

**DYNAMICS OF RURAL LABOUR MARKETS**  
**AN ANALYSIS OF EMERGING AGRICULTURAL LABOUR SHORTAGE IN A**  
**KERALA REGION**

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**SHAJI K. FRANCIS**

**CENTRE FOR DEVELOPMENT STUDIES**  
**TRIVANDRUM**

**1990**

Certificate

I hereby affirm that the research for this dissertation titled "Dynamics of Rural Labour Markets: An Analysis of Emerging Agricultural Labour Shortage in a Kerala Region" being submitted to the Jawaharlal Nehru University for the award of the Degree of Master of Philosophy was carried out entirely by me at the Centre for Development Studies, Trivandrum.

Trivandrum.  
31/12/1990.

  
Shaji K. Francis

Certified that this dissertation is the bonafide work of Mr. Shaji K. Francis and has not been considered for the award of any other degree by any other University. This dissertation may be forwarded for evaluation.


Supervisors



Dr. K.P. Kannan  
Associate Fellow.



P. Sivanandan  
Research Associate.

  
Dr. P.S. George  
Director,  
Centre for Development Studies,  
Trivandrum.

**For  
Leena**

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## CHAPTER 1

### STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM AND IDENTIFICATION OF ISSUES

During the past few years, a large number of cultivators in Kuttanad, especially in the 'Kayal areas' are said to have been experiencing labour shortage during the harvest season. Interviews with the cultivators show that the shortage of labourers in general and during the harvest season in particular has been getting accentuated over the years in several areas of Kuttanad. The cultivators indicate that though such tendencies were there earlier also, the shortage came to be felt most from the 1987 'Punja' harvest season<sup>1</sup>. Though precise data on the degree of labour shortage in various regions of Kuttanad is not available, it is clear that at present it is felt most acutely in the 'Kayal areas'. Nevertheless, the observations of the Rice Research Station at Mancompu in Kuttanad attest to the problem as a general trend emerging in many areas of Kuttanad irrespective of the nature of the work to be performed<sup>2</sup>.

Conspicuously, steps are now afoot to mechanize paddy threshing as a measure to counter the shortage of labour<sup>3</sup>. This scenario is a prominently different one from the

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<sup>1</sup> A Pilot study was conducted in Kuttanad by the author, taking a purposive sample of 80 cultivators who faced harvest labour shortage. It was conducted during 1<sup>st</sup> to 23<sup>rd</sup> July 1988, taking 40 cultivators each from the Kottayam and Kuttanad taluks. The cultivators also observed that migrant labour flow to Kuttanad area fluctuates depending on paddy prices and so the degree of labour shortage also changes from year to year.

<sup>2</sup> Personal interview with Dr.C.A Joseph, Rice Research Station, Mancompu, Kuttanad on 8/5/1988.

<sup>3</sup> " A harrowing headache faced by the farmers is the shortage of labour experienced during the harvest season. Consequently the harvested grain had to be kept unthreshed for days and weeks on end resulting in crop damage, especially in the event of rain. To meet the situation, the Kerala Agro Industries Corporation has developed a paddy threshing machine which could



one that prevailed in Kuttanad in the late 1960s through 70s, when it was reported to have surplus labour for harvesting. A system of restricting the entry of labourers for harvesting operation was also in vogue at that time, known as the 'Pass system'.

The following quotations would give a picture of the problem of labour surplus in Kuttanad during the Seventies.

" Thus in 1976, it was not only the land owners who feared the loss of crop at harvest time (When literally thousands crowd into some of the larger fields at 8 A.M in order to begin harvesting, which might be completed two hours later) but also the local labourers who have seen their earnings diminish as the number of hours of harvesting dwindle due to the pressure of number of people. Both these groups seemed to approve the system of passes handed out by people who owned land in a given field and enforced by police. Both land owners and labourers accepted the use of police to supervise the harvesting operation " (Mencher 1978:358).

"...It was a kind of irony when a farmer in Kuttanad had to go to the local union office in the late 60s and 70s to inform them of the date of harvesting and requesting them to limit the number of workers for that operation"(Kannan 1988:256).

At the same time, one also finds a plethora of research reports about the increasing unemployment situation and the declining per capita employment availability for Kerala as a whole, and the precarious employment situation especially in Kuttanad<sup>4</sup>. In such a situation it becomes difficult to explain the shortage of labourers currently being felt in Kuttanad. Hence, the issue at hand is to enquire whether the phenomenon could be due to some specific factors operating in the labour market in Kuttanad or a reflection of the broader socio-

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thresh and winnow up to ten quintals of paddy per hour"

News report, Indian Express daily, Sept 15 and Sept 22 1990.Cochin.

- <sup>4</sup> See (1) Kannan (1988:268).  
(2) Panikar - Minute of dissent in the report of Kuttanad Enquiry Commission (1981:33-39).  
(3) Mencher (1978).  
(4) Mencher (1980).  
(5) Mencher (1982).  
(6) George (1984).

areas outlying it during the last few decades.

## THE REGION

The area that has come to be known as Kuttanad is a region consisting of 79 villages spread in the districts of Alleppey, Kottayam, and Pathanamthitta and encompassing an area of roughly 874 sq.kms. The Kuttanad region falls into the administrative units of 10 revenue taluks viz: Ambalappuzha, Karthikappally, Mavelikkara, Kuttanad, Shertallai, and Chengannur in Alleppey district; Kottayam, Changanacherry, and Vaikom in Kottayam district; and Thiruvalla taluk in Pathanamthitta district.

Geographically Kuttanad lies in 9 8' and 9 52' latitude and 76 19' and 76 44' longitude. With four rivers discharging into the Vembanad back waters in the area, Kuttanad is criss crossed by the rivers, channels and their waterbody and most of the area is marshy. The South-West Monsoon during June-August, and North-East Monsoon during October-November gives an annual average rainfall of 325 Cms. for the area and the temperature varies between 21 and 36 celcius. Paddy fields in Kuttanad are spread in about 300 'Padashekaram' or paddy fields with an area of 52,000 hectares.

Based on the topographic and agronomic factors, land in Kuttanad is subdivided into 'Kayal lands', (approximately 8,100 hectares), 'Kari lands' (roughly 6,100 hectares), and 'Kara lands' (43,000 hectares). The whole region of Kuttanad lies 0.5 to 2 meters below the mean sea level<sup>5</sup>. Hence

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<sup>5</sup> " The Kayal lands are the 'new reclamations' lying 10 to 20 feet below the mean water level. They lie in the villages of Chennankary, Kainakary and Pulincunnu in the Kuttanad taluk (Alleppey district), and Thiruvvarppu and Kumarakom in Kottayam taluk (Kottayam district). This area of about 20000 acres is divided into large blocks or padashekarams."

" The Karappadams are the 'old reclamations' extending over an area of 102,700 acres. These fields are comparatively shallow. The upper Karappadams are 1 to 3 feet below the water level while the depth of the lower Karappadams is 3 to 7 feet.

the paddy cultivation in Kuttanad is done after the fields are dewatered<sup>6</sup>. Usually one or two crops of paddy are raised in Kuttanad, depending on the geographical peculiarities of each region and the weather conditions. The main crop or the summer crop called 'Punja' is sown during November-January, and harvested in February-April.

#### OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

There have been a comparatively large number of studies on Kuttanad, both at the Governmental initiative as well as by individual scholars focussing on different aspects. Notwithstanding this, the fact remains that there is yet no study which throws light on the size, structure and occupational diversity of agricultural labour households in Kuttanad, their asset conditions, housing, education etc. all of which are important variables affecting their behaviour in the labour market. The present study, by doing a sample survey of agricultural labour households, tries to fill this lacuna in the literature on Kuttanad. Another objective of the study is to point out the different aspects of the seasonal harvest labour market, its dependence on the migrant labour, the non-monetized nature of the mode of payment of wages, and the possible reasons for the existence of the wage payment in kind in an otherwise highly monetized economy.

Within this broad framework we expect to highlight certain unattended features of the present dynamism in the labour market in Kuttanad. More specifically the objectives

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They are periodically replenished by the deposit of silt carried by the rivers in flood.

" Karilands are swampy areas with black peaty soil and high acidity. They lie at the northern and southern extremities of Kuttanad ; about 5000 acres in Shertallai taluk and 10000 acres in Ambalapuzha taluk. These marshy tracts which are waterlogged and overrun with weeds throughout the year were neglected areas until recent years." Pillai and Panikar (1965:30).

<sup>6</sup> For a detailed account of the Agricultural practices in Kuttanad, see Government of Kerala : Report of the Kuttanad Development Project.

can be laid down as follows:

- 1 portray the profile of agricultural labour households in Kuttanad;
- 2 to arrive at a hypothesis on the emergence of labour shortage during the harvest season; and
- 3 bring out the various facets of the kind payment of wages for harvesting and threshing operation in Kuttanad.

#### HYPOTHESIS

The pilot study was conducted to get an idea about the nature of the labour shortage being felt. Of the eighty cultivators who were interviewed, only 77 have been included for the analysis. Some results from that study have been presented here to sharpen our understanding of the research problem. The important characteristics have been presented in Tables 1.1 & 1.2.

A vast majority of the cultivators (90.9%) reported that they first noticed the shortage of labour between the years 1982 and 1987. The striking feature in Table 1.1 is that it shows the harvest labour shortage has been felt not only by the large and medium size-class cultivators, but also by small owner cultivators who own/operate less than one acre. In our sample, this size-class constitutes 18.18% of the total number of cultivators and operates only 1.85% of the total area operated by all the cultivators .

The size-class wise dependence of the cultivators on hired labour shows that in our sample of 77 cultivators, 59 (76.6%) are fully dependent on hired labour for their agricultural operations and the rest also put in family labour in their farms. The only unexpected result that Table 1.1 brings us is the dependence of 28.5% of the marginal cultivators (operating .01 to 1 acre) on hired labour. Though other studies

have found that even marginal cultivators hire in labour,

Table - 1.1

The classification of cultivators who reported labour shortage for harvesting presented according to the area operated

Size Class (Acres)	No. of cultivators	% of total no. of cultivators	Area Operated (Acres)	% of total area operated	% of Cultivators depending mainly / mostly on hired labour
0.1 - 1	14	18.18	13.04	1.85	28.5
1 - 3	11	14.28	21.91	3.10	45.4
3 - 10	36	46.75	268.88	38.12	97.2
10 - 25	11	14.28	182.5	25.87	99
25 -100	5	6.49	219.0	31.05	100
Total	77	100	705.33	100	

that has been found to be true mostly during the peak seasons and not as a general phenomenon for most of the agricultural operations. Hence this aberration in our sample perhaps could have come due to some of our respondents under reporting their area operated or perhaps since the small owners in our sample may be having other sources of income such that they do not do the work, instead use hired labour.

Another significant dimension is revealed by Table 1.2, that labour shortage is being felt for other operations also though only for a lesser proportion of cultivators. 19 cultivators (24.7%) from the sample reported some difficulty in obtaining labour for transplanting and 53(68.8%) reported difficulty for weeding operations. It becomes clear that the degree of shortage is much higher for weeding than for transplanting for all the size classes of cultivators.

These findings take us to the premise that the shortage of harvest labour currently being felt in Kuttanad need not be restricted to the peak labour demand periods in future, but could be a secular one and could be denotative of the more subtle changes that have been happening in Kuttanad.

Table 1.2.

**Classification of cultivators who reported shortage of  
workers for other operations.  
(Percentage)**

Size class*->	0 - 1	1 - 3	3 - 10	10 -25	25- 100
Transplanting	28.5	0	16.6	72.7	20
Weeding	42.8	45.5	69.4	90.9	80

\* The figures are expressed as % of total no. of cultivators in each class. Size class in acres.

A number of factors were pointed out by the cultivators as the reasons for the emergence of labour shortage. The reasons thus attributed include (1) the emergence of a large number of owner-cultivators in Kuttanad, (2) the reduction in the flow of emigrant workers to Kuttanad from neighbouring areas during the peak seasons since harvest work has become less remunerative and since alternative work opportunities are there (eg.construction of Alleppey-Kayamkulam railway line) (3) paddy fields getting ready to be harvested simultaneously all over Kuttanad causing peak demand to be very high (4) some improvement in the living conditions of the labouring class and a general reduction in their poverty due to cultivation of a second crop in several areas as well as due to governmental assistance in various forms which has made many of them less dependent on wage labour, and (5) the reluctance of the educated among the younger generations of Kuttanad to do paddy field work.

Among the several mentioned reasons, one factor viz. a decline in the migration of workers to Kuttanad during the peak agricultural seasons has been later on confirmed during our primary survey. Another frequently cited reason is that since most of the areas in Kuttanad get ready to be harvested more or less simultaneously, the workers get divided and spread over a larger area now a days and hence the shortage

happens. This logic tries to point out the changes in the demand side and peak labour demand due to changes in the crop calendar as the reason for labour shortage. However, we believe that this provides only a partial explanation. In the light of our knowledge about the conditions of excess labour that had existed during the harvest seasons during the past, we hypothesize that 'other things being constant', changes in the demand for labour alone could not have led to the present situation, rather, the supply behaviour of households in the labour market also is likely to have changed. Hence, the shortage could also be the manifestation of the changes happening in the socio-economic structure of Kuttanad. The other reasons cited by the cultivators appear quite relevant in the present socio-economic milieu in Kuttanad and hence may be treated as hypotheses that need to be tested. Hence this study, while trying to analyze the causes for the shortage of harvest labour, ventures to capture the characteristics of the present dynamism in Kuttanad.

#### THE PREMISE FOR FURTHER ANALYSIS

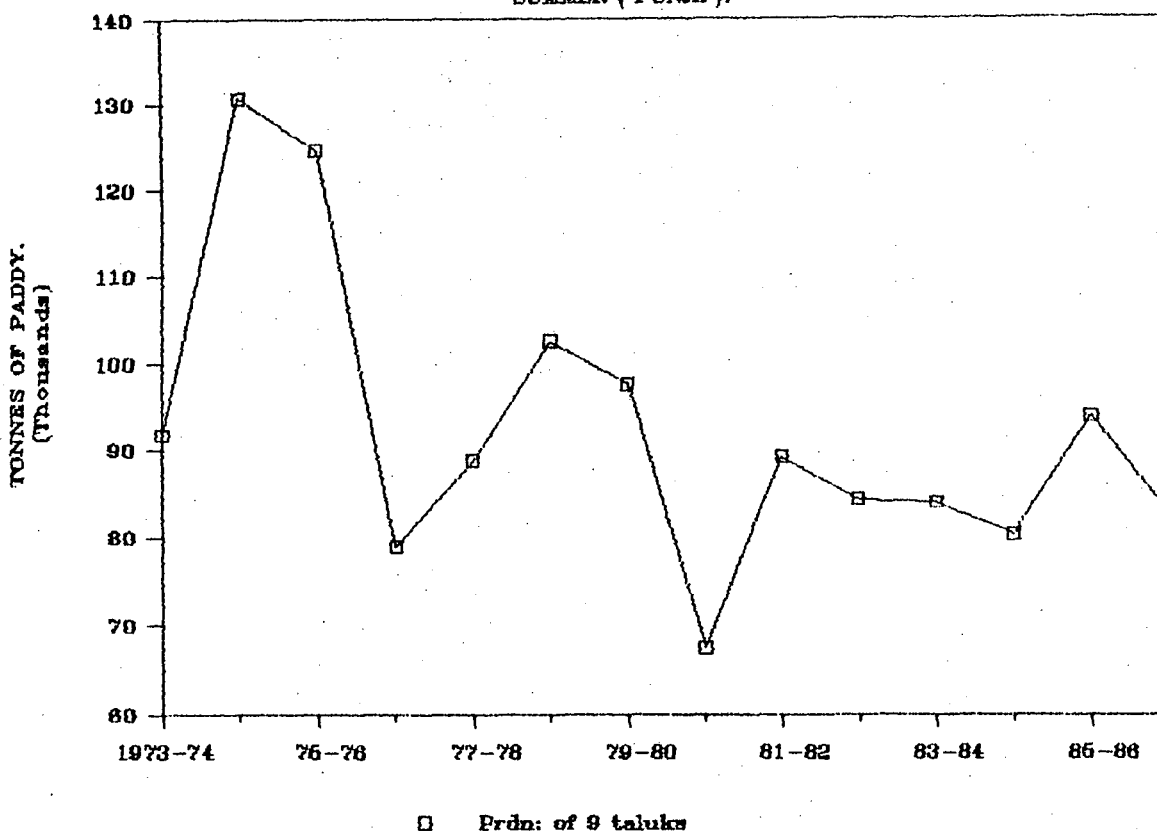
We are trying to analyze two broad issues of which one forms a sub question of the other. In simple words they are (1) What could be the reason for the shortage of labourers being felt in Kuttanad? (2) Why has been the flow of migrant labour to Kuttanad tending to subside?

The first question's central point viz. the shortage of labourers, is the net resultant effect of two forces viz. the demand for labour vis-a-vis the supply of labour. The second question concerns itself with the decline in the degree of migrant labourers to Kuttanad, which has been a major source of labour supply.

A preliminary examination of the reasons for the labour shortage does not indicate that the demand side is the crucial factor. Assuming that the demand for harvest labour is a function of the total paddy produced, we have graphed the trends in the production of paddy for 'Punja' crop in the ten taluks of Kuttanad region for the period 1973-86.

## TOTAL PADDY PRDN: IN KUTTANAD REGION

SUMMER ('PUNJA').



The graph shows that if we compare the production in 1973 to that in 1986, it has declined, though during the period the output has fluctuated. We further examined the production trends for the same period taluk wise. The more or less same pattern of stagnation/reduction in output holds good for all the taluks in the region for the 'punja' crop.

The only contrary trend found is in the matter of cropping intensity. In Kuttanad region as a whole, the cropping intensity has increased. For the taluks in Kottayam district the cropping intensity increased from 110.8 in 1965 to 130.7 in 1983. For the taluks in Alleppey district, the corresponding figures are 137.5 and 161.4. However, since these changes are not reflected in the 'punja' production of paddy we do not probe further on these lines. This makes us turn to the variables in the supply side of the labour market for an explanation of the stated phenomenon.



It may be too naive to rely entirely on the Demand/Supply framework to analyze these two issues which are not purely economic issues but rather involve the interplay of social, economic, and cultural factors and hence should also be placed in the social environment corresponding to the relevant periods.

Hence we would have to take into consideration the changes that might have taken place in a large number of variables like the work participation rate, the impact of education and removal of social disabilities on the attitude of workers towards paddy field work, the potential shift of the work force to the tertiary sector, the supplementary sources of income for the agricultural labourers, the prospects of the emergence of a class of owner cultivators in Kuttanad and its impact on the labour market, changes in the cropping intensity due to factors such as double cropping and the introduction of H.Y.V. paddy, changes in the crop calendar and changes in the cropping pattern in those places which were the traditional labour feeding areas of Kuttanad.

## CHAPTER 2

### REVIEW AND DISCUSSION OF RELATED LITERATURE

We may begin our discussion with the issue of the labour shortage itself. As viewed in the neo classical paradigm, essentially shortage in any market is an indication of a disequilibrium. This may arise from the level of demand being in excess of supply at the given market price or conversely the supply being short of the demand. If initially the market has been in 'equilibrium', a change in the status quo can arise from a shift in either the demand function or the supply function. In normal conditions, such changes are expected to be adjusted by changes in price and the system brought back to equilibrium. The price may rise to bring up the supply quantities and to bring down the demand quantities. When there are rigidities or bottlenecks that prevent these price-quantity adjustments, shortages or excesses may arise in the market.

Essentially from the neo-classical paradigm, Hunter's study on labour shortage in the manufacturing sector in West Central Scotland brings out a number of issues (Hunter with Beaumont 1978:12). Though it is true that shortage of unskilled casual agricultural labourers (as is the case in Kuttanad) strictly cannot be compared to that of skilled workers, the framework of analysis may nevertheless hold.

The study quantifies labour shortage in terms of two factors (1) recruitment difficulty and (2) under manning and comes to the conclusion that the complaints of labour shortage received from employers in the engineering and other industries in Scotland are real. The shortage was the result of rigidities in the spatial labour mobility in West Central Scotland, leading to a situation wherein the sub regional labour market was segmented such that both shortage of labour and surplus labour coexisted. Yet another reason they have attributed

is that the workers in the area had been attracted away by the work opportunities that arose in the North Sea oil findings where high wages were being paid.

We got the impression that in the 'Kayal' areas of Kuttanad, both recruitment difficulty and under manning is being felt; whereas in other areas of Kuttanad the problem felt seems to be of a slightly different kind viz. the extension of the 'turn around period'. This implies an elongation of the period between harvesting of the standing crop and the sowing of the next crop since the entire harvest work takes a longer time to complete than it used to take in the past. In 'Kayal' region the problem of elongation of turn around period does not lead to additional difficulties since no second crop is cultivated. Whether the elongation of the 'turn around period' is due to under manning is not easy to answer especially since it then requires us to define and assume some specific time period as the optimal period within which harvest work has to be completed. We find that the lengthening of 'turn around period' need not be due to under manning arising out of labour shortage, but rather also could be due to some specific customs and sequences followed by workers in harvesting and threshing. We would discuss this subject subsequently.

From our survey in Kuttanad, we have been able to delineate a spatial segmentation within the labour market as between the 'Kayal' lands where there is considerable labour shortage, and the rest of Kuttanad where most areas report more than sufficient labour<sup>7</sup>. However, even within these 'labour surplus' areas, there are sub regions where shortage has been reported.

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<sup>7</sup> It may look contradictory to say that there is considerable mobility between the regions and at the same time say that 'Kayal' areas are segmented. The apparent contradiction comes because when it comes to the regions lying quite close to the 'Kayal' areas, there has been only a comparatively lesser flow of workers to the 'Kayal' areas, where as; when it comes to areas lying farther away from 'Kayal' for example Vaikom, or Sherthallai, there is much more mobility at least during the harvest season. Or the issue is one of differences in the degree of mobility between regions.

The distinct feature of the 'Kayal' lands is that this area consisting of most parts of Kuttanad and Kottayam taluks has been gradually reclaimed from Vembanad backwaters over the past one century or more. These lands are surrounded by permanent bunds to prevent entry and seepage of salinity from the surrounding waters. Cultivation of paddy is done after the saline water is bailed out and after harvest the fields are opened for re entry of lake water. The 'Kayal lands' are therefore submerged for 6 months or more in a year and thus there is very little place for dwelling purposes. The whole area is covered by paddy fields of sizes varying from hundred to two thousand five hundreds acres and hence the area is sparsely populated.

Since this backwater area is geographically isolated from the other parts of Kuttanad, boat services are the only mode of transportation. Since the population is low, the frequency of boat service is also low. Other than conveyance difficulty, the absence of permanent houses for the labourers to live in, lack of potable water, absence of shops and other facilities all make the region an unattractive place to work.

Typically, the migrant workers from other areas of Kuttanad who come for harvesting in the 'Kayal' areas stay in tenements called 'Pantha' put up by the land owner on the bunds of the backwaters<sup>8</sup>. A 'pantha' is a long improvised temporary shed of width less than four meters and varying lengths made from locally available materials like bamboo and platted coconut palm leaves. The shed is usually subdivided using thatched partitions and each family or group of workers is allotted a compartment in the 'Pantha'. Though we found some of the 'Pantha' reasonably habitable, in general these sheds are by no means a hygienic place since there is no flooring made for these sheds (Cement flooring is a necessity in this wet land

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<sup>8</sup> In the other regions of Kuttanad, the land owner may provide a shed for them or the workers many who are regular migrants coming every year, would have developed kinship relations with some one, whose help they use for finding a dwelling place.

region lying below the sea level with saline water all around). Most of these sheds hardly provide proper protection against sun and rain. These ad hoc sheds do not have kitchen or ovens. Firewood for cooking is also difficult to gather.

Workers living in 'pantha' bring along with them some quantity of rice and other provisions they need. The only shops in the area are the temporary shops called 'Vaaniyappura' ('Vaaniyappura' in chaste malayalam, roughly standing for 'provisions store'), put up here and there by local people in order to exploit the seasonal migrant workers. Pillai and Panikar in their book have noted that a large number of shops spring up in all parts of Kuttanad to buy up the paddy received by harvest workers as wage (1965:42). Presently these shops are no more called 'Vaaniyappura' but are called tea shops or shops. Most commodities needed for the workers are available here including toddy and arrack. The owners of these shops give credit for the workers living in 'Pantha' if the labourer approaches the shop and tells the name of the land owner for whom he is working. The debt is usually settled at the end of the harvest season when a good portion of the paddy that the labourers got is sold to these shops at low prices and the labourers leave the 'Kayal' for their home with fifty or sixty kilogrammes of paddy as his asset from the entire one or one and a half month's work. Hence, only those workers whose lives are in dire straits come, live and work in these conditions.

The author was able to find several dozens of groups of such people living in 'pantha' in conditions so deplorable that it was difficult to believe that this has been happening in the very cradle of the most powerful labour movements in India which was once fiercely militant. The author also got the opportunity to witness how some families settled their debt to these tea shops by selling one and a half to two quintals of paddy from their paddy wages. The impression that this author got from the workers is that labour unions used to protest against the land owners bringing these migrant workers with the help of a jobber 'Mooppan'. But for many years now, the unions are also indifferent, the attributed reason being that

since very few local labourers are willing to work in the 'Kayal' regions in these conditions, if the unions object to the existing system, the work in the 'Kayal' paddy fields may come to a standstill. The migrant labourers being more dispossessed than the local labourers are willing to work.

We also ought to make note of the role of the 'Mooppan' in the backwater areas in bringing together the workers seeking work and the land owners who look for labourers, the 'Mooppan' acting as the interface. Here we are quoting some of the workers brought by 'Mooppan'.

"The Mooppan is given advance by the landlord to bring the workers. The advance for the next season would be made in the month of September. The Mooppan would give advance to us on the condition that we would come for work. He may bring twenty or more people depending on the area to be harvested. A pantha is made on the Kayal bunds and we stay there. Sometimes the Mooppan may provide one stove per family. Earlier days it was the duty of the Mooppan to give sickles to those workers without sickles. In those days, if we failed in our duty the Mooppan would punish us mercilessly. Some workers may run away to escape the land lord's powers. In those times, of the people who come for harvesting, some escape, some return and some may never return at all. It was also not uncommon to have one or two marriages from among the labourers at the end of the harvest season when workers have money with them.

The harvest wages was then paid in terms of 'Kutta' (basket). A reward 'Anubhavam' of 2 to 5 para of paddy used to be given to all workers at the end of the harvest season and this settles all relationships between the landlord and the worker. The Mooppan would get a 'Mooppu katta' of 60 paddy bundles, a 'Kudikaan Katta' of 15 paddy bundles (for drinking toddy) and a 'Koithu pidi' a reward of 5 paddy bundles, all together named 'Kalam Pirivu Katta' at the break up of the season's work gathering."

Comments of another worker - "Even now in the Kayal areas, some Mooppan act as the exploiter of the workers. We come here when the agricultural season begins and the flow of workers reaches a peak when harvest season is up. We live in the pantha for 30 to 35 days. The land owner gives the materials for making the pantha. This has to be dismantled and returned to him when we go. When we are here, we make our maintenance income by doing extra work. On most days, after the harvest is over, we do additional work such as 'Kachi pani' (Hay drying) and we get 40-45 Rs. per day. Sometimes when we are short of money, we skip the harvest work and do 'Kachi pani' and 'Nellu pani' (Paddy sifting & drying). We get only 40 or 45 Rs. for this work, where as local labourers get 50 to 55 Rs. per day. The local people also will not harvest the paddy that is poor. So the

land owner will sometimes give us such areas for harvesting. The Mooppan gets a commission of two para of paddy per labourer he brings for the season. Sometimes, for every male worker that the Mooppan brings one Ruppee and for every female worker fifty paisa per day is given apart from the normal reward. We have come here on the agreement with the Mooppan that we would finish all the work that the land owner has asked him to finish. So, many of us will have to stay here till the paddy is stored in the granary and the hay stacks are put up, which the local labourers would not do."

From these descriptions, we get some idea about the difference between the conditions of life and work in the 'Kayal' areas and the rest of Kuttanad. To some extent this explains why workers who have some other way of eking out a living do not come for work in the 'Kayal' regions, making these areas regionally as well as in terms of labour market a segregated area.

We may now turn to other issues related to the matter we are discussing. It would be relevant for our study to make note of a number of references found in the literature about the emergence of seasonal labour shortages being felt during the peak seasons in various paddy cultivation areas in India. About Kuttanad herself the reference made is noteworthy. Pillai and Panikar have observed that during February to March when the harvest begins almost simultaneously in most areas, when there is the urge to finish the entire work before the Monsoon sets in, labour shortage happens and that labour migrates from nearby taluks during this season, (presumably the shortage acting as a pull factor) (Pillai and Panikar 1965:33). However, the same authors also describe the movement of labourers from one paddy tract to another during the harvest season in Kuttanad which they attribute to be due to the "slightly different timings of the sowing and harvesting operations in different padashekharams" (ibid.P.22). They also state that the migrant workers stay in Kuttanad for periods varying between 4 to 5 weeks. This warrants us to define the terms 'shortage' and 'harvest season' more precisely, since such movement of labourers cannot happen if the harvest season is a

very short period<sup>9</sup>.

We would like to bring out two aspects. The first is the fact that there is considerable degree of movement of labourers between the sub regions of Kuttanad (if we define Kuttanad as the ten taluks). This is most striking in the 'Kayal' regions where the degree of dependence on migrant workers is the maximum at the time of harvest. Every year, workers from other regions of Kuttanad come, stay, finish the harvest work in and return to their localities which is made possible mainly due to the difference in the cropping season between these regions. It is from the economically depressed areas of Alleppey and Kottayam districts that the migrant labour to the 'Kayal' areas come. The main areas of migrant labour supply for the Kayal areas are the taluks of Shertallai, Mavelikkara, Kayamkulam, Vaikom and Ambalappuzha. The workers from Mavelikkara pointed out that it was Gingelly season there during the harvest season in Kuttanad and so there was not much work. The same difference in season has been reported by workers from Ambalappuzha. This difference in seasons and hence also the differences in the work availability acts as the push factor in those areas from where in migration to Kuttanad occurs.

The second aspect we emphasize here is the relativity dimension of the labour shortage. That is, though there have been quite a number of cases of total crop losses due to the absence of labourers for harvesting, what we are trying to highlight and analyze is the change in the environment over the period of time, which has made the harvest season in 'Kayal' areas a labour short time compared to the earlier times of surpluses.

The decline in the degree of labour migration of labourers to Kuttanad has been noted in Chapter 1. Apart from the areas mentioned in the last paragraph, a number of other areas too have been providing migrant labour to Kuttanad.

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<sup>9</sup> Part of the confusion may also be due to the differences in the geographical area that each of the scholars have in mind when they refer to 'Kuttanad'.

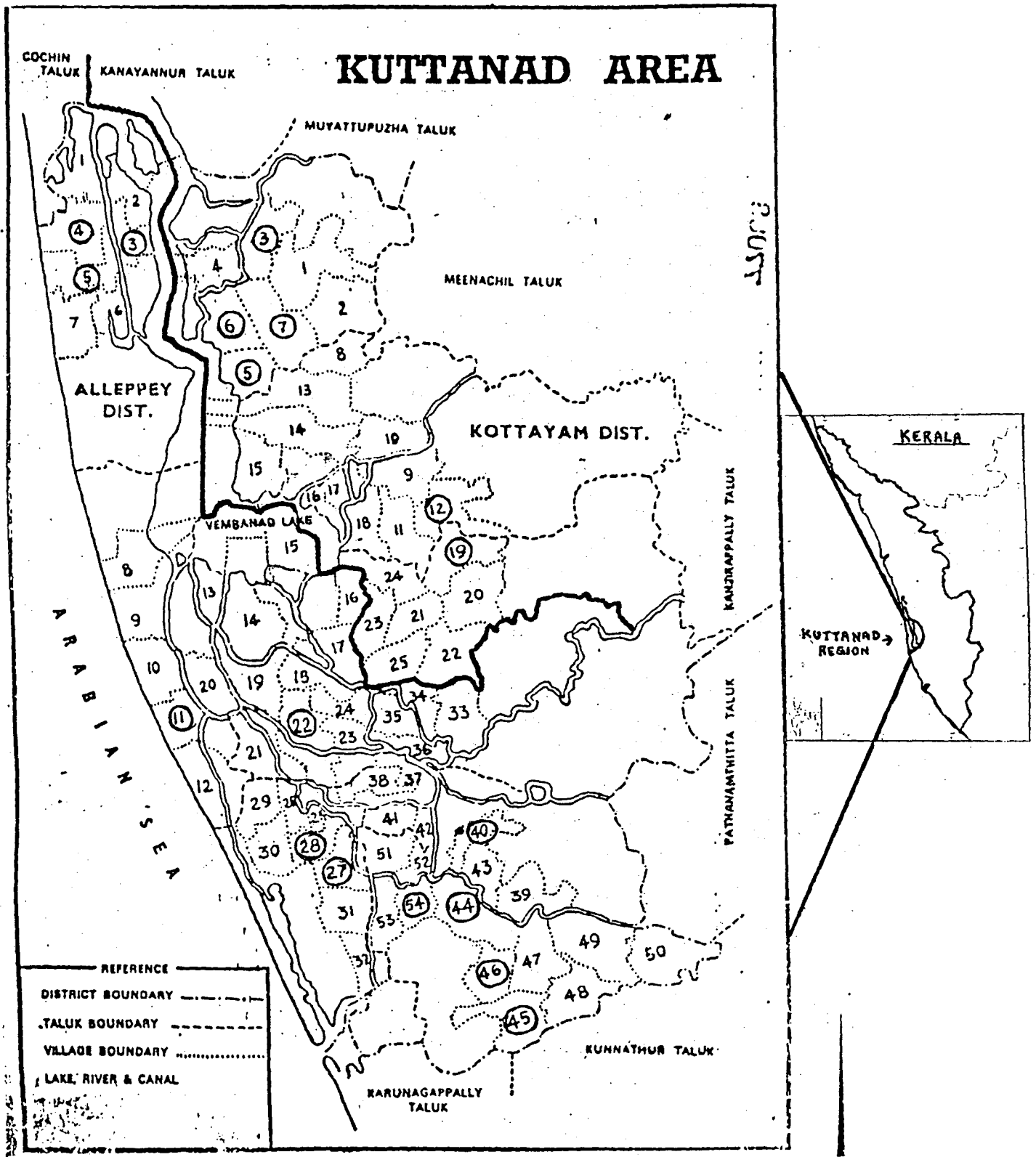


These are the places around Kottayam and Alleppey towns and also areas in Quilon and Pathanamthitta districts. Places like Parippu, Vaikom, Mannanam, Manganam, Athirampuzha, Veloor, Thiruvanchiyoor, Manjoor, and Maadappally belonging to Kottayam district; Harippad, Karuvaata, Alleppey, Mavelikkara, Mannar, Shertallai, Kuthiathodu, Pallippadu, Muhamma, Karthikappally, Punnappa, Karunagappally, Thiruvalla, Vembaala, Kattaanam, Thamarakkulam, Nooranad, Pandalam and Adoor, belonging to the Alleppey and Pathanamthitta districts have been specified as some of the major centres that were the labour source to Kuttanad<sup>10</sup>. It has also been commented by the workers that when ever the government took up major civil construction work in these areas, the inflow of labourers to Kuttanad tended to subside. The construction of Alleppey-Kayamkulam railway line was thus cited as an important reason during the past few years. The work related to Pampa Irrigation Project in some of these areas also was cited as a reason. At this point, we also need to make a distinction between the local migrants or the workers who come from daily commutable areas and the migrants who stay in Kuttanad during the harvest season who are from distant areas. We have differentiated and marked out these areas in the map attached.

Turning to another aspect, let us look at the observation made by Khan who says that inspite of the fact that many of the rice producing countries had very high population densities, labour shortages were occurring due to the seasonal nature of labour demand. Labour shortages were occurring during the land preparation, transplanting, harvesting and threshing operations in various areas. He further comments that if the farmers in Asia have to keep their land near continuous production, some degree of mechanization may be inevitable (Khan 1983:501). We presume that the shortages he is referring to are for different operations in different areas. What we are trying to bring out here is that there may not be much meaning in saying that the shortage is restricted only to the 'Peak seasons' since it may be as illogical (or logical) as saying that a man

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<sup>10</sup> Many of these areas were part of the erstwhile Quilon district and Kuttanad herself was a part of Quilon district till later on Alleppey district was formed.



The encircled numbers denote the villages from where the migrant workers who stay in the backwater areas originate. Most of the other numbers denote villages of local migrants who commute daily. See overleaf for village names.

## MAP-III

## VILLAGES IN KUTTANAD AREA

## Alleppey District

Sl. No. in the Map	Name of Village	Sl. No. in the Map	Name of Village
1.	Aroor	2.	Panavally
3.	Thaikkattusseri	4.	Thuravur Vadakku
5.	Thuravur Thekku	6.	Vayalar Kizhakku
7.	Vayalar Mekku	8.	Aryad South
9.	Alleppey	10.	Punnappa
11.	Ambalapuzha	12.	Prakkad
13.	Kainakary	14.	Pulinkunna
15.	Chennaamkary	16.	Neelamperoor
17.	Velianad	18.	Ramankary
19.	Champakulam	20.	Nedumudy
21.	Thakazhy	22.	Kozhimukku
23.	Thalavady	24.	Muttar
25.	Cheruthana	26.	Veeyapuram
27.	Pallipad	28.	Haripad
29.	Karuvatta	30.	Kumarapuram
31.	Cheppad	32.	Pathiyoor
33.	Thiruvalla	34.	Kavumbhagam
35.	Peringara	36.	Nedumpuram
37.	Kadappa	38.	Kizhukumbhagam
39.	Venmony	40.	Puliyoor
41.	Kurattisseri	42.	Mannar
43.	Cherianad	44.	Thazhakara
45.	Thamarakulam	46.	Chunakara
47.	Noornad	48.	Palamel
49.	Thonnallur	50.	Pandalam South
51.	Triperumthura	52.	Choonithala
53.	Kannamangalam	54.	Mavelikkara

## Kottayam District

1.	Kaduthuruthy	2.	Manjoor
3.	Vadayar	4.	Naduville
5.	Vetchoor	6.	Tbalayazham
7.	Kallara	8.	Onamthurutha
9.	Vijayapuram	10.	Perumpaikad
11.	Panachikad	12.	Puthuppally
13.	Kaipuzha	14.	Aimanam
15.	Kumarakam	17.	Tbiruvarppa
17.	Kottayam	18.	Nattakam
19.	Vakathanam	20.	Madappally
21.	Vazhappally East	22.	Thrikkodithanam
23.	Vazhappally West	24.	Kurichy
25.	Changanacherry		

stammers only when he speaks. Only if there is a particular level of demand one can sensibly think of the corresponding supply being short or excess. Hence, as long as there is a shortage, even if it is restricted to the peak seasons, it may be important.

Seasonal labour shortage and resultant migration of labour has been noted about other regions too (Gill 1984:961). Another study of migrant labour from Purana Pandey in U.P to Bhatian in Punjab concludes that it is an instance of a high wage differential rather than unemployment causing the migration. The labour shortage occurs in Bhatian during transplanting and harvesting and threshing of wheat and paddy. During these peak seasons, Bhatian attracts migrant labour from Eastern U.P. who are able to earn a daily wage of Rs. 10 to 15 in Bhatian, whereas in their own locality the daily wage is only Rs. 2 per day (Laxminarayan 1977:1818). Another study reports the case of a declining harvest labour migration to Punjab as a result of better crop in those areas from where labour used to migrate. The study also hints that the result was that there was insufficient labour for harvesting and many farmers had difficulty in bringing their crop into the granaries, thus tending to induce mechanization ( Morehouse 1982:M75).

Viewing these more general observations from other parts of the country, we feel that the trends recently observed in Kuttanad need to be assigned a little more importance. Whether the shortage of labour in Kuttanad we are discussing is just a seasonal one or is likely to be a more secular one and whether it is restricted only to some areas or not, we would try to answer in the course of our study. Even assuming that it is just a seasonal one restricted to the 'peak labour demand' periods, it has important implications in terms of the strategy that the farmers would follow to adapt to the new ambience. The study by Pradhan discusses how in Nepal the farm households adapted to the labour shortages during the transplanting and harvest season. The situation was met by evolving an exchange labour system between households in which labourers from one household help overcome shortages of others



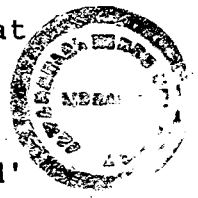
and the other families reciprocate it. Evidently, this is a case where the cultivators successfully overcame the problem of a potential elongation of 'turn around period' by evolving an indigenous labour contract within the members of the village (Pradhan 1983:268).

If short term labour shortages can lead to an elongation of the 'turn around period' in cultivation, mechanization may be resorted to, perhaps resulting in labour displacement. The current move in Kuttanad to mechanize threshing in order to reduce the waiting period of the farmers for having their harvested paddy threshed is essentially a move in this direction only. The risk that the farmer in Kuttanad faces is that once the fields are ready to be harvested, that has to be done within one or two weeks failing which considerable loss of paddy may arise since the over ripe paddy sheaves easily fall off from the stem while harvesting and while being carried to the threshing yard. The more critical threat faced by Kuttanad farmer is the risk of the paddy fields being flooded in the monsoon rains. The urgency to finish the harvest and see his grains in the granary arises more from this risk than from anything else. A few days of incessant rains in the high lands and mid land areas of Central Travancore would bring down torrential discharge of water from all the four rivers that empty into Kuttanad and may inundate the unharvested paddy fields. It is not uncommon in most years to find farmers lamenting loss of unharvested paddy and newspaper reports about breaches in the bunds leading to loss of hundreds of acres of paddy crop in various stages of growth due to the onset of monsoon a one or two weeks ahead of the expected date. It is this critical dependency on the labourers at the harvest times that has been very effectively utilized by the worker's unions to hike up their wages by demanding such hikes at these critical periods.

Elongation of the 'turn around period' can lead to loss in other ways too. Here we cite an instance reported from Philippines. "In rainfed areas, long turn around times (the interval between harvesting of one crop and the planting of the next in a cropping sequence) result in crops

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being planted too late in the wet season for dependable production. For eg:in Lloilo province, when two wet seeded rice crops were grown in sequence, there was a yield loss of 0.7 tonnes/hectare for each ten day delay in planting the second crop" (Moody and Cordova 1983:475). In a general discussion on the impact of the introduction of High Yielding Variety paddy on the employment structure, Aggarwal also has noted the increasing criticality of bringing down the period between harvesting of the standing crop and sowing of the second one, since the land need to be cleared and prepared for the next crop as soon as possible (Aggarwal 1971).

Whether the farmers in Kuttanad who have been facing labour shortage in the absence of alternatives (since mechanization was fiercely resisted till recently) have adjusted and rescheduled their crop operations to some extent by postponing sowing and other subsequent operations by a few weeks need to be investigated. We stress this aspect since there appears to be considerable differences in the period of harvesting as reported by different authors on Kuttanad<sup>11</sup>.

The official information on the 'Punja' crop season in Kuttanad lays it through September-March, with September-October as the sowing season and February-March for harvesting (Kerala Agricultural University 1990:89). But the fact of the matter is that if one considers all the ten taluks included in Kuttanad region, harvesting is now spread over a much longer time period than is specified in these references. Presently, at any point of time the 'Punja' crop in Kuttanad would be at different stages of its growth and it is not rare to find that when it is sowing or transplanting season in one sub region in Kuttanad, it is harvesting period in another. This fact has been noted by both economists and agronomists and is a frequently debated one in the local newspapers as these

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<sup>11</sup> Pillai and Panikar (Opcitp.33) report February-March as the beginning of harvest. Tharamangalam (1981:28) report January-February as the harvest season. The Kerala Agricultural University (1989:89) too report February-March as the harvesting period. However, we found that the harvest season in various regions of Kuttanad extends from mid January to end of May.

differences in the timing of crop operations between regions has been creating problems in the opening of the Thanneermukkom Salt Water Barrier<sup>12</sup>. This is in part due to the photo non sensitivity nature of the H.Y.V paddy which has destroyed the traditional cropping pattern and made it possible to cultivate paddy at any time of the year (Panikar 1981:40). But this may also be due to increase in the area cropped more than once. Let us bring to the attention the differences found in the seasons reported.

Note that in table 2.1, taking Kerala as a whole, the harvesting period which was two months in 1956-57 has become three months by 1980-81 for both the two different seasons reported under summer crop. We do not have a satisfactory interpretation for this, and this may be too aggregate level data to come to conclusions about Kuttanad. The point we are trying to make is that the reason cited by many people that concurrence of harvesting operation is the factor which leads to the peak season labour shortage need not be fully valid. Perhaps it may be one of the reasons.

The present governmental and farm lobby's intention of a phased introduction of threshers in Kuttanad and the response to it from agricultural labourers need to be noted. Any form of mechanization has been anathema to the well organized labourers in Kuttanad who had successfully delayed the introduction of tractors in an earlier occasion and have kept at bay all other attempts at mechanization also till now on the grounds that it is labour displacing. However, the present attempt at mechanization appears to be less fought against compared to the earlier militant opposition from the labourers<sup>13</sup>.

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<sup>12</sup> See For instance. News report "Kuttanad Farmers a Dejected Lot" THE INDIAN EXPRESS SEPT 22 1990, P.5. COCHIN.

<sup>13</sup> For a review of labour struggles against mechanization of agricultural operations, see

- (1) Jose (1979)
- (2) George (1984)
- (3) Oommen (1985)
- (4) Tharamangalam (1981)

Table 2.1

CHANGES IN THE CROP SEASONS<sup>14</sup>

Seasons of Rice Crop		Seasons of Rice Crop	
<u>1956-57</u>		Summer	<u>1980-81</u>
<u>Sowing</u>	<u>Harvesting</u>	<u>Sowing</u>	<u>Harvesting</u>
Nov.- Dec.	Feb.- March	Oct. - Dec	March- May.
Jan.- March	Apr. - May	Jan. - March	April- June

In today's backdrop, the introduction of threshing machine seems to have been accepted to by the labourers except for the wage issue<sup>15</sup>. This is an interesting departure from the attitude the labourers had one decade back; the reasons for which we shall try to figure out in the later sections.

Who among the labourers and through what all modes would they be affected by the proposed mechanization? How would it affect the labour market in general and the land poor workers in particular?

Some broad answers to these questions

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<sup>14</sup> Note : Collated from Season and Crop Reports, Kerala State 1956-57 and 1985 . (Department of Agriculture 1959 :42 and 1985 : 48 )

<sup>15</sup> " While the farmers generally welcome the move, the farm labourers view it with suspicion and reservation as they fear mechanization would curtail job opportunities.....The bone of contention remains to be settled relates to the wages of labourers. Now the labourers engaged in harvesting, threshing and winnowing operations are paid at the rate of one and a quarter of a para for every seven paras of threshed paddy. The labourers demand the same rate of payment even when the job is done with the aid of the threshing machine to which the farmers are far from agreeable. The farmers aver that when the machine is introduced, the manual labour involved would be considerably reduced and then there is no justification for paying the labour at the old rates".(Venugopal 1990:3)



could be arrived at by browsing through the existing literature. Two different aspects of the answer to the above questions project themselves into dominance here. The first one is the preponderance of female labour in harvesting and threshing (some of the post harvest operations). The second one is the crucial and unique role played by the kind payment of wages for these operations which has been shown to have much deeper connotations than is apparent.

Let us first examine the gender wise division of labour that exists in farming operations, the role of female employment, and its contribution to the agricultural household income. After a thorough analysis of the sexual division of labour, one study concludes that ploughing, harrowing, hoeing and construction or the repair of dikes are almost always men's work but further generalizations are difficult since exceptions are always found. The preparing the seed bed, pulling seeds and water management are also mainly men's tasks. Females are mostly engaged in transplanting (with very few exceptions), weeding and harvesting (with more exceptions). The study also records that weeding operation appears to have been more volatile having been found to shift from women to men and back to women or vice versa in some places. Threshing of harvested paddy seems to be mainly a female task, although men may also join in (White 1983:131).

Chen (1988:4) points out more specifically that in all regions (except rainfed paddy and wheat regions) female family farm labour dominate in all operations with the exception of ploughing which is almost an exclusive male domain. Harvesting is carried out by both men and women. The processing of row crops provide a significant portion of women's income in Asia with regional differences in the proportion. She notes that harvesting alone provides a third or more of women's income in major rice growing states in India.

The conclusions reached by Acharya and Patkar (1983:295) after a study on the impact of changing technology on labour market is quite relevant here. They stress

that harvesting is the single most important occupation for women labour. In West Bengal and Kerala harvesting has increased its proportion in the total time disposition of both men and women. According to them, this may be due to the labour intensive harvesting in West Bengal and Kerala. In the case of Orissa and Tamilnad, the proportionate share of harvesting in the total time disposition has fallen for both the sexes the plausible reason being that human labour displacement by threshers could have happened. Interestingly, for Andhra Pradesh it has fallen for men and risen for women which may be indicative of a male labour to female labour substitution. The reference made about Orissa and Tamilnad in the above citation need to be specially noted in our discussion since it is very much suggestive of the likely impact of the proposed threshing mechanization on the labour market in Kuttanad.

What role does kind payment of wages play in the life of people in rural labour markets? Writing about Philippine villages on the issue, Francis (1983:85) reports that crop sharing arrangement for harvesting is endorsed by the landless labourers, who have to buy their staple food rice from the market. She points to not only this aspect but also that the earnings per hour of harvesting is higher than that in other female activities. This significant fact viz: the relatively higher earnings for harvesting being used by women to supplement their income has been supported by the observations of White (Op cit.137) also. Again, the predominance of women in harvesting job and the role played by harvest share as an important source of family income in the rice areas of Java has been noted by Sajogyo (1983:153). Finally, about Kerala herself, the role of the kind component of wages in insulating the workers from being totally dependent on the open market for their rice requirements has been registered<sup>16</sup>.

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<sup>16</sup> "Since only about 2/3 of the quantity of cereals they consumed came from the public distribution system, does it follow that for the balance they were driven to the open market? This does not seem necessarily to follow, partly because a good proportion of them should have drawn some of their wages in kind." United Nations (1975:48).

Some references can be found in the literature about how important the proportion of female income in total income is for the survival of the lowest sections of the community. Agarwal (1983:325) while making note of this, comments that the crucial role of female income is not restricted to female headed households, but also for households with both male and female adult earning members. She also cites other studies relating to Kerala, Tamilnad and West Bengal and brings out that in the case of landless households, where both women and men were earners, the women's contribution to the household income was almost always more than men's. With regard to the marginal land owning households, female earnings from wage labour contributed to around fifty percent of the household's total earnings from wage labour market. Women's income and its contribution to the well being of rural households has been brought out by Saradmoni (1983:378) who inter alia says that declining work opportunities for men is also a reason why women seek wage employment. She underscores that the substantiveness of female earnings in the total earnings is not restricted to female headed households.

The vital role played by female labour income is noted also by Chen (Opcit:5) who indicates that the proportion of female income in the total income of household is often greater than the proportion of male income in total income. Ryan and Godake (1984) while making the same point indicate that both the quantum of female labour in agriculture as well as the income from it may be under estimated. They highlight that "these high proportions of female labour used in agricultural land far exceed the 20 percent figure cited for Asia by Ester Boserup (1970)". Mencher's (1983:365) study of Indian villages also comes to the interesting conclusion that in all cases the proportion of income contributed by working women to the household is far higher than that of their earning husbands. She found that the amount contributed by the women workers varied between 1.21 times that of the average for the working husbands in the case of a Alleppey village to 0.53 in the case of a Trichur village.

The discussion done in the last paragraphs indicate the nature of the labour displacement likely

to occur with the mechanization of threshing and its impact on income of rural labour households. How precisely it would happen would depend on the way in which mechanization is brought about, for example the type of labour contract and wages which is at present the 'bone of contention'. This has best been expressed in Kikuchi et.al (1984) study on the changes in the rice harvesting technology in Javanese rice economy and its impact on rural labour households.

Having exposed some dimensions of the research problem that we are addressing, we may now turn to some variables that have been identified as the forces influencing work participation in general and female work participation in particular both of which are factors involved in the analysis of our research problem.

Bardhan (1984:185) while reviewing studies on factors influencing work participation describes how increases in the asset level correlate directly with shift of females from field labour work to domestic labour and then to supervision of servants. Other things being equal, the changes in asset and income levels of households would affect the female labour through the caste and ethnic rank of the household. Let us quote some of her important observations for our study.

"The correlation of low social status with agricultural wage labour is stronger for women than for men and may be explained in terms of two related processes. One is what Srinivas (1966,1978) calls 'Sanskritization': observances of female immurement and propriety in women's work as instruments for hierarchical status differentiation from the castes below and emulation of those above. Peasants are normally less averse to manual labour than the upper class landed. Still, as they experience income increases, women are withdrawn from work in the field into home processing activities and cottage industries, and then occasionally into education for transition to white-collar jobs, the supply of which has been increasing even in rural areas. The second process, Boserup noted, is that the very presence of labouring poor supports the status differentiating value of eschewing manual field labour and makes it inexpensive for even the not so rich to have this form of conspicuous consumption" (ibid.188).

Rosenzweig's (1984:228 & 239) detailed

analysis of the inter relationships of variables affecting Indian rural labour markets brings out some very fascinating features. Among his conclusions, he declares that the hypothesis they had tested that where alternative employment is available the amount of labour supplied to agriculture is decreased held. We must note that a similar statement had been made by the workers in Kuttanad about their migrant counterparts who do not come to Kuttanad when there is work available in their locality in construction, irrigation and railway work. Rosenzweig further elaborates and concludes that the market supply curve for women appear to be positively sloped which was also found in the case of his United States study.

The empirical results he presents are indeed revealing. The female market supply was found to be quite sensitive and responsive to the movements in the male wage rates. His findings say that a ten percent increase in the male wage rate induces a 14 percent decline in the number of days worked by females from land less families and a twenty percent decline in the number of days worked off farm by females having some land. This also is a very pertinent finding for us since as we would see in the following chapters both in terms of wages as also in terms of other socio-economic factors Kuttanad has been undergoing drastic transformations. A similar observation of an inverse relationship between male wages/income and female work participation has been made by Sandbergen (1989:134) too.

The observation that hiring out behaviour of females is inversely related to the employment opportunity for males has been made by others also (Begum 1983: 227). The logic is that when economic polarization occurs females from male headed households may be driven to the wage labour market if the male labour market is highly competitive, saturated due to the high levels of population. This relationship may be thought to work in the reverse direction too, that is, when economic and social status improvement takes place, females may retreat from the market as long as female work in fields is not a positive attribute.

Bardhan's (1984:248) study on West Bengal's rural labour market confirms the usually held inverse relationship between land owned and labour hiring out. But he observes a positive association between hiring out and the number of dependent per earner. Another relevant finding is the discouraging effect that education has on hiring out. He reports that the supply of agricultural wage labour is negatively associated with the number of adult males in the household having more than primary education. Though whether such relationships are as simplistic and linear as has been suggested is dubious, it is quite important to recognize these variables as factors influencing labour market behaviour of households and for a finer understanding of the dynamics of rural labour markets. What is most significant is his observation that in general the labour supply is not highly responsive to wage rate, but is primarily determined by other economic, social and demographic constraints. He finds that hiring out behaviour is usually positively related to the number of adult workers in the family and the number of dependents per earner, and that it is negatively related to the amount of land cultivated by the household, the standard of living, and the educational level of adults in the household. These observations are crucial to the arguments which we build up through later chapters in which we have indicated the likelihood of educational and cultural factors being one important factor among the several factors that would explain the current dynamism in Kuttanad.

Acharya and Patkar (Opcit.288) uphold the usual notion about a U shaped supply curve for wage labour. They also describe how the peasant families consider it a matter of prestige to exit from work in most areas as prosperity increases since manual labour unfavorably influences the social status of women within a household. Hence they hypothesize an inverted U shape supply curve for women labour. Sinha (1975:672) also supports the notion of inverse relationship between per capita income and female participation as also the notion of a U shaped supply curve based on his study. He however takes pains to stress that only the negatively sloped portion of the U shaped relation is relevant for the present income levels in India. Agarwal (Opcit.312) cites Epstein (1962,1983) who found a negative association between the family's socio economic status and the involvement of females in field work and Vanamala (1982) who too had found the same relationship holding good for Andhra Pradesh. Writing about Nepal, Pradhan (Opcit.164) stresses that other things being equal, the role played by social values and notions about female work are crucial factors.

Clearly, in a society where casual

female wage labour in farms is not a positive attribute, but rather reflects economic depressiveness, female participation in labour market may be more a reflection of economic vulnerability despite the male labour contribution to income. In such circumstances a highly competitive male labour market with high unemployment may push more females into wage labour for subsistence needs. Therefore, how high or low the male wage rates and income from male wage labour are to the household may be an important determinant of female market participation. It is here that the studies made earlier about Kuttanad that needs attention. We would see in the next Chapter of this study, how the researchers stand divided on the issue of whether there has been any improvement in the living conditions and income of the agricultural labour households.

We may append a few words about the scene in Kuttanad before concluding the section on work participation. The impression that we got from our survey in Kuttanad was that in general many among the younger generations in Kuttanad are reluctant to take up any type of paddy field work which they look down upon. (Except as it was pointed out, on contract basis for piece wage rates). The main reason attributed for this attitude among the youngsters is the fact that the younger generation is more educated. (Which presumably raises their expectations about the kind of work they undertake as well as the income from it).

The view expressed about the educated unemployed in Kuttanad in another study is very illuminating in this context "...these young people were supported by agricultural labourers in their own families. It is not immediately clear why these educated people are not working in the fields at the time of our study (1975-77), but one factor may be that they simply missed the early learning experience because they were studying. It is also possible that some of them have learned to disdain manual work, but in any case there is less incentive to go for paddy field work when they see so many of

their own contemporaries out of work" (Mencher 1982:42). However, the fact we indicated above that the younger generation is willing to take up work on better terms prompts us to believe that education might have pushed up their reservation wages for paddy field work.

We now have a general picture about a number of variables thought to be influencing the supply behaviour of rural labour households. Though these descriptions would not lead us to an answer to our central question viz. why the recent trend of shortage of labour in Kuttanad, we nevertheless get some insights about where to look for answers to the issues we are tackling. Hence, now we turn to the information found in the literature about the demand side of the labour market.

Quite detailed studies exist about the factors affecting the demand for farm labour<sup>17</sup>. However, these are too general for us to be relied upon for making definitive conclusions about specific issues raised on Kuttanad. Hence here we focus only on some studies which have explicitly looked into some specific questions relating to farm labour demand viz., what change happens to demand for farm labour when high yielding paddy varieties are introduced as is the case of Kuttanad from the early 1960s?

We may first note the seasonality aspect of agricultural employment. Chattopadhyay (1977) after classifying the farms into five size classes and the agricultural operations into five main classes such as (1) preparatory tillage, (2) sowing (3) transplanting (4) weeding (5) harvesting found that the employment of total human labour as well as family labour shows more or less the same pattern of fluctuation. He

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<sup>17</sup> See for discussion on labour markets  
(a) Bhardhan et.al (1978) .  
(b) Hirashima and Muqtada (Ed.1986).  
(c) Ishikawa (1978).



found that from operation 1 to operation 2 it is retrogressive and from operation 2 to operation 5 it is developmental. Or, the pattern of employment marks two humps-at the one end is ploughing season and at the other, the harvesting season. The study by Rudra and Biswas (1973:98) also justify this pattern. They conclude that employment of total human labour on farms and employment of family labour on farm as well as outside farm marks four humps in the year. They correspond to two sowing seasons and two harvest seasons of summer and winter paddy crop. The further assertion made by them is that this pattern is more clearly visible in the small size group farms than in the large farms. The same four humped pattern of labour demand is observed by Gill (1984:961). Reasonably, we may assume that this broad pattern of fluctuations in employment holds true for Kuttanad also where also the crop is the same ie. paddy.

Acharya and Patkar's study (Opcit.289) throws light on the demand side of the market too. They comment that the biological-chemical technology that helps in growing H.Y.V short duration crops augment labour use in two ways. The first is through the enhancement of labour use in each activity performed ie., from soil preparation, and sowing, to harvest and post harvest operations. The second factor enhancing labour demand is the short duration of each crop which permits the number of crops in each region to be increased to two or even three in a year. They postulate that the extra labour requirement arising from such changes could be 75 to 100 percent more than that used in the case of traditional crops. They also propose that some shifts may however take place within the human labour use pattern as between men and women. Analyzing the changes in the employment pattern in some states they found a reduction in the labour use in West Bengal and Orissa for both males and females. The larger variations which they found in the case of female labour use is attributed to the higher elasticity of female labour supply and withdrawal. Another remark they make concerns the absolute size of labour input. In the case of West Bengal, they report the use of women labour to be abysmally low where as it is higher in the South and more or less comparable to men's labour input in Kerala and Tamilnadu only.

Another empirical study on Indian states concluded that in the case of Orissa, the introduction of H.Y.V. led to a higher use of labour for female and male casual labour as well as total labour (Agarwal Opcit.311). In Andhra Pradesh the adoption of H.Y.V paddy has been found to be positively associated with total labour use and with female casual, male casual and male permanent labour use. In Tamilnad also the hypothesized positive association between the adoption of H.Y.V paddy and the total labour use as well as male casual labour use held. The study makes the distinction between female family labour and female casual labour and records that the impact of H.Y.V paddy on female family labour use is much more difficult to predict. This is because while H.Y.V paddy increases the overall requirements for labour on farm, it is very likely that this also leads to increase in family income. On the one hand, the increase in labour needs would act as an inducement for more intensive use of women on farms. On the other hand, there would be a tendency for women to withdraw from manual work in the fields owing to family prestige considerations if the family now can afford to use hired labour. The last statement made by Agarwal needs to be taken with a pinch of salt since though the argument holds logically, it seems to assume that all or most households involved in the wage labour markets own or cultivate land, which in most areas of India may not be true.

Yet another review about the impact of introduction of H.Y.V also speaks on more or less the same lines—that the modern varieties generally require more labour than traditional varieties because they require more weeding (due to increased fertilizer use) and the increased yields require more harvest and post-harvest labour. It points out that Barker and Herdt review of 20 village studies of labour use both before and after modern variety adoption throughout Asia and found that in 13 cases labour use increased and in another 3 cases remained unchanged. The increased labour has generally been used in women's tasks: intensification of crop establishment (transplanting in straight rows) and crop care (weeding and fertilizer application) and harvesting and processing the additional yield (International Rice Research Institute 1984:7).

Two observations made by Evenson and **Binswanger (1984;275)** loom important at this juncture. The first one is that after a review of literature on the issue of changes in the demand for labour, they concluded that adoption of H.Y.V does not appear to have much employment effect, which is contrary to the results obtained by other authors. Secondly they correctly point out that fragmentation of land may reduce the demand for labour. Nonetheless, It is not clear how or whether the total demand for labour could decline due to fragmentation. Although the studies we referred to earlier also have indicated that the hired labour component of the total labour demand could vary depending on size of farms, the total demand for labour need not vary because of fragmentation. We also feel that if we have to come to any unequivocal conclusion on the matter, we will also have to consider the differences in the intensity of cropping and productivity as between different size classes of farms.

In this connection we have to note a factor that perhaps may be contributing to the decline in migration to Kuttanad. This is the emergence of small farmers in those areas of Kottayam, Alleppey, Pathanamthitta and Quilon districts from where the people used to migrate. This is so since the emergence of small farmers cultivating commercial crops like rubber, cocoa, and pepper has been noted. Krishnaji (1979) observes that in Kerala even small farmers operating 1.25 to 2.5 acres depend on hired labour and he has also mentioned that even on very small holdings commercial crops like rubber, pepper and cocoa is cultivated. We have not empirically examined the potential impact of the emergence of owner cultivators on the labour market in Kuttanad. But it need to be remembered that if work opportunities are available in their own localities, the migrant workers might prefer to stay back from working in Kuttanad, especially when the paddy prices are low.

In chapter 1, while discussing the preliminary results from the pilot study, we had noted that the emergence of a class of small peasantry in Kuttanad has been suggested as a reason for labour shortage. Among scholars there

is a consensus that there has been some 'modest' reduction in the inequalities in the distribution of land in Kerala. The central argument is that the agricultural labourers have not benefitted drastically from the land reforms except that many would have become owners of small pieces of land such as one tenth of an acre which they may have got as hutment right. Notwithstanding this fact, references have been made about the impact of such measures on the reserve price of labour (United Nations 1975:91).

Our discussion hitherto about the effect of the introduction of H.Y.V paddy on labour demand had not taken into consideration the reverse effect of any sort of farm mechanization. In very many regions where H.Y.V technology has been effectively popularized, it has also been followed by some degree of mechanization<sup>18</sup>. Reporting about Punjab and Haryana, Billings and Singh (1970:70) have written how the peak labour demand during the crop cutting season increased so high that the demand outstripped the supply at 'almost any price' due to the extra yields from H.Y.V. They also find reasons to believe that such changes in peak labour demand has led the way for rapid mechanical reaping. Their article highlights that mechanized harvesters displaces 42 lakh mandays. The distinction they further make about labour displacement due to mechanization is that about 55 percent of the labour displacement is caused by tractors and pump sets and about 37 percent by reapers.

Lastly, we may attend to one study which has directly ventured to answer the question that we are trying to answer viz. What changes could have happened to the labour demand vis-a-vis labour supply in Kuttanad relative to their position three decades back or as between the 1960s and the mid 1980s?

According to Jose (1979:20) "During the decade of the sixties, there is a phenomenal increase in the size

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<sup>18</sup> For a discussion of the Indian experience in farm mechanization See (a) Billings and Singh (1970: 70).

(b) Rao (1972 :393)

(c) Morehouse (1982)

of the labour force. In the Kuttanad taluk, between 1961 and 1971 the increase in the number of agricultural labourers was more than thrice the increase in population. In Alleppey district when the population increased by 17 percent, the agricultural labour force increased by 57 percent during the same decade. These figures indicate the extent to which rural labour market was getting saturated in Kuttanad".

He further notes that neither the cropping intensity nor the acreage under paddy increased significantly during the corresponding period. The 'Kayal' lands accounting for around 50000 acres remain single cropped even now. He cites the Kuttanad enquiry commission appointed by the Government of Kerala in 1970 that only 10.3 percent of the total 1,43,000 acres of paddy land is double cropped. Further, "...the average annual input of human labour in the punja crop of Kuttanad was only 58 mandays...Let us take the case of Kuttanad taluk, where 56,890 acres are brought under punja cultivation. The total volume of employment available would be roughly over 3.3 million mandays a year. As per the estimates of agricultural labour force based on the 1961 census, the per capita availability of employment in Kuttanad taluk worked out to 124 mandays per year. Given the fact that there was no perceptible increase in the cropping intensity during the sixties, the per worker availability of employment came down to 90 mandays by 1971. The evidence collected by the Kuttanad Enquiry Commission of 1970 on the quantum of employment available to agricultural labourers also supports this contention". He notes the observations of the Kuttanad Enquiry Commission that a male agricultural worker gets only about 100 to 120 days work per year and a women worker gets 80 to 100 days. Jose concludes the issue with the observation that for major part of the year the agricultural worker in Kuttanad remains practically unemployed.

The underlined portion of the last paragraph point to a common notion about agricultural labourers- that they only do work directly related to the farm. We have noted in an earlier section about the multiplicity of work done by most individuals as a survival strategy evolved towards the

declining employment opportunity and declining income in the agricultural sector. We would discuss in the next chapters to what extent the observations about the workers in Kuttanad may be true.

## CHAPTER 3

### THE EVOLUTION OF LAND-LABOUR RELATIONS IN KUTTANAD

The Kuttanad area formed a part of the erstwhile state of Travancore. During the reign of the King Marthanda Varma, many principalities around the Venad kingdom were annexed to it and the state expanded its boundaries to the southern borders of Cochin. All the land under the annexed area was declared state property and correspondingly the tenants became state tenants who thereafter enjoyed fixity of tenure. It is surmised that by the end of the 18th century, nearly half the area under the Travancore state was under state tenancy. In 1865 the Travancore monarch gave ownership right to the hitherto state tenants.

As we would see in the following section, Kuttanad had a feudalistic tradition. Some authors however describe the relations as semi feudal (Pillai and Panikar 1965:119). The cultivators depended entirely on their attached labourers and the 'Thalappulayan' or 'Mooppan' (jobber whose counterpart may be seen in 'Mukkadam' in North India) for the supply of labour during the harvest season. Mooppan brought many of them as families, even from the distant places of the surrounding districts. These labourers belonging to the untouchable castes of 'Pulaya' and 'Paraya' stayed in huts on the landlord's property till harvesting was over. We have described in Chapter 2 the main characteristics of this seasonal migration. Along with the drastic changes in the socio-economic relationships that Kuttanad witnessed during the past five decades, the attached labour system also almost disappeared and the 'Mooppan's role in the labour market is now only minimal; limited mainly to the 'Kayal' regions of Kuttanad. In general, now the cultivators in Kuttanad deal directly with the labourers.

The labour requirements for the paddy cultivation of the landlords and the tenants in Kuttanad during

this feudal period were met by the slave castes of 'Pulaya' and 'Paraya' (belonging to the generally oppressed class of Harijans) The extremely time bound cultivation practices in Kuttanad and the labour intensive nature of it necessitated a large labour force for the tenant cultivators. This requirement was met by housing the slaves on huts pitched on the ring bunds or on the tenant's land. It was these labourers who had to do the most difficult and unhealthy operations for several generations. Thus the most tedious jobs of constructing and maintaining the ring bunds which protected the paddy fields from the surrounding water body, by collecting mud and clay from the river bed, the dewatering of the 'Padashekharams' using large persian wheels etc. had been traditionally the work of the slave castes. Some of the relatively easier and more hygienic operations like hedging, sowing, weeding, transplanting, manuring etc. were performed by the 'Ezhava' caste which in the Hindu caste system formed an intermediate class between the lowest slave castes and the higher castes of 'Nairs' and 'Brahmins'. The system of slavery was enforced by the social rules restraining them from upward mobility in the society and by a system of social relations which denied self respect or esteem for the slave castes. These were cemented by the restrictions placed on their clothing, enforced use of self derogatory words while addressing oneself etc. which through the generations built into their minds a sense of inferiority and subordination.

The reclamation of land from backwaters which started during the 1880s by Nair and Christian tenants at the instance of Travancore state with an end to increasing the paddy production in the state gained further momentum when the state announced loans for reclamation in 1888 and with the large scale use of mechanized pumps for dewatering during the first decades of the twentieth century<sup>19</sup>. Moreover, paddy prices sky rocketed during the first world war period (1914-18) making land

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<sup>19</sup> The exact period when the land reclamation actually started is not known. " It is now difficult to ascertain when reclamation in the back waters began. But records show that from 1009 M.E (1833) if not from an earlier period, reclamation has been going on" (Pillai and Panikar 1965:14).



reclamation and paddy cultivation extremely rewarding. Land reclamation again got a fillip with the increase in paddy price in Travancore during the second world war period when Burma fell to the Japanese army and the import of rice from there was blocked. This had two effects—on the one hand this led to land reclamation by cultivator tenants on a massive scale and on the other, the paddy fields which were hitherto cultivated only biennially or triennially began to be cultivated annually<sup>20</sup>. But one has to bear in mind that the crucial precondition for such a massive and labour intensive endeavour was the availability of a cheap and subservient labour force which was readily available in Kuttanad due to the attached labour system that had not been shaken yet.

In 1855, slavery was officially abolished in the Travancore state and the system of labour subjugation through slave trade and mortgaging underwent a gradual change from slavery to attached labour system. The distinction between attached labourers and slave labourers appears to be blurred as some authors seem to consider the difference to be of minor importance. Thus Alexander (1973:1556) describes the farmer labour relations in the Kuttanad in the past as being similar to the situation anywhere else in India. Cultivation was carried on with the help of attached labourers (Paniyals) most of whom were Harijans. Nagesh (1981:A114) makes a similar description referring to the 'Paniyals' of Quilon. He says that these contractual workers who are neither forced nor debt bonded, work in groups headed by a kind of contractor and engage in bunding, ploughing and other types of short term contract jobs. The 'Paniyals' are different from the 'Panniyals' of Tanjore, but may be compared with the workers under Sherugar in Malenad region of Karnataka. Since these references are made without mentioning the time period they are referring to, we may assume that they are writing about the later stages of labour

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<sup>20</sup> While George (1987) attributes the beginning of annual cultivation in Kuttanad to the second world war period, Kannan (1988:237) puts annual double cropping of paddy to a much earlier period "A technical innovation in draining water introduced between 1914-19 (from manually operated persian wheels to motorized pumps) enabled double cropping".

relations in Kuttanad. But there is reference that 'Paniyals' were the permanent workers who were employed regularly in Kuttanad (Jose 1979:7).

The exact period as well as the main impetus for this transition from slave labour to attached labour appears to be under dispute<sup>21</sup>. Though slavery was abolished in 1855, the status of the 'Pulaya' and 'Paraya' labourers seems to have remained more or less the same under the form of attached labour almost until the second decades of the twentieth century, since they were neither allowed to lease in land for cultivation, get educated nor mingle with the so called upper castes. George (1987:A144) describes that situation as follows "... Enforced economic dependence, threat of eviction from homesteads, perpetration of physical violence and subjugation by the socially disabling rules of caste were the devices by which the tenant cultivators and the latterly emerged class of owner cultivators exercised their hold over attached labourers..The Pulayas and Parayas could not walk on public pathways. They were not allowed to enter the village tea shops either. The doors of educational institutions remained closed to them. The Pulayas and Parayas were banned from wearing clean clothes". He further notes that till 1943, the highly brutal feudal features of the attached labour system prevailed in Kuttanad and the system began to disintegrate only with the unionization of labourers from 1943<sup>22</sup>.

The capitalist commercial farming and the reclamation of submerged land for cultivation led to large scale recruitment of labourers. The observation made by Kannan (1988:237) in this regard is noteworthy. The labourers who came to Kuttanad for the work related to the reclamation were mostly migrants from the midlands and they could find further work in

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<sup>21</sup> See George (1987) and Jose (1980)

<sup>22</sup> This is the view held by George (Opcit.). Though Jose (opcit.) also agrees to the time of this change to be 1940, the reason attributed by Jose seems to be different. He holds the view that the cause for the end of the attached labour system by 1940 was the capitalist investment in the labour saving technological and infrastructural improvements as well as demographic factors.

the paddy cultivation. George (1987:146) while observing the emergence of the increased demand for labour during the second world war period, has stressed that the demand was met by free wage labour. Jose (1977) too observes an increase in the availability of casual labourers during the period, as a result of seasonal migration and the increase in the number of local labourers. He puts forth this as an important factor that led to the collapse of the attached labour system. However, George does not seem to give assent to this reason that Jose attributes for the break up of the attached labour system. George holds that both the attached labour system and free wage labour system co existed and that only with respect to the Paraya and Pulaya castes that the transition could be thought of. He indicates another important tendency during this period. The affinity towards a high degree of monetization in the agrarian economy of Kuttanad reached its apex during this period when the farmers started substituting kind payment of wages by cash, due to the higher price of paddy during the war.

Despite these descriptions, we do not have precise information as to when exactly the labour migration to Kuttanad could have started. It is clear that from the time large scale commercialized farming started in Kuttanad during the first decades of the twentieth century, labour migration both permanent (as attached labourers of the tenant cultivators) as well as seasonal (during the peak seasons especially harvest) occurred. The observations made by Jose George (1984:28) indicate this. It is very likely that the migration of labourers to Kuttanad could have started as a trickle during an earlier period; that is the period when the land reclamation itself began.

By the end of 1930s the stage was set for a cataclysm in the socio economic status of the labourers as well as the cultivator-labor relations in Kuttanad. The deplorable living and working conditions of the vast mass of agricultural workers which was getting worsened by the addition of the workers from other sectors like coir industry to their ranks made them look forward to some force which would improve

their lot. Social reform movements aiming at the social emancipation of the depressed sections of the society had already begun. The Ezhava Social Reform Movement (ESRM) which later became Sree Narayana Dharma Paripalana Sangham SNDP in 1905, (primarily a forum of the Ezhava caste) and the Sadhu Jana Paripalana Sangham formed in 1907 (to mobilize the Pulaya and the Paraya castes) were the pioneers who initiated the struggle against social disabilities (Kannan 1988:92). These movements played a role in awakening the minds of the oppressed; prompting them to question and challenge the existing social values and system.

It was under such a volatile environment that the Communist movement gathered support among the working class. Alexander (1973:1553) describes how the Communist movement promulgated its ideology among the masses during the second war period. He notes that the movement conducted secret study classes, public meetings etc. as a part of mobilizing the depressed sections of the society. The political and ideological polarization of the classes had thus begun.

Apart from the political factors, Alexander (1973:1555) remarks that a more humane problem could have been the immediate cause of unionization of workers. This was the extreme food scarcity among the labourers during the war period. It happened due to the very policy followed by the government to tackle the food shortage arising from the war. The government introduced rationing of food items and non agricultural families were given ration cards for receiving weekly rice quotas. Since the wages of the agricultural labourers were traditionally being paid in kind in Kuttanad, ration was not issued for agricultural labour families. On the other hand, due to the high price of paddy, the farmers refused to pay the wages in kind and the labourers got caught in between the government policy and the cultivator's obstinacy. This desperate condition prompted the labourers to respond to the union's call to organize.

At the dawn of the 1940s the efforts of

the social reform movements and the politicisation of labourers by the Communist party workers had converged to form a force to reckon with. Apart from the agricultural labourers, the coir workers in and around Alleppey who were mostly from the intermediate class of Ezhavas were also getting organized. Kannan's (1988:243) description goes as follows " The politicisation of the coir workers under the influence of Communists gave an impetus to organizing labourers. The party line was, as one author put it 'to build transmission belts to pass its radical ideology to the masses ( Alexander 1980:A 72.) ..... one was the fact that many coir workers came from Ezhava households where other family members or relatives worked as agricultural labourers. In addition there was the influence of ESRM on Ezhavas, and to a smaller extent of the HSRM (Harijan Social Reform Movement) on Harijans. The ESRM had already been a powerful social force and its proletarian section had been enthusiastically responding to radical ideological appeals". Appending this description, Kannan notes the birth of a union of agricultural labourers in 1939 in Kainikari village called Travancore Agricultural Workers Union. (Thiruvithamcore Karshaka Thozhilali Union)<sup>23</sup>. As mentioned earlier, although a movement for the social emancipation of the 'Pulaya' and 'Paraya' castes was formed as early as 1910, it could not make much headway due to the fear of the attached labourers of the oppression from their tenants. Thus it was only in 1943 that the attached labourers in Kuttanad joined the labour union on a massive scale and from that time onwards the extreme confrontation between the two ideologically polarized classes began.

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<sup>23</sup> Though it does not make a crucial difference for our purpose, we have to take note of the fact that there is a difference of perception between Kannan and Alex George about the year in which the union was formed. George puts it to a later year ie. Dec 11 1940. This union was formally registered only in 1941 after a successful strike was organized at Kaavalam pressing for regular settlement of work accounts and wage payments. Alex George (1987:A147). We find that this disagreement about the date of formation of the union is a more fundamental one which has been there as between the pioneers of the union themselves. Jose George (1984:42) has noted this difference of opinion as between S.K .Das and K.P Joseph, both of whom are leaders of the movement.

The next three decades were the period of intense struggle of the organized labourers not only very often against the muscle power of the landlords, but also against the oppressive social laws. Strikes demanding increase in wages, reduction of working hours, better working conditions and most important of all against the landlord's arbitrary powers for punishing the labourers and evicting them from their hutments were a normal feature of those days in Kuttanad<sup>24</sup>.

Very often strikes were planned and conducted during that period of the crop cycle when there was critical requirement of labourers (like transplanting and harvest times) and hence the cultivators are most dependent upon the labourers. In times of confrontation, this dependence on the labourers were jacked up by the unions by blocking the import of labourers from other areas by the cultivators and thus increasing their bargaining power. (Kannan 1988:248) and (Tharamangalam 1981:72).

The election of the first Communist ministry to power in 1957 and later in 1967 provided the political support that the labour movement needed. These ministries made relatively radical laws favouring the labouring poor and took certain legal measures like preventing the police from involving in the conflicts between cultivators and labourers; which given the social milieu in Kuttanad was tantamount to giving complete governmental support to the worker's cause. In Kuttanad, labour union had already started winning struggles against the cultivators mostly by their sheer organizational power. The Communist government also set up an Industrial Relations Committee (I.R.C.), a tripartite body including the representatives of the workers, the cultivators and the government as a forum for settling agricultural work disputes. We would see that this institution would play a crucial

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<sup>24</sup> For a detailed account of the labour struggles see  
(a) Kannan (1988:241).  
(b) Alexander (1980)  
(c) Tharamangalam (1981).  
(d) Jose George (1984).

role in the cultivator-labour relations.

Two authors on Kuttanad have noted the differences in the pattern of growth and activities of the Trade union movement in Kuttanad. Oommen (1985) identifies two distinct phases in life cycle of the movement. The period prior to 1957 he terms as the phase of mobilization and the post 1957 period has been the institutionalization period. Though Tharamangalam (1981:72) does not strictly classify the different stages, he too has marked out the period since the 1970s as the phase of 'class collaboration', also noting that the unions have virtually discontinued their militant struggles from this period delivering peace to Kuttanad.

Both these authors seem to be on agreement on the role and the impact of the Industrial Relations Committee as the major power that has diverted so to say, the original path of confrontation followed by the labour movement. The I.R.C provided a platform for collective bargaining and thus brought the workers union and the cultivators to the negotiating table, with the government acting as the mediator. In practice many struggles that the union fought were first fought in the paddy fields with their sheer organizational power and later got the victory accepted by the I.R.C. (Jose, A.V 1979:15). But the involvement of the union in the collective bargaining process, which is a socially accepted mode of settling disputes vis-a-vis the militant struggle, appears to have brought in the phase of institutionalization. We feel that such changes in the attitudes and strategies of a movement also would be a reflection of the forces acting behind them. That is to say that, unless there has been some changes and differentiation in the composition of the union/s such changes in the mode of activity may not have been possible. We are indicating the possibility of the emergence of a middle or small peasantry who became a force to be reckoned with within the labour movement. Differentiation that occurred within the labourers during the evolutionary process of the movement could have influenced their goals and strategy from within. Such a class of small peasantry need not be a very large one to influence the strategies of a movement. If a class is large

enough to threaten a break away from the movement, the movement may try to reconcile with their interests too to avoid a rift.

Tharamangalam (1981:108) has made some observation on this line. He opines that the political alliance that was made by the Communist Party (C.P.M) which sponsored and guided the labour movement, with the Kerala Congress (essentially a political party of the landed) in the early seventies was a exigent attempt to win back the middle peasantry who had been estranged from the party as a result of the vehement struggles for 'Kudikidappu' land which had adversely affected their interests. Tharamangalam goes on to say that the labour movement has started to show portends of disintegration since the unions have been organizing hardly any practical programmes which involved the workers actively as compared to the earlier days of fierce militancy on every issue. He suggests that such conditions are conducive for the decay of the movement. In his view, this problem is a classic one arising from the ambivalence of the political parties that guide the movement. Here we quote a significant observation of his " This ambivalence is the result in part, of a certain contradiction between trade unionism and revolutionary class struggle. Trade unions typically aim at improving the conditions of the worker's lives within the framework of capitalism, accepting and accommodating to the class rule of the bourgeoisie. They abide by the bourgeois 'rules of the game'. Revolutionary movements, by contrast aim at the destruction of the system and reject the rules" (Tharamangalam 1981:96).

It may be preposterous to propose that the labour movement in Kuttanad is disintegrating. It has been noted that the trade unions have from 1980 onwards pressed for the effective implementation of the agricultural worker's pension though it was not very strongly pursued Jose George (1984:90). However a fact observed during our survey in Kuttanad is that the movement definitely does not have the vigour and vitality it once said to have had. Whether this has been due to the reason that most of the benefits that could be asserted and achieved through a trade union movement has already been achieved given the socio-



political ambience in Kuttanad during each period, or whether it is a result of the differentiation within the movement which has made it impossible to make further progress in the interests of the 'proletarian' sections needs more careful analysis. Nevertheless the impression that crystallized in our mind during the interviews with labourers and local leaders is that the latter factor is very much contributory to the situation of lethargy of the movement. That is, the emergence of or the initiation of the emergence of a class of owner-cultivators which itself may be in part the result of the organization of the labourers, is now acting as forces impeding further ventures of the movement.

What changes and achievements did the organized efforts of the workers make and whether there has been an improvement in the economic conditions of agricultural labourers are two different but related questions. (Different since the changes in the economic conditions of the workers need not be correlated only to their organization). The answer to the second question is a debated issue even now and is best echoed when Kannan (1988:231) says "...This assessment is important in that it sheds light on a series of evaluations of the economic conditions of the agricultural labourers in the wake of agrarian reform movements of the last half century. These evaluations have conclusions that vary from observing a definite decline in the living standards (Mencher 1978 & 1980), to a decline or virtually no improvement (Panikar 1971 & 1978) or a cautious judgement of modest improvements attributed to a number of factors of which the organization of workers was thought to be possible (Raj and Tharakan 1983)". To that list we can add Ninan (1981) and Mencher (1982) who after debating the matter, leave us back in square one. Hence we shall take up this issue later.

As an answer to the first question, research papers point to two aspects of change. The first is the conferment of ownership rights to the hutment dwellers. The second aspect is the increase in real wages of agricultural labourers reported for the whole state and for Palghat and Alleppey districts in particular. Kannan reports that in the mid

seventies the real wages in these two districts increased by 30-35 percent and 50-60 percent respectively (Kannan 1988:259).

On the other hand, a number of researchers have opined that though the real wages have gone up, the income of the agricultural labourers have declined due to the decline in per capita employment availability all over Kerala and distinctively in paddy cultivation areas. Mencher while analyzing the unemployment scenario, states Panikar's (1971) observation of a snow balling process wherein the increases in wages of workers makes the employers cut back on labour hiring, thus inducing further reduction in number of days of work. This further prompts the workers to demand for higher wages, with the end result of a lower total income for the agricultural labourers in the rice regions. (Mencher 1983) This process has been observed to be true by agricultural experts also. " There has been a slackness of late in the demand for agricultural labour. The agriculturists have a tendency to postpone or curtail various items of work which normally would have been done by hired labour. Instances have been pointed out of postponing or not doing at all the items of work necessary for proper crop management such as weeding etc. The ploughing operations are reduced to the minimum possible perhaps to reduce the cost of cultivation" (Nair 1981:49).

Thus it appears quite likely that the real incomes of the agricultural workers in Kuttanad (as also that of workers else where in Kerala) has not improved over the years. After a perusal of the diverging views of different authors on the issue Kannan has come to the conclusion that the annual earnings of the agricultural households from agricultural occupations has definitely declined. But he confirms that, taking stock of the other changes that have happened, such as the improvements in the conditions of work, ownership of homesteads, removal of social maledictions, and the larger role that the state has come to play through transfer payments to the weaker sections etc. the situation has modestly improved (1988:303).

(However, a more recent study by the same author has concluded that the real income of the rural labour households have increased considerably. (See Chapter 5, Page 101 of this study).

Could such improvements, however small they may appear to be, changed the behaviour of the households in the labour market? A more detailed study on Kerala has remarked on these lines "The daily wages rate of agricultural labour has been higher in Kerala than in most other states of India, partly reflecting the higher price of food grains and partly perhaps due to supplementary income from other sources (small holdings of land, petty trading etc) rising its reserve price. But there is evidence to suggest that other factors helping to rise the reserve price of labour, (eg. land reforms giving fixity of tenure on small holdings) could have been equally important" (United Nations 1975:3).

We now turn to another aspect of the problem we are analyzing. That is, what are the dimensions of the system of paying the wages in kind? Can we perceive the system of paying for in kind as a vestige of the feudal system when barter was the mode of transaction? It appears quite likely that this may be so. It has been observed by Pillai and Panikar (1965:58) that by the early 1960s most of the wage payments in Kuttanad were monetized. However, the mode of harvest wage payment defied change. Payment of wages in kind draws the closest comparison with the various forms of share cropping. In share cropping the labourer gets a part of the produce for doing some of the operations of cultivation or all the operations depending on the type of contract. The crucial contrast lies in the fact that in share cropping usually different degrees of attachment or bondage of labourer to the land owner is involved, where as in the system we are referring to in Kuttanad presently, the labourers are free 'wage labour' or 'casual labour'.

A large number of types of share cropping has been reported in India with widely varying terms and conditions with various shares going to the share-cropper. The proportion of the produce that goes to the labourers depends and changes according to the degree of his involvement in the cultivation for example depending on whether the labourer supplies any other input such as bullock labour, fertilizers etc., apart from his own manual work. Thus the share going to the

land owner has been recorded to vary from  $3/4$  to  $2/3$  or  $1/2$ . Reporting about Gujarat, Vyas (1970) wrote about a type of share cropping in which the landlord prepares the land, sows the crop and then hands over the land for the rest of the operations till harvesting to the share cropper. The share cropper provides the labour input whereas the landlord gives all other input. He remarks that for all functional purposes this is a labour contract. Payment of wages in kind was very common not only for harvesting, but also for all other activities under the 'jajmani' system. In Maharashtra the 'Saldars' are paid for partly in kind and partly in cash. There, under the 'Wata' system the wage paid in kind is a fixed share of the produce. The share of the worker in groundnut or chilies cultivation vary from  $1/8$  th to  $1/4$ th of the total produce. So also, all the harvesting work of cutting, bundling, threshing and stocking are given on a share basis to a team of workers numbering three to ten called 'toli'. Various arrangements of share cropping has been reported from Tamilnad also (Mencher 1974:1497). The same mode of payment has been reported from Punjab, Haryana, and U.P. (Laxminarayan (1977)). Aggarwal (1970:A75) in his discussion on wages payment in kind, opines that it is the market oriented cultivation with its increased demand for labour that eliminates traditional services on barter terms.

Though we find that paying for in kind has been quite common in India, the question remains as to why this mode withstood change in Kuttanad where the socio economic and political environment has been quite different from the rest of India. The role of risk aversion and risk sharing has been pointed out as a reason for the prevalence of share cropping (Binswanger and Rosenzweig 1984). They say that if there is an incentive problem such that the land owner can neither force the worker to put in a stipulated quantum of work nor can he monitor it, it would be in the interest of the employer to have share cropping so that 'job shirking' can be minimized<sup>25</sup>. In Chapter 2 we have noted the risk that the Kuttanad farmer faces and his

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<sup>25</sup> For a discussion on this matter see Roumasset James (1984).

urgency to find labourers for harvesting. It may be this urgency that makes crop sharing attractive since the cultivator does not have to bother about the availability of labour in time. They do not have the burden of supervision and the problem of job shirking is minimized due to the incentive effect of crop sharing. Conversely, the labourers also appear to have found it to their benefit to get their wages as paddy, a major item in their daily consumption basket which when bought in the open market as processed rice is not so cheap an item.

Therefore, as the system existed both the agents benefited from it. Changes in the 'status quo' could have come through changes in the price of paddy, a factor which determines the real wage of the workers. Any change in the price of paddy could make either the cultivator or the labourers the loser and conversely the other the gainer. Hence whenever the paddy prices have changed drastically, it has also been followed by a move on the part of the loser to shift to cash wages or to change the crop share. In the case of Kuttanad it has been observed that it was the high price of paddy during the Second World War period that paved the way for farmers shifting to cash payment of wages. (Pillai and Panikar 1965:124) and also (Alex George 1987:146). Conversely, in recent times workers have started demanding that the harvest crop sharing be substituted by cash wages. Nair, while noting this trend, also proposes the reason for this change. In his opinion the decline in the price of paddy has made this mode unattractive. The paddy that the workers get as wages would not equal the money they could have legitimately earned if it was cash payment (Nair 1981:26).

Contrary to the idea that crop shares are 'institutional wages' or 'customary wages' which are more influenced and determined by some non market forces, recent studies have shown that these are also responsive to changes in the market conditions. A number of instances have been pointed out where, as a response to the increased population pressure when the supply of workers for harvesting increased to more than what was desired, the customary wages declined in real terms and also the system itself underwent changes to adapt to the new

environment.

White (1983:142) reports about such changes in the 'Bawon' harvest shares in Java. "We cannot speak of 'one' harvest system but rather a range of arrangements" an observation shared by Stoler(1977) and Utami and Ihalauw(1973) depending on the relations between employer and harvester. In one case it showed a gradual decline in the level of 'Bawon' payment, from 1/5 to 1/10; and in two other cases a shift from open to closed access to 'Bawon' and also from 'Bawon' to the arrangement called 'Ceblokan' (in other parts of Java, 'Kedokan', 'Ngekak-Ngedok', 'Pajegan', 'Tanduran', 'Nekon') in which earning a bawon is conditional on previous work without pay in some other task or tasks". Similarly, the 'Bawon' has been replaced by 'Tebasan' system in Central Java where the farmers sell the standing crop to middlemen who then employ contract workers to harvest with a lower harvest share. A similar change that occurred in Philippines is the shift from the traditional 'Hanusan' system to 'Gama' system in which only those workers who weeded the field without receiving wages are allowed to participate in harvesting Kikuchi, Hafid, and Hayami (1984:118).

Reporting the changes in Java, Kikuchi et.al study concluded that the farmers gradually switched from the more open 'Bawon' system to a more restricted form of 'Bawon' and later to 'Ceblokan' system. The original wage rate for harvesting under the 'Ceblokan' was 1/6th of the produce if the worker had transplanted the paddy without a payment. But as the system under went change, the share was reduced to 1/7th and weeding and harrowing was added as the obligatory work required to be done if the worker is to be permitted to harvest. The matter that Kikuchi et.al makes is that the harvest wage rates under the original 'Bawon' system were higher than the wage rates for other agricultural operations in real terms. But when there arose an excess supply of labour for harvesting this difference between the wage rates were brought down first by a reduction in the Bawon share and later by introduction of Ceblokan system thus bringing down the wage rates for harvesting on a par with the wage rates for other operations.

We now need to turn our attention to similar situations that arose in Kuttanad in the 1960s and 1970s. In our case, both the cultivators as well as the labour unions had to resort to restricting entry into the labour market. Jose George (1984:77) has described the scene in Kuttanad wherein the unions insisted on the system of passes or identity cards in order to control the entry of the workers for harvesting and to avoid clashes. He stresses that in those villages of Kuttanad where the unions were strong, the system was successfully implemented so that the workers who had worked in those paddy fields throughout the cultivation season was given the privilege to harvest. The explanation provided by George is that, Kuttanad being saturated with casual labour and a readily increasing work force the main intention of the move was to prevent further decline of employment and income of the agricultural workers.

The emergence of this 'Pass system' and that of the right of the local workers to be employed ('Parisara thozhilali') is also recorded by another author. "A typical harvesting operation proceeds as follows. The land owner is required by law to obtain the permission from the revenue office before harvesting. He announces the date of his harvest and requests police protection in advance. In addition, he approaches the local K.S.K.T.U leader or leaders and reaches a prior understanding that no trouble will be caused. He would very likely have made a 'contribution' to the labour union. The morning of the harvest arrives with the police on the scene and about 2000 workers instead of the 250 that are supposed to be accommodated. (The I.R.C had decided that the number of workers be restricted to 125 per hectare.) When the first 225 have been let into the field, respecting the rights of the workers of the vicinity, the landlord, the Police officer and the local union leader hold a brief discussion. The union leader suggests that another 400 workers could be accommodated. The police officer they says to the landlord "Sir, don't you think we could allow another 200 into the field?" Almost certainly the landlord accepts the suggestion. The officer then asks the remaining crowd to look for work else where. In fact many will already have left for another harvest site" (Tharamangalam 1981:86).

It needs to be noted here that all these restrictions can only be deemed as barriers to entry to the market which are made in order to avoid the erosion of work and income of one section of the labourers at the cost of another. Here we come to the classical dilemma of the insider versus outsider predicament of unionization of labourers. Here, the workers are pitched against the workers. Further, such restrictions on the market entry severely curtails the effectiveness of the agricultural sector as a residual sector or a buffer into which workers of all sectors fall back in times of distress conditions in their own sectors. However, the fact that such restrictions were not continued in Kuttanad after the specific period needs to be noted. This might have been impossible for both the cultivators as well as the union/s. The union is very likely to have objected to it even if the cultivators wanted to continue it. On the one hand, the unions might have realized that if the cultivators were allowed to freely substitute local labourers with migrants, their control over the market would be completely lost and winning demands by resorting to strikes would be difficult. On the other hand, if strict geographical restrictions were continuously placed on entry to Kuttanad's labour market, that might have detrimentally affected the image which the union held among the workers as an organization of working class. This is especially relevant in Kuttanad since the workers are reported to have developed by this time, a class consciousness irrespective of caste or regional differences.

Nevertheless, we have to note that in Kuttanad the workers have been able to prevent any reduction in their harvest wage shares (as reported in Java) in spite of the pressure of surplus labour during those harvest seasons. In fact they succeeded in having the wages hiked from time to time. The credit for this (paradoxically though) should go to the union/s.

We now turn to the issue of turn around period discussed in Chapter 2. It needs to be noted that the wage rate of 1/7th of the produce given to the workers is for



operations involving not only harvesting, but also bundling and carrying it to the threshing yard and for threshing. It should also be borne in mind that the paddy being given as wage is unwinnowed and so contains also the chaff. Since by tradition threshing is also treated as a part of the entire harvesting operation, in Kuttanad the labourers used to harvest for 1 or 2 days and then on third day thresh what they have harvested, and again proceed further with harvesting. However, of late, apparently in an attempt to harvest as much area as possible, labourers sometimes continue harvesting for several days consecutively, keeping the cut paddy bundled in the threshing yard, and moving over to the other fields for harvesting, postponing the threshing operation till the harvesting ends. Once they have harvested and kept as much paddy as they wish in threshing yards in various places, they come back to the first threshing yards and start threshing.

This sequence followed by the workers is very likely to be contributing to the 'elongation of the turn around period'. We are unable to expose why the labourers are able to follow this sequence now? Is it because the cultivators who recognize the strength of the unions fear potential trouble from them if they get their paddy threshed by some other workers? Or is it also due to shortage of workers? We feel that both these determinants may be valid, though it may be the customs and traditions that is followed in harvesting that makes it difficult for the cultivators to resort to methods which would evoke retaliatory steps from the workers.

We also need to look at the unique situation arising from crop sharing for harvesting. Till 1952, in Kuttanad the harvest wage was 1/12 th of the produce (8.3%)<sup>26</sup>. Strikes were conducted in 1952 which realized the wage rate as 1/11 or (9%). By 1957, the wage for harvesting in Kuttanad was 1/10 of the harvested grain (10%). In that year upon strong pressure from the Thiruvithamcore Karshaka Thozhilali Union, (which later became K.S.K.T.U) the Government of Kerala fixed

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<sup>26</sup> Minor inter-regional differences are found in the harvest wage rates.

1/9th of the produce (11.1%) as the minimum wage. The rate was further raised to 1/8th of the produce in 1970 (12.5%). Till 1989, the harvest labourers got 1.25/7.25 as the wage (17%) of which the 1/6th is termed 'Patham' and 0.25 as 'Theerppu' which are the wage and maintenance wage (given as a fringe benefit) respectively<sup>27</sup>. In other words, 83% of the total produce goes to the cultivator and 17% to the harvest labour as a whole. (It is important to note that this 17% goes not to any single worker). How exactly the 17% of the total produce would be divided among the labourers would depend on the total number of labourers harvesting per unit of land and each one's efficiency. Khan (1984:43) in his discussion on the real wage of workers in Mymensingh district of Bangladesh, has pointed out how the average wage of a worker varies according to his efficiency in a crop sharing arrangement.

For the reasons just mentioned, it is important for the harvest labourers as to how large the total crop is or whether the yield is good or poor. If the yield per unit of land is low, the worker's share will be low. By referring to a good yield, we imply two factors viz. the total out put per unit of land and the Paddy:chaff ratio being high. The experienced workers have a knack to distinguish between a very good yield, a mediocre yield and a poor yield. Therefore, if there is any other alternative they would avoid harvesting a paddy field with a low paddy:chaff ratio. This evidently is the reason why the cultivators in Kuttanad whose yield is poor have to give additional incentives and perquisites to get labourers for harvesting.

The effect of the decline in migrant labour is now very vividly reflected in the attitude of labourers in Kuttanad. Earlier sufficient labour was available for harvesting irrespective of whether the cultivator's crop was good

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<sup>27</sup> By the end of 1989 the wage rate had gone up to 1/6 'patham' and 1/4 of it 'theerpu' Or (21%) in several places in Kuttanad and it is reported that it is only a matter of time before this rate comes into prevalence as the standard harvesting wage.

or poor. Now since the exodus of labourers from nearby areas has dwindled, workers in many areas of Kuttanad have become choosy about the harvest work they undertake. If only the cultivator's crop is good labourers are easily available. Similarly now the workers are reluctant to go to the 'Kayal areas' far away from their homes and with poor conveyance facilities.

On the other extreme is the case when the cultivator's crop is very good or when only one or two paddy fields are being harvested (instead of a whole area). Too many labourers flock to these fields such that the work is finished within a limited time. Perhaps, this type of situation could be the one which Mencher (1980:1787) was referring to when she wrote " ..It is only in Kuttanad that I have heard workers talk about time spent harvesting in terms of 45 minutes or one and a half hours rather than in terms of days or at least in terms of half days as they do else where".

The two situations presented here point to a relationship. The absolute quantity of paddy that a labourer receives as his wages depends on (1) the yield per unit of land and (2) the relative abundance or scarcity of labourers harvesting per unit of land.

Let us examine the productivity of paddy in Kuttanad region. The average yield of paddy per hectare for India as a whole in 1970-71 was only 1134 Kg. vis-a-vis 5713 Kg. in Japan. However, yields up to 6 or 7 tonnes have been reported in India under scientific cultivation methods (Government of Kerala 1974:14). The average yield for Kuttanad for the period 1977-86 is given in Table 3.1. The per hectare share that goes to the labourers has been calculated from the yield and is presented. It becomes clear that the share of the labourers varies directly with the yield and 'other things being equal', it would be more remunerative to do harvesting in those taluks with higher yield.

Table 3.1

The average yield of paddy per hectare in Kuttanad taluks and the estimated share of the workers. ( Moving Average/in Kgs.)

Taluks	1977-79	1980-82	1983-86	Worker's share.*
1 Thiruvalla	3758	3941.333	4560.75	651
2 Karthikappally	4033.666	3514.333	3855	551
3 Mavelikkara	3803.333	3578	4377.25	625
4 Chengannur	3649.333	3615	3911.25	559
5 Kuttanad	3976	3724.666	3824.75	546
6 Ambalappuzha	3127.666	3184.666	3378.75	483
7 Shertallai	N.A	N.A	N.A	N.A
8 Changanachery	3956.666	4239	3707.25	530
9 Kottayam	2889.666	3661.666	3661.25	523
10 Vaikom	2480.333	2367.333	2455.75	351
KUTTANAD REGION AVERAGE	3567.523	3536.222	3748	535

Note: \* The worker's share has been calculated at 1/7th of the total produce. The share estimated is for the period 1983-86. N.A Stands for data not available.

The introduction and popularization of H.Y.V paddy in Kerala during the latter half of 1965 had been noted to have increased the productivity. But by the beginning of the 1980s there was general decline in the productivity of H.Y.V not only in Kerala, but also in most of the states where H.Y.V have been widely adopted. About Kerala it has been observed that the same variety of paddy cultivated continuously loses its vigour and the yield comes down Nair(1981:45). In our Pilot study conducted in Kuttanad, 14.5% of the cultivators reported a reduction of the yield per unit of land over the last 10 years, 38.7% reported an increase, and for the rest 46.7% the output stagnated<sup>28</sup>. Examining Table 3.1, we find that Kuttanad taluk has registered a decline in the productivity, Kottayam taluk has shown an increase, Changanachery taluk shows a fluctuating pattern and in Vaikom taluk the productivity appears to stagnate being the lowest. How far these changes could have influenced the workers flow to Kuttanad is difficult to predict. We may surmise that this factor may not be a too important one.

<sup>28</sup> Pilot study conducted by the Author. See Chapter 1.

Another important variable that would influence the real wages of harvest labour is the price of paddy. The low price of paddy has been pointed out to be one of the reasons for the decline in the flow of labourers to Kuttanad by many cultivators. Unni (1981) had found that the paddy prices had shown increasing trend between 1960-61 and 1974-75 in all the districts of Kerala. The major part of the increase in price happened during 1961-68. She points out that the relative price of paddy to coconut fell sharply till 1979-80.

## CHAPTER 4

### A NOTE ON THE RESEARCH DESIGN, AND DATA COLLECTION.

#### Sample Selection.

A multistage stratified purposive sampling method was resorted to for choosing the sample labour households for the study. The first step was to stratify the 10 taluks that constitute the Kuttanad region into two, based on productivity (Yield per hectare)<sup>29</sup>. The stratification was done as those having average productivity above and below the Kuttanad region's average productivity. The yield data for ten years from 1977-78 to 1986-87 was used for this. The arithmetic mean yield of all the 9 taluks over the ten year period was taken as the average yield of Kuttanad region.

Further, the ten year average of each taluk was calculated and used to stratify them. This classification is presented in Table 4.1. Thus we have four taluks having productivity below and six taluks with their average productivity higher than that of the Kuttanad region average<sup>30</sup>.

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<sup>29</sup> Productivity was chosen as the criteria for the classification since the wage payment for harvesting is made in kind. Hence the income they get is a function also of the total produce. See Chapter 3.

<sup>30</sup> When this classification was cross checked using a five year period instead of the ten year period. We found that the Kottayam taluk which came in the low productivity strata in the first stratification, now comes in the high productivity strata, and the Karthikappally taluk which in the ten year classification was a high productivity taluk has now tumbled into the low productivity strata and the number of taluks in each of the strata remain unchanged. Though this change was noticed, we proceeded with the stratification using ten years since a better index of productivity was expected to be obtained with a longer period since short term fluctuations may be ironed out.

The next step involved was the choice of two taluks each from the two strata. (It was arbitrarily decided to take samples from 4 taluks to accommodate the regional variations). Since priority was given to choosing those areas which would most truly reflect the features of the Kuttanad

Table 4.1

Mean yield of paddy for 'Punja'(Summer) crop in Kuttanad taluks 1977-86.

Taluks	1977-78	78-79	79-80	80-81	81-82	82-83	83-84	84-85	85-86	86-87	10 Year AVG	5 Year AVG
1 Thiruvalla	4350	3899	3025	3188	4423	4213	4303	4487	4373	5080	4134	4491
2 Karthikappally	4357	4655	3089	3005	4296	3242	3748	4729	3640	3303	3806	3732<
3 Navelikkara	3619	3625	4166	3618	3650	3466	4199	3382	4596	5332	3965	4195
4 Chengannur	2893	4041	4014	3895	3213	3737	3136	3559	4690	4260	3743	3876
5 Kuttanad	3650	3950	4328	3268	4050	3856	3581	3280	4211	4227	3840	3831
6 Ambalappuzha	1773	4116	3494	2858	3267	3429	3794	3072	3185	3464	3245<	3389<
7 Shertallai	N.A	N.A	N.A	N.A	N.A	N.A	N.A	N.A	N.A	N.A	N.A<	N.A <
8 Changanachery	2930	5140	3800	3420	3572	5725	3061	3830	4440	3498	3942	4111
9 Kottayam	2601	2719	3349	3096	3084	4805	2716	3787	4393	3749	3430<	3890
10 Vaikom	2106	N.A	2616	2389	2207	2506	1748	1522	3301	3252	2405<	2466<
Kuttanad Region	3142	4018	3542	3193	3529	3886	3365	3516	4092	4018	3612	3776

< Denotes taluks with productivity lower than Kuttanad region's.

Source:

Data for 1975-76 -Statistics for planning 1977.p 127  
 Data for 1976-77 to 1978-79- Statistics for planning 1980. p112  
 Data for 1979-80 - Statistics for planning 1983 p153  
 Data for 1980-81 to 86-87 -Statistics for planning 1988. p66

region, Kottayam and Kuttanad taluks which are the core of the Kuttanad region were chosen. (Kuttanad taluk comes from the strata of high productivity and Kottayam from the other). Vaikom taluk was chosen as the second taluk from the low productivity strata since the region has been known to have slightly different agronomic practices and is mostly single cropped. Moreover, it is also a region from where there is considerable in migration to the rest of Kuttanad during the harvest season. Changanacherry taluk was chosen as the second taluk from among the high productivity taluks.

Thus we have, Kuttanad and Changanacherry from the high productivity strata, and Kottayam Vaikom taluks from the low productivity strata. This choice may appear to have a bias looked at from another view point. Three out of the total four taluks chosen come from Kottayam district and there is only one taluk in our sample from the Alleppey district (the district which accommodates most of the area termed as the Kuttanad region). Nevertheless, since we were using productivity as the criteria and not administrative divisions, we do not expect additional bias from this factor.

Once the four taluks from which the sample is to be picked has been decided, it was settled that the sample be dispersed in two or three panchayats within each taluk. These Panchayats were again chosen purposively with the objective of including those regions where agricultural labourers and more specifically paddy field workers tended to center. Based on the information provided by the Panchayat Offices and in consultation with the local workers about such places, two or three wards were chosen from within each Panchayat to begin the data collection. The region wise details of the sample thus chosen is given in Table 4.1.

### The Conceptual Framework

In choosing the households for the survey, it was the agricultural labourer which was treated as the basic unit and only in the next stage did the household become the unit for study. That is, we chose the labourer to begin with and further proceeded to include and treat his/her household as a typical rural labour household in Kuttanad assuming that such a choice would spontaneously and without biases reflect the occupational structure of the labour households in Kuttanad<sup>31</sup>. Hence, what that is taken for granted in our choice of

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<sup>31</sup> We did not define the agricultural labour households as the ones in which 50% or more of the individuals worked in the agricultural sector, or as the ones in which 50% or more of the income is derived from the agricultural sector. That is, the usual time criteria or the income criteria as they have been used in other enquiries were not used.



agricultural labour households in the above mentioned way is that when the family of each agricultural labourer we chose for the study also qualifies itself to be called an 'agricultural labour household', it would not lead to any bias; rather it would reflect the actual structure of rural labour households. To exemplify this, suppose we chose ten agricultural labourers from Kuttanad and further proceeded to include his/her household as 'agricultural labour household', each of the households may have different occupational composition within itself; one household may have only one agricultural labourer in it; the rest working in non agricultural sector and another may have all its members working in the agricultural sector; but as a whole the sample would reflect the occupational structure and the profile of rural labour households in Kuttanad.

The representative nature of such a sample and its unbiasedness would hence critically depend on the initial selection of the agricultural worker into the sample. It need to be noted here that conceptualizing, defining and quantifying work, worker and related issues are typical problems that arises in most empirical work related to work and employment<sup>32</sup>. Much of this problem arises due to the occupational multiplicity of individuals on the one hand and the researcher's requirement to classify it for empirical purposes on the other.

Hence, we depended on our own criteria to choose agricultural labourer and agricultural household so as to suit the purposes of our study. Agreeably, there is an element of subjectivity in such an approach. However, we propose that since the sampling, data collection and all the related work has been done by the researcher himself with the same subjectivity all throughout, it may be detectable if there is any .

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<sup>32</sup> For a discussion on conceptual issues

- (1) Visaria (1990).
- (2) Dantwala (1970).
- (3) Paul (1988).

Readers interested in methodological problems of contemporary scientific research may benefit from Goldsmith (1990).

Table 4.2

DISTRIBUTION OF SAMPLE HOUSEHOLDS TALUK WISE AND PANCHAYAT WISE

STRATA 1		STRATA 2	
<b>1 KUTTANAD TALUK</b>		<b>2 KOTTAYAM TALUK</b>	
Panchayats	No of Households	Panchayats	No of Households
1 Ramankary ...	15	1 Kumarakom	40
2 Muttar ....	12	2 Aymanom	22
3 Velianad ....	12	3 Thiruvaarpu	35
4 Pulinkunnoo ..	12		
Total .....	51	Total	97
<u>Migrants</u>		<b>4 VAIKOM TALUK</b>	
1 Vaikom	50	Panchayats	No of Households
2 Mavelikara			
3 Sherthallai			
4 Chengannur			
Total	101	1 Thalayolaparampu	38
		2 Udayanapuram	17
		3 Vetchoor	35
		Total	90
<b>2 CHANGANACHERY TALUK</b>			
Panchayats	No of Households		
1 Vazhappally ...	35		
West			
2 Vazhappally ..	36		
East			
3 Others	21		
Thrikkodithanam			
Maadappally			
Changanachery Municipality			
Total .....	92		
<b>GRAND TOTAL 380</b>			

For identifying the agricultural labourer, the following method has been used. We asked the respondent whether his/her main occupation was wage employment in the agricultural sector. But we found that this question in itself would leave the identification part too ambiguous and completely dependent upon each respondent's perception as to what is agricultural work and who is an agricultural labourer. This would also have made it difficult for us to distinguish between a pure wage earner and an owner cultivator who also works as a wage labourer. Hence two more questions were added for sharpening the identification part. These questions are (1) Do you go for paddy field work when ever it is available? (2) Do you do all types of agricultural work? If Yes, specify the operations and wage rates.

As a matter of fact, we were concerned about this distinction between a pure wage earner and an owner cultivator only in so far as the failure to make such a distinction might have grossly distorted our sample as one representing rural labourers in Kuttanad. If the sample has too many of owner cultivators rather than pure wage earners, it may not be a proper sample of the agricultural workers of Kuttanad, since the existing information on the agricultural workers shows that a vast majority of the workers are landless. But, since one of the very purpose of this study has been to find out the asset pattern of agricultural workers in Kuttanad, and especially whether there has been any trend of the emergence of a small class of owner cultivators which in turn has altered the patterns in the labour market, we found that all that we could do to ensure that the sample is not a biased one is to ensure that s/he selected as an agricultural labourer into our sample mostly work as wage earner irrespective of his/her asset position<sup>33</sup>.

Therefore, the above mentioned questions on what all operations in paddy cultivation/agriculture does the

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<sup>33</sup> The assumption here is that the commonly held notion of a negative relationship between possession of land and participation in the wage labour market holds true in our case also, and hence if we find wage labourers in our sample who posses or operate land that could be due to the involvement of owner cultivators in the wage labour market.

person concerned do, were added and this was used as a filter in choosing the 'agricultural labourer'. It is known that certain operations in paddy cultivation is performed only by persons whose sole source of income is the sale of manual labour. Thus one way by which we sought to confirm whether a person's main occupation is wage labour was finding out whether s\he performs all or most of the operations related to agriculture (paddy cultivation). A question on the secondary activity of the person also was asked so that those who had secondary activity unrelated to the agricultural sector could be distinguished<sup>34</sup>. We judge that we could more or less identify the part time entrants into the wage labour market and differentiate them .

The further details of each household was obtained through an interview with the worker we accordingly chose to include in our sample. One hundred sample households were covered from each of the four taluks in the above mentioned way. Since one of the objectives of the study was to bring out the dimensions of kind payment of wages for harvesting, the survey was conducted during the harvest season to minimize recall error. A total of 408 interviews were held between March 23 rd and May 14th 1990 while the 'Punja' crop was being harvested. Of this only 380 have been taken up for the analysis, the rest being dropped due to incompleteness or errors.

#### The setting of the interview and related aspects

The interviews with the households were done in the most informal way possible. In most of the households at least five minutes were spent as introduction during which the household was apprised about the intentions of the researcher,

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<sup>34</sup> It is beyond the scope of this note to discuss all the problems that arose in classifying the workers into various work categories. We feel that it suffices to say that maximum care and prudence were used to do the classification such that it led to minimum distortion from reality. When it became impossible to classify an individual due to the diversity of occupations that he did, he has been ascribed to miscellaneous category.

the broad objectives of the study, the type of questions that would be asked etc. Usually, this was met by a number of questions from the different members of the household about the social background and the native place of the researcher followed by questions like "What benefit do we get from this?" "What do you do with the information we give?" etc. upon which once again a more detailed explanation was given about the research study. There have been a number of instances of flat rejection or indirect refusal to co operate. In general, the workers were very enthusiastic about the interview once it started off since they appreciated the questions on their day to day work. It was also found that once a beginning has been made by covering four or five households in one locality, any number of others were ready to volunteer from the locality.

Most of the interviews were held in the front yard of the respondent's house or in the threshing yards of the paddy fields when the workers occasionally took a break. A number of interviews were held in tea shops, bus stops and in paddy fields as the labourers were engaged in harvesting. Each interview took anywhere between 20 to 40 minutes. Occasionally, interviews became discussions about the issues not strictly falling within the structure of the questionnaire.

### The Questionnaire

The questionnaire sought to collect cross sectional data from the selected sample households. It has been divided into three sub sections. The first section has been on the preliminaries where the address and such details pertaining to the household were to be recorded. The important aspect about this section that we have to inform would be that, we did not include any question to find out the religion or caste to which the household subscribes, though we collected the information on it and noted it down on each of the questionnaire when the interview was made. This information was obtained through observing several other cultural indicators rather than by asking questions.

The broad religious category could be made out from the pictures of gods displayed on the walls of the houses. In the case of the 'Ezhava' caste households, the investigator could without exception find the picture of Sree Narayana Guru, the spiritual head of the community. Very often the indication about the religion/caste of the household was obtained from the respondent's answer to the question on whether certain specific agricultural operations are done by them. For example, it was often heard that "mud work and mud collection are mainly done by Parayas and Pulayas...We do not do it, We are 'X' caste". In some places when the sample belonged to the Harijan households, they either told it without being asked or it became explicit when they gave their address as Harijan settlement colony. Similarly, most Christian households could be identified from the names of individuals and sometimes from the dress they wore. However, there were a number of cases where absolutely no clues could be obtained about the religion. These have been classified as 'Religion/Caste not known' and add to six percent of the total sample.

The second section of the questionnaire was meant to capture the profile of the rural labour households and information on variables like Age, Sex, Education and Occupational status of all members of the household were recorded. The data on the assets of the households was sought, which was sought to be supplemented and cross checked by the data on other indicators of the economic status of the household such as the type of building materials used for the construction of the house, whether the house is electrified or not, the type of toilet etc.

We have to admit that during the initial stages of the survey it was found that the question on the family's income invariably elicited grossly under reported answers. We further found that this question did more harm to the setting and mood of the interview by evoking suspicion and

reservation on the part of the respondent than doing any good<sup>35</sup>. Hence, after the first forty or fifty households this question was dropped (not asked). Instead, we decided to depend more on the asset information of the household as an indicator of its economic status and maximum care was given to getting as much precise information on this aspect as possible by posing more probing questions than that are given in the questionnaire. Despite this care, we must report that the question on the ownership of land was generally answered with hesitance and skepticism and there is a degree of under reporting on the data on land which we are unable to quantify.

A few questions about the labour union activities and the spatial mobility of labour were included to get a picture of the current status of the labour market and the trade union movement. The question on labour mobility has been meant also to ascertain whether there are any barriers to entry and mobility in the labour market.

The questions were posed to the respondent in the vernacular language and hence some of the questions as they are given in the questionnaire do not convey the exact meaning of the question as it was asked in colloquial Malayalam. The information on some variables like whether an educated unemployed is registered in employment exchange, does s/he get unemployment benefit, whether the former agricultural workers (now above sixty years of age) are receiving agricultural labour pension, whether there has been any governmental assistance for constructing the house etc. (for which the questions are not there in the questionnaire), were consistently collected by asking those questions. These information were noted down on each questionnaire at the time of the interview, later to be classified and analyzed.

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<sup>35</sup> The workers were apprehensive of the potential loss of benefits and concessions they get from the Government and it was stated that a year back after such an 'enquiry', the agricultural labour pension they were getting was stopped. The workers hence had the doubt whether this 'enquiry' also comes from the Government.

A wealth of qualitative information about the practices of the wage payment in the past, the changes in social attitudes, about the trade union movement, and about a variety of issues related to the labour market in general was obtained from elderly workers who were witnesses to these changes and were only eager to pass it on to a student on the agricultural workers. We hope to integrate all these information to portray and analyze the labour market situation in Kuttanad at present.



## CHAPTER 5

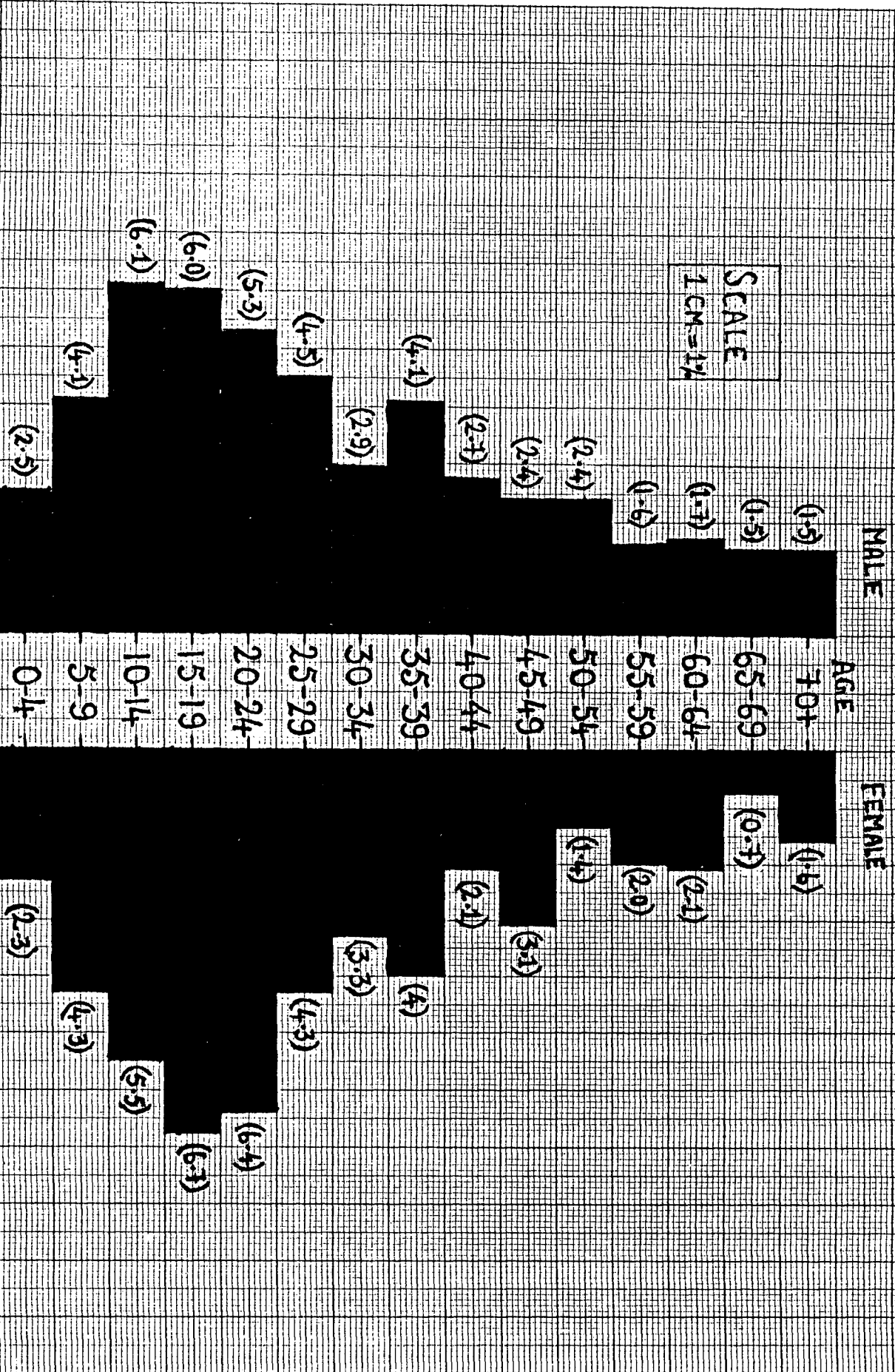
### RURAL LABOUR AND THE RURAL LABOUR MARKET ANALYSIS OF SURVEY DATA

#### Demographic features of the Sample Population.

We have presented the total population of 1934 individuals from 380 sample households in the form of a population pyramid. The pattern of the pyramid reflects the general transition reported to have taken place in the age profile of the population in Kerala due to the decline in fertility rates. The population and the work force of a country/region is always dynamic and could be deemed to be undergoing transition through time. Whether the dynamism actually makes any impact on the age structure of the population would depend upon how the relevant variables like the fertility rates, death rates and migration vary. Since we find that in Kuttanad also the fertility rates appear to have declined as a part of the general transition that has taken place in Kerala's demographic profile, we may touch upon some implications of it to our study, but would not go into detailed analysis since it is beyond the scope of this study.

In our sample, the highest percentage of people in the cohort is reported in the 15-19 age group for females and 10-14 age group for males (Assuming that there is no age mis statement from the respondent). We find that the percentage of population below the age group 15-19 is becoming smaller and smaller. Since we collected the data in 1990, it implies that through the period 1971-75 there could have been a decline in the general fertility level of the people. Among the different age groups, the 15-19 age group dominates accounting for 12.8% of the total population followed by the 20-24 age group accounting for 11.7%. Evidently, a good proportion of the total population (24.5%) is young and they constitute the bulk of the

# AGE PYRAMID OF THE SAMPLE POPULATION



PERCENTAGE

work force<sup>36</sup>. Moreover, the proportion of the population in the age groups 65-69 and 70+ who might be leaving the work force soon, account for only 5.5% of the total population, implying that a net increase in the work force could be expected in the near future. (The 'cohort effect' in demographic terminology).

Thus, other things being constant, since the population growth rate is still positive we do not expect drastic changes in the population of Kuttanad perhaps for the next 10 years. Nevertheless, as the smaller and smaller proportions of the lowest age groups mature and enter the labour force and at the same time larger proportions in the higher age groups leave the working age groups, changes in the population and the work force can happen after sometime. The 24.5% of the present total population who are now in the 20-24 and 15-19 age groups would start crossing the work force upper age of 60 around the year 2020 A.D onwards. Though we cannot precisely tell what the size and composition of the population in future would be since it also depends on the future fertility and mortality rates, it may be good to keep in mind the broad pattern mentioned above while trying to analyze the labour market in Kuttanad.

Since ours is not time series data, we have limitations in illuminating further about the demographic features of the sample households. Nonetheless, certain features have to be highlighted.

1 The average family size in all taluks are smaller than that proposed by an earlier study conducted in 1983-84, in which the family size for rural labour households in Alleppey district was found to be 5.47 and for Kottayam District 5.26 (Government of Kerala 1985:17). That study found the average family size of agricultural labour households to be 5.61 and 5.37 for Alleppey and Kottayam districts respectively. In our sample, the highest reported average family size comes in Kottayam taluk where it is only 5.05. The lowest reported size comes in Changanachery taluk

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<sup>36</sup> This has been observed by an earlier study also. " about 34 % of the population in the rural labour households consists of children below the age of 15 ". (Government of Kerala 1985 :25)

where it is 4.9 only. This perhaps indicates that the average family size could have declined further since 1983.

Table 5.1  
Some general demographic indices

Taluks	Avg. Family Size #	Sex \$ Ratio	Earners# Per Family	Dependency Ratio@
Kuttanad *	5.03	1.04	2.94	1.90
Kottayam	5.05	1.09	2.6	1.94
Changanachery	4.96	0.88	2.51	1.98
Vaikom	4.97	1.04	2.6	1.9
Kuttanad Region**	5.003	1.01	2.66	1.93

Notes:

\* Of the total 101 households in the sample from Kuttanad taluk, only 51 are included for this calculation, the rest being migrants from various taluks were dropped.

\*\* The data from four taluks of our study alone is used.

# The earners are defined as those who are not Students, Unemployed, House Wives, Old and Disabled. Only the permanent residents of households are included in the family. Those members of the family who are married and living separately have been left out, but non members of the family such as Nephews of the head of the household who permanently stay with the household have been included.

\$ Sex ratio is defined as Number of Females/ Number of Males.

@ Dependency ratio is defined as Total number of individuals/ Number of earners.

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2 According to the earlier mentioned 1983 study, the average number of earners per household is 2.33 for rural labour households in Alleppey district and 1.88 in Kottayam district. For agricultural labour households, the corresponding figures are 2.44 and 1.92 for Alleppey and Kottayam districts respectively (Ibid.p18). The lowest average number of earners in our sample comes in Changanachery Taluk where it is found to be 2.51. This is a figure higher than that reported for all the classifications made by the 1983 study. Though our classifications are not the

same as that of the 1983 study, it needs to be emphasized that in all the taluks, we find a higher average number of earners.

3 The sex ratio of 0.88 found in Changanachery Taluk departs from that found in other taluks. We do not find a satisfactory explanation for this aberration. It could be a reflection of the distinguishing characteristic which Kottayam district was found to be having with respect to sex ratio<sup>37</sup>.

If our conjecture based on these observations is correct, the families in Kuttanad now have a more favourable demographic environment to make the chances of economic improvement higher. On the one hand, we find a smaller average family size such that what ever economic gains that a household makes, is divided among a lesser number of individuals. On the other hand, we also find that the number of earning members is higher, such that 'other things being constant', a higher earnings per household can follow.

A few words about the representativeness of our sample may not be out of place. Since readily comparable age specific data for Kerala as a whole is not available, we have not compared our sample with such data and the representativeness of the sample is not confirmed. But we may legitimately expect that our sample broadly represents the scenario in Kuttanad region, and could be thought to reflect more precisely the demographic dynamism in the four taluks from which we drew our sample.

#### A Profile of the Work force and the Labour market

We have used a two fold classification of the activity statuses, namely 'Main Occupation' and 'Sub

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<sup>37</sup> The number of females per 1000 males works out to 1037 in the case of Rural Labour Households as against 1034 for the state as per the 1981 census. This ratio varies widely from district to district. It ranges from 943 in Wynad to 1110 in Trichur district. Both males and females are equal in number among Rural labour households in Kottayam district. " See (Government of Kerala 1985 :24)

activity'. Later on, for analytical purposes those whose Main Occupation and Sub Activity are the same have been termed 'Pure' category. The definitions of the activity statuses are laid out as follows.

1. Students - All those who study including apprentices who do not earn.

2. Unemployed - All those who reported "doing no work" to the question on main activity or sub activity.

3. Agricultural labour - Those who perform all direct work in rice farming such as tilling, ploughing, harrowing, sowing, weeding, fertilizer and pesticide application, harvesting etc. and also those who do allied agricultural activities such as mud collection from canal bed, its transportation, bund maintenance as well as garden land work.

4. Salaried - All salaried or regular and assured income workers including those from short term assignments for 2 or 3 months.

5. Casual work - Loading and unloading, Road construction work, Building construction manual work and a variety of activities like Head load work, Sand collection from rivers, Saw mill work, Red stone cutting, Petty shop ownership, Paddy parboiling, Toddy shop work, Toddy tapping (irregular), Shop helper, Bus porter, Beedi making (irregular), Transport work (ferrying), Furniture work, Bamboo and Cane work, fishing in canals and paddy fields, grass cutting etc. (the list is not exhaustive).

6. Selected Agricultural operations - This classification refers to workers who do only one or two types of agricultural work. For example, among female workers those who go only for harvesting. Among male workers those who do only contract work example: pesticide application and manuring. These workers enter the agricultural labour market only for these specific operations.

7. Technical workers - Welders, Fitters, Wire men, Automobile

Workshop employee, Boat assistant and other skilled workers.

8. Artisans - Those who do Screwpine matting, Coir yarn making, Tailoring, Coconut Palm Plating, Lime shell and flesh collection, Inland fishing.

9. Household work - Mostly female workers who report household chores as their activity.

10. Miscellaneous work - Workers performing more than 3 or 4 of the activities listed under 'casual work' or those who do agricultural work and some activities classified under 'casual work', thus making any sensible classification difficult, have been listed under this category. They are mostly the individuals who are willing and take up whatever work that is available in the locality, adapting themselves easily to changing work availability, rather than being idle for the reason that they do not know any particular work.

To begin with, we introduce the initial sample of 380 agricultural labourers, (See Chapter 4) analyzed in terms of employment, caste, and education levels. Table 5.2 presents these workers according to their secondary activity and Education. This occupational subdivisions are of the workers whose main occupation has been identified as agricultural labour.

The most notable feature from Table 5.2 is that the secondary activity of the agricultural workers in our sample is quite diverse. If we are to define agricultural workers strictly as those whose main occupation and sub activity both are work in the agricultural sector, alternatively terming them 'pure agricultural workers', of the 380 who were identified as agricultural labour based on their main activity, only 145 (38%) belong to this 'pure agricultural workers' category. The rest 235 individuals (62%) spent part of their time, and earn part of their income from a number of non agricultural activities also.

Table 5.2

## Educational and Secondary Activity Status of the Initial Sample (380)

Education->Student Sub Activity	Unemp.	Ag.Wage Lbr	Salaried	Casual work	Sel.Ag. operations	Arti sanal	House wives	Old & disabled	Misc. work	Row total	
Illiterate	0	0	9	0	12	1	13	0	1	0	36(9.4)
Primary		1	32	1	30	2	8	1	2	6	83(21.8)
Middle School			65	1	61	5	19			8	159(41.8)
High School			16	1	18	1	6	1	0	2	45(11.8)
SSLC			21	1	16	2	7	0	0	3	50(13.2)
Pre Degree	1		1	0	0	1	1				4(1.05)
Degree			1			1					2(0.5)
Technical & Career diploma							1				1(0.3)
Column total	1(0.3)	1(0.3)	145(38.1)	4(1)	137(36.1)	13(3.4)	55(14.5)	2(0.5)	3(0.8)	19(5)	380

The employment profile generated by these agricultural labourers shows that 'casual work' is the second single most important secondary activity. Also to be noted is that 'Casual work', 'Artisanal work' and 'Miscellaneous work' categories add to 55.8% of the secondary activities. It is quite significant to note that we had seen in the review of literature that the general notion about workers in Kuttanad is that they are solely dependent on paddy field work. However, our sample of individuals whose main activity is agricultural work shows that they engage themselves to a considerable extent in non agricultural activities also. It therefore calls for a detailed assessment of the employment profile of the agricultural labourers in Kuttanad. This issue will be probed further in our analysis employing the total sample of 1934 individuals from the 380 households also.



Another striking attribute is that very few people have reported their secondary activity as household work. This would require further investigation since disguised unemployment is in some way believed to be reflected in larger number of women reporting themselves as housewives. They drop out from the labour market, because of non availability of opportunities. They swell the category of unemployed but most of them report themselves as doing household chores.

The educational status of the initial sample is shown in Table 5.2. Those having education up to middle school is 42%. Those who have high school education (standard 8 and above) and higher than that come to 25%. These levels are very likely to be much higher than the educational standards of agricultural workers elsewhere in India. This indeed is a reflection of the attainment of higher educational status among the general population in Kerala.

In the following section we attempt to do a more detailed analysis of the sample population. In Table 5.3 we bring out the correlation between caste and education. At the outset, it may be clarified that our sample is not a proportionate sample of the population in Kuttanad and hence we do not draw general conclusions about the religious/caste composition in Kuttanad.

Our purpose here is only to get a general idea about the educational level. A discernable trait is that illiteracy and lower levels of education are proportionately larger among the Harijan households, while technically and professionally trained persons are proportionately higher among other communities. Ezhavas and Christians seem to dominate in such positions. This may be viewed as reflection of the relative differences in the economic and social opportunities and accessibility to educational facilities which are still persisting in Kerala despite decades of concerted efforts to bring the backward section into the main stream of development.

Table 5.3

## Caste wise Education of the Total Sample Population

Education > Religion	Age <5	ILLI	PRI	MID	HIGHSCHOOL	SSLC	PUC	DBG.	TECH & PROP.	TOTAL
Harijan	47	73(11.2)	148(22.7)	214(32.8)	92(14.1)	94(14.4)	18(2.7)	3(0.5)	10(1.5)	699 [36.1]
Harijan Christian	11	7(6.4)	19(17.3)	35(31.8)	24(21.8)	13(11.8)	7(6.9)	1(0.9)	4(3.6)	121 [6.2]
Ezhava	48	52(8.1)	132(20.5)	199(30.9)	99(15.4)	114(17.7)	19(2.9)	6(0.9)	21(3.3)	690 [35.7]
Christ ian	11	10(4.6)	48(22.2)	60(27.8)	34(15.7)	39(18)	16(7.4)	2(0.9)	7(3.2)	227 [11.7]
HighCaste	6	5(7.2)	8(11.6)	25(36.2)	11(15.9)	15(21.7)	3(4.3)	2(2.9)	0	75 [3.9]
Rel.not known	8	5(4.8)	28(26.7)	47(44.7)	7(6.7)	11(10.5)	4(3.8)	2(1.9)	1(0.9)	113 [5.8]
Muslim	1	2	1	4	1	0	0	0	0	9 [0.5]
Total	132 6.8*	154 [8.5]	384 [21.3]	584 [32.4]	268 [14.9]	286 [15.8]	67 [3.7]	16 [0.9]	43 [2.4]	1934

Note:

Figures in parenthesis ( ) are percentages of row total excluding those below age 5.

Figures in parenthesis [ ] are percentages of Total population.

Figure with asterisk \* is the percentage of total population.

Figures in [ ]@ are percentages of population after deducting the non school going age groups.

In Table 5.4, we have tabulated the main occupation and sub activity of the total population in the form of a matrix. Such a classification gives us a large number of combinations of main occupation and sub activity. This gives us insight into the occupational diversity and distribution of the workers in Kuttanad. The individuals are classified according to their main occupation column wise (vertically) and their secondary activity is arranged row wise (horizontally). The figures in the parenthesis are the percentages. Thus, if we take

Table 5.4

Matrix of Main Occupation and Sub Activity of the Total Sample Population (1934 individuals)

MOC/ SOC	STUDENT	UNEMPLO.	AG.WAGE LBR	SALARIED	CASUAL WORK	SEL.AGRI OPRTN.	TECHNICAL	ARTISA- ANAL	HOUSE WIVES	OLD+ DIS- ABLED	MISC. JOBS	TOTAL
Student	601											601[31]
Unempl.		116 (78.9)	3									119[6.1]
AgWage labour		18	386 (51.7)		25		1	4	13	1	1	449[23]
Sala- ried			4	32 (100)								36[1.81]
Casual work		4	239		87 (72.5)	1		1		1		333[17]
Sel.Ag operati		4	1		4	3 (21.4)			14	2		28[1.4]
Techni- cal		1	2				18 (94.7)					21[1.1]
Arti- sanal		3	74		1	9		36 (87.8)		2		125[6.5]
House wives			3			1			23 (46)			27[1.4]
Old& dis.			1							140 (96)		141[7.3]
Miscel. work		1	33		3						17 (94)	54[2.8]
Total	601 [31.1]	147 [7.6]	746 [38.6]	32 [1.6]	120 [6.2]	14 [0.7]	19 [0.9]	41 [2.1]	[2.6]	146 [7.5]	18 [0.9]	1934

Note: Main Occupation (MOC) represented column wise and Secondary Activity (SOC) row wise.

the sum of any one column we get the number of people with a particular main occupation. Take for example Row 8, the sum of the row gives the 125 individuals having artisanal work as their secondary activity.

The diagonal elements of the matrix shows the individuals whose main activity and sub activity are the same or they represent the 'pure agricultural labourers' the 'pure artisans' and the like. We have for example 386 individuals in the diagonal whom we call 'pure agricultural workers'. It shows that in the total population of 1934 individuals, there are 386 persons who are engaged only in agricultural wage labour. Therefore, the number of persons whose sole occupation is agricultural work comprise 51.7% of the total 746 engaged in agricultural work and the rest 48.2% depend on non agricultural activities also, mainly casual labour and artisanal work.

Perhaps some of these combinations may not make much sense. For instance, what does it mean to say that there are 25 individuals whose main activity is 'casual work' and secondary activity is 'Agricultural work'? (column 5, Row 3) Does it mean that these people in the absence of their usual work turn to agricultural work or something else? Such questions cannot be answered unless more detailed enquiry is made into the time disposition of these workers are conducted. On the other hand such difficulties in interpretation may also indicate the difficulty in classifying and compartmentalizing work and partly may arise from our notion of work which we shall briefly touch upon in the concluding chapter.

Some important attributes of the labour market in Kuttanad as brought out by Table 5.4 are the following.

(1) 31% of the total population are students and they do not involve in the labour market in any way, even as part time workers. This could affect the labour market in Kuttanad in two ways. Firstly this reduces that section of the population who are students, from any kind of involvement in the labour market which

is not the case of typical rural labour economies where we find at least some of the individuals belonging to the school/college going age groups in the labour market. Secondly, if this longer period of education leads to higher educational levels for the population, their attitude towards agricultural work and other forms of rural labour could be negatively influenced if the generally postulated notion of an inverse relationship between education and agricultural work is true.

(2) There are 147 individuals who reported unemployed main occupation wise. However, we find that 21% of the unemployed engage in some kind of secondary activity. This implies that the vast majority of the unemployed (79%) are absolutely unemployed. Whether this lack of involvement in any activity is due to the absence of any work in the region or the work available is not the kind of work they prefer to do need further examination. This can be done by probing further into the characteristics of the unemployed.

The work force in the total population constitute 61% (1187 individuals). Among them, 63% report agricultural labour as their main occupation. A total of 19.4% of the work force is distributed among other occupations like salaried jobs (2.7%), casual work(10.1%), technical work(1.6%), artisanal work (3.4%) and miscellaneous work (1.5%). Moreover, even among those whose main occupation is agricultural labour, only half of them (52%) belong to what we defined "pure agricultural workers", not doing any other work. This may indicate that though in general agricultural sector remains the single most important source of employment, the rural labourers of Kuttanad have to look for other non agricultural operations also to ensure a regular source of income for their livelihood.

(3) When we analyzed the structure of the initial sample of 380 agricultural labourers, artisanal work has been the secondary activity of 14.5% . However, only 3.4% of the total work force of 1187 follow it as their main occupation. This indicates that the concentration of artisans in the taluks of Vaikom and Kottayam which we had observed during the survey is true.

(4) As noted earlier, 'household chores' is not followed as a dominant activity by the females. Only 50 have reported it to be so and a little over half of them are doing agricultural labour as their secondary activity.

This makes us ponder about the notion of work they have. Is it that work such as household work without direct pecuniary benefit is not viewed as work? Throughout our survey, women who looked after the household work frequently tended to report themselves initially as 'unemployed', 'doing nothing' 'oh-looking after hen and children' and so on. Their concept of work is associated with the prospects of earning an income directly from it. We feel that many of these women may be actively engaged in wage labour apart from doing the routine household work, thus qualifying themselves to be called agricultural wage labourers.

#### ANALYSIS OF THE SAMPLE WORK FORCE

Table 5.5 brings out the main occupation of the total work force according to age groups. We have left out the students, the old and disabled from the classification, bringing down the number of individuals from 1934 to 1187. Those who discontinued their education and have joined the work force earlier than the age of 16 are included in the work force, as also those who continue to work even after the age of 60.

Some relevant observations from the table are listed out as follows.

(1) The Unemployed - An important observation about the unemployed is that 88% of the total 147 belong to the age group 16-30. The corresponding percentage of unemployed in the next age group 31-45 is low, being 1.6% of all individuals in that age group and accounting for 4.1% of the total unemployed. It is significant to note that the proportion of the unemployed in the

16-30 age group is as high as 23.7%. This seems to suggest that most of the unemployed youth in Kuttanad have certain specific characteristics attributable to their attitude towards work.

Table 5.5

Main occupational classification of individuals according to age group

Main Ocp Age groups	Unempl.	Agri.wage labour	Sala ried	Casual work	Sel Agri: Operation	Tech nical	Artisans	House wives	Miscell: ocpn.	Row Total
0 -15	7	4					2			13[1.1]
16 - 30	130(23.7)	282(51.4)	24(4.4)	37(6.7)	4(0.7)	19(3.5)	29(5.2)	17(3.1)	7(1.3)	549[46.2]
31 - 45	6(1.6)	276(73.8)	6(1.6)	51(13.6)	3(0.8)	0	3(0.8)	23(6.1)	6(1.6)	374[31.5]
46 - 60	3(1.4)	151(72.2)	1(0.5)	29(13.8)	5(2.4)	0	7(3.3)	8(3.8)	5(2.4)	209[17.6]
61 - 90	1	33(78.5)	1	3	2	0	0	2	0	42[3.5]
Column Total	147[12.4]	746[62.8]	32[2.7]	120[10.1]	14[1.2]	19[1.6]	41[3.4]	50[4.2]	18[1.5]	1187[100]

Note: Figures in parenthesis ( ) are percentages of Row total  
 Figures in Parenthesis [ ] are percentages of Total number of individuals

(2) As a logical corollary to the above noted feature, though the number of individuals belonging to the 16-30 age group is higher than that in 31-45 age group in most occupational categories, as a percentage, the persons in the 16-30 age group are less represented in agricultural labour, casual work, selected agricultural operations, house wives and miscellaneous occupations. While 98.3% of those in the 31-45 age group participate in some activity or the other only 76.3% of those in 16-30 age group participate in any kind of work (the rest remain unemployed). The possible reason for this lower participation of the younger persons appears to be associated with the aspirations for better job opportunities in accordance with their educational levels. This is evident from their participation in the occupational categories 'salaried', 'technical' and 'artisanal work' which is considerably higher than that shown by the 31-45 age group. The higher participation in these activities could be indicative of the preference for these occupations among the

individuals belonging to the lower age groups. However, to the extent that work patterns are also determined by the availability of such work, this may also denote the gradual occupational diversification that is taking place in Kuttanad due to changes happening in the structure of the rural economy (however minor they may at present be) in which, the tertiary sector and non agricultural activities in general are beginning to play more important roles than that in earlier periods. (In our sample these three categories of activity together account only for 7.7% of all the activities, 2.7% of the total work force in the salaried category, 1.6% in technical jobs and 3.4% in artisanal work). But one need to note of the fact that for Kerala as a whole, sectoral shift of rural labourers has been proposed by an earlier study. (Government of Kerala 1985:9)

Further, taking the total of column 2 of Table 5.5, the number of workers with agricultural wage labour as their main occupation is 746 or 62.8% of the total work force. Note that the percentage of those engaged in this work category in the three higher age groups 31-45, 46-60 and 61-90 are markedly higher than this overall average. The lowering of the overall participation has happened due to the lower participation in agricultural wage labour from the younger age groups 0-15 and most dominantly from 16-30 age group whose weighage in the total work force is the highest (46.2% of the work force). Hence one evident conclusion would be that irrespective of the reasons for the lower participation of the younger age-groups in agricultural wage labour, it has led to a reduction in the overall participation in agricultural work. In this respect the higher unemployment reported in the 16-30 age group appear to have brought down the overall participation rate considerably and hence may be contributing to the labour shortage we are analyzing.

We also note that 6 out of the 13 persons from the 0-15 age group and 41 out of 42 from the 61-90 age group, are employed. It is revealing to observe that in the 61-90 age group 41 individuals (97.67 of all persons in that age group) are employed in some activity or the other, only 1



reporting himself being unemployed, whereas in the 0-15 age group only 6 out of 13 individuals (46%) are employed, the rest 7 reporting 'unemployment'. This again prompts us think about the reason for the lower participation of the younger population.

The Table 5.6 suggests the increase in the levels of education achieved by the work force in Kuttanad. If we take 10 years of school education (S.S.L.C.) and above as a bench mark, 48% of those in the age group 16-30 comes in the category, where as in the 31-45 age group it is only 13%, in the 46-60 age group it is 7.2% and in the 61-90 age group it is 9.5%. In the 16-30 age group 10% have collegiate education and if we are to include technical and career diploma holders also

Table 5.6

Educational levels of the work force according to age groups

Education-> Age group	Illit.	Primary	Middle School	High School	SSLC	Pre Degree	Degree	Career/ Tech.Dip.	Row Total
0-15	0	1	6	3	2	0	0	1	13[1.1]
16-30	10(1.8)	30(5.5)	135(24.6)	110(20)	171(31.1)	47(8.5)	8(1.5)	38(6.9)	549[46.3]
31-45	24(6.4)	74(19.8)	177(47.3)	50(13.4)	41(10.9)	4(1.1)	1(0.3)	3(0.8)	374[31.5]
46-60	46(22)	69(33)	75(35.8)	4(1.9)	12(5.7)	0	2(0.9)	1(0.5)	209[17.6]
61-90	14(33.3)	19(45)	4(9.5)	1(2.4)	4(9.5)	0	0	0	42[3.5]
All Ages	94[7.9]	193[16.3]	397[33.4]	168[14.2]	230[19.4]	51[4.3]	11[0.9]	43[3.6]	1187

Note: Figures in Parenthesis ( ) are percentages of Row total  
 Figures in Parenthesis [ ] are percentages of total number of individuals

into this category of post metric education , this percentage goes up to 16.9%. It is doubtful whether any other rural sector in India has even achieved this high levels of education among its working class. Indeed this is the result of the high priority that successive governments of Kerala had placed on education

throughout the post independence period<sup>38</sup> .

What impact does education have on the labour supply behaviour of individuals? Our review of literature has shown an inverse relationship between education and wage labour. But we have not come across any study that fully describes the relationship to ascertain whether the relationship is a linear one or not. Notwithstanding this fact, we find that the higher levels of education achieved by the working class is acting as a dis-incentive for doing manual work among the youngsters of Kuttanad, though education may not be the sole reason for it. Unless the over all economic background of the working class is also conducive for such a behavioral pattern, we cannot expect it to happen.

The lower participation of the younger generations in manual labour and its association with the impact of education are quite evident. On the one hand, unlike the earlier periods almost every one attends school now in Kuttanad at least till the middle school level. In rural labour markets else where in India, it is not unusual to find children at the school going ages participating in the wage labour market. But in Kuttanad we find only very few children participating in the labour market. This itself may reduce the total number of people in the work force, at least some of who would have been involved in the labour market. Whether children in the school going age groups should or should not participate in the labour market is not the issue we are addressing, (since the age at which an

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<sup>38</sup> The expenditure on education had grown to Rs.345 Crores in 1984-85 accounting for about 39% of the State's annual budget vis-a-vis. 23% for India as a whole. The expenditure on education as a percentage of total development expenditure was 45.31 in Kerala in 1986-87. A corresponding increase in the enrolment ratios also need to be pointed out, which was 96.4% for the 5-9 age group, 86.2% for 9-14 age group and an average of 91% for the 5-14 age group as a whole.

Source (1) Progress of Kerala in Three Decades-1965-85. Directorate of Economics and Statistics, Trivandrum.

(2) High Level Committee report on Education and Employment Vol.1, P.8, 1984. State Planning Board, Trivandrum.

individual should enter the labour market is one which is determined by the economic and cultural variables of a society as a whole) but whether or not children in Kuttanad are participating in the labour market. It has been pointed out that those who have education up to SSLC or above are generally averse to doing paddy field work which is not a socially high placed occupation.

In this context it is interesting to recall some of the assertions made by workers in Kuttanad about the more educated younger generation. Since agricultural work and manual labour are lower status occupations than what they expected to get, many educated youngsters prefer to remain unemployed or continue their education, the males turning to tertiary sector training like automobile repair, lathe work and apprenticeship in printing press in the nearby towns or to some other kind of nonagricultural activity which may fetch them some income. The females on the other hand try to get trained in such activities as typewriting, tailoring etc. Thus both the young females and males seem to avoid manual labour in agriculture, but prefer to go for some nonagricultural activity. It was also found that many among them after unsuccessful attempts for non agricultural work, finally have come back to agricultural labour due to economic compulsion. Analogously, it was stated by elderly workers that young females who are educated and got married in Kuttanad refuse to go for paddy field work initially (especially those who brought with them 'dowry'), and after they have one or two children, they start going for paddy field work out of economic need. Though these observations are difficult to be empirically verified, in the present socio economic milieu in Kuttanad the impression is quite relevant.

We find that the low status assigned to agricultural work in general and paddy field work in particular by the educated youth could be attributed to certain factors related to the evolutionary process of the society itself. In the feudal or semi feudal systems of social relations in India, all kinds of agricultural work in general had been assigned to the 'low castes' and the economically depressed sections. Even now

agricultural sector work is predominantly done by the economically and socially depressed sections of the society. Thus it may be the implicit realization of this association between economic and social backwardness and agricultural work that the educated youth in Kuttanad have in mind.

We feel that education as such is not that what generate the stigma towards agricultural work. Education could have reinforced such sentiments. We would stress the cultural changes that have happened among the population of Kuttanad, (true also of Kerala as a whole in general though perhaps to a lesser degree) due to the gradual transition from the feudal to the modern capitalist society, during the last seven decades of this century. We may also point out that there are reports from different rural areas of Kerala that the traditionally specialized workers' like 'Paravan' (the coconut climber) 'Veluthedan' (the washerman) and 'Pandaaram' (the Pappad maker) are fast disappearing from the village social setting.

The transition of the society from feudal bondage to capitalist relations has released vast sections of the population from cultural confinement and the traditional caste based division of labour, leading to changes in the aspirations of the people, especially that of the younger generation, (who have grown up in this new ambience) to come on a cultural parity with the upper sections of the society. The aspiration to dress well, to have their hair styled in the latest fashions, to go for movies, the aspiration to talk and live on equal terms with the rest of the society are all only part of this cultural change. Education being the door to this culturally changed society, affinity was shown for higher levels of education also.

At the same time, it would be naive if we do not recognize some simple and pragmatic factors and nature of paddy field work also as reasons for the attitude of the youth. Paddy field work in Kuttanad involves working in knee deep slush and water under hot sun sometimes without easy access to even potable water. Especially in the 'Kayal lands' where paddy fields are surrounded by vast bodies of canal waters, walking from one

end of the field to the other need not be less than covering a distance of one kilometre, only to wait for the next boat to arrive, to take one to the nearest town .

When these factors also are assessed, we may also contradictingly say that there is nothing 'irrational or 'negative' if the younger generations of Kuttanad prefer not to do these occupations if there is an alternative. Rather we may look for the factors that makes it possible for them to abstain from work without being over run by hunger and poverty. Though we are not able to forward a complete explanation to this question, a partial explanation may be sought in the general economic conditions of the working class in Kuttanad, to which we turn in a subsequent chapter.

Tables 5.7 and 5.8 focus exclusively on the unemployed among the work force. They corroborate the argument that a major chunk of those in this category belong to the younger age groups and are more educated than their elders. The column totals of Table 5.8 shows that 70.6% of the unemployed are educated up to and above S.S.L.C. and that 38.8% of them have collegiate education or posses technical and career diplomas. It is significant to note educational achievement of the 16-30 age group.

Table 5.7

The unemployed according to Age group and sex

Agegroup-> Sex	1-15	16-30	31-45	46-60	60-70	Row Total
Male	5(6.1)	70(85.4)	4(4.9)	3(3.6)	0	82 [55.8]
Female	2(3.1)	60(92.3)	2(3.1)	0	1(1.5)	65 [44.2]
Column Total	7[4.7]	130[88.4]	6[4.1]	3[2.0]	1[0.6]	147

Note: Figures in parenthesis ( ) are percentages of Row Total  
 Figures in parenthesis [ ] are percentages of the total unemployed.

44 individuals out of 47 (93.6%) having S.S.L.C., 28 out of 29 (96.5%) who have studied up to Pre degree level, all the 5 having degree level education and 22 out of 23 (95.6%) who are technically or professionally trained, all belong to the 16-30 age group.

The percentage of women among the total unemployed is 44. We have seen earlier that the number of females in the work force of 1187 individuals is 611 of which 65 (10.6%) report unemployment; whereas though the total number of males is only 576, 82 (14.2%) report unemployment. We also have observed earlier that the number of females who reported their main activity as 'household chores' was much lower than the expected number of 380 and that this may be because many of them also engage in wage labour, qualifying them to be categorized under 'wage labour' and not under 'house wives' thus disguising the fact that they may be managing both household chores and wage labour, exhibiting the possibility of females being over worked (or their intensity of work being higher than that of the males). Among the females, (92%) who reported unemployment belong to the age group 16-30, where as in the 31-45 age group only 3.1% report unemployment buttressing our earlier proposition that there may be something peculiar about the work ethos of the lower age group.

The difference between male and female unemployment in the 16-30 age group (85.4% and 92.3% unemployment for males and females respectively) with females reporting a larger percentage may be due to the fact that the present social milieu and gender wise division of labour expects and permits females to do only some type of agricultural occupations like harrowing, weeding, transplanting, harvesting and winnowing, whereas the entry to the market for all agricultural operations are open to males at their discretion<sup>39</sup>.

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<sup>39</sup> We should remember that certain traditional occupations like paddy hulling which used to provide considerable employment for the women, have been completely mechanized, displacing women workers. For instance, between 1960 and 75, the number of rice mills in Kerala increased from 2832 to 8368. See (Sen 1983).

Similarly, in many of the activities we have listed under the category of 'Casual work' the entry of the females are restricted by the socially accepted system of division of labour. Is the low difference found between male and female unemployment rates due to reasons like the male labour market in itself being highly competitive, unionization and such

Table 5.8

The unemployed according to age group and education

Age groups	Illit.	Primary	Middle School	High School	SSLC	Pre Degree	Degree	Technical	Row Total
1 - 15	0	1	3	1	2	0	0	0	7[4.7]
16 - 30	1	2	14	14	44	28	5	22	130[88.4]
31 - 45	0	2	1	0	1	1	0	1	6[4.1]
46 - 60	0	0	3	0	0	0	0	0	3[2.0]
60 - 70	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1[0.6]
Column Total	1 [0.6]	6 [4.1]	21 [14.3]	15 [10.2]	47 [31.9]	29 [19.7]	5 [3.4]	23 [15.6]	147 [100]

Note: Figures in parenthesis are percentage of the total unemployed.

other factors restrict the mobility of males between occupations as well as spatially such that in reality men also are not more mobile than females? It was often pointed out during our survey that entry into head load work and loading and unloading activities are spatially regulated by trade unions in each locality. Only the members of the union are allowed to work. Similarly, activities like sand collection from rivers, building construction work etc. are also often restricted by craft unions.

## FEATURES OF THE FEMALE WORK FORCE

Tables 5.9 and 5.10 depict the activity status of the female work force. We find that a good number of women who do both household work and other activities have been categorized under some work category other than household chores. Even if we add the number of women whose main occupation and sub activity is household work we get only 77 individuals where as we would expect some where around 380 which is the number of households surveyed. This has happened due to the mutually

Table 5.9

Female work force according to age group and main occupation

Age group	Unemp.	Agri.Wage Labour	Salaried	Casual Work	Sel:Agri. operation	Artisans	Household chores	Miscel Work	Row Total	
0-15	2(25)	4(50)	0	0	0	2(25)	0	0	8[1.3]	
16-30	60(20)	185(63.4)	3(1.1)	3(1.1)	3(1.1)	21(7.2)	17(5.8)	0	292[48]	
31-45	2(1.1)	147(80.3)	1(0.5)	4(2.2)	3(1.6)	2(1)	23(12.6)	1(0.5)	183[29.9]	
46-60	0	79(73.1)	0	8(7.4)	5(4.6)	6(5.5)	8(7.4)	2(1.8)	108[17.7]	
61-90	1(5)	14(70)	0	1(5)	2(10)	0	2(10)	0	20[3.3]	
Column total		65[10.6]	429[70]	4[0.6]	16[2.6]	13[2.1]	31[5.1]	50[8.2]	3[0.5]	611

Note: Figures in Parenthesis ( ) are percentages of column total.  
 Figures in parenthesis [ ] are percentages of female work force .

exclusive nature we had attributed to the work categories thus ruling out the possibility of household work being combined with some other main occupation and sub activity.

The tendency which we had observed with regard to unemployment to be higher in the lower age groups holds true for female work force also. Similarly, the proportion of females with secondary activity agricultural operations is also



found to be increasing as we go to the higher age groups. For the females in the 16-30 age group artisanal work is a more important secondary activity than the operations under 'casual work'. (Table 5.10)

Table 5.10

Secondary activity of female work force according to age group

Occupation Age	Unemployed Labour	Agri Wage	Salaried	Casual Work	Sel. Agri. operations	Artisans	Household Chores	Miscell work	Row Total
1 - 15	3	3				2(25)			8[1.3]
16 - 30	51(17.5)	148(51)	3	25(8.6)	4	47(16)	13		291[47.6]
31 - 45	2(1.1)	100(54.6)	2	33(18)	13	27(14.7)	5	1	183[29.9]
46 - 60		42(70)		27(25)	3	27(25)	7	1	107[17.5]
61 - 90	1	9		3(13.6)	1	6(27)	2		22[3.6]
Column Total	57[9.3]	302[49.4]	5[0.8]	88[14.4]	21[3.4]	109[17.8]	27[4]	2[0.3]	611

Note: Figures parenthesis ( ) are percentages of total number in the age group.  
 Figures in parenthesis [ ] are percentages of the female labour force.

Keeping the shortcoming mentioned about the activity status of the female work force in mind, we shall compare the activity statuses of female workers with that of the total work force to highlight the major features of the labour market. This is being done using the conceptual categorization we had earlier made; as between 'pure', 'Main occupation' and 'sub activity'.

IMPORTANT GENERAL FEATURES OF THE OCCUPATIONAL STATUSES

THE UNEMPLOYED

- (A) Main occupation = Sub activity = Unemployed
- Percentage of total work force = 9.8
- Percentage of Female work force = 9.3
- Percentage of Male Work force = 10.2

The figures presented above show the totally unemployed ie., those who are doing no 'work' both main activity wise and secondary activity wise. Consistently, even in

our other classifications shown below, the female work force reports a lower percentage.

- (B) Main occupation = Unemployed Status  
Percentage of total work force = 12.4  
Percentage of Female work force = 10.6  
Percentage of Male Work force = 14.2
- (C) Secondary Activity = Unemployed Status  
Percentage of total work force = 10  
Percentage of Female work force = 9.3  
Percentage of Male Work force = 9.4

For males, the unemployed status decline from 14.2 to 9.4 as between main activity and sub activity statuses, which may reflect that about 5% of those who report their main activity status as unemployment, do some kind of work part of their time, but is not sufficient enough to report themselves as employed by their own criteria of income and time. Though the difference between male and female percentages are small, it still needs to be noted that the male percentages are higher, the possible reasons for which we have suggested in an earlier paragraph.

#### AGRICULTURAL WAGE LABOUR

- (A) Main occupation = Sub activity = Agricultural work.  
Percentage of total work force = 25.77  
Percentage of Female work force = 49.4  
Percentage of Male work force = 2.2

The category of workers whom we call 'Pure agricultural wage labour' is distributed as above. What is striking is the difference between Male and Female percentages, pronouncing that about half of the female labour force is fully dependent on agricultural wage labour, whereas for male labour force this total dependence on agricultural wage labour is restricted to a mere 2.2%, indirectly indicating that male labour force may be having much more diversity of occupation than

females as we shall see soon. We may further note that it is the higher percentage of 'pure agricultural workers' for women labour force who constitute 51.5% of total labour force that pulls up the average of the two sexes to 25.77% (or conversely, the lower percentage of 2.2, among male labour force pulls down this average). The other two classifications made as 'main occupation' and 'sub activity' also support this finding and is presented below.

(B) Main Occupation = Agricultural wage labour

Percentage of total work force = 62.8

Percentage of Female work force = 70.2

Percentage of Male work force = 55.5

(C) Sub Activity = Agricultural Wage labour

Percentage of total work force = 37.7

Percentage of Female work force = 49.4

Percentage of Male work force = 26.1

#### ARTISANAL WORK

(A) Main occupation = Sub activity = Artisanal work

Percentage of total work force = 3.03

Percentage of Female work force = 5.07

Percentage of Male Work force = 0.99

The preponderance of females in artisanal work is brought out in all the three of our classifications. The activities under this classification include coir yarn making, screw pine matting, coconut palm weaving and tailoring among women and fishing, limeshell and flesh collection among males. Coir yarn making is mostly restricted to some parts of Kottayam taluk and Vaikom taluk. Screw pine matting, an artisanal work which is a declining cottage industry is most pronounced in Vaikom taluk, though the work is reported from different areas of all the four taluks in our study. The main reasons pointed out for the decline of the screw pine matting activity are (1) Non availability of screw pine and (2) Un

attractive prices for the product. However, our observation suggests that de-skilling may be a more important reason<sup>40</sup>. Vast majority of the younger generation reported that they do not know this traditional job. We feel that in general, de-skilling and low price of screw pine mats could be the more important reasons for the decline than the non availability of screw pine. However, in Vaikom taluk where in some areas like Thalayolapparambu a large number of households still do this work, screwpine scarcity may be the major reason. In earlier decades screwpine was available for the workers from their landowner's property which they freely cut and used for matting. But now nobody gives screwpine leaves without a price, which has made this work less remunerative since the price of mat has stagnated over the years.

Coir yarn making again a female domain, also appear to be undergoing de-skilling since most youngsters do not show any affinity to learn these skills probably since they are not very lucrative occupations. Scarcity of husk, high price for it and rationing of husk by coir co-operative societies were cited as reasons for the declining role of coir yarn making in both Kottayam and Vaikom taluks. However these activities could have to some extent mitigated unemployment as well as provided at least subsistence income for the working class households in times of distress. Artisanal work acting as a buffer against unemployment was most evident in Vaikom taluk, where women reported that till the recent years since the area was only single cropped, when paddy field work was not available, screw pine matting was the main off season activity.

Limeshell collection, an activity reported for limited number of males in 'Kayal' regions of Kottayam and Vaikom taluk appears to be the only artisanal work with the prospects of surviving the challenge of modern society. Although the work itself is tedious, all men engaged in this

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<sup>40</sup> Though scarcity of screw pine was noticed in the Vaikom taluk, in many areas of Kottayam taluk we found extravagantly lush growth of Screwpine plants (with no indication of their leaves being cut) on common property land such as canal bunds, banks of brooks and rivers.

activity reported that they get reasonable price for lime shell either in the open market or from Limeshell Co-operative Societies who also provide for provident fund and medical allowance.

(B) Main occupation = Artisanal work  
Percentage of total work force = 3.4  
Percentage of Female work force = 5.1  
Percentage of Male Work force = 1.8

(C) Sub occupation = Artisanal work  
Percentage of total work force = 10.4  
Percentage of Female work force = 17.8  
Percentage of Male Work force = 2.9

#### CASUAL WORK

(A) Main occupation = Sub activity = Casual Work.  
Percentage of total work force = 7.3  
Percentage of Female work force = 2.6  
Percentage of Male Work force = 12.1

(B) Main occupation = Casual work  
Percentage of total work force = 10.2  
Percentage of Female work force = 2.6  
Percentage of Male Work force = 17.6

(C) Secondary activity = Casual work  
Percentage of total work force = 27.9  
Percentage of Female work force = 14.4  
Percentage of Male Work force = 41.5

The percentages presented above makes it evident that most of the activities we have categorized under 'Casual Work' are mostly the domain of males. Females involve in the activities only as a secondary activity to some considerable degree. We would see in the next paragraph that the same is true of the activities under 'miscellaneous work' category also. Remember that the 'miscellaneous work' category has been used to

identify the individuals whose activities are too diverse to be classified under any single category.

Does this large divergence between male and female percentages in 'casual work' and 'miscellaneous work' categories indicate that there is considerable degree of segmentation in the labour market based on gender? It appears so, since most of the activities we have put under 'casual work' category are predominantly male activities (with the exception of road construction work and to some extent building construction work and finally grass cutting which is an exclusively female activity<sup>41</sup>).

#### Some observations on Wages and Wage Structure

Table 5.11 displays the wage rates for agricultural and some nonagricultural operations now prevailing in Kuttanad. The rates expressed as 'daily wage for ordinary operations' are the ones fixed by the Industrial Relations Committee for the different regions (as reported by the workers). Since the wages actually received by the workers vary profoundly from these official rates, we have specified the operation wise rates in the table.

One general feature of the wage structure is that the wages actually received by the workers are considerably higher than that fixed by the Governmental agencies. This may be the result of two forces. On the one hand, the impact

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<sup>41</sup> We may have to elucidate the activity 'grass cutting'. This is an activity done by women in economically backward labour households, in which they go to the 'Kayal lands' and cut weeds and grass (Sedges and Broad leaved weeds), to be carried to the nearby town for sale as cattle feed. If the 'Kayal lands' are distant, 3 or 4 women with the help of a male may hire a canoe to go to the 'Kayal areas' especially to the R Block, cut, bundle and transport the grass to the nearby market or sell it directly to households on a regular basis.

Table 5.11

## WAGE RATES FOR VARIOUS OPERATIONS, TALUK WISE

Operations	Kuttanad Taluk	Kottayan Taluk	Changanachery Taluk	Vaikom Taluk
	<b>MALE WAGE RATES</b>	<b>MALE WAGE RATES</b>	<b>MALE WAGE RATES</b>	<b>MALE WAGE RATES</b>
Daily wage for ordinary operations	22 Rs./6 Hrs in 'Kara' lands. 22 Rs./5 Hrs in 'Kayal' lands.	22 Rs/6 hrs in 'Kara'lands 22 Rs./5 hrs in 'Kayal' lands.	Daily wage for ordinary 22Rs/6hrs operations	Daily wage for ordinary 22Rs/5hrs. operations (8A.M to 1P.M)
<u>Special rates</u>	Garden land work not reported	<u>Special rates</u> Garden land work 35-40 Rs/7-8hrs	<u>Special rates</u> Garden land work 30-45 Rs/7hrs	<u>Special rates</u> Garden land work 30-40 Rs/6Hrs.
'Varampu pani' Sowing	30 - 35 Rs./6 hours-> 15 to 20 Rs/ Acre->	30 - 35 Rs./6 hours -> 15 to 25 Rs/ Acre. ->	30 Rs/6 hrs. -----> 20-30 Rs./Acre. ----->	25 to 35 Rs/5hrs. 15-20 Rs/Acre.
Manuring	15 to 25 Rs./Acre->	15 to 30 Rs./Acre. ->	20-30 Rs./Acre.----->	15-20 Rs/Acre.
Pesticide application	2.5 to 3.5 Rs/Barrel-	2.5 to 3.5 Rs/ Barrel	2 to 3.5 Rs/Barrel --->	3.5 Rs/Barrel.
Mud work @ 'Chettan' 'Vachukettu'	5 to 6 Rs/ 'Pathivu'-> 7 to 8 Rs./'Pathivu'->	7 to 8 Rs/'Pathivu.' 9 to 10 Rs./'Pathivu'.	5 to 7 Rs./'Pathivu' -> 6 to 7 Rs/'Pathivu'---->	4 to 5 Rs/'Pathivu' 6 to 8 Rs./'Pathivu'.
	<b>FEMALE WAGE RATES</b>	<b>FEMALE WAGE RATES</b>	<b>FEMALE WAGE RATES</b>	<b>FEMALE WAGE RATES</b>
Daily wage for ordinary operations	17 Rs/6 Hrs. in 'Kara' lands. 17 Rs/5 Hrs. in 'Kayal' lands.	17 Rs/6 hours. in 'Kara' lands. 17 Rs/5 Hrs. in 'Kayal' lands. Garden land work 20 - 22 Rs./6hrs.	17 Rs/6hrs.  Garden land work 20-28 Rs/6hrs.	15 Rs/5hrs in 'Kari' land. 15 Rs/6hrs in 'Kayal' lands.
Harrowing Weeding Transplanting Over time rate 2.50 Rs./hr.	17 - 20 Rs / 6 Hrs.->	Same rates as that of Kuttanad taluk. <u>Over time rate</u> 2.50 Rs./hr.	17 - 20 Rs/6hrs. ----->  <u>Over time rate</u> 2.50 Rs./hr.	15 to 20 Rs/5hrs.  Over time rate not reported.

⊙ See foot note for description of the operations and details.

'Varampu pani' stands for operations related to bund maintenance and the preparation of water channels in the paddy field.

of the power of the labour unions is likely to be acting to push up the wages. On the other, if the elasticity of the supply of labour vis-a-vis the demand for it is lower, (heuristically it appears to be) that also may be acting as a factor. We would stress the former since we found that the workers have been able to sub categorize and discriminate between the various agricultural operations on the basis of the relative exertion and strain caused by the operations and fix the rates according to that. This fact is not fully reflected in table 5.11.

The most evident instance has been the piece rates for pesticide application which varied as between piece rates based on acreage and the piece rates based on barrels of pesticide sprayer. We also noted that in some regions of Kuttanad and Kottayam taluks, the workers discriminated between pesticides and fungicides, as well as between the usual pesticides and the more powerful ones. The rate for all fungicides and for a particular pesticide 'Hinosan' (applied against *Leptocorisa Acuta* or 'Munja') varied between 5 to 7 Rs. per barrel of manual sprayer as the workers felt that this pesticide is more detrimental to their health. What this essentially brings out is, the command that the workers in Kuttanad enjoy in the determination of the wage rates. The same matter is reflected by the difference in rates between the officially fixed rates and the actual ones.

We found that each sub region in Kuttanad (sometimes each locality) has its own actual wage rates, though the difference is only of Rs.2 or 3 between regions. The rate for the same operation was found to vary not only from region to region, but sometimes from worker to worker depending on the criticality of the work and the workers perception about the tediousness of the work<sup>42</sup>.

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<sup>42</sup> We need to give a brief note on 'Mud work' which we have referred to in the table as 'Chettam' and 'Vachukettu'. In both these operations, mud and clayey soil is dug out from the bottom of the canals to be used for maintenance of canal bunds as well as for conversion of wet land into dry land. The operation is mostly restricted to the monsoon season when the farmers need mud to strengthen their bunds. Workers reported that with the advent



Another distinction found is in the matter of the lesser degree of flexibility of the female wage rates. Though the actual male wage rates tended to be higher than that of the officially fixed rates by 36 to 59% (see the difference in the rate for 'Varampupani'), the female wages do not show so much flexibility. The highest reported female wage for paddy field work is 20 Rs in both Vaikom and the other taluks. The difference of this rate as a percentage of the official rates comes to 33% in Vaikom taluk where the official rate is only 15 Rs, and 17.6% in the other taluks where the rate is 17Rs.

We may point out that this aspect may be a general feature for Kerala's rural sector as a whole. Kannan in his recent study, has brought out that the compound growth rate of daily money wages of paddy field labour for the period 1974-75 to 85-86 was 11.10 for males and 9.13 for females (Kannan 1990:61). For the same period, in Alleppey district, the compound growth

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of permanent bunds made of cement, the employment opportunity has declined. The wage rate fixed is based on 'Pathivu' which approximates to the tonne in the metric system.

The operation is unhygienic since the worker has to go to the bottom of the canal bed without any face mask or protective covering. In the case of 'Chettam', the depth that the worker goes down in order to dig out mud varies between 5 to 8 feet. With his eyes closed and his lungs reserving the breathing air, the worker goes down to the canal bed and mud is dug out with the help of a spade and using his leg. It is lifted out of the water to be dumped in to a canoe nearby. The workers reported that since the mud weighs less in water, it is not very difficult to bring up the huge blocks of mud up to the water level, but to turn it over into the canoe is exerting.

In the case of 'Vachukettu', the operation remains the same, but since the worker has to go deeper down, (10 to 18 feet) a bamboo ladder termed 'Vachukettu' is fixed on either side of the canoe and the operation is carried out. All workers engaged in this activity reported that after a few months of work they develop problems with hearing due to the high water pressure at the canal bed and that they tend to lose the physical balance even during day time.

The wage rate fixed per tonne of mud varies from place to place. It is fixed for providing mud at a distance of about 20 metres from the place of digging. The rate goes up depending on the increase in the distance between the two places and based on the quality of clay. The clay from backwaters with a higher sand content is charged more. It was reported that a worker can make 50 Rs net on the average per day during the Monsoon season if work is available.

rate of female money wage rates was 8.81 whereas for males the increment was of the order 11.36 (Ibid.67). The same author's calculations show that the index of money wages of female paddy field worker with respect to that of male paddy field worker showed an incremental trend during the period 1970-71 to 80-81 where after it declined and by 1986-87 it had dropped to the level that had prevailed in the late 1960s (Ibid.63).

The above feature may be due to the effect of the gender role assigned by the society to the females. This also could be due to the reason that the unions do not exercise as much coercion in the matter of female wage rates due to the role of gender which expects women to be more docile and less aggressive than the males.

A third aspect that needs to be noted is the difference between the wage rates for garden land work and paddy field work. In all places of the four taluks we covered, we found that if garden land work is available in the locality, the wage rate for it is higher. It may be that garden land work is more exacting than wet land work.

To summarize the section on wages, we state that the tendency which some authors had noted about the wage rates to be higher than the officially fixed ones is found to be true in Kuttanad. For females the actual rates exceed by Rs.1 or 2 and for males it usually exceeds by Rs.5 to 10 and sometimes higher than that. It seems quite possible that the trend reported by others about the increase in the real wages of workers could have continued.

The wage rates in themselves hardly suffice to make conclusions about income of the workers since the number of days of work is also a determining factor. Since an in depth analysis of the trends in real wages and that of income is not feasible at this juncture, we would restrict ourselves to surmising from the existing information.

Assuming that the per capita employment availability has declined further since the 1970s, if the real wages have stagnated (if not increased), the demographic variables could be acting in favour of the labour households recently<sup>43</sup>. In the first few paragraphs of this chapter we had found that the reduction in the average family size and an increase in the average number of earners per family, acting simultaneously could be resulting in a reduction in the dependency ratio. Apart from this, a number of other broader social processes also may be at work, acting as factors conducive for the improvement of the general standard of living of at least some sections of the labouring poor, which in turn would have its impact on the labour market.

However, a recent study has shown that for Kerala as a whole, a marked change in the annual real income of agricultural workers has happened. The real income of agricultural labour households as well as other rural labour households has increased between 1964 and 1983, despite the decline in number of days of work. Initially, i.e. during 1964-74 period there was a decline in annual real income which was followed by an increase during the 1974-83 period. The real income of agricultural labour households rose by 54%, and that of other rural labour households increased by 64% between 1974-75 and 83-84 (Kannan 1990:71). This increase appears to have come about due to the increase in real wages. This may show that the rural labour households now have not only the demographic factors to their support, but economic variables too.

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<sup>43</sup> This is a more valid assumption than assuming that per capita employment availability has not declined, since our own demographic data shows the potential increase in the labour force and so far we have not come across any report which says that the total number of days of work has increased.

## CHAPTER 6

### SOME ASPECTS OF KIND PAYMENT OF WAGES

In this Chapter, we attempt to expose the various aspects associated with the payment of wages in kind which we have referred to in earlier contexts. Certain features of the paddy harvesting in Kuttanad may be highlighted. Paddy harvesting a predominantly female occupation and the wages paid for it is not just for the reaping activity alone, but for the entire operation till winnowing. This includes bundling and carrying the cut paddy to the threshing yard and threshing.

Once the threshing is over, a preliminary sifting is done in the yard with the help of natural wind. The winnowed paddy is heaped in the threshing yard, and the wages for the entire work is settled at the 'Kalam Piriyaal' occasion when the total paddy is shared between the land owner and the worker according to the ratios fixed for sharing. In the presence of the land owner or his representative, the worker measures out the paddy using the 'Para' measure<sup>44</sup>. From the total heap of paddy the worker measures out 6 'paras' and makes another heap to become the land owner's share and after every sixth 'para', the seventh is measured and heaped separately as the share of the worker termed 'Patham'. This method of dividing the produce goes on until the total paddy is exhausted. In addition to the 'patham' the worker also gets the maintenance wage termed 'Theerppu' at the rate of 1/4 of every para that the worker got as 'patham'. Or for every four 'para' of paddy that the worker

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<sup>44</sup> The 'para' measures are of different volumes varying from place to place. The 'Kalloorkkaadan Para' which is most commonly used in Kuttanad measures 5 to 5.5 Kg and the 'Standard Para' measures 7.5 Kg. Both the quantities we expressed above vary slightly depending on the paddy : chaff ratio and the grain weight. According to the figures provided by the Rice Research Station in Kuttanad, the paddy grain weight in Kuttanad varies from 1.8 to 2.8 grams per hundred grains and paddy to chaff ratio varies from field to field depending on several agronomic factors. Hence for practical purposes throughout our analysis we have used 1 'Para' = 5 Kg. as the conversion factor.

got as 'Patham' , one 'para' is given in addition as 'Theerppu'<sup>45</sup> .

Table 6.1

Estimates of total paddy received by harvest workers as their wages

Dry Paddy / Kg.	Workers in Kuttanad Taluk	Workers in Kottayam Taluk	Workers in Changanachery Taluk	Workers. Vaikom Taluk	Four Taluks Total
1-20	1(0.99)			2(2.2)	3(0.8)
20-50	8(7.9) $\frac{31.6}{\%}$		10(10.8) $\frac{35.8}{\%}$	8(8.8) $\frac{39.8}{\%}$	27(7) $\frac{30.3}{\%}$
50-100	23(22.7)	13(13.5)	23(25)	26(28.8)	5(22.4)
100-150	2(31.7)	13(13.5)	19(20.6)	19(21)	83(21.9)
150-200	8(7.8) $\frac{66.7}{\%}$	19(28.8) $\frac{66.7}{\%}$	20(21.7) $\frac{52}{\%}$	15(16.6) $\frac{53}{\%}$	72(18.9) $\frac{60}{\%}$
200-300	17(16.8)	33(34.4)	9(9.8)	14(15.5)	73(19.3)
300-400		11(11.4)	8(8.7)	4(4.4)	23(6.1)
400-500		5(5.2)	2(2.2)	2(2.2)	9(2.4)
500-600	2 (1.9)		1(1.1)		3(0.8)
600-700		1(1)			1(0.3)
Total	101(26.6)	96(25.3)	92(24.3)	90(23.7)	379

Note: Figures in parenthesis ( ) are percentages of the total workers in the taluk.

After having described the method of sharing the produce between the worker and the land owner, we

<sup>45</sup> We have noted in the review of literature that the share going to the worker is 1.25/ 7.25 (17.2 % of the gross produce) . This is the case with most areas of Kuttanad except some areas of the Vaikom taluk, where the harvest share is 1/6 (16%) 'Patham' and no 'theerppu'. The intra regional differences are found in the matter of working hours also. See (Jose George 1984:51)

shall turn to certain other aspects associated with the payment of wages in kind. We shall probe into questions like How much paddy do the harvest workers get as wage? What do they do with the paddy? Does distress sale of paddy wage happen during the harvest season since the work is paid for in kind? To whom do they sell? What prices do they get? etc.

In Table 6.1 we have classified and presented the dry weight of total paddy that each worker in our initial sample of 380 reported to have got. The figures obtained from the survey was first converted into the equivalent weight of winnowed paddy using conversion factor obtained from the Rice Research Station, Kuttanad. The chaff content of the paddy that the workers got after a preliminary winnowing was taken as 15% and this was applied to arrive at the quantity of winnowed paddy that the workers would have got. The second step was to convert the quantities reported by the workers into Kilogrammes since the figures we recorded were in terms of Litres. For doing this, 1 liter = 500 Grams was employed as the conversion factor. We have thus obtained the weight of un dried paddy that the workers would have got. (the paddy immediately after harvest would weigh more due to the high water content. 14 to 16% reduction in weight dry (Dryage) is expected for paddy in Kuttanad region). The undried paddy weight we had arrived at has hence been converted into dry paddy weight applying a conversion factor of dryage loss 15%.

Since the above mentioned manipulations had to be done with the quantities we recorded in order to convert them into the commonly used denominations, an element of error is likely to be there<sup>46</sup>. Our primary objective is to expose

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<sup>46</sup> We have tried to minimize the error by conducting the survey immediately after the harvest such that recall error would be minimized. We further asked the respondents as to which 'Para' measure they were referring to, whether it is winnowed or not, whether the quantity reported is gross or net etc. (since many of them sell the paddy every day as also consume it). However, the quantities reported are the ones the workers arrived at by their own judgement since none of the workers keep any written records. Hence to the extent that these judgments vary in preciseness from person to person, our estimates also are likely to have been affected.

the social and economic dimensions of the practice of kind payment rather than precise quantification as such and therefore the figures could be taken as rough estimates.

Table 6.1 shows that Kottayam taluk which we had taken as a low productivity taluk for sampling purposes shows an curious deviation. 67% workers from this taluk have got paddy earnings between 100 to 300 Kg. paddy per person and only about 15% of the workers earn less than 100 Kg. Note that for the lower weight classes the percentage of workers from Kottayam taluk is lower (being 14.5% vis-a-vis 30+% for all other taluks) and in the higher weight classes of 100-300 Kg. their percentage is larger (66.7%). We ourselves had noted in the Chapter 4 that when a five year period is taken for productivity classification, Kottayam comes in the high productivity strata. There may also be other reasons for this deviation.

Table 6.2

Per head average total paddy received by workers, taluk wise

	Kuttanad taluk	Kottayam taluk	Changanachery taluk	Vaikom taluk
Total paddy earned by all workers (Kgs)	14444.5	20458.3	14013.8	12888.4
No. of workers	101	96	92	90
Average paddy per worker	143	213	152	143

Examining the average per head paddy earning from the harvest season, the expected correlation between the total paddy wage received and productivity of taluks is not truly reflected in our data. This could have been due to a number of reasons, but the most important would be two variables which we have not taken into consideration. (1) the total number of workers harvesting per unit of land. (2) the total number of days each one has worked. The number of workers can vary from taluk to

taluk, and in fact from one field to another. Similarly the number of days worked does vary from person to person. Hence the conclusion that we can make from the above data is that the workers in Kottayam taluk appear to have got higher total quantity of paddy for either of the above two factors being favourable for them. It is very likely that the workers from Kottayam taluk have got either a larger total number of harvesting days and lesser number of worker per unit of land, since most of the areas in our sample from Kottayam taluk come from 'Kayal lands' where labour shortage is reported.

However, the reverse appears to be the case in Changanachery taluk. In spite of being the second highest in terms of productivity when a 5 year period is taken and third highest with 10 year period, the total quantity of paddy received by the workers in the taluk does not show much variation from that of the workers of Vaikom taluk which has the lowest productivity of all taluks. (Yield per unit of land in Vaikom is about 40% lower than that of Changanachery taluk according to both the five year and ten year periodization in Chapter 4). Many areas from where we collected the data for Changanachery taluk were the areas where workers live in colonies and hence there was no shortage of labour for harvesting. Therefore it is very likely that the number of workers harvesting per unit of land had been quite high in those areas, which may be why the total paddy earnings of each worker is lower. Still the question remains why Vaikom taluk has fared better in this aspect. We hypothesize that it could be that there is a lesser number of workers harvesting per unit of land. If this is true, this may be another reason why migrant labour flow from Vaikom to the 'Kayal' areas of Kuttanad has dwindled.

We may get a more precise idea about paddy earnings from another estimation in which we have tried to calculate the per day paddy wage for each worker taluk wise. Table 6.3 depicts the per day paddy wages earned by harvest workers. These figures have been calculated from the data we collected specifically for the purpose of finding the daily paddy earnings and hence the degree of error is expected to be smaller.



What is most striking in the estimate is the large degree of variation between individuals in terms of the paddy they receive per day. This difference largely arises due to differences in the efficiency between workers. The quantity received differs from 1 Kg. to 20 Kg. between individuals. Hence it is difficult to generalize about the earnings per worker per day. We may rather look at the spectrum of earnings.

Table 6.3

The average daily paddy wage received by harvest workers

Dry paddy in Kg.	Workers in Kuttanad Taluk	Workers in Kottayam Taluk	Workers in Changanachery	Workers in Vaikom Taluk	Kuttanad Region
1-3	26(26) 88.4	33(34.4) 92.9	25(27.2) 88.1	43(47.7) 100	127[33.5]
4-6	38(37.6) *	44(45.8) *	39(42.4) *	35(38.8) *	156[41.2]
7-9	25(24.7)	13(13.5)	17(18.5)	12(13.3)	67[17.6]
10-12	6(5.9)	3(3.1)	4(4.3)	0	13[3.4]
12-14	2(2)	0	2(2.2)	0	4[1]
14-16	0	1(1)	1(1.1)	0	2[0.5]
16-20	1(0.9)	0	2(2.2)	0	3[0.8]
21+	3(2.9)	2(2.1)	2(2.2)	0	7[1.8]
Total No. of Workers	101	96	92	90	379

Note:

Figures in Parenthesis ( ) are percentages of the Column total.

Figures in parenthesis [ ] are percentages of total number of workers.

The productivity of land emerges as one of the principal variables that determines the daily paddy earnings. A significant observation is that no worker in Vaikom taluk has got more than 9 Kg of dry paddy per day, where as in the other three taluks there are a few individuals who have got 20 Kg and more. If we take the first three weight classes, (that is 1 Kg.to 9Kg) the majority of the workers in all taluks fall within these classes. However, within this classification the proportion of workers from Changanachery taluk is the lowest followed by Kuttanad and Kottayam taluks. This trend in fact corresponds to the productivity trends which we had observed in Chapter 4.

The relationship between productivity of land and daily earnings of harvest labourers is very clearly brought out by the marked deviation in their earnings. 86% of the workers in Vaikom got 6 Kg. or less. 47% of the workers in that taluk have got only 1 Kg. to 3 Kg paddy per day the corresponding figure for all other taluks being conspicuously low. This may to some extent explain why during the harvest season people from Vaikom taluk have been migrating to other regions in large numbers, especially to the Kuttanad and Kottayam taluks.

#### Some Aspects of Paddy Sale During Harvest Season

What do the workers do with the paddy they receive as wages? We found that they use it for two major purposes. Firstly, they use it for their own daily consumption and secondly they sell a part of it to purchase provisions and other household requirements. We have not been able to quantify precisely the amount that the workers withhold for their consumption. Some of the workers use the paddy as a buffer stock which they can sell for money when any contingency arises. Almost all workers reported that they hold back 30 to 100 'Para' of paddy for their future use such that they do not have to buy rice in the open market during the off season. The quantity held back would depend on the number of members of the household and their other sources of income. Some of the workers also stated that now that there is a second crop being raised in many areas, they do not store much.

We find that there is a considerable proportion of workers who sell paddy every day for buying provisions. The workers reported two reasons for this. The first reason is that they do not have an earning male in the family who goes for work other than harvesting so as to have a source of money income during the harvest time. The second is that even in families where there are workers who get income other than the kind wages for harvesting, that money would not be sufficient to meet all expenses of the whole family and so some quantity of paddy have to be sold.

The sale of paddy itself is found to have variations. On the one extreme is a section of workers who sell paddy every day to the provision stores, tea shops, or pan shops. We have referred to these shops in an earlier context. These sales could be thought to be distress sale since they do it for want of alternative sources to survive. Sale of paddy in such situations fetches comparatively low price and the shop owners resort to malpractices in measuring the paddy. A typical worker in Kuttanad returning home after harvest, first winnows the paddy s/he (mostly females) received and goes to the provision store with it to buy the provisions in exchange. The shop owner measures it (in most areas in terms of Litres, but in some areas in terms of Kilogrammes) and settles the transaction according to the price that would be displayed somewhere in the shop. If there is any cash balance to be given, that is settled and the deal for the day is over.

We also find another section among the harvest workers who purchase things every day on credit and the accounts are settled at the end of every two or three weeks. This facility is available only to those who enjoy the confidence of the shop keeper.

On the other extreme is the category of workers who are relatively better off. They can afford to wait till the harvest season is over for selling the paddy. They usually sell the paddy in bulk (20-30 'para' or more, occasionally in quintals) either to the local parboilers or to people who come from other areas for large scale purchase of paddy from farmers<sup>47</sup>. This section of the workers generally get the going market price for their paddy. However, the sale of paddy by the group of workers can be called barter trade .

Table 6.4 classifies the workers from who do this distress sale of paddy is classified according to the

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<sup>47</sup> A good proportion of the paddy purchased in bulk from farmers are by paddy traders coming from Kalady area (Trichur district) in the north and a number of places in the Trivandrum district in the south.

quantity sold (converted into dry paddy in Kilogrammes) taluk wise. We find that maximum number of workers who do the distress sale is in Changanachery taluk where 77.5% of the sample workers do it. For all other taluks the percentage is considerably lower, varying between 33 and 45%. As we had already noted, our sample from Changanachery taluk was mostly from labour colonies settled on either side of the first 7 Km stretch of the Changanachery-Alleppey road. The larger proportion of distress sale in Changanachery taluk appear to be an indication of their general economic depressiveness. Most of these households are young families recently married and settled in life. This class may perhaps be seen as an example of the reverse process of 'proletarianization' that is going on among the working class in Kuttanad region .

Table 6.4

Distress sale of paddy during harvest season

(The number of workers according to quantities of paddy sold)

Dry Paddy Kg.	Kuttanad Taluk	Kottayam Taluk	Changanachery Taluk	Vaikom Taluk
100grams to 1.5Kg.	6(13) 23.8 %	10(31) 34 %	15(21) 29.4 %	6(20) 40 %
2 Kg.	5(10.8)	1(3.1)	6(8.4)	6(20)
3 Kg	18(39)	13(40.6)	17(23.9)	9(30)
4-5Kg	14(30)	7(21.8)	25(35)	6(20)
6-8Kg.	2(4.3)	1(3.1)	6(8.4)	3(10)
9-10kg.	1(2.2)	0	2(2.8)	0
Number. of Workers	46[45.5]	32[33.3]	71[77]	30[33.3]

Note: Figures in Parenthesis ( ) are percentages of column total.  
 Figures in parenthesis [ ] are percentages of the total number of workers in each taluk.

A few more features can be identified from Table 6.4. In the matter of the quantity of paddy disposed off as distress sale, the proportion of the workers from Kuttanad and Changanachery Taluks show a slightly different pattern. When it comes to the lower weight groups, their share is low (23.8% for Kuttanad and 29.4% for Changanachery) and for the higher weight groups, they have a slightly larger proportion. This shows that for a larger proportion of workers from these taluks, the quantity of paddy sold as distress sale is larger. Or they sell larger quantities than their counterparts in other taluks.

Among the workers of Kuttanad taluk, 69% sell quantities between 3 and 5 Kg. whereas in Kottayam taluk it is 62.4%, For changanachery it is 58.9 and for Vaikom it is only 50%. Similarly note that for Vaikom taluk 40% of the workers sell only quantities between 100 grams and 2 Kg. Hence we surmise that the distress sale of paddy is the highest in Kuttanad and Changanachery taluks.

Table 6.5

Prices received by workers for the paddy sold daily

Rs.per Litre	Kuttanad Taluk	Kottayam Taluk	Changanachery Taluk	Vaikom Taluk
1.10-1.20	26(56.5)	12(37.5)	21(29.5)	7(23.3)
1.20-1.40	16(37.7)	16(50)	39(54.9)	6(20)
1.40 +	4(8.7)	4(12.5)	11(15.5)	17(56.6)
No of Workers	46	32	71	30

Note: The figures in parenthesis are percentages of column total.

We also find from table 6.5 that the prices received by most of them are low. In the matter of price, the workers from Vaikom taluk got a better deal. 56% of those who had to do distress sale of paddy got prices above 140 Paise per litre of paddy.

The main objective of discussing these issues here has been to integrate certain aspects of kind payment for harvesting into our study, to link it up with the issue of labour shortage. We find two factors related to paddy wage system likely to be contributing to the issue of labour shortage. One is the issue of price of paddy which had been shown to have stagnated relatively possibly resulting in making harvest work a less remunerative job than it was. The second is the fact that harvest workers use the paddy wages they get also for their own consumption. Could this not be one of the principal reasons for workers coming for harvesting?. If we accept this as a fact, then the increase in the cropping intensity in both Alleppey district and Kottayam districts we noted in Chapter 1 may be acting as a dis-incentive for the labour migration to Kuttanad. That is to say that the workers who used to come to Kuttanad from other areas earlier, may now be able to get the paddy they need from their own locality. This indeed cannot be the only reason for labour shortage. But, to the extent that many areas in Kuttanad had been depending on migrant labour, this also would act as a factor contributing to labour shortage through reduced number of migrants.

## CHAPTER 7

### SOME INDICATORS OF ECONOMIC STATUS OF THE LABOUR HOUSEHOLDS

#### The Housing Conditions of the Sample households

It is with the broader objective of answering certain issues raised in Chapter 5, that we examine the housing conditions and other asset holdings of the labour households in Kuttanad.

The materials used for the construction of house could be taken as some indicators of the socio-economic conditions of the household. From a need based notion of housing, any estimates without considering the plinth area and the number of inhabitants may be of less meaning. Our estimates and description suffer from this shortfall since we have not collected data on the plinth area. Nevertheless, we get a broad understanding of the dwelling conditions of our sample households from the following analysis.

Most of the houses we are dealing with are small ones typically with 2 or 3 small rooms. We may classify the houses according to the materials used for the laying of the foundation, and the construction of walls and roof. We may classify them into 'katcha' houses and 'pucca' houses. Many houses with their foundation made of mud and cow dung are mostly typical 'katcha' houses or huts made from locally available materials without using cement, and tiles which are more expensive. Those houses with their foundation constructed of laterite and granite stones and cement may be deemed 'pucca' houses also depending on the materials used for their walls and roofs.

Table 7.1 shows that 42% of the sample households have foundations made of clay and cow dung (without any foundation in the modern sense of the term) conform to the

typical huts, further details of which are obtained from Table 7.2 and 7.3.

Table 7.1

Details of Materials used for House Foundation

Description of Materials	No. of Houses	Percentage of the total
Mud and Cow dung	159	41.18
Rubble / Red stone un plastered	171	45.0
Rubble / Red stone plastered	50	13.2
Total	380	100

Of the total 159 houses (42%) which are not built on proper foundation, 129 (81.1%) have thatched roof using plated coconut palm leaves. Table 7.2 shows that of the total 168 thatched roof houses, 151 (89.9%) have their walls made of 'katcha' materials like palm leaves, planks and clay. Thus we may say that the 159 houses with nominal foundation made of mud and cow dung are typical huts. Though a small proportion of the houses without proper foundation (18.8%) use tiles or asphalt sheet, most of these too have their walls made of planks and mud (Table 7.2) thus qualifying to be called 'katcha' houses or huts.

Table 7.1 also shows that there is another section of households having residence with 'pucca' foundation made from laterite or granite stone and cement. Technically speaking, many of these houses may not be classified as those with 'pucca' foundation since in many cases some portion of the house would not have the cement foundation that modern housing concept would require to have. However, unlike the houses with their foundation made of clay and cow dung mixture; these are houses with some kind of strong basement.

Out of the total 380 houses, 171 (45%) have un plastered floors and 50 (13.2%) have plastered floors. (Table 7.3) However, 80 percent of both these categories of houses



have tiled roofs. A few houses have asphalt and concrete roof. In short, we say that around 200 houses (52%) out of the total 380 are 'pucca' houses though they not be as strong as the houses in other areas of Kerala due also to the geographical features of Kuttanad .

Table 7.2

Particulars of Materials Used for Walls and Roofing of Houses

Wall\roof ->	Thatched	Tiled	Asphalt Sheet	Concrete	Row Total
Thatched	81	0	4		85(22.4)
Planks	65	5	0		70(18.4)
Mud	5	1	1		7(1.8)
Brick/Red stone Unplastered	13	161	2	2	178(46.8)
Brick/Red stone plastered	4	35	1		40(10.5)
Column Total	168(44.2)	202(53)	8(2.1)	2(0.5)	380(100)

Table 7.3

Particulars of Roof and Floors of Houses

Roof-> Floor	Thatched	Tiled	Asphalt sheet	Concrete	Row total
Mud and Cowdung	129	26	4		159(41.8)
Rubble and Red stone Unpla.	33	136	1	1	171(4.5)
Rubble and Red stone pla.	6	40	3	1	50(13.1)
Column Total	168(44.2)	202(53.1)	8(2.1)	2(0.5)	380

Note: The figures in the parenthesis are percentages of the total

Two more indicators of the living conditions of the labour households need to be looked into, the first is

the use of electric power supply and the second the possession of a lavatory. These two are classified and presented in Table 7.4 and 7.5. Though only 28% of the total 380 houses are electrified, it is a rather prominent and revealing attribute that there are labour households who can afford to use electric power. Most of the houses having electric power are also the 'pucca' houses, though a few of them (10) are ones with just thatched/plank walls and partitions. (Not represented in Tables).

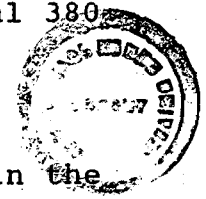
Table 7.4

Use of electric power among Households

House type	Total number of Houses	No. of houses electrified	Percentage of electrified houses
Thatched	168	17	15.6 [4.5]
Tiled	202	88	80.7 [23.2]
Asphalt Sheeted	8	2	1.8 [0.5]
Concrete	2	2	1.8 [0.5]
Total	380	109	100 [28.7]

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Note: Figures in parenthesis [ ] are percentages of the total 380 houses.



A similar feature is observed in the matter of possession of Lavatories also. Though by general standards lack of toilet may indicate economic depressiveness of households, in Kuttanad due to her peculiar geographic features, till the not so distant past (roughly 1 decade back) possession of lavatory with some kind of a non septic tank had been a luxury which only the relatively well to do could afford.

We find that the majority of the houses in our sample do not have any kind of lavatory. But the fact that there are 97 households (25.5%) among the sample of 380 having some kind of improvised non septic lavatories indicate to some extent the changes that have come in the social status of the

working class in Kuttanad. We found in our survey that most of the houses having lavatory had not fabricated them with their own money, but they had been either donated or constructed on loans/subsidies provided by the Governmental or by non Governmental voluntary agencies. We also noticed that many houses received loan/subsidy assistance for house construction from a number of Governmental bodies. Hence, this variable need not be treated as

Table 7.5

Houses classified according to possession of/lack of lavatory

Type of Toilet	No. of houses	Percentage to total
No Toilet	283	74.5
Leach pit	11	2.9
Concrete Ring	72	18.9
Septic tanked	14	3.7
Column total	380	100

an indicator of the economic well being of the household but it nevertheless symbolizes the improvement in the conditions of living of a section of the working class mostly due to the subsidization of several of the wants of the labouring class like Housing, Education and Medical services by the government and also due to other forms of transfer payments. We had also noticed that many of the households had got loan or subsidy for house construction from a number of Governmental bodies.

An interjection appears necessary here. There have been reference in the literature about the various social welfare programmes and transfer payments from the Government earmarked for the weaker sections of the society. They include subsidies and loans for construction/improvement of houses, consumption subsidy, agricultural worker pension, widow pension, Unemployment benefit, pension for the disabled and

individuals afflicted by infirmity etc. (Kannan 1990:11) and (Government of Kerala 1985:64).

In our study we came across a number of beneficiaries of such programmes. The beneficiaries belong to two broad categories, (1) The households who have obtained loan or subsidy from various Governmental agencies and (2) The recipients of transfer payments. A short discussion on this follows.

There are 63 households among the total sample of 380 (16.6%) who have received either housing loan or subsidy from different governmental agencies. The percentages of the number of households in each taluk who got such assistance goes as follows. Kuttanad 12.5%, Kottayam 14.6%, Changanachery 14%, and Vaikom 25%. The single most important source of assistance cited has been the Housing Board which has advanced loans between 3000 and 9000 Rs to 27 households (43% of the total number who got assistance) and 6 cases of subsidies, totally accounting for 52% of all the housing assistance given. The Harijan Development Corporation has given subsidies/loans for 11 houses (17.5%) (the reported amount in most cases being 6000 Rs.) and one household reported having got free house from the Corporation. There are 11 cases where loan or subsidy has been obtained from the Village or Block authorities mostly under the Integrated Rural Development Programme. Another four households reported assistance from the Matsyafed or from the Fisheries Welfare Office at Alleppey. The remaining 3 households of the total 63 who received help for housing, got it from different voluntary agencies.

The total number of beneficiaries of transfer payments add to 63. There are 45 individuals receiving agricultural labour pension, 3 getting widow pension, and 14 individuals receiving unemployment benefit. The taluk wise distribution of these individuals is presented in Table 7.6. In our sample of 1934 individuals, there are 146 persons above the age of 60. Among this, 45 (30.8 %) receive agricultural labour pension of Rs.45/ month. Kannan's estimate (Kannan 1990:12) report that for Kerala as a whole; as in the year 1986-87, one

person in every 3.7 labour households receive agricultural pension and that it works out to one out of every eight agricultural labourer. In our sample, this works out to one out of every 17 agricultural labourers, if we take the number of individuals with agricultural labour as their occupation as 746 (See Table 5.4). The reason for this difference is most likely to be the under reporting of agricultural pension received, in our survey. The possible reason for the under reporting we have suggested in Chapter 4 (See footnote 35).

The total number of absolutely unemployed (Both Main activity and Sub activity Statuses being unemployed) in our sample is 116, of which 14 (12%) receive unemployment benefit. We found 20 individuals between the age of 55 and 24 being in the state of infirmity. Since the researcher was not aware of the governmental financial assistance for infirmity, data on it could not be collected. It is possible that some of these individuals also receive some kind of assistance. What is substantial in table 7.6 is that of the 62 individuals receiving some form of transfer payment, 29 (37%) belong to Vaikom taluk. However marginal these assistance may be in terms of money received, these also could be contributing to the decline in migration from Vaikom to Kuttanad.

Table 7.6

The number of recipients of transfer payments taluk wise

Scheme-> Taluk	Ag.labour pension	Widow pension	Unemployment benefit	All schemes
Kuttanad	9	0	5*	14*
Kottayam	10	1	2	13
Changanachery	8	1	2	11
Vaikom	18	1	5*	24*
Total	45	3	14	62

Note: \* Denotes that all the five receiving unemployment benefit categorized under Kuttanad taluk are migrant workers from Vaikom taluk. Thus the actual number of unemployment beneficiaries in Vaikom taluk is 10 and the total number of beneficiaries in all categories of Vaikom taluk becomes 29 instead of the 24 presented, and correspondingly the total beneficiaries in Kuttanad taluk comes down to 9.

Such subsidization and economic assistance in the form of transfer payments could have made it possible for the labour households to divert some of their own resources to their other wants. Hence we may say that, to the extent that the governmental expenditure on subsidization and transfer payments has been increasing, it could have gradually increased the income of the lower strata of the society or at least could have protected them from the ever increasing cost of living.

#### The Asset Structure Of the Labour Households

For a majority of the households, we did not find any other assets other than the livestock and some minimal household utensils. However, in the matter of land assets, we found certain interesting features, which we will discuss separately.

Table 7.7

Livestock and poultry holding among the sample households

Description of households owning		Percentage of total 380
1 or 2 Cows/Goats	114	30
1 to 3 Hens/Ducks	99	26
4 to 9 Hens/Ducks	77	20.3

Table 7.8

Other assets of the sample households

Number of Households possessing		Percentage of Total Households
Coir Ratt	13	3.4
Canoe	34	8.9
Pesticide Pump (Manual)	10	2.6
Fishing net	32	8.4
Others	7	1.8
Total	96	25.3

Since the tables on the live stock assets and other assets are self explanatory we would not comment on them except that many of these households have got assistance for buying live stock also . Similar is the case with other assets possessed by sample, which are presented in Table 7.8. The households have benefitted from the loans and subsidies given for buying fishing nets, pesticide pump and canoes. Since there is this element of Governmental support, it becomes difficult for us to delineate the effect of Governmental effort on improving the living conditions of the rural labour households from the self generated or spontaneous improvement in their economic status which would be one coming out of structural change in the economy. But there is no doubt that this intervention is perhaps the single most important factor that has enabled at least some sections of the working class to improve their lot.

#### The Salient Features of Land Ownership of the Sample Households.

##### 1 The Pattern of Homestead Ownership.

Here, we bring out the important features of land holdings pattern of sample households. Table 7.9 brings out the size of homestead land and the way in which the land has come to be owned. We may list out the most important of them as follows.

(1) If we go by the literal meaning of the word 'landless', there are only 16 households out of the total 380 (4.2%) who come under this category, since they are dwelling in common property land without any legal right to the ownership.

(2) 80% of our sample labour households have only less than 10 cents each as their homestead and another 14% possess a little over, but less than twenty cents. 24% of the households have purchased their homesteads. This indeed is unanticipated. Though 68% of all the homestead purchased is only of the size not more

than 10 cents, the impact it makes on the labour market in terms of the psychological and cultural effect that land ownership imparts to the members of the working class households can only be speculated since there is no way of quantifying it.

Table 7.9

The Size of Homestead According to Mode of Acquisition

Mode of Acqui/ Home stead area	Inherited	Bought	Land Reform	Multiple Acquisi- tion	Settlement colony	Purampoke*	Undivid. property	Others	Row Total
No Land	2*?	0	0	0		16		1	19(5)
1-10 cents	39	63	77	36	35	17	2	27	296(77.9)
11-25 cents	11	26	4	9		1		2	53(13.9)
26-50 cents	3	2	1	2			1	1	10(2.6)
51-100 cents		1					1		2(0.5)
	55 (14.5)	92 (24.2)	82 (21.6)	47 (12.4)	35 (9.2)	34 (8.9)	4 (1.2)	31 (8.2)	380

Note:

Figures in parenthesis are percentages of the total 380.

\* Purampoke denotes common property like Road side or wasteland occupied illegally.

'Others' denote land leased in, and ownership title not conferred .

\*? Denotes dubious credibility of the reported data.

We feel that the most important effect may be the security feeling that arises from owning the homestead. In the past, almost all labour households lived on land belonging to their landlords and hence they were always under the threat of eviction. Owning a piece of land seems to give them a sense of pride and security. To some extent it could also have contributed to increasing the self assessment of the labour households vis-a-vis the rest of the society since land ownership was earlier the prerogative of the high castes only. Whether the ownership of bits of land could also have led to an increase in the reserve price of labour as indicated by some studies conducted earlier is



a subjective issue though it is very much possible that such an effect also is there. The subjectivity increases especially due to the difficulty in judging correctly whether the size of the homestead being so small is due only to economic depressiveness of the labourers or also due to the dearness of dry land in Kuttanad most of the area being waterlogged<sup>47</sup>. We feel that both could be relevant factors.

However the issue remains to be settled whether or not the fact that the households involved in the labour market in Kuttanad are able to purchase land either through their savings which they managed perhaps through a life times effort, or also with the assistance of various Governmental bodies reflect the difference that they have compared to their counterparts elsewhere in India who even now remain in servitude through generations, let alone the idea of buying land.

(3) Through the implementation of land reforms provisions, 22% of the households have become landed by getting 'Kudikidappu' or hutment rights. Another 9% of the households have benefitted from settlement colony rehabilitation programmes of the government<sup>48</sup>. If we add the number of households who have obtained their homesteads through 'land reforms' (mostly those who have been conferred hutment rights, but some who have benefited from surplus land redistribution also) and 'Settlement colony', it comes to 117 households (30% of all the households). This shows

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<sup>47</sup> The population density of Kuttanad is very high. With an estimated population of 1.7 million, approximately 2000 persons per sq.Km dwell in the area according to 1981 Census. the corresponding figure for rural Kerala is just 558 which itself is deemed to be the highest in rural India (Kannan 1990:24).

<sup>48</sup> Settlement colonies appear to be a relatively more recent form of governmental support to the economically depressed in which bits of homesteads of sizes varying from 4 to 10 Cents are assigned in a colony. (The first of these programmes started with the 'Lakh house programmes) This is sometimes (not necessarily) accompanied by a loan or subsidy to construct/improve the house. This assistance could come from the Social Welfare department, the Housing Board, the Harijan Development Corporation or the Blocks/Panchayats. Amounts thus reported to be granted to some of our sample houses vary from Rs.1500 to Rs. 5000 in the case of subsidy and loans up to Rs.10000.

that the number of households who have benefited from the government's land reforms in fact outnumber those who purchased their homestead.

(4) 55 households (14.5%) have inherited their homestead. The majority of them (74.5%) inherited land not more than 10 cents each, conceivably indicating the degree of fragmentation of land arising out of partitioning of families.

(2) The Pattern Of Ownership and Operation of Wet Land by Sample Households

Nearly one third of the total households operate some wet land; but only 107 (28%) among them own the land, the rest are lease holders and 1 household is even operating land without title or any claim on it.

Table 7.10

Distribution of households operating wet land by size class

Size class in Cents	No	Percentage	Cumulative Percentage	% of All Household
1 -10	2	1.6	1.6	0.5
11 -20	9	7.3	8.9	2.4
21 -50	51	41.5	50.4	13.4
51 -75	8	6.5	56.9	2.1
76 -100	19	15.4	72.4	5
101 -200	17	13.8	86.2	4.5
201 -300	13	10.6	96.8	3.4
301 -400	1	0.8	97.6	0.3
401 -600	3	2.4	100	0.8
Total	123	100		32.4

(1) The highest proportion of wet land holdings is in the category 21-50 cents, accounting for 41% of all the households operating wet land. (Table 7.10) The size classes above it account for most the rest. Clearly, a vast majority of the wet holdings are larger than one quarter of an acre.

(2) If we are to define those who operate 1-60 cents as 'tiny cultivators', 70 households (57% of all households operating wet land) belong to this category. Considering the effect on the labour market, this class may be able to influence both the demand as also the supply sides. In fact these households, which did not operate or own land in the past, might have now become less dependent on the sale of their wage labour for survival. The degree of this transition would however depend on the other means of income they have acquired, as well as on the number of dependents in each of the household. If these bits of land produce good yield, and if the paddy prices are also attractive, it seems possible that these households can manage to get an income for survival without toiling as much as they used to do. Hence, some of them may prefer to abstain from the labour market. We do not anticipate that these people will completely stop doing paddy field work, but we expect that their degree of involvement in the wage labour market may come down by doing lesser number of days of work as wage labour or by the withdrawal of the relatively older and less healthy members who decide to stay back from labour market and do some work on their own land.

Secondly, if we are to credit the observations made by other studies on the use of hired labour in small holdings, these tiny holdings also hire in some labour especially during the peak seasons such as harvest. We may now recollect that in our pilot study on labour shortage, (Chapter 1) 14 cultivators (18% of the total 77 cultivators) operating less than 1 acre had reported shortage of labour during harvest season. 28.5% in the same size class had experienced some difficulty in weeding and transplanting operations also. This shows that some of the small cultivators also depend on hired labour. Hence, the tiny cultivators also could possibly be contributing their component to the total labour demand.

Though the labour shortage has been found to be mostly confined to the 'Kayal lands', we have been able to identify some factors which prevent labour shortage from being felt in other parts of Kuttanad. During our survey, labourers and small cultivators acknowledged that tiny land

owners cooperate and mutually help to tide over peak season labour demand. It is true of not only harvesting, but also of other operations.

Table 7.11

Distribution of wet land operated by size class, taluk wise

Taluk->	Kuttanad	Kottayam	Changanachery	Vaikom
1-10	2(9.5)	-	-	-
11-20	1(4.8)	1(2.3)	4(15)	3(9)
21-50	5(23.8)	14(32.6)	14(53.8)	18(54.5)
51-75	3(14.3)	3(7)	1(3.8)	1(3)
76-100	4(19)	8(18.6)	4(15)	3(9)
101-200	4(19)	7(16.3)	2(7.7)	6(18)
201-300	2(9.5)	7(16.3)	-	4(12.1)
301-400	-	1(2.3)	-	-
401-500	-	2(4.7)	1(3.8)	-
Total	[17.7]	[34.9]	[21]	[26.8]

Note: Figures in parenthesis ( ) are percentages of total in each taluk. Figures in parenthesis [ ] are percentages of total 123 households operating wet land.

To some extent the land ownership pattern observed above explains why the demand for hiking up harvest wage shares has not been made in recent years though the price of paddy has declined relatively. Some of the workers observed that "If I work for X today, X will work for me tomorrow. So how does anyone benefit from having the wages increased?" We also found the labourers complaining that the small owners often restrict the work in their fields to their kin and sometimes to the members of their own caste. True, this attitude is prevalent and may be limited to those who own some bit of paddy field. However, what is to be noted is the observations made by others about the stagnancy of the labour movement in Kuttanad. It could be a consequence of the emergence

of a class of small farmers, the size and relative importance of which we do not fully know even now.

(3) The number of households owning/operating holdings between 76 and 100 cents is 19 (15% of the 123 who operate wet land). We may classify this class as small peasants since most of the observations we made about the 'tiny owners' may hold good for this class too probably to a larger degree.

There are 34 individuals operating more than 1 acre. (27.6% of all households operating wet land and 8.9% of all the sample households). However, the mode of acquisition of these holdings shows that considerable proportions of the households do not own the land they operate. 21 operators (30% of those operating wet land) have reported leasing in land for cultivation. (See Tables 7.13 to 7.16).

The practice of leasing in land on a considerable scale has been pointed out by many workers during our interview. They reported that many cultivators owning 8 to 10 acres or more lease out their land for amounts varying from Rs.1000 to 1500 Rs per acre per crop. The lease period may go on for several years, the cultivator making sure that for each crop the lessee is changed to prevent lessee from making any claims on the land<sup>49</sup>. Workers pointed out that when paddy prices are low it is more beneficial for such land owners to lease out their land without being involved in any risk that cultivation inevitably would have brought them had they themselves cultivated it. It is possible that the area and the number of people who have leased in land are under represented in our sample since land leasing is prohibited by law and hence the respondents are likely to have exercised some caution on disclosing the actual dealings.

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<sup>49</sup> Interestingly we also found that land leasing is not altogether without any documents, in several cases written agreements between the land owner and the lessee called 'Paatta cheetu' clearly stating the rent, the individuals involved and the time period was reported in spite of leasing of land being legally prohibited.

We are unable to completely comprehend the economic logic behind the workers leasing in land at such high rates. One plausible explanation may be that the wages for workers in Kuttanad are too high for the landowners to carry on paddy cultivation 'profitably' and hence they lease out their land. If this statement is true, that may to a great degree explain why labourers can cultivate the land and make a profit even after paying the rent for land; since a lessee would try to minimize hired labour component of the total demand for labour in his land by doing maximum work by himself and with his family members.

The phenomenon that the land owners are often compelled to lease out their paddy land on a considerable scale due to the present social milieu in Kuttanad seems to have a sociological dimension also. Though the labour movement in Kuttanad has almost reached a state of stagnation, they have been able to make the social environment in Kuttanad a difficult one for their class opponent 'The Capitalist' and a congenial one for themselves within the existing social framework and without a class revolution.

As in the case of homestead acquisition, we find that those who have purchased land are not a small proportion since they add to 29% of all the wet land owned. Many who have purchased wet land have bought only small pieces such as 40 cents; though those who have bought more than 1 acre also is considerable. (accounting for 32% of all land purchased, fact remaining that our size class classification does not fully expose the area bought by them). 'Multiple sources' category which includes the households who have acquired wet land through more than one means is the single most important category in terms of the number, accounting to 36% of all land owned.

Table 7.12

The average size of wet land operated in the four taluks

Taluks	Total wetland operated	Average size. (Acres)
Kuttanad	19.49	0.93
Kottayam	59.57	1.40
Changanachery	18.00	0.69
Vaikom	26.41	0.80
Kuttanad Average*	123.87	1.7

\* The figures may not tally due to approximation.

There seems to be considerable variation in the average area operated in the four taluks as visible from Table 7.12. On an average, the households who are able to cultivate wet land, operate around one acre. This further buttresses our hypothesis that there is indeed a process of differentiation going on within the labour households in Kuttanad through which a section of the labourers are changing their status from pure wage earners to peasants.

In conclusion we can say that the number of households who do not own or cultivate any wet land is the majority among the labour households in Kuttanad (257 out of 380 or 67%). But considering the fact that we are analyzing the land owned or cultivated by rural labour households who have been at the bottom of the social and economic structure, it appears that gradual change from total land dispossession to ownership of pieces of land is taking place through a number of social processes, land reforms being one among them<sup>50</sup>.

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<sup>50</sup> A concurrent process through which the 'Ezhava' caste households have been acquiring land is described by Kannan (Kannan 1988:184). Yet another process through which the 'Ezhava' households have been moving up the social ladder by the acquisition of land is portrayed by Tharamangalam who describes the conditions of uncertainty and insecurity in the agrarian

Though it doesn't mean that the entire or most of the working class in Kuttanad is benefitting from such changes, in the context of the over populated Kuttanad the nature of the dynamism in the land market cannot be ignored. Considering the soil fertility, cultivation of even half an acre of double cropped land would fetch a reasonable income to the cultivator if it is being done by workers who minimize the hired labour component. One would be surprised only if the ownership of such pieces of land has not led to reserve price of labour going up among this section of the labour force. Our investigation

TABLE 7.13

Wet Land Operated By Households In Kuttanad Taluk According to Mode of Acquisition

Mode-> Sizeclass	Bought	Surplus land redistribu.	Leased in	Source not known	Multiple sources	Row total
1 - 10 Cents			1(20)	1(25)		2[9.5]
11-20	1(14.3)					1[4.7]
21-50	3(42.8)			2(50)		5[23.8]
51-75	2(28.6)	1(33.3)				3[14.3]
76-100	1(14.3)	2(66.6)	1(20)			4[19]
101-200			2(40)	1(25)	1(50)	4[19]
201-300			1(20)		1(50)	2[9.5]
Total	7[33.3]	3[14.3]	5[23.8]	4[19]	2[9.5]	21 @

Note: Figures in parenthesis ( ) are percentages of column total.

Figures in parenthesis [ ] are percentages of households operating wet land.

@ The total number of households from Kuttanad is only 51, the rest 50 coming under Kuttanad taluk are migrants (Not included for this categorization)

sector of Kuttanad leading to disposal of land by the large cultivators, which in turn is bought by this section of agricultural labourers (Tharamangalam 1981:47)



therefore support rather than contradict the hypothesis that emergence of small farmers also is contributing to the labour shortage situation emerging in Kuttanad, the effect of changes in the land ownership pattern affecting both the demand and the supply side of the labour market.

The largest average area of wet land operated as well as the largest number of operators is in Kottayam taluk, and it could be mainly due to the fact that there are more holdings in all the larger size classes of this taluk. In Kuttanad taluk 21 out of the 51 households (41%) operate some wet land. In other taluks the proportion of households operating

Table 7.14

Wet land Operated By Households in Kottayam Taluk According to Mode of Acquisition.

Mode -> Size class	Bought	Surplus land redistribu.	Leased in	Source not known	Multiple sources	Row total
1-10 Cents	N O O B S E R V A T I O N S					
11-20	1(7)					1[2.3]
21-50	7(50)	3(50)		4(40)		14[32.5]
51-75	2(14.3)			1(10)		3[6.9]
76-100	2(14.3)	3(50)	1(14.3)	2(20)		8[18.6]
101-200	1(7)		4(57)		2(33)	7[16.3]
201-300	1(7)		1(14.3)	3(30)	2(33)	7[16.3]
301-400			1(14.3)			1[2.3]
401-500					2(33)	2[4.6]
Column Total	14[32.5]	6[13.9]	7[16.3]	10[23.3]	6[14]	43

Note: Figures in parenthesis ( ) are percentages of Column total.  
 Figures in parenthesis [ ] are percentages of households operating wet land.

wet land constitute 45% in Kottayam, 28% in Changanachery, and 36% in Vaikom. Detailed description of the way in which wet land has come to be operated is presented in the Tables 7.13 to 7.16.

(1) In all the four taluks, the land purchased (hence also owned) account for the single most important means through which the households have come to operate the land, exceeding 30% of the total number of operational holdings. The majority of all wet land purchased belong to the two small size classes 21-50 and 51-75 Cents. Among these classes, the 21-50 class dominate in three taluks, the exception being Changanachery taluk where 87% of the land purchased comes under the larger size class of 51-75 cents. One conclusion that may be derived may be that in general though land purchased is high in terms of number, area wise the purchase of land may not be very dominant.

Table 7.15

Wet Land Operated By Households In Changanachery Taluk According to Mode of Acquisition.

Mode -> Size class	Bought	Surplus land redistribu.	Leased in	Source not known	Multiple sources	Row Total
1-10 Cents	NO OBSERVATIONS					
11-20	1(12.5)			3(42.8)		4[15.4]
21-50	7(87.5)		2(50)	4(57)	1(25)	14[53.8]
51-75					1(25)	1[3.8]
76-100		3(100)	1(25)			4[15.4]
101-200			1(25)		1(25)	2[7.7]
201-300	NO OBSERVATIONS					
401-500					1(25)	1[3.8]
Column Total	8[30.8]	3[11.5]	4[15.4]	7[26.9]	4[15.4]	26

Note:

Figures in parenthesis ( ) are percentages of Column total.

Figures in parenthesis [ ] are percentages of households operating wet land.

(2) As we move to the larger size classes, the other classifications of acquisition 'leased in' and 'Multiple sources' become more important.

(3) The contribution made by surplus land distributed by the

Government is not negligible if one is to consider its percentage share to the total area operated, varying around 11% in all the taluks.

Table 7.16

Wet Land Operated By Households in Vaikom Taluk According to Mode of Acquisition.

Mode-> Size class	Bought	Surp.land redistri.	Leased in	Source not known	Undivid. Property	Multiple sources	Row Total
1-10 Cents	NO OBSERVATIONS						
11-20	1(7.6)			2(28.6)			3[9.1]
21-50	8(61.5)		5(100)	5(71.4)			18[54.5]
51-75	1(7.6)						1[3]
76-100		3(75)					3[9.1]
101-200		1(25)			2(100)	1(50)	4[12]
201-300	3(23)					1(50)	4[12]
301-400	NO OBSERVATIONS						
401-500	NO OBSERVATIONS						
Column Total	13[39.4]	4[12.1]	5[15]	7[21]	2[6.1]	2[6.1]	33

Note:

Figures in parenthesis ( ) are percentages of the Column totals.

Figures in parenthesis [ ] are percentages of households operating wet land.

(4) Operating leased in land is most dominant in Kuttanad and Kottayam taluks the reason for which is not hard to find since leasing in or conversely leasing out has been happening mostly in the 'Kayal areas' and these two taluks constitute most areas of the 'Kayal' region.

The general discussion done as the prelude to this chapter under the heading 'The Pattern of Wet land Ownership and Operation by sample Households' has brought out the dimensions and importance of our findings. Hence they are not repeated.

## CHAPTER 8

### CONCLUDING OBSERVATIONS

There seems to have been taking place significant changes in the labour market situation in Kuttanad in the recent past. Our study started off by highlighting the changes that have come about in the supply of and demand for harvest labour in Kuttanad. If excess supply of harvest labour was the phenomenon that had prevailed in Kuttanad during the mid sixties and seventies, the present situation experiences a harvest labour shortage which is conspicuously felt in the 'Kayal' region, and it leads to the current move towards mechanizing paddy threshing. A number of hypotheses have been arrived at on the basis of a pilot study of cultivators conducted in 1988. Invariably, these hypotheses have been equally related to the current social setting in Kuttanad, as they have been related to the specific issue of labour shortage. Hence, treating the labour shortage as an indicator of the subtle socio-economic and cultural changes taking place, we ventured to expose the nature of these changes by analyzing the composition and structure of the labour market in Kuttanad through a survey of 380 households from four taluks.

To start with, we made a preliminary examination of the demand side of the labour market to see whether there is prima facie reason to believe that changes in cropping intensity and total paddy production could be the reasons for the present phenomenon of harvest labour shortage. Although we find that during the last one decade the cropping intensity has increased in both Alleppey and Kottayam districts which accommodates the Kuttanad region, there has not been any marked improvement in the paddy output of 'punja' crop for which the harvest labour shortage is reported. On the contrary, we found that quite in consonance with the stagnancy observed by other authors in the agricultural sector of Kerala, the 'punja' paddy production in Kuttanad had fluctuated, and by 1986 had come down to the levels that had prevailed in the mid 1970s. Hence,

surmising that the problem of labour shortage in Kuttanad does not arise very much from the factors associated with the demand side, but has been related to the supply response of labour households, further analysis has been done.

Among the various hypotheses forwarded, the prominent one has been that the reserve price of a section of the labourers could have gone up due to a number of reasons, like an improvement in the living conditions of labour households, reduction in poverty etc. The achievement of higher levels of education, its impact on cultural factors, the reduction in inequalities in the distribution of land and the impact of the removal of social maledictions etc. have been tentatively treated as variables influencing the supply behaviour of labour households.

We also noticed from our data, that demographic factors also could have been undergoing change. The average family size in all the four taluks is smaller than that was found in an earlier study conducted in 1983 (See Chapter 5). Similarly, in the matter of number of earners per family, our observation suggested a slight increase in the number as compared to the situation in the early 80s. This would imply that 'other things being equal', there exists a more favourable demographic environment at present, for making economic progress of labour households viable in Kuttanad.

We propose that an important contributory factor for labour shortage could be the reduced work participation of youth in Kuttanad in agricultural activities. The work participation of the 16-30 age group in general, and that in agricultural activities in particular has been found to be considerably lower than that of the higher age groups such that the over all participation rate has come down. The participation rate of the 16-30 age group in the agricultural activities is only 51.4%, where as for the 31-45, 46-60 and 61-90 age groups the corresponding figures are considerably higher, being 73.8%, 72.2%, and 78.5% respectively. (Chapter 5, Table 5.5) The reduction in the over all work participation comes primarily

due to the higher weight the 16-30 age group has in the total population. Around 33% of the total population belong to the 16-30 age group.

We feel that the lower participation of the youth in Kuttanad in agricultural activities could be the result of the broader socio-economic and cultural changes that the population has been going through since the break up of the feudal social system. As a latent effect of the dissolution of the feudal social relations, a vast section of the population have been emancipated from the caste based division of labour and cultural captivity. The experience of the long established nexus between agricultural work and low economic and social status makes the younger generations look for work in other sectors. In our study we found that the youth have a clear preference for non agricultural activities especially blue collar or service sector work. The higher levels of education achieved by the youth further strengthens their aspirations on these lines. Although we found only a very small section in Kuttanad now engaged in such activities, a shift of a sizable section of the work force from agricultural to non agricultural sectors seems quite probable in future, if the economic milieu makes such changes viable. If such shifts are made possible by structural changes in the economy, mechanization of agricultural operations also may become a socially viable option in the near future since the demographic changes also appear to be favouring such changes<sup>51</sup>.

In this context the observation made by a study conducted in 1983 needs mention. Comparing the results of the Rural Labour Enquiries of 1964 and 1974 with their own findings, they report that "the proportion of agricultural labour households to rural labour households slightly decreased, the proportion of other rural households total rural households increased during the ten year period. This may be due to the

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<sup>51</sup> In fact the portends of such a change is already discernible. As we write this report, the Minister for Agriculture in the state has publicly stated that it is now necessary to mechanize agricultural operations.

shifting of labourers from agricultural to non agricultural sector" (Government of Kerala 1985:9). Hence, we speculate that the digression we find in Kuttanad in the matter of job preference may partly be reflection of transformation in the rural sector in Kerala.

A major chunk of the unemployed belong to the age group 16-30. From the descriptions of the workers we interviewed, as well as from the profile of the unemployed generated from our data, it appears that by and large this segment of the work force is ready to bear the cost of some idleness than working in the paddy fields. In this context that, examining the general economic conditions of the labour households, we have not been able to find a general or overall improvement in the asset conditions of the work force. But a section of the labour households seems to be moving up the social ladder through a number of social processes, various types of state intervention being one among them. (See Chapter 7)

The following are some of the other important findings of our study.

1 The shortage of labour reported in Kuttanad is at present confined to the 'Kayal' areas, though there may be other regions where the trend is not so obvious. The 'Kayal' lands are found to be segmented both spatially as well as in terms of labour market, the former leading to the latter. The difficulty in conveyance and lack of basic amenities for labourers in the 'Kayal' areas are the factors which make the area a less preferred place of work compared to other regions.

2 The migration of labour from other subregions of Kuttanad to the Kuttanad and Kottayam taluks during the harvest season has been declining considerably. Though the lower relative price of paddy may be one of the factors for this trend, it seems equally related to other factors like the emergence of small peasants in the traditional labour catchment areas of Kuttanad, an improvement in the availability of work in those areas due to increased cropping intensity, some improvement in the standard of

living of the people which seems to have come about due to the earlier mentioned broader social processes.

3 An attempt has been made to assess the employment profile of rural labour households in Kuttanad with the specific objective of finding out whether the workers in Kuttanad are totally dependent on paddy field work. This was sought by classifying the activity statuses of the sample labour force. We found that though agricultural activities remain the single most important source of employment, artisanal work and 'casual work' and 'miscellaneous work' categories also are important, essentially because nearly half of the agricultural labourers themselves involve in non agricultural activities as their secondary activity to supplement their income (Chapter 5).

4 A lethargy in the labour movement in Kuttanad had been observed by some authors earlier (Chapter 4). During our survey also we found a similar trend which is in sharp contrast to the reported militancy of the movement in the earlier periods. This change in the demeanor appears to have come about on account of the interests of a class of small peasants who have emerged from the ranks of the labourers themselves. The process of differentiation taking place within the working class seems to have been accelerated by state intervention through welfare programmes and transfer payments. Such programmes could have made it possible for the labour households to divert a part of their resources spent on 'needs' to expenditure on 'wants' (Chapter 7).

5 We have addressed ourselves to some of the dimensions of the practice of wage payment in kind. The most significant of them may be that we find that yield per unit of land and the number of workers per unit of land have vital influence on the per day paddy wage earnings of the harvest workers (Chapter 6).

6 The kind payment of wages still continues to prevail in Kuttanad basically since both the cultivators and the labourers are beneficiaries of the existing system. (though it is possible that one may be benefitting more than the other depending on the market price of paddy). Most of the workers find it to their



interest to get paddy as their harvest wages since a part of their daily requirements of rice can be met from this. Similarly the farmers find it in their advantage to have this mode of payment since the problem of incentives for the worker and consequent 'job shirking' could be minimized this way.

7 About 47% of the our sample workers sell paddy daily during the harvest season for their household requirements. This tendency of distress sale of paddy may be an indication that the economic improvement we suggested to be happening among the labour households may be restricted to some sections.

In conclusion, we may comment on the notion of work. The point we try to bring home is the fact that employment is not an end in itself, but it is the income from employment which is sought<sup>52</sup>. Hence, if a social system now makes it possible for its members to do lesser work than that was needed for attaining a specific level of income in earlier times, the tendency of at least some of the individuals would be to work lesser and be at the level of income that they deem necessary for their well being, (according to their own subjective criteria of well being) rather than continue working to reach levels of incomes they perhaps could have achieved, had they worked themselves to exasperation. To the extent that income can come also from sources other than manual work, as is the case of assets and income that is not earned (transfer payments), such behavioural patterns could be expected.

We hope to highlight the same in a little more detailed way through a quotation.

"On the one hand, rural Asian men and women are among the most overworked people in the world. Many recent time allocation studies have shown that working hours of the rural poor are much longer than any western standard of 'full employment'; that rural

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<sup>52</sup> The tendency to detach the relationship between work and income and the inclination to treat work as an end in itself is found in exalted enquiries also. See for instance Dantwala (1970). The concept of gainful employment is most relevant in countries like India where the major source of income is sale of human labour. Yet, it is disheartening to find that the above mentioned enquiry bypassed the issue. The only consolation on this aspect is the note of dissent expressed by one of its members.

women in general work longer hours than men; and that poor rural women are the most overworked of all. The fact of this drudgery - too much work for too little income point to the need of labour saving technologies to reduce the burden of working hours and/or to achieve greater productivity per working hour. On the other hand, reliable studies in the same societies, (often by the same authors !) complain equally correctly that new labour saving technologies are reducing work opportunities - as if more, rather than less work should be the objective of agricultural development policies..... This seeming paradox is reflected in the common ambivalence towards questions of technological change and employment, and the failure to understand (or at least, to translate into policy) the fact that employment is not an end in itself, but only a means to an end. It is only in the societies where the majority of the direct producers earn their livelihood through the sale of labour, rather than through ownership of the product of labour, that this contradiction is observed, a contradiction resulting in the irrational situation where technological progress makes it possible to generate more income from less work but working people are unable to share the benefits of this progress, since the only way in which their incomes can improve is through an increase, not a decrease, in the demand for their labour" (White 1983:121).

The paradox has mainly to do with the organization and relations of production in an economy as White implicitly suggests. The 'irrational' situation of workers objecting to mechanization of threshing in Kuttanad too comes from this paradox which is an inseparable part and consequence of the present social relations and distribution of resources. Presently, the opposition to mechanization has declined, one of the reasons being that a section of the working class has become land owners.

At the end of the study the author wishes to comment that conceptualizing and analyzing work and the notion of employment has suffered due to the conception of contemporary research; the necessity to a great extent of research having to be empirisistic and 'scientific' to prove/disprove the existing thinking and understanding. The problem arises since the 'paradigm of Science', itself has been guided, and controlled (rather trapped) by social priorities and values at all evolutionary stages of society. We have not succeeded any way in isolating our research from such influences, mostly due to the urge to prove/disprove certain 'facts'.

APPENDIX<sup>53</sup> \*

SURVEY ON RURAL LABOUR IN KUTTANAD

Name of the worker: \_\_\_\_\_



Address :

Date \_\_\_\_\_ Place of interview \_\_\_\_\_

General Information.

1. Do you go for paddy field work whenever it is available? Y / N
  
2. Do you do all types of paddy field work? Y / N ( If yes, specify the operations and the wage rate)
  
3. Do you go for any work other than paddy field work? Y / N  
If yes, specify the type of work and the wage rate.

Household profile

S.N	Name	Age	Sex	Rel.	Edn.	Ocpn.
1						
2						
9						

Code: Rel. 1.Ft/Mt 2. H/W 3. S/D 4. Br/Sr 5. Others.  
 Edn. 1.Ill. 2. Pri. 3. Midl. 4. SSLC 5. PUC  
 6. Degree 7. Others.  
 Ocp. 1.Unmp 2. wg.lbr 3. Sal.jobs (spe) 4.Others

4. Family's Monthly income \_\_\_\_\_

<sup>53</sup> \* See Chapter 4 also.

5. Do you own land? Y / N. If Yes, DRY \_\_\_\_\_ WET \_\_\_\_\_  
HOMESTD \_\_\_\_\_

6. The land was INHERITED BOUGHT  
LAND REFORM OTHERS

7. Particulars about house: (a) floor \_\_\_\_\_  
(b) Walls- \_\_\_\_\_ (c) Roof- \_\_\_\_\_  
(d) Electrified? Y / N (e) Type of toilet \_\_\_\_\_

8. Other assets (a) Live stock \_\_\_\_\_  
(b) Agri: implements \_\_\_\_\_ (c) Household utnls \_\_\_\_\_

Harvest Wage information

9. Since how many years have you been/engaged in harvesting? \_\_\_\_\_

10. The quantity of paddy received as wages in this season?  
Winnowed/Unwinnowed \_\_\_\_\_

11. The number of days thus worked? \_\_\_\_\_

12. Quantity of paddy received as wage from any one field you  
harvested? Winnowed/Unwinnowed \_\_\_\_\_

13. How many hours of work did it take? Including/Excluding  
threshing?

14. Does it include 'Valla katta' or any perquisites? Y / N If  
yes specify. \_\_\_\_\_

15. The paddy thus received is :

stored for consumption  
stored for future sales

sold immediately  
any others (specify).

16. If the paddy is sold give details

17. Are you a member of any agricultural trade union? Y / N. If yes specify which \_\_\_\_\_

18. Does union effect control on harvest work and harvest labour? Y / N If yes, give the nature of it.

19. Are you free to choose the fields for harvesting? Y / N  
(Details)

20. In general how far is the place of harvest from your place of residence? \_\_\_\_\_

21. Are there your Co-workers who used to do paddy field work earlier, who have given up paddy field work for any reason other than old age or sickness? Y / N If yes, specify the reason as you know?

22 General comments on the issue.

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