Field techniques to simplify recall

The present study employed the following field techniques to encourage the respondents to recollect quantitative information related to their family histories. These techniques are based on an understanding of how the villagers themselves recollect the timing of events and estimate quantities.¹

Data on demographic histories and land transfers

It was found that most villagers were ignorant of their age and other actual dates of changes in their family history. They could, however, describe the timing of an event by relating it to some other event in their family history (such as a marriage, a death or a birth of a child) or local history (severe drought or construction of a school or temple etc.). Even before the interview process began it was found that it was useful to compile a chronology of local events which most villagers could remember well. For example in the present study the communist movement (locally called communist daadi) 1950, major cyclone of 1977, introduction of cotton crop in 1969, electrification of the village in 1976, were used as useful reference points.

¹ A detailed discussed on these techniques, their validity and limitations are elaborated in detail in the author's joint article with Lucia da Corta "Field methods for economic mobility in a book field work in developing countries edited by Stephen devereux and John Hoddinott (Harvester wheatsheaf, 1992 pp.102-123)
The exact dates of such events were carefully verified before using them. In the first instance, oral accounts differed from written accounts partly because the latter often referred to the district or taluk level and could not be generalized to all the villages. For example, during 1986 and 1999, the former Prattipadu taluk in which the study village is a part had been declared drought-prone by the Government of Andhra Pradesh. But only the unirrigated, cotton growing part of the taluk was actually affected by drought. The irrigated paddy region was not affected at all. Moreover, the identification of drought years varied among different classes. In this study area, when there was a drought in 1982, wage labourers suffered from falling wages. Inspite of the in their yield of cotton, the farmers did not suffer as their returns were normal due to a hike in the price of cotton. In 1978, a year of good rains, exactly the reverse occurred Labourers found employment, and better wages, while farmers suffered as the price of cotton declined. Severe drought years were more easily identified as they to affected both labourers and farmers.

After verifying reference points, each random sample Interview began by identifying the ages of all the household members in 1991, 1969 and in 1954, by relating them to the dates of local events. The interviews then set out to reconstruct the dates of deaths, marriages and household partitions. A crude family tree was drawn up for each household, outlining their composition in 1950, 1969 and in 1991. This greatly facilitate
the questioning about each family member throughout the interview” [Appendix-la quotes part of an original interview the author had with one villager, which illustrates this process.]

Although collecting dates of demographic chanties was sometimes a tiresome process, yet it made further questioning on the dates of asset transfers much easier. First, demographic data, combined with the list of dates of local events, enabled us to draw on a store of reference points. Secondly, the exercise of dating demographic events mentally prepared the respondents to recall other facets of their family histories in a similar fashion. Finally, beginning the interviews with demographic questions was a polite way of showing an interest in the respondents, family, helped to develop a fluid rapport and anticipated at a later stage of intimacy when more sensitive questioning could commence.

The interview in Appendix-la demonstrates how easily dates of land transactions could be determined once this vital of reference points had been established. It was also found useful to ask about current land ownership before proceeding to trace land transfers from the grandfather. At the end, all land transfers should add up to the current land owned. It was methodologically imperative to ask for information surrounding land transactions, such as the class of partners in transactions, the source of finance for purchase or conversion, why that transaction took place, and so on, in order to analyse land transfers correctly later.
In a similar manner the dates of other asset transfers (such as house purchases or construction), dates of adoption of new technology, changes in occupations, major loans takes, major illnesses and other crises, good and bad agricultural years, and migrations were identified.

Estimating quantities: determining occupational labour use ranks

Another set of interview difficulties relates to shorter-term recall of very detailed data on routine activity. Here the study focuses on problems involved in recollecting and estimating occupational patterns; that is, the amount of time spent on different occupations and on income earned from different activities within one year, for 1991. Extract figures were not available, but obtaining at least a rough estimate of such occupational activity was essential to classify households in the field and for later analysis.

Ranking occupations

Useful measures of the relative importance of different occupations include: (1) labour time spent on different occupations, and (2) Income occurring from each occupation. Occupations refer to activities within agriculture (that is class division such as hiring out labour, own labour, Tenancy and supervising labour etc.) as well as to occupation outside crop production (artisan work, merchant activity etc.)
When collecting occupational data it is important to cover a complete year because activities vary greatly from one crop season to another and with crop season from sowing season to harvest season. In an earlier survey by the author in Chittoor district it was found that most small peasants who owned only dry land mostly cultivated their own land in the first crop season (July–November). In the second and third crop seasons (December–June) they did labouring work or lease in wetland. In the first crop season they have enough work on their own land and even hire in labourers during the harvest season. The same peasants in the second and third crop seasons, however, work for others as labourers or tenants. Similar changes were found in the activities of wage labourers as the seasons changed. Landless labourers were well employed during the first crop season when both wet and dry lands were cultivated, but found only occasional non-agricultural work in the second and third crop seasons, such as collecting firewood or tamarind sale.

The optimum methodology for collecting time allocation and income data is to monitor each individual daily, but this is time consuming and intrusive. A more widely used method is to make an inquiry once or twice a month, asking villagers to record or recall their labour use and income for the preceding period. In studies where repeat surveys over the course of the entire year are not possible, however, the long-term recall method described below may prove to be a worthwhile option.
To construct proportions of (1) time allocated to different activities and (2) income earned from different activities, we followed several steps:

* Listing all activities and discussing comparisons among them
* Ranking activities according to their relative importance.
* Constructing proportions.

It was found that villagers could list activities before 1950 and rank activities from 1950 onwards in terms of their first, second and their greatest contribution to overall time spent or to overall income.

To trace occupational change the reference years 1950, 1969 and 1991 were chosen which the villagers were most likely to remember. The respondents were asked to rank their occupations in terms of contribution to total income or the proportion of time allocated to them. The respondents were also asked to mention the dates of major changes in occupation or occupational pattern and to explain the circumstances surrounding these (for example if they were attributable to a land purchase to getting a salaried position, to investing in a tea stall, etc.). For 1991, a more or less precise estimates could be obtained, of the relative importance of time allocated to different activities and income derived from each activity. The data for the year 1991 was easily recalled because it was the year preceding the survey.
Labour use patterns were reconstructed by listing agricultural occupations, discussing comparisons among them and then ranking them in terms of labour use. Respondents suggest that dividing their labour use into sections based on how they estimated difficult quantities in their daily life. For example, a respondent might estimate proportions of his labour use as follows: 'Out of five days, three were spent on my own land and two on my leased-in land'. Alternatively, he might have gone directly to precise amounts: 'Last year we went for wage labour for three months in all - in stretches of ten days each.

The respondents then were asked to translate these estimates into approximate months or fractions of Booths out of twelve. These estimates were refined by inquiring about the months in which they were completely unemployed, employed for half days, doing exchange labour and performing non-agricultural work. The proportions were then adjusted accordingly until refined figures were arrived. The process continued until the respondent concurred with the final proportions.

This method could not be used to determine the extent to which a household hired in labour. For this rough figures were obtained by asking villagers one of the following questions.  
1. How many days did you hire in labour and how many labourers were hired on each occasion?  
2. What was the total wage payment this year and what was the average wage paid each time?
In a similar way data on income derived from each activity was obtained. The interview process began, as with the labour use proportions, by listing activities, discussing comparisons among them and ranking them. Then the respondents would suggest breaking their income down into parts, again based on how they ordinarily estimate difficult quantities. For example, a respondent might do one of the following:

* Use fractions, as follows: 'Half of my total income comes from cultivation of my land, a quarter from wage labour and the remaining quarter is divided into half on selling milk and half on selling sheep' (that is, one eighth part from each of the last two activities).

* Suggest a convenient unit, such as 5 rupees, and construct proportions as follows: 'Say my total income is 5 rupees. 2.5 comes from cultivation, 1.5 from wage labour, 1 from tenant work

After the respondents had constructed simple fractions or proportions, it was found very useful to ask them to images that their total income was Rs.100. They would immediately come up with revised estimates, and whenever they were not clear they would give a single estimate for two or more activities (such as wage labour) The figure Rs.100 gave them the flexibility to make further refinements on their proportions and to disaggregate groups (for example, wage labour into agricultural and non-agricultural wage labour). A simple example of the steps taken is shown in the following table:
Table 1. Constructing proportions for income from labour

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Discuss agricultural activities</td>
<td>Rank them</td>
<td>Respondent fractions out Rs. 100 and refine</td>
<td>Disaggregate wage labour</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Own farm</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>45%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wage labour</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>30X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tenant</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

On the spot calculations were often made and referred to previous answers to test the accuracy of the respondents' answers. If a gap was found, the respondents were offered a chance to reexamine answers and thus to report details they might have been trying to hide or had forgotten to mention and ask them to adjust the proportions accordingly.

Testing the validity of reconstructing proportions

Collecting data by this 'proportions method' is act totally precise and the author was conscious that the data gathered this way must be analysed with great care. Yet requesting the villagers to construct proportions compels them to adjust and refined original rankings, and as a result, at the very latest, the study obtained more disaggregated and superior ranking. Perhaps even more important, the process of asking villagers to estimate quantities this way led to a far more in-depth knowledge of the nature of different activities than would have been otherwise obtainable.
This method of data collection was originally designed and applied during the author's earlier field study conducted for Lucia da Corta in 1988 in Chittoor District. In order to test the reliability and statistical validity of this method the author conducted a separate field study in Palparru in 1990 before the field work for the present study began. The author compared the results of the proposed method with those acquired by a more sophisticated approach involving the collection of each and every detail of time allocation income and expenditure. In the first method respondents were asked to construct proportions directly; in the second method the author calculated proportions himself using details procured from the interviews. Thus the author collected two separate sets of statistics from nine cooperative respondents from different classes. While the proportions method took 30-40 minutes, this more detailed study took 3-4 hours. The results of the longer study were collected together with the rough observations and a pair wise statistical test was conducted to compare them. No statistically significant difference in the results was found.

APPENDIX 1A

EXCERPTS FROM AN INTERVIEW WITH A POOR PEASANT

(This interview is reproduced from the author's joint article with da Corta (da Corta and Venkatestwarlu, 1992) As this interview was conducted as a part of another field study of a village in Chittoor district in 1980, the dates and events mentioned differ from the present study. For instance, in Chittoor the famine of 1952, the construction of a new school building in 1968, construction of a dam in 1978 were used as useful reference points.)
Eliciting dates of demographic change

Interviewer (I): Sir, how old are you?
Respondent (R): My age... around 50 years, or one or two years more or less than 50. What do you think?
I: (It is very difficult to guess his age.) Um, you look like around 50 years old. Sir, it seems that a long time ago people in this area suffered from major famine called the 'Gruel Famine'. Do you remember that famine?
R: Oh yes! How can I not remember the Gruel Famine? I remember very well. [...]  
I: How old were you during the Gruel Famine?
R: I was this much. (Tries to show his height with his hand)
I: 'This much' means that you were six or seven years old?
R: Yes! - six or seven years old. In the famine year I was admitted to the first class in the school.[...]  
I: If you were in the first class, it means you were six or seven years old then; not more. The Gruel Famine came in 1952. That means you are now 43 or 44 years old?
R: Yes, you should be correct sir. I look like over 50 years old but I am young. Only one year back my youngest son was born.

(After establishing the date of birth of the respondent, the interviewer set out to reconstruct the dates of births, deaths, marriages and household partitions:)

I: Can you tell me the approximate age of your father during the famine and whether he was in a joint family with your grandfather and uncles or separated from the family?
R: Sir, how I can tell my father's age? I was small then. But one thing I remember very well, by that time only my lather separated from my grandfather. It seems that two years after my father's marriage, the year I was born, quarrels between my mother and grandmother started. My grandfather decided it would be better for my father to have a separate establishment.
I: How many brothers and sisters did you have at the time of the Gruel Famine?
R: I was the only child. I am the first born. Later after the famine my sister was born.
I: Sir, tell me at least this. In those days generally at what age did men get married?
R: At a very young age. My father also got married at a young age. My father used to tell me a story. It seems he started moving around with girls after he started getting a moustache. He fell in love with my mother and had a premarital sexual relationship. My grandfather came to know about this and decided to get them married. It seems my father was only 17 years old then. My mother was a little younger that my father

One could work out the approximate years of birth for the respondent and his parents, and the year of the respondent's parents' marriage and partition, as follows his father got married at the age of 17 and partitioned two years after his marriage, and the respondent was born in that same year respondent is about 43 or 44 years old (that is his year of birth
was 1944 or 1945), Thus, one can assume that his parents got
married in 1942 or 1943. His father was about 17 years old at the
time of the marriage and his mother was a little younger than him
(by one or two years). So:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Event</th>
<th>Year</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Respondent's year of birth</td>
<td>1944 or 1945</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Father's year of birth</td>
<td>1925 or 1926</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent's marriage year</td>
<td>1942 or 1943</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mother's year of birth</td>
<td>1926 or 1927</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Father partitioned in</td>
<td>1944 or 1945</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>During the Gruel Famine:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Father's age</td>
<td>26 or 27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mother's age</td>
<td>24 or 25</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The interviewer went on in this manner to reconstruct the
approximate ages of members of the 1950 household.

Eliciting land transfers

I: Sir, when did you partition ?
R: I partitioned...twenty years 'ago.
I: Do you have any other clues ?
R: Sir, it happened exactly three years after my father's death.
The same year my brother got married and my first daughter was born.
I: How old is your daughter now ?
R: She is about 20. Two years ago she got married.
I: Sir, do you have any other clue regarding the partition data ?
Twenty years ago the new school building was being constructed.
Do you remember that incident ?
R: Yes ! - the same year my daughter was born.
I: (The school building was constructed 19 years ago. in 1969.
It seems he partitioned in 1969, 3 years after his father's death
Thus his father died in 1966.) Sir, can you tell a* about your
father's land sales, purchases, development of dry land into wet
land and encroachments [seizures of government land], if any ?
when did he first buy or sell the land ?
R: In the Gruel Famine [that is, 1952-3] my father purchased an
aery of dry land from my uncle - who went to Tungabhadra Dam for
work. He also purchased 0.75 acre of wet land and 1 acre of dry
land in the same year when my sister was born. My father used to
tell us that my sister brought Lakshmi [ the goddess of money]
to our family. That year we had very good rains and got profits
from cultivation.
I: Can you tell me approximate age gap between you and your
sister ?
R: Ten to twelve years.
I: (That is, in1952-3, during the famine, his father purchased1
acre of dry land from his uncle and in 1956 or 1957 his father
purchased another 1 acre of dry land and 0.75 acre of wet land.)
Sir, next....
R: Next... I purchased 2 acres of dry land a year after my
father's death. I managed to finance it by selling all the goats
and sheep because after my father's death there was no one left in
my family to look after them.
1: (One year after his father's death means 1967.) Any wore purchases or sales?
R: I sold one acre of dry land to meet my brother's marriage expenses [that is, in 1969].