CHAPTER 6
IMPACT OF LABOUR STRUGGLES AND
STATE POLICIES ON AGRICULTURAL
LABOUR
Impact of labour struggles and state policies on agricultural labour

The wage question has to be addressed in the context of the past struggles and resistance movements of labourers as a class against oppressive measures resorted to by the state on behalf of the class owning the means of production. Any change in real wage is an outcome of the interplay of a complex set of factors and, therefore, can be meaningfully analysed only against the background of the state policies manifested in various rules and regulations governing labourers and also of the resistance of labourers against such rules and regulations. A comprehensive analysis of the trend and pattern of wage rate for the labourers in the unorganized sector in general and of agricultural labour in particular, therefore, calls for situating the wage changes in the totality of the broader political context which existed not only in the area of study but of the economic and political environment and the balance of class power at the national and global levels.

Given the setting, the major objective of the chapter is to review the labour struggles and the state policies with respect to agricultural labourers in Kerala. This chapter deals with the formation of labour organisations prior to the linguistic reorganisation of the state in 1956 and the crucial policy changes pertaining to wages, agricultural labourers and their working conditions brought forth by successive state governments since 1957. The chapter is divided into four sections. In the first section, the origins of labour movements and their graduation into mass-based radical political movements are analysed against the backdrop of the radical political environments and ideological shifts at the international level. Struggles and resistance put up by agricultural labourers are analysed in the second section. The third section deals with the state policies of minimum wage legislation for agricultural labourers in Kerala. In section 4, the social security schemes implemented by the Agricultural Workers Welfare Fund Board are analysed, followed by a few concluding remarks.
Section 1

6.1. The state and its policies on labour and wage

Any decision or act by the state falls under either a class for itself or a class by itself. The intervention of the state in disputes between labour and landlords, manifests itself in policies and ordinances promulgated relating to labour and capital, appointment of minimum wage committees and the wage size recommended by such committees, methodology employed to determine the wage size and the vigilance with which minimum wage are implemented and further the disbursement of benefits under social security schemes for labourers. In all these activities, the class bias of the state is reflected. It is important to understand the way in which a particular act of the state with respect to labour affects the class concerned because the state, as an important political institution, under different situations, does adapt its strategies in ways in which to ensure continued accumulation and social reproduction. There exists a plethora of writings on the character, content and the role of the state. The common thread that links the vast body of literature is their close proximity, either in terms of differences or by way of convergences, to the Marxian conceptualisation of the state. In the discussion on labour power and wages on the one side and on policy changes related to them on the other, the role and character of the state and its apparatus forms an inevitable part. The Marxian theory of the state attributed a central role to class struggle in the process of capitalist accumulation. Marx viewed the state in a modern capitalist economy as a private property of officials and it is used for their self-advancement, just the same way as master craftsmen and bourgeoisie used the state for their material interests. It was argued further that the state and its...

1 The literature on the state is aplenty and it is one of the areas in which social scientists have profusely contributed. The important works by Marx include: Marx, 1970; 1973; 1974 and Marx and Engels (1973). In addition to the work mentioned, Lenin and Engels have immensely contributed to characterize the state. To mention a few important other social scientists who contributed to the area: Althusser (1969; 1976); on the contemporary context include Holloway and Picciotto, (1976; 1977); Jessop (1977); Polantzas (1969; 1976); Milliband (1969). The list is interminably long.

officials, far from representing the common interest, tended to exploit and suppress the civil society on behalf of a particular social group. The state and the state power are simple surface reflections of the property relations and class struggle and, therefore, law, politics and legal relations are part of the superstructure, which is based on the economic base. It implied an one-to one correspondence between juridico-political relations and economic relations. Engels viewed the state as an institution that emerged pari passu with stages of development of the society. Engels held the view that function of the state was to regulate class struggle between antagonistic classes through repression and concessions, which would moderate class conflict without undermining the continued domination of the ruling class and the reproduction of the dominant mode of production. Precisely, Marxism-Leninism treated the state as a set of institutions facilitating class rule, which could be identified with a particular class.

For the present study, the extension of the Marxian frame of analysis made by a group of Marxists centered at Frankfurt would be more useful. They introduced into the study of the capitalist state a greater degree of historical specificity to the role of class struggle. The Frankfurt school insisted that the capitalist state could be understood only in terms of its changing functions in the class struggle over the organisation of the labour process and the

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5 In the discussion on the state, Miliband and Poulantzas stressed political and ideological struggles but left unaddressed the economic interpretation and requirements of capital accumulation. Miliband argued that the ideology of the ruling class was an important source of political power and social order and therefore politics cannot be discussed in isolation of its complex articulation with economic forces. Poulantzas held the view that the state was comprised of a complex set of social relations. By social relations, he meant classes, which should not be seen as simple economic forces existing outside the realm and independent of the state, capable of manipulating the state as a passive instrument. For the political influence, class and class fractions depend in part, on the institutional structure of the state and the state power. Further class struggles are not confined to the civil society, but reproduced within the heart of the state apparatus itself.
appropriation of surplus\textsuperscript{6}. In other words, the school held the view that the role and function of the state changed with the mode of production. In the stage of primitive accumulation of capital, the reproduction of labour would be based on the mercantilist policy of the state, which was transferred into \textit{laissez-faire} under capitalism. However, the state would continue intervening in the economic affairs of the society to regulate the self-destructive tendencies of ruthless competitiveness and to ensure general conditions necessary for accumulation through factory legislation and control over credits\textsuperscript{7}. As the process of capital accumulation continues, the socialisation of production and the tendency of the rate of profit to fall, would demand stronger intervention from the state to harness counter tendencies, which can be made possible by restructuring of capital, disciplining the labour force by re-imposing harsher capitalist controls over the labour process and above all further reassertion of bourgeoisie hegemony over the working class\textsuperscript{8}. The change from capitalism to liberal capitalism would pose a set of new issues to the state to ensure the continued accumulation on a world scale. The state must now enter into direct relations with individual capitals and increase the strength and scope of its means of intervention, and the adequate form of the state is the bourgeoisie parliamentary democracy, which would provide a forum for the representation of different fractions of the ruling class. As the mode of appropriation changes form liberal capitalism to monopoly capitalism, the role of parliamentary democracy would be weakened as capital seeks direct access to the executive and administration. To quote

\textit{“As accumulation proceeds, there is a growing tendency for the capitalist state to be transformed into a strong state characterized by a weak parliament, a powerful bureaucracy and marked participation by individual capitals and social democratic trade unions”}\textsuperscript{9}.

\textsuperscript{6} Von Braunmuth et al. (1973); Grerstenberger, (1975); Hirsch, (1977); Hollowat and Piccionitto, (1977)
\textsuperscript{8} Ibid p.365
\textsuperscript{9} Ibid
6.1.1. Political economy of labour regulations: A historical overview

Irrespective of the character of the state or sub-state in question, the state has to frame rules and regulations on labour to facilitate its historical and social function of perpetuating the dynamic process of capital accumulation and the social reproduction of labour to uninterrupted. The totality of all such rules and regulations is manifested in the class bias of the state. Legal regulations on labour is one of the diverse types of state interventions and the very context and content of such interventions is subject to change in conformity with the changes in the balance of class power not only in the realm of the state concerned, but at the global political environment, which, in turn, is indicative of the fact that the analysis of wage-related issues even in a sub-state like Kerala needs to be viewed in the broader spectrum of changes at the global, national and international levels.

It is rather well-known that the British-ruled colonies were subjected not only to crude ways of appropriation of surplus but to oppressive measures against peasants and labourers. Kerala was not an exception to this general pattern. Even though the degree of severity of oppression differed between the north (Malabar) and the south (Travancore-Cochin) of Kerala, to a very great extent, the nature and the context of oppressive regulations and rules were not significantly different.

A word is in order in this context on the common trend in the British policy towards labour movements and struggles for social and economic rights, in the major colonies of the imperial power. It was found that the nation states had broadly adopted two different strategies for appropriation of labourers and small peasants\textsuperscript{10}: i). Methods of coercion by which labour reforms were rejected and workers were denied their legitimate rights and the status quo was sought to be maintained by supporting and retaining the old and obsolete institutions of exploitation; ii). Policy of liberalism through which political

rights and reforms were recognised and labourers were granted a few concessions, intending primarily to suppress class contradictions.

The post-war period witnessed three distinct but broad phases in labour regulations at the global level. The two decades which followed immediately after the II world war (1940s and 1950s) formed the first phase; the 1960s and the 1970s constituted the second phase and the period since 1980s to the present day forms the third phase. To a very great extent, corresponding to the changes in labour relations at the global level, the character and content of democratically elected governments and policies and programmes of nation states with respect to labourers underwent considerable changes during these phases.

During the 1940s and the 1950s, there were upsurges in democratic movements all over the world, which were propelled by a set of factors: the anti-fascist war, the ideological shift of East European countries to socialist blocks, the defeat of Nazism, freedom movements in most of the erstwhile colonies and their release from the yoke of colonialism and state interventions. The growing influence of left-wing forces, the popularity of socialist ideas and pro-labour legislations compelled Western Europe to follow suit. It was under the influence of left politics in the 1950s that many of the West European countries framed rules, which included the right to work and worker representation in factories. For instance, the 40-hour working week in France and the laws to provide health and economic protection to working mothers in Italy were introduced during the 1950s. However, it was a period also of anti-labour legislations such as the Taft-Hartley Act in 1949 and the Landrum-Griffin Act in 1959, which were enacted in USA during the progressive phase.

Corresponding to the different phases observed in movements of macro-economic variables, important countries in the world too had undergone similar phases. For instance, USA, immediately after the period of the great Depression during 1927-47, during which the middleclass in the country experienced its highest rate of proliferation and witnessed a post-war boom during 1947-73. In USA, the period between 1973-80 witnessed stagflation characterized by a fall in real wages by 3 percent and a rise in the income of the richest 1 percent by 4 percent. The New Gilded Age, which was begun by 1980, registered a fall in real wages in manufacturing by 1 percent and a phenomenal rise in the rate of growth of income of those who were closer to US$ 227000 in 2004 (Crugaman, P.(2006). The Hindu Daily, Vol.129. No.198. p.11)
In India, it was the period of ascendancy of the left-wing politics, which assumed power in Kerala in 1957 and of the Nehruvian Socialist policies which gathered momentum at the national level.

Labour legislations in capitalist blocks were led by the economic theory of Keynes and the welfare state doctrine during the 1960s and the 1970s. Motivated by the objective of socio-economic and political stability, various progressive pro-labour reforms were implemented and social services were set up in education, health and housing. The question naturally arises in this context why the capitalist blocks were behaving differently during this period. The answer was simple. Monopoly capital, on having fully reaped the advantage of the first technological and scientific revolutions, besides providing a stable and rapid economic growth, raised the efficiency in production and productivity, and enjoyed manifold increase in profits. It extended the material base for social maneuvering, especially for increasing state allocation for social purposes. The political mobilisation by the labourers in France in May-June in 1968, in Italy in 1969, the civil Rights movement against Vietnam War in the USA, and the general strike by British miners in 1974 had all compelled monopoly capital in the era of modern capitalism to opt for maneuvering.

The 1980s was often characterised as a period of neo-conservative shift in labour laws. The shift has occurred not only in the laws and regulations governing labour but in the ideological sphere as well. Irrespective of the content and character of political parties in power in the 1950s and the 1960s, they, resorted to anti-labour laws in capitalist economies. The tactics and strategies against labourers were influenced by the consolidation of socio-economic life by the mighty transnational corporations. It is a fact that the mid-1970s experienced a two world-wide cyclical crises of over-production combined with equally acute and painful structural crises, which were compounded further by the balance of payment problem and the growing

public debt. Adding to them was the ever-rising military outlays. The employment sphere was characterised by mass elimination of technologically obsolete, unprofitable enterprises and inter-sectoral linkages, and introduction of the new labour-savings machinery, all of which resulted in a sharp increase in structural unemployment, which in turn contributed to the closing down traditional industries mostly in Third World agrarian economies. In the western literature, this phenomenon is called marginalisation. All these changes in the labour market in the modern capitalist economy, which have been taking place since the late 1970s have weakened labour movements and made it difficult for the working class to resist.

An analysis of the trend in the number of strikes (and the severity of strikes), and the duration of strikes in India from the 1960s clearly shows two broad phases, which were quite in agreement with the observed pattern narrated above. The number of strikes waged for daily employment in the material production sector (primary and secondary sectors) are continuously rising in the 1960s and the early 1970s. Barring an upsurge immediately after the withdrawal of the Emergency in the late 1970s, the severity of strikes and the number of days lost per strike (excluding the days lost from lockouts) declined sharply since the 1980s. Kerala was considered to be one of the strike-prone states in India. But the observed trend in the state in strike severity and days lost was perfectly in tune with not only the all-India pattern, but the strike severity considerably declined in the state during the 1980s. The same trend could be observed in the density of trade unions defined in terms of the number of members in trade unions in relation to total employment. The 1980s experienced severe unemployment of labourers particularly of women from Scheduled Castes who had been earlier employed in paddy fields. The agrarian front in India in general and Kerala in particular, since the second half of the 1990s, witnessed suicides of thousands of farmers and agricultural

13 Ibid Pp.22-29
14 Ibid P.28
16 Ibid Pp. 43-44
labourers who lost employment on account of the price fall of primary commodities. It is strange to note that the response of farmers’ organisations and political parties including radical political parties in the state, have been lukewarm. The spate of suicides is yet to take an agitation mood capable of compelling the state to find out ways to resolve the crisis. All these developments resulted in the weakening of the bargaining power of labourers and considerable deterioration in the real wages, living standards and relative social position of not only labourers but marginal and small farmers as well. The upsurge of radical movements and labour agitations and the response of the tepid state need to be viewed against this backdrop.

Section 2

6.2. Struggle and resistance of agricultural labourers in Kerala

In the history of the struggle of agricultural labourers in Kerala, different phases could be identified. Often, the history of the struggle of peasants and agricultural labourers in the state is divided into two phases: i). The phase of mobilisation (up to 1951\(^{17}\)) and, ii). The phase of institutionalization (After the formation of the first ministry in the present state of Kerala)\(^{18}\). In contrast to such an apolitical\(^{19}\) phasing of labour mobilisation which is an ever dynamic and never-ending process, the present study analyses the labour struggle in Kerala in the following five discernible phases. The basis of the classification is the response of labour to the strategies of capital: Phases identified are: i). Phase of severe repression (up to 1951); ii). Phase of consolidation (1952-1957); iii). Phase of articulation and struggle (1957-80); iv). Phase of transformation (1981-1997); v). Phase of resurgence (1998 onwards). The characteristics of each of these phases are briefly summarised as

\(^{17}\) It was in 1951 that the ban on the Communist Party was lifted after the Punnapra-Vayalar revolt of 1946. The leaders could come out and organise mass agitations against the oppressive measures on labourers imposed by the state as well as the landlords.


\(^{19}\) The phasing is apolitical because the characterization of labour mobilisation and its phasing needs to be otherwise related to the response of capital or to change in the mode of appropriation.
in Table 6.1. In the present section, it is not intended to unearth the causes and consequences of each phase; the discussion is confined to the specificities of the formation of labour unions and their struggles. For the sake of brevity, the review of the struggle of agricultural labourers is confined to the period prior to and immediately following the formation of linguistic states and the documentation of the struggle is limited to issues related to wages and working conditions of labourers in Kuttanad (Alapuzha) and Palakkad, two regions which witnessed the formation of agricultural workers unions in Travancore and Malabar and were the places of intensive labour struggles in Kerala.

The struggles and the resistance movements of agricultural labourers in Kerala for better wage and working conditions synchronised with the freedom struggle and mobilisation for various social reforms agitations. The subject was discussed in chapter 4 wherein it was shown that the agrarian relations which existed and the form and magnitude of surplus extraction by landlords on behalf of the imperial government in Britain were different in Thiruvithamcoor and Malabar. The brutality meted out to agricultural labourers, and small and marginal peasants led to a number of historic struggles in the state and the two important points to be emphasised with respect to agricultural labour mobilisation are: i). In Travancore, agitations and strikes of agricultural labourers were concentrated among paddy field labourers in Alapuzha district. ii). In the Malabar region, the appropriation by landlords and the imperial government was so severe that peasants and agricultural labourers jointly put up resistance and therefore, Kisan Sabhas or Karshaka Sanghams were formed rather than agricultural labour unions as was the case in Travancore. At the outset, it needs to be stated that the labour struggle for better pay and working conditions cannot be viewed in isolation of various social reforms movements and that the struggle took place as apart of the freedom struggle.

In Alapuzha district, Kuttanad is the area where paddy cultivation is concentrated. The region is known as the 'Rice Bowl of Kerala'. It is perhaps the only region (after the Netherlands) in the world where farming is done below the sea level.
Table 6.1. Phases in the history of agricultural labourers' struggle in Kerala during 20th century

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phase</th>
<th>Period of phase</th>
<th>Characteristics of the phase</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Till 1951</td>
<td>Phase of severe repression and suppression of labourers by the imperial power and their local agents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>1952-57</td>
<td>Phase of consolidation: During this phase, after the lift of ban on unionisation, labour unions were strengthened.</td>
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<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>1958-80</td>
<td>Phase of articulation and struggle: Important struggles for hutment dwelling, land grabbing for the distribution of surplus land to peasants and labourers, struggles against eviction of peasants, for land reforms, and for agricultural workers Act and incessant struggles for wage hike and other economic and social benefits. An important factor distinguishing the third phase from the earlier phases is the success of the labour movement to get its demands accepted. This period also witnessed proliferation of labour unions among agricultural labourers.</td>
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<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>1981-97</td>
<td>Phase of placidity: Barring a few but localized strikes, this period is characterised by absence of mobilization and strikes. The area under labour-intensive food crops started declining and was replaced by cash crops grown not only in the paddy fields but in dry land too.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>1998-till date</td>
<td>Phase of resurgence: The exploitation of labour and small peasants intensified in this phase. This phase is characterised by a spate of suicides by peasants and a significant fall in the number of days of employment for agricultural labourers.</td>
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Source: Based on literature review,

6.2.1. Agricultural Labourers' struggles and resistance in Travancore upto 1957

Owing to the specificities born out of the diversity in crops grown, labour migration, political vibrancy and the geographical positioning of the state, Kerala had been integrated into the world economy by way of trade much ahead of many other states in India. Changes in political and economic conditions of the world, exerted profound influence in the local economy and,
therefore, the analysis of the historical evolution of labour unions, struggles, agitations and state policies in Kerala needs to be situated against this backdrop. The history of mobilisation of agricultural labourers in the state is closely interwoven with social and political movements in the state, which in turn trace their origin to the caste-based trade union movements of factory workers in Alapuzha district. Caste-based organisations were formed in as early as the last quarter of the 19th century, which, in due course graduated towards a critical political posture against the then prevailing economic and political order, in the princely states of Travancore and Cochin. The Malayali Memorial (1891) submitted by persons of the intermediary castes against the discrimination of the princely state was the first of its kind. Following the Memorial, a good number of caste organisations sprang up in quick succession in Travancore and Cochin. Important among them were *Tiruvitamkur Ilava Sabha*, the *Sree Narayana Darma Paripalana Sangham* (SNDP) represented Ezhava community in 1903. The *Sadhuva Paripalana Sabha* was formed by Ayyankali in 1905, *The Vala Samudaya Parishkaraa Sabha* came up in 1910, *The Kalyanodayathi Sabha* was formed in 1912. The three organisations last in this list represented different castes of *Avarnas* (backward communities). During the same period, people from *Savarnas* (forward communities) too organised on caste lines such as *The Yoga*

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21 For instance, the world economic depression had left a devastating impact on the regional economy which was manifested in terms of an unprecedented fall in price, unbearable and agonising wage cuts, and retrenchment of workers. One thousand coconuts fetched Rs 54/- in 1928; but the corresponding amount in 1933 was only Rs 19. In response to the price fall, the organisation of farmers in *Tiruvitanceor*, submitted a memorandum to the Sivaswamy committee of Travancore (Economic Depression Committee Report, Trivandrum, 1931). As a result of the price compression, debts of small and marginal farmers accumulated on an unprecedented scale (Report of the Agricultural Redemption Committee, Trivandrum, 1935) and the farmers were forced to sell off their land to moneylenders and speculators (Thampi, A.N., 1941: part I.P.26). Another similar example of the influence of changes in the world economy on Kerala was the experience during the Second World War period. The scaling up of prices of primary commodities, particularly coconut led to concentration of wealth in fewer hands. The price of coconut per 1000 nuts registered an increase from Rs 25-30 to Rs 150 between 1939 and 1944-45 (*The Government English Records, C S No 523, Trivandrum*)

Ksheme Sabha, founded in 1908 and Nair Service Society (NSS), formed in 1914. In 1910, people of Pulaya community, under the leadership of Ayyankali, refused to do harvesting rice in protest against the ban on the admission of their children in departmental schools in which upper castes people were enrolled.

Much before the mobilisation and formation of agricultural labour unions, trade unions had been formed and had become hyper active in Travancore. Such unions were formed mostly by workers in coir factories. The primary objective of unionisation was the mobilisation of workers for capture of state power by the use of radical political ideology. In the charged political environment in Alapuzha district, the first agricultural labourers union called Thiruvithamcore Karshaka Thozhilali Union (TKTU) was formed in 1940. Even though the union was led by the then communist leaders, it was formed as an independent organisation. TKTU led its first ever organised struggle in the history of agricultural labourers in Kerala in 1941 with the following demands:

1. Fixation of working hours;
2. Use of standard measure for wage payments in kind;
3. Interval for lunch.

The suppression of the struggle and the various forms of brutalities unleashed by landlords in Alapuzha district were described by aged agricultural labourers (see appendixes 1 to 5). Among those three demands, landlords accepted only one, the demand for half an hour of lunch break, and the demand for wage hike was downright rejected. However, in spite of their high status and oligopsonic positions in the employment markets, landlords in Kuttanad in the 1940s were...

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23 Labour unions had been formed initially as labour welfare organisations and movements like Brotherhood Movement of Sahodaran Ayyappan were instrumental in bringing workers together. Alapuzha was the nerve centre of the coir industry and the first union, named 'Labour Union' was formed there in March 31, 1922. In July 1922, the union was renamed as Travancore Labour Association. The historic struggles like Punnapra Vayalar and other agitations against the misrule of the imperial state were led by the union under the leadership of radical political movements in the region. The background became sufficiently radical by the late 1930s for agricultural workers to engage in a bargain with big landlords and raise their demands. The environment was graduated to this level with the formation of labour unions among factory workers.


25 Ibid. P.46.
compelled to accept the demand for lunch break an act which became a great morale booster to the workers' organisation. TKTU became popular among agricultural labourers and on having gained the strength from mobilisation and the past struggle, TKTU organised its second historic strike against the severe oppressive measures resorted to by one of the biggest landlords in Kuttanad known as Thevara Kattu Thomman, who owned a vast area of paddyland known as Managalm Kayal in 1943\textsuperscript{26}. Since the repeated requests from labourers were tuned down by the landlord, agricultural labourers gave a call for strike and the strike lasted for 17 days. The duration of the strike assumed special significance as alternative sources of income or employment for the agricultural labourers in Kuttanad were virtually non-existent. Important demands raised in the strike were: i). Hike in annual payment after harvest from 25 to 100 kg of rice, ii). Clearing of arrears due to labourers. As the labourers stopped working in the field, the landlord was forced to concede their demand. One of the historic mobilisations and struggles by labourers in Travancore was the famous Punnpra-Vayalar revolt of 1946. Even though the revolt was against the proclamations of the then Travancore Dewan, Sir C.P. Ramaswamy Iyer on United Kerala and American model constitution in Travancore, it was part of the freedom struggle and against anti-labour practices, economic compression, food shortage and suffering of the rural masses during the period immediately following the World war-II\textsuperscript{27}. Consequent upon the strike, TKTU was banned which was lifted only in 1951.

\textsuperscript{26} Ibid. P.37.
\textsuperscript{27} It is known as Punnapra-Vayalar Uprising-1946. Punnapra and Vayalar are two villages in Alapuzha district, where the confrontation between labourers and the mighty army of Travancore led by C.P. Ramaswamy Iyyer took place. In the armed struggle, trade union activists, communist party workers and rural masses from Ambalapuzha and Cherthala joined hands and the direct armed struggle of the people with the army lasted for four days from October 24\textsuperscript{th} to October 28\textsuperscript{th}, 1946. Three important demands which led to the uprising were the cessation of princely rule in Travancore, the acceptance of the idea of United Kerala and the establishment of democracy. In the upheaval, landlords and the rich sections of the rural society from all castes sided with the state to suppress the mobilisation of labourers. The government declared martial law and unleashed terror in Cherthala and Ambalapuzha taluks in Alapuzha under the command of the dewan. The rural masses attacked the mighty army with crude wooden spears. About 300 to 700 persons were reported to have been killed in the police firing in 12 centres in these two Taluks. The struggle built up the base for the struggle of agricultural labourers and improved the working conditions and wage rates in the state
As soon as the ban was lifted, TKTU presented a charter of 44 demands, which comprised a hike in the wage rate for harvesting from $1/12^{th}$ to $1/10^{th}$ of the produce. The daily wage rates of women labourers was demanded to be raised from two and half measures to three measures of rice. In 1953, labour unions and the landlords reached an agreement by which the following demands of workers were accepted:\(^{28}\)

1. Wage rates of women labourers to be raised to three measures of rice;
2. Working hours in the kayal land to be fixed as 7 hours and for karanilam as 8 hours
3. Half an hour rest at work during lunch-time.

In spite of the agreement reached between labour unions and farmers, the provisions of the agreement were not implemented, as the result of which the call was made for another strike in 1955 by TKTU. One of the important demands raised in the strike was for 'Theerppu'. Theerppu is a maintenance allowance for the workers during the period between harvest and the final clearing of wages in kind. The strike was held in K.M.Kora’s field. Even though the landlord resisted the implementation of the terms of the agreement, he had, finally, to succumb. All the major political parties had their agricultural labour unions in Travancore and all these unions were active in their own ways.

In Cochin, trade union activities and political consciousness were as rigorous as Travancore. However, the constitutional reforms carried out in Cochin served to a certain extent to keep the class struggle at bay. Though the agricultural workers union was not as much mobilized in Cochin as in Travancore, the historic struggle by the workers of Amballoor\(^{29}\) Textiles Mills and the agitation of toddy workers of Anthicadu did prepare the ground for political activism and strengthened the bargaining power of agricultural

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labourers. In Cochin, the mobilisation of workers in the unorganized sector was centered mostly around the toddy workers.

6.2.2. Peasant struggle in Malabar up to 1956

The exploitation of small peasants and agricultural labourers in the Malabar region was severe. Therefore peasants and agricultural labourers were mobilised together to put up resistance against the imperial government and landlords. In Malabar, *Kisansabha* was formed in every district which gave leadership to joint struggles of agricultural labourers and farmers. In order to suppress the resistance from the part of Muslims, the British government enacted the Mopalah Outrageous Act\(^{30}\). In 1921, Mopalahs in Malabar organised against the oppressive measures and led the historic revolt known in history as *Mopalah Revolt*, which rendered later a strong base for peasant movements in Malabar. In order to provide relief to the peasants, who had suffered during the period of the Great Depression (1929-33), a peasant organisation was formed in Kodungloor in 1933\(^{31}\). Like Travancore, social reform movements, in Malabar too supplied an ample base for class-based political mobilisation of people. Among the movements, the demand for the rights of lower castes to enter temples along with other people of the Hindu community was a notable one. Following the Guruvayoor Satyagraha in 1935, for the first time in the history of Kerala, *Karshaka Sanghams* were formed under progressive political movements. *Karshaka Sanghams* were formed in different places in Malabar which took up issues such as the right of tenants to collect green leaves and firewood form private forests, the issuance of receipts for rent payment and abolition of non-rent extractive measures. Subsequent to the formation of the Congress Socialist Party in Kerala, peasant organisations were formed all over Kerala. The Malabar *Karshaka Sangham* was formed in

\(^{30}\) Ibid. P.16.

\(^{31}\) Ibid.

170
A series of agitations and revolt took place all over the Malabar region immediately after the formation of Karshaka Sanghams. Important demands raised by framers included fixity of tenure and security of tenancy, norms for fair rent and use of standard measures for measuring rent payments. Abolition of non-rent extractions and conferment of ownership right on occupants of dwelling hutments were the major demands of labourers. In Malabar, the Kayyur revolt of 1946 was the most historic one. As the government refused to grant any of the demands raised by peasants, peasants and labourers organised a protest meeting and the severe shortage for food articles compelled them to block the movement of rice which was on its way to the Raja of Chiraackal as rent. The blockade resulted in a police firing killing two labourers.

6.2.3. Agricultural labour struggle after the formation of Kerala

Receiving impetus from the upsurge and upheavals in different parts of India and the world over and drawing inspiration from the wide popularity that left ideology was gaining during the late 1940s and early 1950s, agricultural labourers in the state too beefed up their agitations against the anti-labour policies of the government as well as the oppressive measures resorted to by landlords. During the period 1950-58, as many as 2279 labour strikes were reported in Kuttanad, of which 55 percent were related to the wage question, 33 percent to hours of work and 12 percent to other social issues. The assumption of power by the communist ministry in Kerala in 1957 assumed

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32 The formation of farmers organisations in Malabar region is traced to a private meeting of a few tenants at the residence of V.M.Bharatheeyan at Kalacherry village of Thaliparambu Taluk in July 1935 (George, J.1992. P.17).

33 In the history of labour struggle in Kerala, Kayyur uprising is considered as important as the Punnap-Vayalar revolt in Travancore, even though the incident was related to a policeman who was drowned to death by the activists who were holding a march against the police's excess in the village during the preceding days. Even though the immediate cause of the struggle may not be directly related to the wage issue, Kayyur upheaval was primarily against the excessive rent appropriation and oppression of tenants by landlords who were the agents of the imperial government. Kayyur is a remote village in Kasargod Taluk of the former Canara district.

crucial significance and it boosted the morale of the working class in general and agricultural labourers in particular. The communist government announced two policy decisions relating to wages and labour agitations, which had far-reaching consequences on the working relations in the agrarian sector in Kerala. The first was the appointment of a Minimum Wages Committee (MWC) and the strict implementation of the Committee’s recommendations. The second was the policy of non-intervention of the police force in labour disputes\(^{35}\). The policy of the new government compelled landlords to abandon their retaliatory approach towards labourers and sought to settle labour disputes through dialogue and conciliation. The communist government took four crucial policy decisions: i). Occupancy rights over hutments and dwelling places of labourers (*kudikidappavakasam*); ii). Prevention of eviction of tenants; iii). Non-interference of the police in labour disputes; iv). Appointment of MWCs and their strict implementation. The conciliatory approach was made possible with the constitution of an Industrial Relations Committee (IRC) to enable farmers and labourers for settlement of disputes. Soon after the announcement of the policy decision and appointment of MWC for Travancore, agricultural workers in Kuttanad demanded in 1958 a hike in wage rate to Rs 2.50 for males and Rs 1 for females and reduction of working hours from 12 hours to 8 hours\(^{36}\). In spite of the out right denial by landlords to reduce the working hours, labour unions unilaterally decided working hours, from 9 to 12 am and from 2 to 5 pm\(^{37}\) and made arrangements to announce in and out timings of agricultural labourers by raising the red flag in the agricultural fields, by union activists. In due course, the practice became very popular and to a very great extent landlords became unable to make any alternation to the working hours that labourers fixed for themselves. Landlords responded to the regulations on working hours and wage fixation declared by the union, by introducing mechanisation in agriculture. In the absence of

\(^{35}\) Ibid P.50

\(^{36}\) Ibid

alternative employment opportunities in Kuttanad, trade unions were left with no option but to oppose the introduction of tractors in paddy fields for ploughing. In the agrarian front in Kuttanad, the struggle during the 1960s was directed mostly towards the mechanisation of agriculture. Landlords adopted other labour saving machines such as introduction of threshers, weedicides and transplanting machines, which was also resisted strongly by workers. Landlords attempted to resist the pressure of workers with muscle power by forming a union of able-bodied cadres who blocked resistance to mechanisation in their fields.

Another notable policy decision by the left government which had significant impact on production, productivity and employment as well as on the living standard of workers was the introduction of the Agrarian Relations Bill. The bill aimed at a comprehensive land reform programme in the state. However, before the Bill was enacted, following the unholy alliance of the middle class and the upper class of society which organised themselves on caste and community basis under Indian National Congress, led the notorious Vimochanasamaram against the working class bias policies of the communist government, which culminated in the dismissal of the communist ministry by the Centre in 1959.

The split in the Communist movement in India in 1964 had wide ramifications in Kerala too, and inter-party rivalries and infights followed within the working class movement in the state weakening the labour movement as a whole. Sooner than later, the moment regained momentum and the Communist Party of India (Marxist) was voted to power in the state in 1967 and the ministry reintroduced the Agrarian Relation Bill in the Assembly. However, the communist ministry lost power to rightist forces in 1969. The 1960s and the early 1970s witnessed incessant struggles for implementation of the Minimum Wages Act and land reforms. The Agrarian Relations Bill received the assent of the President on 18th December 1969. It was followed by the announcement of the state government that the Bill would come into effect

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38 Ibid P.55
Another historic struggle waged during the 1970s was the one for the rights on land for hutment dwelling. As a result of the long struggle led by labourers and tenants together, labourers were granted *de facto* right to their huts and 10 cents of land around the huts. The eviction of tenants was also made impossible by the Act. The rights over hutment and the dwelling place along with the non-eviction provision in the Act, improved the status of agricultural labourers in the state, beyond recognition. Following the introduction of the Agrarian Relations Act, the government was compelled to take over the vast paddy fields owned by big landlords in the Kuttanad area, *viz.*, Rani field, and the Chithira and Marthandam fields of Murikan. These paddy fields came to be run under the auspices of the state as co-operative farms. But in due course, this arrangement ran into rough weather due to lack of sincerity on the part of the state government and the co-operative mismanagement. However, the struggle for hike in wages and for implementation of recommendations of the MWCs continued in the 1970s.

KSKTU organised a land grab agitation in the 1970s. The agitation was intended to take hold of the surplus land (land above the permissible limit of the Land Ceiling Act) possessed by a wealthy farmer and to distribute that land to landless agricultural labourers in the state. The land grab agitation commenced on May 26th, 1972 and lasted for 80 days. The state apparatus unleashed violent repressive measures against labourers, which the labourers resisted and defeated. The land grab agitation in the state compelled the government to include the Land Reforms Act in the IX schedule of the Constitution and to accelerate its implementation. KSKTU continued its struggles in six phases to exert pressure on the government for implementation of land reforms and the 7th phase of the agitation could not take-off as an internal emergency was declared in June 1975. The 7th stage could be resumed only by January 1979.

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40 Each field had an area above 1000 acres, which the landlords appropriated to themselves through reclaiming backwater (kayals). Murikkan was one of the wealthiest farmers as well as a businessman in Kuttanad. He possessed extensively vast areas of kayal.
In Malabar, agitations of agricultural labourers for better pay and working conditions waged, after the formation of the state in 1956 became widespread in the Palakkad district. The distinguishing feature of this district is its high percentage of agricultural labourers belonging to Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes and also the predominance of rice as the major crop. During the 1950s and the 1960s, there was a series of agitations in the agrarian front in the Palakkad district. The labour strike in the paddy field of Pazhanyappa Mudaliyar of Kizhakkethara at Kollangode in September 1954 was the first in the series. An important demand raised in the strike was the hike in wage rate to 1/11th of the produce for harvesting paddy and four measures of rice (4 Edangazhi) as wages for male labourers and three measures of rice for female labourers, in other agricultural operations. In the same year, agricultural labourers in Kollengode struck work in the field of Balakrishna Manadiyar, who refused to give 1/11th of the produce as wages for harvesting. The practice that prevailed then was that the labourers should plough the paddy field and female labourers should do the replanting till noon. In the afternoon harvesting would start, but wages for the work done till noon would be paid only for the harvesting work, late in the evening. Labourers opposed this nefarious practice and demanded wages for the entire work done during the day. After resisting the demand of labourers for a while, the landlords were compelled ultimately to concede to the demand. In response to certain anti-labour provisions in the Malabar Tenancy (Amendment) Act of 1954, labourers launched a widespread protest in Palakkad district along with the demand for a hike in wage rate, freedom to wear upper cloth and non-eviction of kudikidappu and Kudiyirippu of labourers.41

A notable change in the agrarian front in Malabar in the 1960s was the sharpening of the contradiction between farmers and labourers. It has already been mentioned elsewhere that farmers and labourers jointly put up resistance and it was therefore that farmers unions (Karshaka Sanghams) were formed.

The scenario changed by the 1960s and a separate organisation for agricultural labourers was formed in 1968. The 1970s witnessed a series of agitations mostly centered around economic issues and fixation of working hours. The incessant struggles resulted in a wage hike from $1/8^{th}$ of the produce to $1/6^{th}$, during the period 1970 to 1972. Like in the case of Travancore, 1970s witnessed agitations for land-grabbing, its distribution of surplus land and implementation of land reforms. The achievements made in wage hike and the improvements in working conditions were subverted by landlords during the emergency. As a result, a series of struggles were waged immediately after the withdrawal of Emergency in 1977. The agitations in Palakkad and Alapuzha had their ripple effects in the wage rates and working conditions of labourers in other districts of Kerala also. In certain parts of the Palakkad districts, namely Kozhinjampara, Eruthempathy and Vadkarapathy where unionization was relatively weak, agricultural labourers had to work for 12 hours a day for a wage rate which was much lower than in other places in the district.

The mobilisation of agricultural labourers in Kerala was not confined to the communist party or other left political parties; all political parties in the state have their agricultural labour wings as well as farmers wings. Other than under KSKTU, agricultural labourers were organised under the banner of important political parties in the state such as the Indian National Congress (DKTF), Communist Party of India (KSKTE), Revolutionary Socialist Party (KSPKTF), BJP (HKMU) and Janata Dal (JKTU).

The 4th and the 5th phases, shown in Table 6.1 call for a brief discussion. During the 4th phase of the agricultural labour struggles in the state, certain major changes took place, which may summarized as follows. i). After the lift of the ban on inter-state movement of rice, rice became available in the state at prices lower than its cost of production of rice in the state; rice was brought from other rice producing states in India. As a result, the price of rice remained more or less stable and unchanged while the cost of major inputs kept on rising; ii). After the implementation of land reforms, large holdings

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42 Ibid. P.67
and big landlords ceased to exist and small and marginal farmers found it difficult to survive with the income from agriculture alone, particularly income from rice cultivation; iii). In order not to leave paddy lands fallow, coconut and other perennial but less labour-absorptive crops began to be planted since the 1980s, as a result of which the area under rice cultivation declined from 1975 onwards; iv). Owing to its relative price stability and profitability rubber replaced food crops such as tapioca from dry lands particularly in certain districts like Kottayam, Pathanamthitta, Kollam, Ernakulam, Thiruvananthapuram and Kannur; v). The inflow of foreign remittances following massive labour migration to West Asian countries since the mid-1970s and the subsequent construction boom in the state pushed up the demand for labourers, which attracted agricultural labourers from rural areas to urban centres. The recorded increase in the real wage rate for agricultural labourers and other agricultural labourers during the 1980s and the phase of tranquility in the agrarian front may also be perceived against the backdrop of these developments. The liberalisation drive initiated since mid-1991 removed non-tariff barriers and reduced substantially tariff barriers on imports and the effective rates of protection of domestically produced primary products resulting in large-scale imports of agricultural commodities into India. Further, the price fall of primary commodities since the mid-1990s led to a spate of suicides, which caused, to a lesser extent, an upsurge in the labour movement particularly of small and marginal farmers in Kerala.

Section 3

6.3. Minimum wage legislation and its implementation in Kerala

As outlined above, an important function of the state is to ensure the social reproduction of labour. For the social reproduction process to continue uninterrupted, labourers should be paid a wage rate sufficient to subsist and rear the younger generation. The state is often compelled to intervene and legislate because employers would always tend to keep wages at their barest minimum possible. Viewed from the labourers side, for the fixation of
minimum wages, continuous fight with labour is inevitable because minimum wage legislation and its implementation would tilt income distribution in favour of labourers. However, minimum wage legislation and its strict implementation is a reflection of the state's policy towards labour. Statutory legislations such as the Minimum Wages Act, 1948, the Equal Remuneration Act, 1946, the Contract Labour system (Abolition) Act, 1970, the Bonded Labour System (Abolition) Act, 1976, and the Inter-state Migration Workmen (Regulation, Employment and Conditions of Service) Act, 1979 have been enacted at the state's initiative to ensure the minimum subsistence level of income to labourers, among the statutory legislations, the Minimum Wages Act, 1948, assumes special significance. Its objective was to bring all labourers engaged in different occupations in which wages tended to be kept at their barest minimum, within its purview. Minimum wage legislation and its implementation is aimed at tilting the income distribution in favour of low-paid workers and the realisation of its benefits depends on the extent of price control on wage goods and the available days of employment.

Minimum wage committees were constituted for agricultural labourers prior to 1953 in Bihar, Gujarat, Punjab, Maharashtra, Uttar Pradesh and West Bengal. Kerala (Travancore-Cochin and Malabar) belonged to the second set of states in which the minimum wages committees for the agricultural sector were constituted. A committee was appointed in 1953 to recommend minimum wages for workers in the agricultural sector for the Travancore-Cochin state and the committee submitted its report in 1956. For the fixation

43 The origin of the Minimum Wage Act, 1948, can be traced to early 1920s when K.C.R. Choudhuri placed a resolution in the Bengal Legislative Council in 1921. The resolution was then rejected on grounds of lack of adequate information on the existing wage rates in different industries in the unorganised sector and the shortage of staff to oversee its implementation. In 1928, the International Labour Conference focused on the imperative of introducing a minimum wage regulating machinery. The Royal Commission on Labour emphasised the importance of a statutory legislation making the payment of minimum wage mandatory in industries where sweated labourers work. By mid-1930s, when the Congress party assumed office in most of the provinces, the issue of minimum wages legislation was again pushed forward and eventually, Labour Enquiry Committees were constituted in the provinces of Bombay, Bihar and Central and United Provinces. In 1944, the fourth meeting of the Standing Labour Committee recommended that a separate minimum wage legislation should be enacted in India (Mohanakumar.S and Sharma, R.K., 2000).
of minimum wage in the Malabar region and for the revision of the recommended wage rate for agricultural labourers in the Travancore-Cochin region, a committee was appointed in the state of Kerala and the report was submitted in 1963. For the state as a whole, the first minimum wage committee (MWC) to fix wage for work in agriculture was appointed in 1969. It submitted its report in 1973. The first MWC for Travancore-Cochin region had observed that labourers engaged in agricultural operations were a depressed class and that most of them were landless. The committees defined agricultural labourers as "all those who are hired for agricultural operations permanently attached to a farm and those who are employed temporarily on a causal basis". The first MWC for Travancore-Cochin region had undertaken a detailed study of the socio-economic conditions of agricultural labourers in the region. For the committee, enquiry was conducted in 21 agricultural villages, for formulating a wage rate acceptable to both labourers and farmers.

The family budget survey conducted in 2398 households by the committee divulged that 45.70 percent of the total agricultural labourers in the state were employed at least for some part of the year and that there were 1011 non-working male members for every 1000 working male members and 1394 non-working female members for every 1000 working female members. Further, it was estimated that the average income per family of 5.4 consumption units was Rs 37 per annum, which formed only 24.30 percent of the then estimated per capita income of the country. The average number of days of employment for a male worker was 201 days and for a female worker 131 days per annum. To arrive at a 'fair wage' which included subsistence plus 'small luxuries and comforts', the MWC of 1953 estimated the family budget of agricultural labourers as well as the cost of production of and net return from cultivation. For an agricultural labour family consisting 5.4 consumption units, the average annual income was estimated at Rs 370 against an expenditure of Rs 450. The estimated consumption expenditure of an

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45 Ibid. P.
average agricultural labour household could be met only if an agricultural labourer was employed for all the 365 days in a year at a daily wage rate of Rs 1.25. Given the interrupted nature of employment in agriculture, employment throughout the year was considered rather unrealistic. Therefore, the committee arrived at the conclusion that the possible number of days of employment during a year for an average agricultural labour family consisting of an adult male, a female worker and an adolescent male worker was 201 days for an adult male worker and the adolescent and 130 days for the female worker.

The second MWC for Employment in Agriculture (1963) held the view that the nature of agricultural operations and the standard of living of the agricultural workers were fairly uniform in the Travancore-Cochin and the Malabar regions. Therefore the committee opined that there was no need to recommend separate wage rates for these two regions. It was observed further that the wage levels that prevailed in Palghats and Kozhikode districts of the Malabar region for the same type of work had been significantly different, with Palghat recording the lowest wage rate and Kozhikode, the highest\(^6\). In the light of this observed disparity, MWC maintained that (a) the wage rate that prevailed in the Kozhikode district would be considered the representative wage for the Malabar region; and (b) since the lower rate ruling in the Palghat district was in sharp contradiction to the high yield of paddy per acre in the district, the workers in that district should also receive a wage rate equivalent that ruling in Kozhikode district. The other recommendations of the MWC included a proper housing scheme, establishment of agro-processing industries to accommodate the seasonally unemployed agricultural labourers and provisions to improve productivity to enable the cultivators to enhance their paying capacity. One of the recommendations of the MWC, emphasizing the importance of organizing agricultural workers co-operatives to rescue them from the clutches of rural moneylenders, calls for special mention. The

committee observed that "Agricultural labourers are given their wages partly in kind and a considerable quantity of the paddy paid to them as wages during the harvest season, was sold off to clear past debts and commitments and to meet the needs such as purchase of clothes, utensils etc and conduct of social functions such as marriages, all of which were generally postponed to this season when they would be receiving maximum earnings.

"The result was that the labourer was forced to sell his paddy to the moneylender cum trader to whom he had already been indebted, the terms of transactions were often very unfavorable to him. Later, the labourers purchased rice at a much higher price, with the result that he did lose on both accounts. The Committee recommended co-operative credit societies as a source of borrowing for the agricultural worker which would help them to hold back the paddy for future consumption and sell the surplus at a fairly reasonable market price."47

An important difference to be noted between the recommendations of the first and the second MWCs on employment in agriculture was that the recommended rates for male labourers (general agricultural operations) in 1956 and in 1963 (or the year in which the recommended rate was likely to come into effect) were higher in Trivandrum and Trichur district (Table 6.2). For the Quilon district, the recommended rate was lower by 6 percent and for Kottayam, it fell short of the ruling wage rate by 21 percent in year of implementation of MW(1958-59). Except for Kottayam, the recommended rates by the first MWC for female agricultural labourers were on the higher side for all the districts. It was logical to presume that the observed disparity between the actual and the recommended wage rate in the Kottayam district have been on account of the fact that the committee failed to make a realistic assessment and estimation of the subsistence requirements of agricultural labourers in Kottayam, which, in turn, got shaped up through the historical interplay of social, political and economic forces in those region. However, the fact remains that compared to the subsequent MWCs, the first MWC could take into account, to a very large extent, the biological and the cultural

subsistence requirements of agricultural labourers as is revealed by the narrowness in the gap between the recommended and actual wage size in the other districts and Travancore - Cochin region.

Table 6.2. Actual wages and Wages recommended by the first MWC for agricultural labourers by districts in Travancore-Cochin.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>District</th>
<th>Wage rate which prevailed in 1954(^1) (Rs)</th>
<th>Recommended wage rate in 1956(^2) (Rs)</th>
<th>Wage rate which prevailed in 1958-59 (Rs)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trivandrum</td>
<td>1.18</td>
<td>0.75</td>
<td>1.30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quilon</td>
<td>1.12</td>
<td>0.70</td>
<td>1.18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kottayam</td>
<td>1.05</td>
<td>0.75</td>
<td>1.18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trichur</td>
<td>1.18</td>
<td>0.65</td>
<td>1.30</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: 1. Recommended wage rates for Travancore-Cochin area for general agricultural operations were Rs.1.25 (male) and Rs.0.90 (female).

2. MWC was appointed in 1954 and the report came out in 1956.

Table 6.3. Actual Wages and Wages recommended by the First MWC for agricultural labourers for different agricultural operations. (Rs)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Agricultural operations</th>
<th>First Recommended wage rate in 1956</th>
<th>MWC Recommended wage rate in 1956</th>
<th>Second MWC Recommended wage rate in 1956</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. General agricultural operations (8 hours of work)</td>
<td>1.25</td>
<td>0.85</td>
<td>1.70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Coconut plucking (100 trees)</td>
<td>3.12 plus 2 nuts</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>5.00 plus 4 nuts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Ploughing</td>
<td>2.75 (5 hrs)</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>2.75 (8 hrs)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.i. with labourers’ bullocks</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.ii. with cultivators’ bullocks</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Harvesting and threshing</td>
<td>2/19 of the yield</td>
<td>2/19(^{th}) of the yield</td>
<td>1/9(^{th}) of the yield(*)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: 1. If the ground prepared for threshing was not located near the paddy field, at the rate of one ground per every 200 acres of paddy field, labourers were entitled to remuneration for carrying ‘Katta’ to the threshing ground.

2. NA = not available

The wage rates recommended by the first and second MWCs are to a great extent comparable, in the light of the view expressed by the second MWC that the wage rates suggested for Travancore-Cochin region could be made applicable to the Malabar region as well. Table 6.3 compares the wage rates for different agricultural operations as recommended by the first and the second MWCs. It is seen that during the period between 1956 and 1963, the wage rate recommended for male and female agricultural labourers increased by 36 percent. There was a 60 percent increase in the money wage rates for coconut plucking and the number of nuts which labourer were entitled to receive as part of his wage (in kind) increased by 100 percent. For ploughing, Table 6.4. Daily wage rates for agricultural labourers recommended by various MWCs-1973-2002. (Rs)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year and date</th>
<th>Recommended wage rate</th>
<th>Prevailed wage rate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1973 (29.6.1973)</td>
<td>4.50</td>
<td>3.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1975 (3.9.1975)</td>
<td>8.00</td>
<td>6.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1984 (30.5.1984)</td>
<td>15.00</td>
<td>12.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1992 (31.3.1992)</td>
<td>40.20</td>
<td>30.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2002 (9.6.2003)</td>
<td>125.00</td>
<td>72.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: 1. In the MWC report vol. XLVIII, No.996, dated 9th June 2003, wage rates for men and women are not given separately. However, wages have been fixed separately for hard work and soft work. From the categorization, it is clear that the works usually performed by men are included under hard work and those worked performed by women labourers are categorised as soft work. 2. NA= not available

Source: Report of the MWC for employment in agriculture, relevant years.

The daily wage rate for the category of labourers who ploughed by using cultivators' bullocks was hiked while keeping unchanged the rate for ploughing with labourers bullocks. The observed difference in the wage rate for the same operation calls for an in-depth enquiry. The piece rate for harvesting and threshing recorded a marginal improvement from 2/9th share of the yield to a 1/9th of the yield, between 1956 and 1963. It is important to note that the increase in the wage rate, which had considerable impact on the standard of living of the labourers engaged in agricultural operations, was the increase in the case of general agricultural operations. Between the 1955-56 and 1960-61, the price index for Kerala (with base 1950-51) increased from 81 to 125, indicating a significant fall in real income of the agricultural labourers.
The second MWC recommended wage rates for the Travancore-Cochin region which was to be made applicable to the Malabar region as well without change. In 1963, the year in which the Committee submitted the report, the prevailing wage rate for male agricultural labourers engaged in general agricultural operations and that for female labourers, in the Travancore and Cochin regions were higher by 23 percent and 5 percent respectively than the recommended rate. In the second year of submission of the second MWC report, the recommended wage rate for male agricultural labourers was less by 53 percent than the prevailing wage rate.

The minimum wage for agricultural labourers in Kerala have been revised at seven time points since 1963. The wage rate suggested by the second committee was revised through the notification method in 1968. Since 1973, five MWCs have been set up for fixation of wage rates in the agricultural sector (in 1973, 1975, 1984, 1992 and 2002). The recommended wage rates need not be compared with the wage rate that prevailed at the dates of appointment of committees because once the committee for the fixation of the minimum wage rate is appointed, it takes not less than two years to submit its recommendations which would, in the normal course, take one more year to get implemented. It is logical therefore to compare the recommended wage rate with the wage rate that prevails in the second year of the submission of the report. It is found that the recommended rate deviated from the prevailing wage rate all through the period, 1973-2002, and further, that the deviation has widened over the years. The difference between the actual and the recommended wage rates for males was higher than that for females. The wage rates that prevailed at the time when the minimum wage rates recommended for the years, 1984 and 1992, were begun to be implemented, were found to be higher than the rates recommended by 57 percent and 63 percent respectively. This in turn indicates that in sharp contrast to the general observation on the positive impact of minimum wages on the original wage, the actual impact of the minimum wage rate for agricultural labourers in Kerala have been to push the wage level down. Table 6.4 shows the widening gap between the actual and recommended rates for general agricultural operations during the period 1973 to 1992. It is pertinent, in the light of these observations, to examine why such a disparity existed. The plausible reasons are the following:
1. The subsistence requirement, estimated on the basis of biological and cultural elements, has not adequately been accounted for by the successive MWCs formed for wage revision in the agricultural sector. The cultural subsistence requirements of workers are influenced by the general socio-economic development of the region which influences the wage rate for the classes (upper and lower strata) living in conditions approximate to those of agricultural labourers;

2. The wage-paying capacity determined by the net income from cultivation did not permit the committees to recommend a wage rate of the required level for labourers. Moreover, the employers influenced the members of the committees not to revise wage rates too high.

Table 6.5. Comparison of methodologies of MWCs (1956-1992)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sl.No</th>
<th>First Minimum Wage Committee</th>
<th>Minimum Wage Committee-1992</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>The socio-economic subsistence requirement was assessed through a scientifically designed family budget survey of 2398 agricultural labour households in the concerned region.</td>
<td>Calorie-based norms of food requirement were used to assess the family budget as suggested by the Nutrition Advisory Committee, thereby negating the basic principle that regional consumption pattern did vary across states and regions. Requirements of clothes, house rent, medical and educational expenses were estimated on the basis of general norms adopted at the national level.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>District-wise information on family expenditure of agricultural labour households was estimated to recommend the district-wise wage rates.</td>
<td>No district-level detailed enquiry of agricultural labourers’ income and expenditure was scientifically carried out and analysed to arrive at the subsistence requirement of labourers in tune with the general development of the region concerned.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>The wage rates were recommended by considering the burden of dependence of earners in the agricultural labour households.</td>
<td>National level ratio of dependents and family size were considered and regional specific factors regarding family size were ignored.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Available days of employment per annum for agricultural male labourers (201 days) and female labourers (131 days) were estimated through field survey to arrive at the subsistence level of income for the family.</td>
<td>Annual income and expenditure were estimated without considering the possibilities of the sharp drops in the days of employment in the wake of the fall in the area under rice cultivation.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Minimum wages were recommended for agricultural labourers were for the year 2002. The comparison was made between MWC reports in 1956 and 1992 because the latest reports were based on a notification method and therefore the methodology of arriving at the wage rate was not developed.
In order to identify the factors considered by the committees to make their recommendations since 1973, a comparison of the methodology followed by the first MWC with that of the last (2002) is attempted (Table 6.5). A comparison of methodologies unambiguously provides a pointer to the observed trend in the wage disparity. The Committee in 1956 had undertaken a detailed enquiry into various aspects of the consumption pattern such as living standards, available days of employment and the dependency burden of earning member in the family, in order to recommend the wage rates. However, the subsequent committees did not pay adequate attention to such factors, which were of crucial importance in determining the biological and cultural subsistence requirements of labourers. The decline in the area under rice cultivation indicated that the net return from the crop too would have played an important role in preventing the Committees from recommending wage rates higher those that they did recommended for agricultural operations.

The importance of the recommendations of the first MWC could be gauged from the effectiveness with which the recommendations were implemented in Kerala when compared to the other states in India during the 1950s. Although Kerala accounted for only 2.9 percent of the total number of agricultural operations in the country, in terms of the number of inspections held, the number of prosecutions launched and the number of cases in which fines were imposed during the initial years of the implementation of minimum wage (1956 and 1963), the state's performance was exemplary. The state had accounted for 11 percent of the total inspections conducted in connection with the implementations of the minimum wage legislation and 15 percent of the prosecutions made. These achievements assume significance when compared with the share of the state in the total workforce in the country. The Chairman of the National Commission on Rural Labour observed thus:

"minimum wages are best enforced in Kerala, where a tri-party system functions at the Panchayat level". 48

However, the grim side of this story of effective implementation of the recommended wage rate is the fact that quite often the observed performance in the implementation of the Act is attributed to the effective functioning of the state apparatus and the generosity of the employers and not to the stage of development of the labour movement in the state49.

Two important observations which emerge from the analysis of the trend in the recommended wage rates for agricultural labourers by the successive MWCs are: i). During the 1950s and the 1960s, the recommended wages were more or less comparable with the then prevailing rates; ii). In the 1970s and after, the wage rates recommended by the MWCs have been falling short of the ruling wage rate and the gap between the two wage rates has been widening over the years; iii). The recommendations of MWCs were based on an in-depth analysis of the socio-economic conditions and the availability of employment to agricultural labourers in the 1950s and the 1960s whereas the recommendations since the 1970s have not been supported by systematic and scientific analyses of the prevailing situation of agricultural labourers.

Section 4

6.4. Agricultural workers’ Act and its current status in Kerala

Irrespective of its size, the social security scheme for agricultural labourers assumes special importance on account of two factors: i). Agricultural workers are not covered under any legislative protection to bank upon as and when they become physically incapable to perform work; ii). The informal agricultural sector is characterised by low paid and irregular work, which leaves workers with little resources to meet unforeseen or urgent expenses demanding substantial sums of money. It, therefore, becomes the responsibility of the state to give them security. The state often declares social security measures to pacify workers and thereby to contain possible revolts against the state. Often, even legislated social security measures remain

unimplemented or implemented in part or half-heartedly. As mentioned elsewhere, Kerala is one of the few states in India in which a pro-working class government assumed power immediately after the formation of the state and in which radical political movements are strong enough to exert pressure on the government to implement labour legislations for the security of the working class. In labour market analysis, such legislations and their implementation, as in the case of minimum wages, assume special significance.

Kerala enjoys distinction as the first state in India to legislate a social security scheme for agricultural labourers, as early as in 1974. The Kerala Legislative Assembly passed ‘The Kerala Agricultural Workers Act, 1974’, which received the assent of the President of India on the 31st day of July 1974. In the preamble to the Act, it has been stated that the Act purports “to provide for the welfare of agricultural workers in the state of Kerala and to regulate the conditions of their work”\footnote{Government of Kerala (1976). The Kerala Agricultural Workers Act, 1974. Government Press, Trivandrum. P.1.}; the Act defines an agricultural worker as “a person who, in consideration of the wage payable to him by a landowner, works on, or does any other agricultural operation in relation to the agricultural land of such landowner”\footnote{Ibid P.2}. The Act in its original form envisaged that the contribution to the agricultural Workers Welfare Fund may function with contributions from employers as well as workers. It was stated in the Act that the employer should contribute 5 percent of his annual wage expenditure to the Fund while the worker too would contribute the same amount annually. In addition to the Provident Fund Scheme, the Act also envisaged regulations on working conditions, employment, disputes between employer and worker and wages. The Act was implemented in 1980 and was subjected to amendments in 1982 and 1990. As per the amendment in 1990 (G.O. (p).No.52/90/LBR dated July 9), Agricultural Workers Provident Fund scheme was replaced with “Kerala Agricultural Workers Welfare Fund Scheme”, which came into effect from the 1990. The Kerala Agricultural Workers Welfare Fund Board was established to make the scheme operational. The
Board is comprised of 21 persons equally distributed to represent Agricultural workers, landowners and the Government. The contribution of agricultural workers is fixed as Rs 2 per month. The contribution of landowners possessing an area of more than half a hectare but less than one hectare is fixed as Rs 10 per annum and for every additional hectares of land above one hectare as Rs 15 per annum. The primary enquiry conducted in the district offices of Agricultural Workers Welfare Fund Board (AWWFB) divulged that the contributions from land owners are not being collected at all. Nor has any action been taken to collect the amounts from landowners. On the contrary, if a worker does not remit the amount for six months, she or he would be deemed ineligible for any benefit under the scheme and stand to lose the membership in the Agricultural Workers Welfare Fund Board. It was also reported that the workers remit their dues regularly. Political parties collect the amounts from their members and remit them to the Board in workers’ names. Only very few cases of defaulters could be noted among agricultural workers. As per the amended act of 1990, a registered worker in the Board is eligible for the following benefits:

1. **Supperannuation**: A member worker of the AWWFB is eligible for a sum of Rs 25000 on completion of 60 years of age on the condition that the worker should have completed 40 years of membership and that he has no arrears to clear of the monthly contributions. The due on supperannuation is proportional to the number of years of membership, with the prescribed maximum and a minimum of Rs 5000.

2. **Ex-gratia**: A member worker family is eligible for an ex-gratia of Rs 1000 if the worker dies, and has at the time of death a membership duration of not less than 12 months with no default of monthly subscription.

3. **Medical reimbursement**: A member worker who has paid 12 months’ contribution without arrears is eligible Rs 1000 as medical reimbursement and the benefit can be availed once in five years.

4. **Marriage assistance scheme**: Women agricultural workers and daughters of agricultural workers can avail the benefit of Rs 2000: The
benefit is available twice (two cases) in the membership period of a worker.

5. Maternity benefit: The scheme was introduced in 2000. Maternity benefit is available only for women agricultural labourers and the benefit can be availed for two child births.

6. In addition to the above schemes, educational assistances scheme are also implemented for children of agricultural workers.

The secondary information available from the AWWFB is analysed to examine the effectiveness of the social security schemes. It is reported that disbursements under the supperannuation scheme have not been made after 2001. No worker could avail the benefit after 1999 in Alapuzha, Ernakulam, and Kannur. Disbursement under the scheme has been stopped in Thiruvananthapuram, Kollam, Pathanamthitta, Kottayam, Palakkad, Kozhikode and Kasarcode since 2000. For Idduki, Malappuram and Wayanad, the supperannuation benefit has not been granted after 2001. It is important to note that supperannuation is the largest monetary payment that a worker receives and that it is the money paid to him by way of repayment of the amounts he subscribe with interest on completion of 40 years of sweated labour on behalf of the state. Another aspect of the AWWFB worth examining is the pattern of distribution of funds under its different schemes.

Table 6.6. Benefits from AWWFB to Agricultural Labourers by districts - 2000-05. (in percentage)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>District</th>
<th>Superrannuation</th>
<th>Ex-gratia</th>
<th>Marriage Assistance</th>
<th>Maternity benefit</th>
<th>Medical assistance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Thiruvananthapuram</td>
<td>6.55</td>
<td>1.67</td>
<td>3.95</td>
<td>4.29</td>
<td>0.47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kollam</td>
<td>4.45</td>
<td>1.07</td>
<td>2.72</td>
<td>14.08</td>
<td>0.68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pathanamthitta</td>
<td>5.05</td>
<td>2.00</td>
<td>4.52</td>
<td>11.00</td>
<td>1.56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alapuzha</td>
<td>12.65</td>
<td>3.84</td>
<td>10.58</td>
<td>13.34</td>
<td>2.88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kottayam</td>
<td>5.47</td>
<td>2.19</td>
<td>4.86</td>
<td>14.50</td>
<td>1.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Idukki</td>
<td>2.38</td>
<td>0.54</td>
<td>1.34</td>
<td>1.60</td>
<td>0.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ernakulam</td>
<td>12.37</td>
<td>3.00</td>
<td>7.85</td>
<td>4.63</td>
<td>2.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trichur</td>
<td>8.79</td>
<td>3.65</td>
<td>6.02</td>
<td>2.79</td>
<td>1.28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Palakkad</td>
<td>3.48</td>
<td>1.51</td>
<td>3.00</td>
<td>3.40</td>
<td>0.57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Malappuram</td>
<td>5.00</td>
<td>1.90</td>
<td>3.56</td>
<td>6.31</td>
<td>0.65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kozhikode</td>
<td>15.40</td>
<td>5.68</td>
<td>15.54</td>
<td>24.60</td>
<td>2.52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wayanad</td>
<td>3.24</td>
<td>2.09</td>
<td>4.89</td>
<td>14.31</td>
<td>3.36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kannur</td>
<td>8.99</td>
<td>3.05</td>
<td>8.27</td>
<td>3.34</td>
<td>0.96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kasaragod</td>
<td>6.65</td>
<td>2.67</td>
<td>6.24</td>
<td>5.57</td>
<td>1.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kerala</td>
<td>6.10</td>
<td>2.14</td>
<td>4.89</td>
<td>5.69</td>
<td>1.09</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Kerala Agricultural Workers’ Welfare Fund Board.
Table 6.6 shows the percentage of agricultural labourers, who have availed benefits, to total agricultural workers (main) in each district for the period 2000-05. It is rather strange to note that districts with a relatively small size of agricultural labourers have large percentages of beneficiaries availing superannuation; for instance, Alapuzha, Ernakulam and Kozhikode districts. It is also important to note that the percentages of beneficiaries vary significantly across districts particularly in respect of superannuation, marriage assistance, maternity and medical assistance benefits. The observed variation in the percentages of beneficiaries could have been on account of differences in the number of agricultural labourers across districts in Kerala. This aspect of the issue can be verified by comparing the relative share of each district with its respective share in beneficiaries under different schemes of the AWWFB. Table 6.7 shows the district-wise distribution of beneficiaries by schemes. An egalitarian distribution will show a pattern, which would match with the district-wise distribution of agricultural workers with regard to the number of agricultural workers, Palakkad ranked first followed by Idukki and Malappuram in 2001. In the distribution of superannuation benefits also Palakkad ranked first. Ernakulam district came second with a share in superannuation benefit of 10.38 percent and Thrissur figured third with 10.30 percent share. These two districts have relatively lower size of agricultural workers than in Idukki and Malappuram districts. Idukki was the second lowest district in the percentage of beneficiaries followed by Kottayam. The relative rank of Ernakulam in agricultural workers was 9\textsuperscript{th} and the rank of Thrissur district was 6\textsuperscript{th}. The relative share of agricultural workers was found to be the lowest in Kasargod, followed by Kozhikode and Pathanamthitta districts. Barring Palakkad district, the distribution of benefits of the KAWWFB was not in conformity with the proportion of agricultural workers in the districts.
Table 6.7 Percentage of distribution of beneficiaries and Agricultural labourers- 2000-05

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>District</th>
<th>Superannuation</th>
<th>Exgrtia</th>
<th>Marriage Assistance</th>
<th>Maternity benefit</th>
<th>Medical assistance</th>
<th>Total main agricultural labourers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Thiruvananthapuram</td>
<td>7.96</td>
<td>5.81</td>
<td>6.00</td>
<td>2.35</td>
<td>3.17</td>
<td>7.41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kollam</td>
<td>5.22</td>
<td>3.59</td>
<td>3.98</td>
<td>6.49</td>
<td>4.46</td>
<td>7.15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pathanamthitta</td>
<td>3.64</td>
<td>4.12</td>
<td>4.06</td>
<td>3.81</td>
<td>6.31</td>
<td>4.40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alapuzha</td>
<td>9.93</td>
<td>8.60</td>
<td>10.36</td>
<td>12.49</td>
<td>12.65</td>
<td>4.78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kottayam</td>
<td>5.06</td>
<td>5.77</td>
<td>5.61</td>
<td>9.51</td>
<td>5.72</td>
<td>5.64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Idukki</td>
<td>3.76</td>
<td>2.45</td>
<td>2.64</td>
<td>3.22</td>
<td>1.01</td>
<td>9.62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ernakulam</td>
<td>10.38</td>
<td>7.18</td>
<td>8.22</td>
<td>4.51</td>
<td>9.46</td>
<td>5.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trichur</td>
<td>10.30</td>
<td>12.22</td>
<td>8.79</td>
<td>4.48</td>
<td>8.37</td>
<td>7.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Palakkad</td>
<td>12.47</td>
<td>15.48</td>
<td>13.43</td>
<td>20.96</td>
<td>11.45</td>
<td>21.85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Malappuram</td>
<td>7.86</td>
<td>8.52</td>
<td>6.99</td>
<td>6.06</td>
<td>5.70</td>
<td>9.58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kozhikode</td>
<td>8.83</td>
<td>9.30</td>
<td>11.11</td>
<td>6.95</td>
<td>8.08</td>
<td>3.49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wayanad</td>
<td>2.71</td>
<td>4.99</td>
<td>5.10</td>
<td>12.44</td>
<td>15.71</td>
<td>5.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kannur</td>
<td>9.17</td>
<td>8.87</td>
<td>10.52</td>
<td>4.42</td>
<td>5.48</td>
<td>6.22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kasargod</td>
<td>2.72</td>
<td>3.12</td>
<td>3.18</td>
<td>2.30</td>
<td>2.43</td>
<td>2.49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kerala</td>
<td>100.00</td>
<td>100.00</td>
<td>100.00</td>
<td>100.00</td>
<td>100.00</td>
<td>100.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Kerala Agricultural Workers' Welfare Fund Board.
Table 6.8. Total amount disbursed under different schemes-1999-2005

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Schemes</th>
<th>Amount disbursed (Rs million)</th>
<th>Number of agricultural labourers who availed benefits</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Superannuation</td>
<td>619</td>
<td>62268</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ex-gratia</td>
<td>0.52</td>
<td>21821</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marriage Assistance</td>
<td>104.42</td>
<td>49920</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maternity benefit</td>
<td>0.049</td>
<td>17470</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medical Assistance</td>
<td>0.752</td>
<td>11141</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>724.741</td>
<td>162620</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Kerala Agricultural Workers' Welfare Fund Board

It is found that superannuation benefit, marriage assistance and medical assistance have been disbursed not in proportion to the share of workers in each district. *Ex-gratia* and maternity benefits was found to be proportional to the share in agricultural workers as indicated by the significant and positive correlation coefficients. An argument may be advanced to justify the observed discrepancy; the differences may lie in the differences in membership in AWWFB. The pattern of membership matched perfectly with the size of agricultural workers, in districts.

The class bias of the scheme is obvious from the fact that the Board is functioning with the funds raised from workers and that there was no serious attempt to collect contributions from landowners. Moreover, AWWFB has branches in all district headquarters and the staff in the branch offices are drawn from government offices. The salaries for the officials are met from the funds collected from workers and no budget allocation is made by the government to the Board to meet the salaries of officials. In effect, a part of the financial burden of the government staff is met by agricultural workers and their benefits such as superannuation, which is nothing but the return of the subscription paid by workers, are not even paid back in full and regularly. Table 6.8 shows the total amount disbursed under different schemes and the total number of agricultural workers who benefited from the different schemes.
during the period between 1999-2005. During the past six year period, the total amount disbursed under the various schemes of the Board was only Rs 724.741 million and the number of workers who availed the benefits was 162,620. On an average, the per capita benefits availed was only Rs 4456.

6.5. Conclusion

An analysis of the history of labour mobilisation, agitations, labour struggles and trade union activities of agricultural labourers in the state shows five distinct phases. The labour struggles and spread of radical trade unionism in Kerala showed synchronisation with changes in the political and economic scenario at the international level, indicating that the ideological and political changes at the international level have had profound impact at the local level. Therefore an analysis of the history of trade unions and labour movements in Kerala should keep the perspective clear and have a clear understanding of the changes at the global level. However, struggles and agitations of agricultural labourers in Kerala appear to have entered into a phase of tranquility since the 1980s and is characterised by a lukewarm response to trade union exhortations from the part of labourers as well as peasants. The observed trend in the labour front the 1980s is reflected in the intensity of strikes and trade union membership. In the 1990s, though agricultural labourers made attempts to strike against the conversion of paddy fields into less labour-intensive crops, the agitation could not make much headway and was compelled to be withdrawn as KSKTU, the agricultural labourers organisation of CPI(M), failed to convince, or the Communist Party of India (Marxist) did not wish to antagonize, a segment of its voters who are small land owners, the rationale of the agitation.

The state’s policy towards agricultural labour analysed with respect to the trend in the recommendation of minimum wages, shows that minimum wages were fixed on the basis of in-depth socio-economic analysis of working conditions of agricultural labourers in the 1950s and the 1960s. The wages fixed were higher than the then prevailing wage rate. Since the 1980s the entire
process of wage fixation exercise has become a formality. Neither labourers nor farmers have been much concerned about it as the wage rates fixed were much lower than the prevailing ones. The wage fixation exercise seems to have lost its scientificity since the 1980s. The new phase of tranquility owes to the loss of interest of the very political parties in the matter under which the labourers are organised. The trends in the functioning of the social security schemes, another arena of state intervention in the labour front, indicate that the schemes serve purely in the manner of strategies of any capitalist state making legislation to combat and contain contradictions within the society. The experience of AWWFB showed a peculiar case of the worker paying the salaries of state official on behalf of the state.