CHAPTER VIII

CONCLUSION

The basic objective of the present study has been to observe the process and pattern of employment diversification among the rural women workers in Ernakulam district. As a framework for the analysis, the study first examined the peculiarities of the rural employment structure existing in Kerala. With conclusive evidences of a diversified employment structure, the study has subsequently identified the major factors that contributed to the variations in rural female non-agricultural employment. Empirical evidences were also collected from 450 households in six sample villages of the three selected blocks. This primary survey enabled us to observe the nature and pattern of non-agricultural activities undertaken by the women workers in the sample. The determinants and the consequences of diversification among rural women in the district were also looked into. In this chapter, therefore, the discussion centers on the main findings and the implications of these findings to theory and policy.

The major observations made from the study of macro statistics are noted down in section one, and in section two the findings from the primary survey are recorded. Section three constitutes the implications of the study.

8.1 Rural Employment Structure in Kerala

The data used for highlighting the rural employment structure in Kerala in comparison with that of India is from secondary sources based on the NSSO and Census reports. The following observations are made in this regard.
(1) The work participation of rural women in Kerala is lower than that of the nation as a whole. While 29.9 per cent of the women in rural India engage in some economic activity or other in the NSSO estimates, the percentage of women workers in Kerala is only 23.8. Consequently the unemployment rates among rural women in Kerala are also high. In fact 13 per cent of the female workforce and 49.1 per cent of the educated females in rural Kerala are unemployed.

(2) Among the Indian states, Kerala is also one where there exists gender disparity in work participation. The Female Male Participation ratio of the state is found to be very low at 0.43, while those of the other south Indian states ranges from 0.64 to 0.79.

(3) A decline in work participation is also noticed among the rural women workers in the NSSO and Census Estimates. The decline happens to be from 41.3 per cent to 23.8 in the NSSO reports between 1978-2000 and from 20.9 to 15.9 in the Census reports between 1961-2001.

(4) In both the NSSO and Census estimates the share of female employment in the non-agricultural sector in rural Kerala is substantially higher than that in rural India. It is 40.3 per cent in the former and 43.7 per cent in the latter. The corresponding figures in the national statistics are 14.8 and 10.5 per cent respectively.
(5) As for the trend in sectoral shift, the participation in non-agriculture increased from 27.4 per cent to 40.3 per cent during the period 1978-2000 in the NSSO estimates. The trend in the Census estimates reveals this to be from 35.3 in 1961 to 43.7 in 1991.

(6) Within the rural non-agricultural sector the female workers are mainly engaged in secondary activities in India and Kerala with a rise in their share in non-household manufacturing and decline in household manufacturing. While the secondary sector employment of rural women is 9.0 and 22.8 respectively in India and Kerala, the same in the tertiary sector is only 5.8 and 17.5 respectively.

(7) There has occurred a decline of casual labourers among the rural females in the long run in Kerala, whereas a rise is seen among the regular employed as against the trend of casualisation at the national level.

However, the evidences are that the women workers in the rural areas of the state are being increasingly diversified into the tertiary sector. When we examined the changes in participation rates of rural women in different sectors over the period 1977-78 to 1999-2000, the tertiary sector had an increase of 8.35 percentage points as against the increase of 4.57 percentage points in the secondary sector. Thus there is clear-cut evidence for the fact that in Kerala non-agricultural employment of rural women is increasing with more and more of them getting diversified into the tertiary sector.
Except for a few backward districts in north Kerala and the tribal district of Idukki, all the districts of the state have a higher average than the state (68.2 per cent) of females working in the non-agricultural sector in the year 2001. The participation rates vary between 89.2 per cent in Kollam to 32.4 per cent in Palakkad.

The percentage difference between the years 1981 and 2001 is really high in all the districts. It ranges from a decline in only one district, that is Idukki, by 8.9 per cent to a rise in all other districts that reaches a peak level of 36 percentage point in Malappuram. This is mainly due to the decline in the cultivation, especially that of paddy attributable to commercialisation of agriculture, government programmes of diversification of economic activities, and increased socio-economic status in terms of literacy, health-care and income. Rural women are more inclined to take up employment in the non-agricultural sector, where they expect regular and more remunerative work, which enhances their social status.

The sector-wise break-up of rural employment shows that the decline of women participation in the primary sector varied from 0.74 per cent in Palakkad to 12.16 per cent in Kollam between the period 1981 and 1991. A rise in the primary sector employment and a consequent decline in non-agricultural employment are noted only in Kannur and Thiruvananthapuram, where the actual share in non-agriculture is considerably high.

Disaggregation of work participation within the sectors for the state and districts is yet to be published for the census year 2001. So we had to limit our analysis on inter-sectoral comparisons to the period 1981-91. Then, it is noted that in seven districts the share of the secondary sector in
employment structure declined. While this decline was marginal in Ernakulam, Trissur and Palakkad, it was sharper in Kannur and Thiruvananthapuram with 11.45 and 7.81 percentage points. Despite the crisis in the traditional industries of coir and cashew during this period, there has occurred an increase in the proportion of female workers in the districts of Alappuzha and Kollam, where these industries are highly concentrated.

It is found that in all the districts employment in the tertiary sector increased over the years 1981-91. The magnitude of the increase ranged from 0.61 percentage point in Alappuzha to 10 percentage point in Kozhikode.

In the light of the above observations it is concluded that Kerala has a diversified and developed employment structure. At the same time there has also been a sectoral shift of rural women workers from the primary to non-agricultural sectors. This is in fact the central point around which the first hypothesis of the study has been built.

8.1.1 The Determinants of Diversification at the Regional Level

The factors that are prominent in determining the rural female participation is constituted by variables that are clear indicators of development rather than distress. This hypothesis of the study is also found true after a careful screening of the results of the factor analysis. The four major factors identified behind the process of diversification of rural females are general economic development, social and familial set-up, demographic factors and commercialisation.
The variables got included under the first factor general economic development in the census year 2001 are Percentage of Area under Non-Agricultural Use (PANAU), Share of Non-Agricultural sector in the Net Domestic Product (SNANDP), Net Domestic Product (NDP) and Percentage of Urban Population (PUPOP). For 1991 infrastructure development index (IDIND) and DENSITY are also included under the first factor. In 1981, however, the focus is more on social rather than economic development as far as the first factor is concerned. Still economic development is by no means inconsequential as it gets included as the second factor in this year.

The rise in the percentage of area under non-agricultural use and increased share of non-agricultural sector in NDP are significant in the sense that they give better opportunities and easy accessibility to non-agricultural employment for rural women. Like wise, the quality and quantity of infrastructure and high population density in the area lower the transaction costs for marketing products and greater availability of inputs at lower costs needed for non-agricultural activities. The factor economic development thus explains 37.84 per cent of the variance of the standardised variable PRFNAW in 2001 and 36.84 in 1991. In 1981 also 22.67 per cent of the variance is explained by this factor, though it is only a factor that is second in importance.

The second factor identified is the social and familial set-up, which is revealed by the variables Average Family Size (AFSIZE), Male Work Participation Rates (MWPR) and Percentage of Below Six Population (PBSPOP). Increased earnings from male members of the family reduces the need of women to engage in economic activities. Similarly the population below six is expected to negatively affect female work participation especially in the non-agricultural sector that necessitates
much of their time to be spent away from home. The factor family set-up as a whole accounts for 16.76 per cent of the variance in 2001 and 18.04 in 1991.

Demographic factors, the third factor, account for 19.01 per cent of the variance in the year 1981 and 16.25 per cent in 2001. This factor is constituted by the variables MWPR, AFSize and SEXRATIO. Higher male work participation rates and reduced family size in effect give the women workers freedom to move into urban areas and non-agricultural jobs. The freedom, thus gained, is yet another aspect of development in the case of women workers. Again, a favorable sex ratio is also behind Kerala being considered as a model of development.

The fourth and the last determinant factor of rural female non-agricultural employment takes account of the variables commercialisation-defined by the variables percentage of area under non-agricultural use (PNFC)- and female literacy (PRFLIT) in all the census years. Truly, area under non-agriculture is an indicator of commercialisation. Education also acts as a facilitator in the efforts of the individuals to seek employment outside the primary sector and makes them aware of the new openings available in non-agriculture. Thus, this factor is also another aspect of development in rural areas.

Together all these factors explain 84.5, 82.87 and 85.7 per cent of the variability of the original variables in the years 1981, 1991 and 2001.

8.2 Process and Pattern of Diversification in the Study Villages

There exists a diversified employment structure among the rural women in the sample villages with 65.7 per cent of them employed in the
non-agricultural sector. In general they have diversified equally to both the secondary and tertiary sectors. However, there are significant regional differences in the pattern of employment structure and the nature of diversification noticed in the sample villages.

For instance in the villages of Vadavukode the primary sector dominates in providing employment to rural women. In Vazhakulam the workers have diversified to the secondary sector, whereas in Vyttila the tertiary sector attracted more workers. This sectoral diversity among the blocks is found significant at 5 per cent level.

This diversified structure found in the villages is both due to the sectoral shift and due to the choice of the workers. In both these respects also there exists considerable variations among the villages in different blocks.

In the sample 25 per cent male and 35 per cent of female workers are shifted workers. This difference in the proportion of shifted workers by gender is also found statistically significant at 5 per cent level. Of the female workers shifted, 65.9 per cent shifted from the agricultural sector. In all the villages the shift is basically away from the primary sector. But the nature and direction of the shift is different in each block. It is towards the secondary sector in Vazhakulam block and towards the tertiary sector in Vyttila. In Vadavukode both sectors equally absorb the shifted workers.

With regard to the choice of workers 87 per cent of the female new entrants had chosen non-agricultural sector as their sector of activity. In Vadavukode and Vazhakulam blocks secondary sector was chosen by the new entrants and in Vyttila the choice was for the tertiary sector.
Another way of diversification noted in the survey was the preoccupation of women workers in multiple activities in different sectors. Thus 41.9 per cent of the workers in the sample are engaged in at least one more activity. Fifty per cent of these workers had their principal activity in the primary sector and it was found that it is the women workers in the primary sector who are more in need of a supplementary activity.

The women workers in Vadavukode diversified to other sectors due to the nonavailability of work in the agricultural sector, rather than their unwillingness to be employed in agriculture. Diversification in Vazhakulam is due to the starting of household and non-household industries, which gives a more or less regular employment and income. In Vyttila women workers are found to diversify even to casual jobs in the tertiary sector, travelling more distances on this account to urban and semi-urban areas. Here also there exists limited opportunities in the agricultural sector. This differential nature validates our third hypothesis that there is diversity in the process of diversification itself in the villages. We can better explain these diverse patterns by placing the villages as belonging to 'different stages of diversification.' The nature of shift in the villages also can be cited as evidence for the prevalence of different stages in the process of diversification in the district.

Accordingly the villages in Vadavukode are suggested to be in the initial stage of diversification. In this stage it is the primary sector that still employs a higher proportion of women population. The activities of those employed are also mostly home-based, produced and sold within the locality. They include activities which have production linkage with agriculture like crop and food processing, manufacturing of confectioneries etc, bamboo workers, book binding, garment making and so on. There is little rural urban link for these activities in the sense that workers show
reluctance to commute more distance. Infra-structural facilities are also not conducive to enable easy transportation. The result is that even workers who are engaged in the secondary and tertiary sector lean on the primary sector for supplementing their income.

The villages in Vazhakulam block are in the second stage of diversification where there is a mix of two situations. Here women undertake activities, which have linkages with agriculture and at the same time they are also found employed in many small and medium size firms that are located in and around the block boundaries. The proportion of women employed in the primary sector is lower than in the villages of Vadavukode. Again there is fairly good infra-structural development that provides better accessibility to urban and semi-urban areas and jobs located in the mini industrial estates in the block.

In Vyttila the villages seem to be in the third stage of diversification, characterised by increased rural-urban links, transportation facilities and labour mobility. Though the tertiary sector dominates in providing employment, many a women are also engaged in the primary sector due to the prevalence of the fishing business. But the sector has developed to be of a commercial nature and only a few women in prone peeling are found to be at a disadvantage. Women in the village are willing to commute long distances and the barriers between rural and urban areas are fast disappearing. The fisher women completely avoid the middlemen from trading and directly sell their product in the city markets and far away places. The younger generation avoids this sector and gets engaged in tertiary activities as shop assistants, screen printers, beauticians, typists, clerks and so on. Single women and those who can avoid family responsibilities are also found to be entering personal services as maids,
housekeepers and home nursing on contract in association with the agencies like Self Employed Women's Association (SEWA).

8.2.1 Determinants of Diversification of Women Workers in the Sample households

The choice of the individuals regarding the nature and extent of diversification was found to depend on individual, familial and job-related variables. While age, age square, experience and experience square are found significant among the variables denoting the individual characteristics, it is the family size and the number of non-agricultural workers that come under the family-related variables. Regularity of employment in terms of the number of days employed and hours worked are of prime importance in the job-related variables. Place of residence was also revealed a significant control variable in the logit estimates. In the discriminant analysis also the main discriminant factors that placed workers in the non-agricultural group are number of non-agricultural members in the family and number of days employed.

8.2.2 Employment status of Diversified Workers

The study has brought out the fact that there is increased casualness among the women workers in the sample villages. Sixty percent of the workers in our sample are employed as casual wage labour. Even if we take the diversified workers alone this is found to be true as 51.84 per cent of those who work in the non-agricultural sectors are casually employed. Sector wise analysis of casual workers also revealed that 57.18 percent of them are employed in the non-agricultural sectors.
Along with the sectoral shift we also observed the status shift associated with it. Our conclusion in this regard is that 68.22 per cent of the shifted workers have no change in their status of employment in the sector to which they have shifted. While 76.3 per cent of the casual workers retained their status in the new sector 59 per cent of the self employed and regular employed became casualised after the shift. However there exists statistical evidence as to the dependence between the sector shift and status shift, and this has made us to reject our hypothesis that the two are independent.

8.3 Implications of the Findings

The implications of the present study generate from the basic fact that in our sample the women workers are found increasingly seeking employment outside the agricultural sector, but there do not exist enough opportunities. As a consequence they are, by and large, forced to accept whatever jobs came by in the non-agricultural sectors irrespective of their nature. So in the secondary and tertiary sectors of the economy they are employed as daily wage labour. Due to the absence of protective legislations and other arrangements these workers are often at the mercy of their employers.

At the same time the preference for non-agricultural employment by rural women workers has also accentuated the problems of labour shortage in the primary sector. Non availability of jobs in the desired sector of employment forces these workers to withdraw from the labourforce itself creating a peculiar labour market situation - where there is no competition for employment between the sectors. Viewed in these angles the study has important theoretical and policy implications.
8.3.1 Theoretical Implications

Actually this study got initiated from the Clark-Fisher thesis on sectoral shift. It states that along with economic development there is a proportional increase in the total labour force employed in the modern sector, while employment in agriculture declines. This is supposed to be true for women workers also in the long run after an initial fall in the transit stage (Boserup 1970). We now have both macro and micro evidences of increased participation of rural women workers in the non-agricultural activities supporting and upholding these theories.

We then examined the reasons behind the developed employment structure among women in rural Kerala. But they are found similar to those perceived by these early writers only to some extent. The sectoral shift thesis found economic factors like per capita income or output behind the process and pattern of employment diversification. When it came to women workers, Boserup attributed educational and other demographic advantages associated with it. In our inter-district analysis using the secondary data we have also identified both these as important factors. Economic development gets more weightage in our study followed by family set-up, demographic factors and increased commercialisation. However, our own empirical findings from the primary data analysis are different. Here factors ranging from individual and family status to the nature of employment opportunities existing, influence the diversification behaviour of the rural women workers of the sample villages.

Next, the growth of the informal sector employment among women has been a topic of continuing interest among the researchers. Currently called feminisation, casualisation or tertiarisation, attention is drawn towards the status of women workers. Here the basic conclusion that we arrived at is that
there are clear indications of a decline in the employment status of rural women workers in Kerala despite the sectoral shift. In the official estimates, this change in the status of women is manifested in the form of an increase in the proportion of marginal workers and non-workers. At the same time our own survey has indicated that there has not occurred any improvement in the employment status for even those women workers in the sample who have shifted their sector of employment. The increased departure of women from paid employment in official statistics and the nature of casualisation reflected in the primary survey raise doubt as to the much-lauded relative advantage that Kerala is said to be having on matters of female literacy, reduced fertility and infant mortality.

Another theoretical element that can be visualised in this context is the theory of "non-competing groups". This theory has had its origin in the writings of Longfeild, Mill and Cairnes. Later on Chapman (1917) developed it so as to state that in a labour market, the whole population will not compete for all the jobs, but competition is confined to a series of heterogeneous occupations and between them "there is less or sometimes no competition". The gradual withdrawal of women from the labour market or movement even from the 'margins' suggests such a group in existence in the state. A related study by Varma (1993) on occupational mobility has proved the same point in an urban area of Calicut City. The attitude of preference of rural women workers in the state to either being employed in non-agricultural jobs or to be unemployed for the time being is by no means an index of integration to the process of development. The supply of labour to each sector is found to be a function of recruitment within itself. The slow withdrawal from the labour market and the consequent inaction unless and until an emergency crops up in their life cycle is a cause of concern. This has necessitated us to put forward the case of reordering development so that it may be acceptable to women
rather than making efforts to integrate them to the on-going process or to prevent marginalisation in the process.

Yet another intriguing query that arises from our empirical work is whether social development is having a role in the diversification decision. Among the variables taken for our analysis those that indicate social development are caste, marital status, education, nature of family and ownership of land. None of these variables were found to be significant in influencing the diversification decision of the women workers. Still their nature of relationship is in accordance with the accepted norms of the society. For instance caste, marital status and ownership of land are negatively associated with diversification, whereas nature of family and education are having positive influence.

8.3.2 Policy Implications

The primary survey reveals that around 60 per cent of the female workforce is engaged in the unorganised sector and is exposed to various forms of exploitation due to the absence of protective legislation or other arrangement. They are also found busy in jobs that are also unskilled in nature like drying of plywood sheets, peeling cashew, prawn, and processing flowers, fruits and vegetables. Prospects of these women graduating from unskilled to semi-skilled and skilled jobs are practically non-existent due to the nonavailability of such jobs rather than the reluctance or unwillingness of these women to get trained. So, in general, the women workers in our sample face a dichotomous and frustrating situation. While on the one hand, socio-economic conditions are pressurising them to seek employment outside the home premises, in the non-agricultural sector, they can find only unskilled and casual jobs that requires more travelling and demands more working hours. The major task, therefore, is to equip them with necessary training and skill
and provide them with better opportunities in the non-agricultural sector within the villages themselves. Then only the sectoral shift will also result in the enhancement of the employment status of these workers.

The hitherto welfare measures introduced by the government like Development of Women and Children in Rural Areas (DWCRA), Integrated Rural Development Programme (IRDP), Jawahar Rozgar Yojana and the like had only been focusing their attention on the income or employment generating aspects. They should be re-oriented and revitalised to introduce an element of status, so that women get more self esteem and recognition in terms of the work being done by them. In the urban areas of the state as a poverty eradicating measure the Kerala Government has already introduced a new scheme under the banner of KUDUMBASREE. In this self-help scheme the risk families are identified so as to form a group and micro credit is raised from within the group itself and made available to the group for various productive activities. Thus there has occurred a shift in the policy objectives itself in the state from that of women's well being to empowerment of women not only politically but also economically. However, this project is yet to be implemented in the villages and it is our earnest proposition that it be implemented at the panchayath level too.

Another fact noticed in our survey is that the sectoral shift of women workers has posed a grave problem to the agricultural sector. The reluctance of workers to do manual jobs on land and the prevalence of high wages among the agricultural labourers has left many a cultivable area fallow or has induced farmers to shift to less labour-intensive crops. The situation is expected to worsen in future as even the high wages fail to attract the young generation to this sector. They prefer and are readily willing to get engaged in low paid casual jobs in the other sectors. Here again it is the employment status that counts more than the wages.
The fall in demand for labour because of high wages and changes in cropping pattern has also reduced the number of working days available to the agricultural workers. In peak seasons they were also found to move in-groups not only to have better bargaining power but also in search of work spots which are located even outside the village. This type of mobility in-group is also seen in the construction sector. In the secondary sector also there is uncertainty among the workers as the work depends on the availability of raw materials and even weather. So much time is spent on transaction cost. If only there exists an agency that links the available jobs with the workers this can be reduced and uncertainty minimised. Here the Panchayaths can serve as a nodal agency that facilitates the employment exchange. If the workers register with the panchayaths and the employers whichever sector they belong to, approach the panchayaths for their needs some order can be brought out of these chaos. Some sort of regularity in the number of days employed and assurances of a regular income will no doubt prompt the workers to such an arrangement. It will also enhance their status from that of an unprotected wage labour to semi-permanent daily labour.

8.4 Conclusion

To conclude, the study has fulfilled all its objectives, viz., highlighting the rural employment structure in Kerala, examining the process, pattern, determinants and consequences of diversification among rural women workers in the sample villages. Being the first of its kind at the micro level in the state it contributes to the available literature in the area enriching the data base that is crucially lacking for devising projects at the village and block-level. There exists ample scope for future research of similar nature in an urban background where the secondary data-sources are hindering towards a reversal of trends from non-agriculture to agriculture.