14 years in factories, quarries or hazardous occupations. The National Policy for Children, compiled in 1974, envisages adequate services for children during their period of growth in order to ensure full physical, mental and social development. Child labour deprives children of educational opportunities, obstructs chances of vocational training and hampers their intellectual development.

An estimate suggests that out of the 15000 mineworkers in Kuppam, roughly 2500 to 3000 are children.

Today the constant growth of child labour in Kuppam sandstone quarries is explained by a very strange reason. Usually the child labour system exists due to economic reasons but in Kuppam it is the social system that aids in increasing child labour. Kuppam houses a large number of unwed mothers - illegal relationships and extra marital relations being high in number, the children born to these parents are left out with no care and guidance in the society. These children land up as the child labour in the quarries and related occupations. There is a rehabilitation school run by the State government where around 900 children are enrolled inspite of which around 3000 child labour still exists in Kuppam. The reasons why granite industry employs child labour is access to cheap labour, and the flexible hands and gentle pressure are the best to chisel granite to required shape and forms which also leads to reduced wastage. With this talent a child earns 150 to 200 rupees a day.

## **BONDED LABOUR**

The Government of India has consistently maintained a proactive approach to the issue of forced or bonded labourers in the country. It recognizes this evil system as a gross infringement of the fundamental human rights and is committed to its total eradication in the shortest possible time. India has ratified ILO Convention No.29 (Forced Labour Convention 1930) on 30<sup>th</sup> November 1954. Following the ratification, the Bonded Labour System (Abolition) Act, 1976, was passed by the Parliament. It freed unilaterally all the bonded labourers with simultaneous liquidation of their debts. The state governments are implementing the Act. Though not much information is available on the extent of bonded labour system in sandstone quarries, it can be assumed that the practice is still prevalent in few states.

The granite quarries of Andhra Pradesh still house the bonded labour system. However, there is no accurate statistical picture of the bonded labour system, following are some of the instances, which allow persistence of the bonded labour system.

- During rainy season (July to September) there is no mining activity in the area and hence no employment. Labourers are forced to take advance of Rs 10,000 to Rs 15,000 to meet their needs and requirements. According to contract, the borrowed amount has to be returned to the owner with due interest in a certain period of time. However, the workers are never able to do so. Gradually, the cycle of debt begins rolling turning one into a bonded labourer to a particular mine owner or contractor for no less than 5-10 years. This is a common practice in Kuppam and surrounding areas.
- The money disbursed to these labourers during accidents or deaths are also treated as debt and many times the children of a borrower are forced to succumb to the bonded labour system.
- Alcoholism is another way of retaining bonded labour in Kuppam quarries.