

| | | | | |
|-----------------|--------------|--------------|---------------|---------------|
| Pattambi | Low negative | Low negative | Low positive | Low positive |
| Srikrishnapuram | Low negative | Low negative | High negative | Low negative |
| Thrithala | Low negative | Low negative | Low negative | High negative |

Source: Derived from factor scores

Malampuzha, Chittur, Mannarkkad and Alathur belong to the first group. These blocks register positive factor loadings for all the four factors. This indicates that these are the areas where the problem of women agricultural workers is more acute and planning strategy for these areas should be different from that for the other blocks. It may be seen that in all these blocks except Mannarkkad rice cultivation is dominant (Fig. 7.5). Kollengode, Attappady, Nenmara and Palakkad belong to the moderate problem area category. These blocks have both positive and negative factor loadings. Pattambi, Ottappalam, Srikrishnapuram, Thrithala and Kuzhalmannam blocks have comparatively lesser problems with regard to women agricultural workers. It may be noted that almost all these blocks lie in the western part of the District. Suitable planning strategies have to be devised separately for these groups of blocks with regard to the condition of women agricultural labourers so that the overall development of the region can be achieved.

CHAPTER SIX

SOCIO-ECONOMIC STATUS OF WOMEN AGRICULTURAL WORKERS

6.1 Introduction

"There is no chance for welfare of the world unless the condition of women is improved."

- Swami Vivekananda

Although, 'GREEN REVOLUTION' has given our country self-sufficiency in agricultural sector, its benefits have not reached the agricultural labourers especially the women agricultural labourers. They get less and irregular wages and maintain a low standard of life and live below poverty line. Agricultural labourers form an integral part of total Indian labour force. The exploitation of women

labourers in rural regions happens both horizontally and vertically. Therefore, the study of women agricultural labourers is very important in this regard.

The heterogeneous character of Indian economy and the uneven rates of development have had varying degrees of impacts on the different segments of labour force. Therefore, the situation in general would not justify aggregation into a single dimensional magnitude. The different segments need to be estimated separately taking into account such important characteristics as region (state), sex, age, rural or urban residence, status or class of workers and educational attainments (Report on Unemployment, Ministry of labour, 1970).

If any evaluation of women's economic roles is to be meaningful, it has to take into account the socio economic status of different categories of the female workers engaged in different occupations.

Labour is the prime factor, be it the primary, secondary or tertiary sector. Labour productivity in agriculture has two important aspects. First, it profoundly affects national prosperity, i.e. national income; second, it principally determines the standard of living of the agricultural population. National prosperity in the economic perspective is largely synonymous with the high output per person. Therefore, if a country intends to attain prosperity it needs to encourage technical assistance and improvements to the labour population, which help to increase productivity in the agricultural economy (*Shafi, 1981*).

Though wage rates have increased over time, the earnings of labourers have declined as the number of days of employment fell more rapidly than rise in wage rates. With the decline in area under rice, the traditionally trained crop-specific labourers switched to nonfarm activities. Seasonal labour shortages and wage rates remaining higher than productivity compelled small and marginal farmers to leave land either fallow or to switch over to less labour-intensive crops. Because of the

decline of cultivated area and the subsequent fall in the days of employment, the younger generation preferred non-farm employment while the elderly left the agricultural sector in search of employment avenues in other sectors. This is particularly applicable to women workers.

Women occupy high positions in public life as prime ministers, chief ministers, astronauts, scientists, doctors, engineers and sportswomen. However, the proportion of such women in public life is quite small when compared to '*half the humanity*' they constitute.

One of the greatest challenges to overcome in the socio-economic development of women is the gender-based division of work within as well as outside the household (Mitchell, 1997:2002). What is worse, however, is that while men's work is paid work, even in the case of participation at the formal political level, or is compensated for by enhanced status and power, that of women is *unpaid* and their status and power are low and limited. (The International Center for Research on Women 2005 annual report)

In poor families, unless women work the whole day, enough bread for the family cannot be found. Women who control resources are more likely to use them to educate, nourish and keep children healthy usually than men, a crucial step to breaking the chain of intergenerational transmission of poverty and disadvantage. Under these circumstances an understanding of the socio economic condition of poor section of women, especially agricultural labourers is a need of the hour. In this chapter an attempt is made to analyse various aspects of the social status and economic condition of the women agricultural workers and gender disparity prevailed against them.

6.2. Sample Survey

Reliable data on the region specific socio-economic status of women agricultural workers is not available through secondary sources. Hence primary data is generated to assess these parameters in the study area. A structured pre-tested questionnaire has been prepared (Annexure-I). A total sample of 520 respondents have been contacted. The samples are distributed by adopting purposive, stratified random sampling method. Based on secondary data the blocks are categorised into three groups, namely those blocks where the temporal variation in women workers is high, moderate and low. Accordingly 50 samples are chosen from high variation blocks, 40 samples from blocks with medium variation and 30 samples from other blocks. These samples are distributed by random method. The distribution of samples in different blocks in the study area is shown in Table 6.1

Table 6.1
Palakkad District – Distribution of Samples

| Blocks | No. of Samples |
|-----------------|----------------|
| Alathur | 30 |
| Attappady | 50 |
| Chittur | 30 |
| Kollengode | 30 |
| Kuzhalmannam | 30 |
| Malampuzha | 50 |
| Mannarkkad | 50 |
| Nenmara | 30 |
| Ottappalam | 40 |
| Palakkad | 40 |
| Pattambi | 50 |
| Srikrishnapuram | 40 |
| Thrithala | 50 |
| Total | 520 |

In addition to the questionnaire method personnel discussions and interactions were also made with the group of women agricultural workers. The data such collected are tabulated, analysed and inferences are drawn. The details

are grouped under broad divisions, namely Social conditions and Economic conditions. The results are discussed below:

6.3 Results and Discussions

6.3.1 Social Conditions

The social status of women agricultural labourers is assessed by considering the following variables/ characteristics.

- Head of the family
- Caste
- Marital status
- Age
- Type and size of family
- Literacy and Educational level

These are discussed in detail in the subsequent paragraphs.

6.3.1.1 Head of the Family

Male breadwinner as the head of the household is more acceptable and respected than the woman is. Woman as head of the household gets no special recognition. She does not get the respect she deserves when she is the homemaker, either. There is a common belief that female-headed households are poorer than male-headed households. In India there exists linkages between poverty and female headedness. This situation may be due to their lesser control over resources, lower incomes and lower levels of literacy. The extent of female headedness of the households is much higher in Kerala as compared to the country as a whole.

Out of the 520 households surveyed only 94 have female heads. Even in this case, women become the head of the household only because they are widows. They are forced to take up the responsibility of the family with the meager wage they are getting. Government is giving widow pension, which is a relief to the

family. However, female-headed households for the sample as a whole is only 18 percent. Spatially there are variations among the blocks. Attappady and Kuzhalmannam have lower number of female heads of family of only 8% while the highest number of 33 percent is in Kollengode, followed by Palakkad (24%) and Mannarkkad (23%). Chittur, Malampuzha and Ottappalam also have more female-headed families than the overall average. Pattambi and Srikrishnapuram have mostly male-headed families (Table 6.2).

6.3.1.2 Caste

Caste is the most important basis of social stratification in Indian society. Any analysis of agricultural workers is meaningless unless we try to understand the proportion of different castes involved is studied. Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribes together comprise about 47 percent of the surveyed agricultural labourers and another 47 percent belong to other Backward communities. Only a meager 6 percent constitute other communities (Table 6.2). The forward caste people rarely prefer agricultural operations mainly due to the traditional and cultural taboos. In Alathur, Nenmara, Palakkad, Srikrishnapuram and Thrithala all three categories of communities are found. Out of these Srikrishnapuram is having about 25 percent households under other communities category mainly of forward castes. As against the general tradition, they are proud of doing agricultural work. This is the information given while interviewing. In Alathur, about 13 percent workers belong to other communities but they are mainly Christians.

Highest percent share of Scheduled Caste/Scheduled Tribe households is seen in Attappady (88%) followed by Pattambi (60%). Attappady is a tribal block with maximum population belonging to the Scheduled Tribes. However Pattambi shares a higher share of Scheduled Caste Population (Fig. 6.1). Lowest share of

| | | | | marriage | marriage | | 20 | 30 | |
|-----------------|------|------|------|----------|----------|------|------|------|------|
| Alathur | 00.0 | 96.7 | 03.3 | 53.3 | 46.7 | 6.7 | 36.7 | 43.3 | 13.3 |
| Attappady | 16.0 | 76.0 | 08.0 | 32.0 | 68.0 | 10 | 20.0 | 30.0 | 40.0 |
| Chittur | 00.0 | 73.3 | 26.7 | 60.0 | 40.0 | 13.3 | 30.0 | 40.0 | 16.7 |
| Kollengode | 03.3 | 60.0 | 36.7 | 33.3 | 66.7 | 13.3 | 40.0 | 33.3 | 13.3 |
| Kuzhalmannam | 00.0 | 86.6 | 13.4 | 40.0 | 60.0 | 00.0 | 73.3 | 20.0 | 06.7 |
| Malampuzha | 02.0 | 42.0 | 56.0 | 44.0 | 56.0 | 20.0 | 30.0 | 20.0 | 30.0 |
| Mannarkkad | 04.0 | 56.0 | 40.0 | 28.0 | 72.0 | 32.0 | 24.0 | 20.0 | 24.0 |
| Nenmara | 00.0 | 80 | 20.0 | 56.7 | 43.3 | 10.0 | 40.0 | 23.3 | 26.7 |
| Ottappalam | 05.0 | 67.5 | 27.5 | 60.0 | 40.0 | 17.5 | 20.0 | 42.5 | 20.0 |
| Palakkad | 05.0 | 67.5 | 27.5 | 25.0 | 75.0 | 30.0 | 15.0 | 25.0 | 30.0 |
| Pattambi | 00.0 | 78.0 | 22.0 | 30.0 | 70.0 | 18.0 | 36.0 | 36.0 | 10.0 |
| Srikrishnapuram | 10.0 | 82.5 | 07.5 | 45.0 | 55.0 | 20.0 | 25.0 | 30.0 | 25.0 |
| Thrithala | 04.0 | 72.0 | 24.0 | 48.0 | 52.0 | 08.0 | 36.0 | 32.0 | 24.0 |
| DISTRICT | 04.2 | 71.2 | 24.6 | 41.5 | 58.5 | 20.6 | 33.1 | 27.7 | 18.7 |

Source: Field Survey 2010

6.3.1.3 Marital Status

Marital status is one of the significant factors for women to participate as agricultural labourers. Only 3 percent of the sample respondents are unmarried women. A comparatively higher incidence of unmarried women agricultural workers is noticed in Chittur and Malampuzha blocks. Of the remaining respondents widows constitute a considerable share of more than 18 percent in Palakkad district. Kollengode (33%) and Palakkad (30%) ranked top among the blocks in the percent share of widows. Lowest is in Attappady with 8% (Table 6.2). Other blocks with lower share of widow agricultural workers are Kuzhalmannam, Srikrishnapuram, Pattambi and Thrithala. There are no divorced women agricultural workers in the sample respondents.

6.3.1.4 Age Structure

Age structure for workers usually has a span of 15 to 50 years. However, in the present study some deviations have been noticed. In most of the economic activities 15 to 30 years of age group is considered most productive and usually

has the highest share. In the case of women agricultural workers of Palakkad district this age group has the lowest share of just 4.2 percent (Table 6.3).

However, more than two-thirds of the respondents belong to 30 to 50 years of age group. Another important deviation is that there is a higher incidence of old women workers (> 50 years age group), who account for nearly one-fourth of the total respondents. It shows that for women agricultural workers there is no retirement age and they have to work for the maintenance of the family even at a late stage. This illustrates the pathetic economic situation of the agricultural labourers who cannot have their day's meal without work. Further, the distribution also indicates that younger generation is moving away from employment in agriculture as labourers and their apathy to toil in the fields.

Spatial pattern of age structure however, exhibits variation in the share of different age groups. In Attappady (16%) and Srikrishnapuram (10%), respondents of younger age are comparatively more, while Alathur Chittur, Nenmara and Kuzhalmannam do not have workers in this age group. Similarly an unusually high concentration of old women workers of more than 50 years of age is noticed in Malampuzha (56%), Mannarkkad (40%) and Kollengode (37%). Higher concentration of elderly workers is clear from Fig. 6.2. This may show that the economic compulsion of women agricultural workers to work at late stage is more in these blocks than the other parts of the district.

Another dimension which was analysed through primary survey pertains to the entry of women workers to agricultural activity and the number of years they have worked. It is noticed that about 58.5 percent of the respondents have become agricultural labourers only after they have married (Table 6.3). This is mainly due to the domestic requirements, which could not meet with the income from male members alone. Hence females are forced to work to make both ends meet.

In Palakkad block, 75 percent of the females started working only after the marriage. Pattambi, Mannarkkad, Kuzhalmannam, Kollengode and Attappady also have a higher concentration of this group while the lowest share is noticed in Ottappalam (40%). Around two-fifths of the workers started working as agricultural workers before marriage. Majority of them started working as agricultural workers from their childhood.

Table 6.3 presents the number of years in which women are engaged as agricultural workers. It may be noticed that nearly 19 percent of the respondents are serving as agricultural workers for more than 30 years. However nearly 60 percent of the workers are in this sector for a period of 10 to 30 years. About 21 percent of the workers entered as agricultural workers only during the last ten years or less. This includes those who have entered very recently also. This lowest percent share may be due to the changing job expectations of the younger generation. Many of the respondents have expressed that their children are not interested to work as agricultural workers.

6.3.1.5 Literacy and Level of Education

Literacy is one of the important indicators of social development and modernization. Though education by itself does not generate socio economic progress the lack of it can certainly be an impediment in the developmental process. Education improves the quality of life and develops manpower for different sections of the economy. It empowers the poor masses to become self-reliant and enables them to participate in the process of national development. Even though a sizeable section of the laboures is not literate they take maximum pain to educate their children.

Table 6.4 indicates that among the female respondents 37 percent are illiterates. Highest number of illiterates is in Attappady (64%), a tribal block, where majority of the population belong to the Scheduled Tribes (Fig. 6.3). Another block with more than 50 percent of the illiterate respondents is Malampuzha where Scheduled Caste population is comparatively more.

Literacy rate among Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes is generally low and the same is the case with the agricultural workers. Further the female

literacy for the total population in the district is very high (80%) while literacy of the sample agricultural workers is only 63 percent.

About 45 percent of the literate respondents obtained lower primary education but often this is not necessarily indicative of literacy as many of the workers in this category did not know even to read and write. Hence, the levels of illiteracy among the agricultural workers under study would be even higher. For instance, as regards the query on the reading habits among the women workers, majority of them reported that they do not know to read and write. Indeed, irrespective of having received schooling for one or two years, a significant proportion of them do not get the benefit of education in their life, at least to read and write few words. Its variation among the blocks shows that more than 60 percent of the literates in Malampuzha and Alathur have only Lower primary level of education. It is less than 40 percent in Attappady (33.3%), Srikrishnapuram (34.4%), Kuzhalmannam (34.8%) and Chittur (38.9%). Upper primary level of education among the literates is about 37 percent. Among the blocks, it is the highest in Kuzhalmannam with 56.5 percent and Kollengode with 50 percent (Table 6.4). Upper primary level of education is the lowest in Malampuzha (20.8%) followed by Mannarkkad (24.2%).

15 percent of the literates have education of high school level and it varies from 24.2 percent in Mannarkkad to about 6.3 percent in Kollengode (Fig 6.4). Respondents from only four blocks in the district have higher secondary or college level educational qualification. They are Pattambi, Srikrishnapuram, Mannarkkad and Thrithala. Highest share is in Pattambi with 7.5 percent. Pattambi, Srikrishnapuram and Thrithala have not only lower share of illiterates but also have sizeable number of respondents with higher secondary level of education. Hence these blocks are comparatively more developed in this index. All these blocks are located in the western part of the district.

Table 6.4
Palakkad District
Women Agricultural Workers - Literacy and Educational Level

| Blocks | Literates | Illiterates | Lower Primary | Upper Primary | High School | > High School |
|-----------------|-----------|-------------|---------------|---------------|-------------|---------------|
| Alathur | 66.7 | 33.3 | 60 | 30.0 | 10.0 | 0.0 |
| Attappady | 36.0 | 64.0 | 33.3 | 44.4 | 22.3 | 0.0 |
| Chittur | 60.0 | 40.0 | 38.9 | 44.4 | 16.7 | 0.0 |
| Kollengode | 53.3 | 46.7 | 43.7 | 50.0 | 06.3 | 0.0 |
| Kuzhalmannam | 76.7 | 23.3 | 34.8 | 56.5 | 08.7 | 0.0 |
| Malampuzha | 48.0 | 52.0 | 62.5 | 20.8 | 16.7 | 0.0 |
| Mannarkkad | 66.0 | 34.0 | 45.5 | 24.2 | 24.2 | 6.1 |
| Nenmara | 53.3 | 46.7 | 50.0 | 37.5 | 12.5 | 0.0 |
| Ottappalam | 70.0 | 30.0 | 50.0 | 39.3 | 10.7 | 0.0 |
| Palakkad | 55.0 | 45.0 | 45.5 | 36.3 | 18.2 | 0.0 |
| Pattambi | 80.0 | 20.0 | 40.0 | 30.0 | 22.5 | 7.5 |
| Srikrishnapuram | 80.0 | 20.0 | 34.4 | 46.8 | 12.5 | 6.3 |
| Thrithala | 76.0 | 24.0 | 47.4 | 36.8 | 10.5 | 5.3 |
| DISTRICT | 63.1 | 36.9 | 44.8 | 37.2 | 15.3 | 2.7 |

Source: Field Survey 2010

6.3.1.6 Type of Family

Among the agricultural labour households nuclear type of family is very common. About 79 percent of the family comes under the nuclear type and the

remaining is joint family. Out of the thirteen blocks, eight of them are having more than 80 percent of nuclear families with Attappady (88%) and Alathur (87%) ranking at the top. In contrast, Kollengode, Mannarkkad and Ottappalam have more joint families.

6.3.1.7 Family Size

In Kerala even in agricultural labour households, small family norm is very common. This is a common pattern in Kerala across all sections of the people. The primary data regarding the family size has been grouped into three.

- Below 4 members – Small
- 4 to 6 members – Medium
- Above 6 members – Big

Table 6.5
Palakkad District - Women Agricultural Workers
Type and Size of Family

| BLOCKS | Type of Family | | Size of Family | | |
|-----------------|----------------|---------|----------------|--------|-----|
| | Joint | Nuclear | < 4 | 4 to 6 | > 6 |
| Alathur | 13.3 | 86.7 | 20.0 | 80.0 | 0.0 |
| Attappady | 12.0 | 88.0 | 58.0 | 42.0 | 0.0 |
| Chittur | 26.7 | 73.3 | 26.7 | 73.3 | 0.0 |
| Kollengode | 40.0 | 60.0 | 40.0 | 60.0 | 0.0 |
| Kuzhalmannam | 20.0 | 80.0 | 16.7 | 83.3 | 0.0 |
| Malampuzha | 20.0 | 80.0 | 24.0 | 68.0 | 8.0 |
| Mannarkkad | 30.0 | 70.0 | 20.0 | 74.0 | 6.0 |
| Nenmara | 16.7 | 83.3 | 33.3 | 66.7 | 0.0 |
| Ottappalam | 30.0 | 70.0 | 17.5 | 82.5 | 0.0 |
| Palakkad | 22.5 | 77.5 | 22.5 | 77.5 | 0.0 |
| Pattambi | 14.0 | 86.0 | 12.0 | 80.0 | 8.0 |
| Srikrishnapuram | 15.0 | 85.0 | 20.0 | 75.0 | 5.0 |
| Thrithala | 18.0 | 82.0 | 14.0 | 80.0 | 6.0 |
| DISTRICT | 21.0 | 79.0 | 24.8 | 71.5 | 3.7 |

Source: Field Survey 2010

About 25 percent of the sample households belong to the small families with less than four members in the study area. It varies from about 58 percent in Attappady to about 12 percent in Pattambi. Other blocks with lower number of households with less than four family members are Thrithala (14%), Kuzhalmannam (16.7%) and Ottappalam (17%).

About 72 percent of the sample households have four to six family members. Five of the blocks have more than four-fifths of the sample households coming under this category of four to six family members. They are Kuzhalmannam (83.3%), Ottappalam (82.5%), Attappady, Pattambi and Thrithala (80%) each. Only less than 4 percent of the sample respondents in the study area have more than six members in their family (Table 6.5). This category of family is found only in five of the blocks. They are Pattambi and Malampuzha (8 percent each) and Thrithala and Mannarkkad(6 percent each) and Srikrishnapuram with 5 percent.

About 25 percent of the households are single child family. Alathur, Attappady and Nenmara have more than 40 percent of the respondents with a single child. Lowest number of single child family is in Pattambi and Kuzhalmannam (10 percent). More than half of the households are with two children. Among the blocks the two children family varies from 68 percent in Ottappalam to 47 percent in Nenmara. Only about 23 percent of the households are having more than two children. Majority of them are having just three children and a very few households are with four children. More than three children is a very rare phenomenon in Kerala, except in the case of Muslim communities.

The discussion made so far have brought out the varied condition of social set up with regard to the women agricultural workers in the study area. It is also necessary to analyse the varied economic characteristics of the workers so that effective planning strategies could be devised for improving their standard of life.

Hence an analysis about some economic parameters of the agricultural workers like, the number of working days, income level, loan availed, expenditure pattern, financial support from the Government etc. is attempted here.

6.3.2 Economic Condition

Economic condition of the agricultural workers is generally low. The following parameters are used for the assessment of the overall economic status of respondents.

- Working condition and number of labour days
- Average monthly income
- Additional financial support
- Expenditure pattern
- Share of women workers in family expenditure
- Burden of loan
- Availability of Household appliances

6.3.2.1 Working Condition and Number of Labour Days

The peace and tranquility and the efficiency of the labourer depends to a considerable extent upon the wage structure and the amenities provided at the field or work spot. Further, the psychological conditions of the agricultural labourers are influenced by the situation prevailing at the work spot. Since a large number of the female and male labourers are engaged in agriculture, which is the major unorganized sector, the matter of improving their working conditions assumes paramount importance. Here an attempt is made to evaluate the working conditions of the male and female agricultural workers. The level of participation of women in agriculture varies from one mode of production to other.

In the complex and mixed mode of agricultural production in Kerala, it varies from region to region. In the very sparsely populated region where shifting cultivation is practiced men do little farm work while women do the maximum work. In somewhat more densely populated region where agriculture is that of extensive cultivation, women do little farm work but men share the major part of the work. In addition, in the region of intensive cultivation of irrigated land both men and women work hard in order to earn enough to support a family from a small piece of land.

Table 6.6
Palakkad District
Women Agricultural Workers - Economic Condition

| <i>Blocks</i> | Loan availed | Number of Labour days | | | Monthly Income | | | Financial support for House construction |
|-----------------|--------------|-----------------------|------------|-------|----------------|--------------|--------|--|
| | | < 100 | 100 to 120 | > 120 | < 1000 | 1000 to 2000 | > 2000 | |
| Alathur | 56.7 | 00.0 | 13.3 | 86.7 | 13.3 | 40.0 | 46.7 | 40.0 |
| Attappady | 22.0 | 08.0 | 92.0 | 00.0 | 08.0 | 88.0 | 04.0 | 70.0 |
| Chittur | 40.0 | 40.0 | 50.0 | 10.0 | 10.0 | 53.3 | 36.7 | 20.0 |
| Kollengode | 60.0 | 43.3 | 50.0 | 06.7 | 16.7 | 50.0 | 33.3 | 30.0 |
| Kuzhalmannam | 30.0 | 6.70 | 86.7 | 06.7 | 23.3 | 40.0 | 36.7 | 46.7 |
| Malampuzha | 02.0 | 34.0 | 52.0 | 14.0 | 24.0 | 28.0 | 48.0 | 16.0 |
| Mannarkkad | 24.0 | 34.0 | 60.0 | 6.00 | 24.0 | 40.0 | 36.0 | 64.0 |
| Nenmara | 20.0 | 16.7 | 66.7 | 16.7 | 16.7 | 43.3 | 40.0 | 26.7 |
| Ottappalam | 22.5 | 45.0 | 50.0 | 05.0 | 10.0 | 42.5 | 47.5 | 42.5 |
| Palakkad | 40.0 | 45.0 | 55.0 | 0.00 | 10.0 | 50.0 | 40.0 | 60.0 |
| Pattambi | 36.0 | 20.0 | 44.0 | 36.0 | 08.0 | 32.0 | 60.0 | 48.0 |
| Srikrishnapuram | 35.0 | 40.0 | 55.0 | 05.0 | 10.0 | 40.0 | 50.0 | 35.0 |
| Thrithala | 22.0 | 48.0 | 46.0 | 06.0 | 02.0 | 34.0 | 64.0 | 16.0 |
| DISTRICT | 31.7 | 30.0 | 56.0 | 14.0 | 13.3 | 44.6 | 42.1 | 40.6 |

Source: Field Survey 2010

In the plain areas, men are engaged in bunding and ploughing of the soil while women do sowing, transplanting, weeding, harvesting, threshing and winnowing. However, women also take up ploughing in some regions like Himachal Pradesh it is not widely seen in other parts of the country.

In the irrigated and unirrigated parts of Palakkad women do almost all work except ploughing and preparing the field. The introduction of harvesting machine

in this part of the State recently reduced the number of labour days. Largely this affects the women badly by reducing their income level. However, a discussion with cultivators reveals that the non-availability of labourers during peak time and the high wage rate compel them to use harvesting machine.

Out of the 520 respondents, about 30 percent have less than 100 working days in a year. Some of them expressed that they had even less than 60 days of fieldwork due to application of machines in the field. In six of the blocks, namely, Thrithala, Palakkad, Ottappalam, Kollengode, Srikrishnapuram and Chittur more than 40 percent of the respondents have less than 100 labour days.

Majority of them have between 60 and 70 days of work only. About 56 percent of respondents have between 100 and 120 days of work and the remaining 14 percent have above 120 days of work. Among these 14 percent most of them have around 125 days of work only (Table 6.6). Thus, the major problem faced by women agricultural workers is the decreasing number of working days. In some parts of Palakkad usually three crops are raised but now some of the landowners are hesitant to do that. They are of the opinion that rice cultivation is not profitable compared to other crops like rubber, coconut, etc., because it is labour intensive crop and the wage rate of even the female agricultural workers is high. More details have already been explained in the previous chapter.

About 87 percent of the respondents in Alathur have more than 120 labour days and in Pattambi it is about 36 percent. In Attappady and Palakkad not even a single respondent has more than 120 labour days. However, in Attappady 92 percent of them have 100 to 120 days of work (Fig. 6.5).

Fragmentation of paddy fields into small plots, droughts and infestation by insects which lead to crop damage are the general factors which reduce the number of working days. Even in the irrigated part of Chittur and Kollengode, scarcity of

water persists and leads to failure of crops, which in turn exacerbates the lack of job opportunities in the area. The explanation clearly brings out the fact that women agricultural workers have only a maximum of four months in a year with which they have to meet the entire annual needs.

6.3.2.2 Average Monthly Income

In general, women agricultural workers get a daily wage of Rs 80 to 100. This means that the average monthly income may not exceed Rs 2500. Hence, for the present analysis the following three groups of income are considered.

- Less than Rs 1000
- Rs 1000 to 2000
- More than Rs 2000

Table 6.6 indicates the monthly income level of the sample households. In the study area, most of the women agricultural workers earn only Rs 1000 to 2000 as monthly income. This group accounts for a share of 45 percent. However, in Attappady their share is the highest (88%). Palakkad, Kollengode and Chittur also have more than 50 percent of their agricultural workers in this group. Lowest share of 28 percent is found in Malampuzha (Fig.6.6).

About 42 percent of the respondents have a monthly income of more than Rs 2000. Thrithala, Pattambi and Srikrishnapuram in the southwestern part of the district have more than 50 percent of the respondents in this category. A mere 4 percent is the contribution of Attappady block in this category. For the remaining nine blocks the value varies between 33.3 in Kollengode to 48 percent in Malampuzha which is closer to the average value 13 percent of the respondents come under the category of income below Rs1000. Variation among the blocks is from 2 percent in Thrithala to 24 percent in Mannarkkad and Malampuzha. Pattambi, Attappady, Chittur, Ottappalam, Palakkad and Srikrishnapuram show

less than the average number of respondents in this category. From this explanation, it is clear that women workers are struggling to meet their daily requirements. Hence, they try to get other available sources of financial support from various sources to meet their requirements.

6.3.2.3. Financial Support

An average of about 40 percent of the respondents received financial support from the Government. One important scheme implemented by the State in the housing sector is the SASH Housing Scheme. SASH stands for Subsidised Aided Self-Help. One third of the cost was given as subsidy by the Government. This scheme provides support to the respondents in the construction of houses. Under the scheme Indira Awas Yojana also they received grant in aid for construction purposes. The objective of Indira Awas Yojana is to help construction of dwelling units by the members of SC/ST, freed bonded labourers and also non-SC/ST, rural poor, below poverty line. This is a Centrally Sponsored Scheme sharing cost between Centre and State in the ratio of 75:25. The beneficiaries of the scheme are selected by Grama Sabhas and they should be having at least two cents of land for house construction. They should not have dwelling units fit for occupation. The assistance is sanctioned to the female members of the family or in the joint name of husband and wife. House constructed under the scheme should have not less than 20 sq.m. of plinth area but no plans or design is prescribed. Nowadays financial support is also given for the repair of the semi pucca houses.

More than 90 percent of the households have pucca houses with tiled roof and brick walls. Majority of the houses have sanitary latrine facilities and water supply for the houses are satisfactory. 95 percent of the houses are electrified. Pucca houses, latrine facility, electrification etc. are made possible with the Government support to the low-income groups under various schemes discussed

above. Financial assistance for other purposes includes purchase of cattle, assistance for self-employment, etc. One of the respondents got an amount of 50,000 for the purchase of Auto-rickshaw for her son under self employment scheme.

Highest number of respondents got financial support for house construction is in Attappady (70%), under Attappady Hill Area Development scheme and in Mannarkkad (64%), while the lowest is in Thrithala (16%). Even though financial support received is less, the house types here are comparatively in a better position because it is one of the developed blocks (Table 6.6). Out of the 13 blocks, seven of them received financial assistance for toilet construction with Kuzhalmannam having the highest share of beneficiaries.

6.3.2.4 Expenditure Pattern

Generally, the level of expenditure depends upon the level of income. It is observed that majority of them spend a major part of their earnings on food and in many cases even the income is not enough to meet the food requirements. Majority of them are non-vegetarians. However, because of their low income, they cannot afford nourishing food items like fish, meat, eggs, milk and curd on a daily basis, even though most of the household members undertake hard labour. This leads to the problem of anemia and other diseases.

Table 6.7 reveals the expenditure pattern of the respondents in various blocks of Palakkad. Expenditure pattern on food requirements has been divided into three categories:

- < 50 percent of their total income
- 50- 75 percent of their total income

- > 75 percent of their total income

Only 15 percent of the total sample respondents spent less than 50 percent of their income for food items. Alathur (30%), Pattambi (24%), Thrithala and Chittur (20%) are the blocks with comparatively higher number of respondents in this group. This lower share is an indication of their better economic status. About two-thirds of the respondents spent between 50 and 75 percent of their income on food. In this category, Srikrishnapuram (80%) ranks first and other blocks with higher rates are Thrithala (78%), Kuzhalmannam (74%), Kollengode (72%) and Palakkad (70%).

A little over one-fifth of the respondents spent more than 75 percent of their total income for the purchase of food items alone. In Attappady this category is very high with 60 percent of the respondents. This is very low in Thrithala and Srikrishnapuram with less than 5 percent of the respondents. They find difficulty in meeting expenses for other requirements.

Expenditure for fuel is comparatively less. In almost 90 percent of the households wood is the major source of fuel. Most of them do not spend any amount for fuel. They used to collect it from nearby open spaces which have natural shrubs and other vegetation. Less than 10 percent of them use cooking gas and kerosene for cooking along with wood. Most of them have a better monthly income. Expense for education is not common for all. Not all the households have school going or college going children. Hence, it is restricted to few families. In Srikrishnapuram 21 percent of the respondents spend more than 20 percent of their income for education purposes because some of their children are studying in colleges in Postgraduate courses.

Other expenses like religious ceremonies, health expenses, social expenses, repayment of loan, etc., play a major role in putting them in debt. About 66 percent

of the respondents spent 20 to 40 percent of their income on other purposes. 14 percent of them spent more than 40 percent of their income for other purposes.

6.3.2.5 Share of Females in the Family Expenditure

Despite the wages of men being higher than that of women, when it comes to the household expenditure, women's contribution becomes the substantial part. Expenses on food items are almost fully managed by the women. A good proportion of men's earnings is spent on consumption of alcohol, consuming food outside the home, cinema, mobile phone, bike and travel. Woman's role as the substantial provider of the family subsistence, however, calls into question the long-standing notion that it is the man who is the major breadwinner of the family. From Table 6.7 it is clear that share of the female in the family expenditure is much higher than that of males. To get a clear picture of the female's share in the family expenditure, the respondents are classified into three classes, namely Less than 25 percent, 25 to 50 percent and Above 50 percent (Fig. 6.7).

In 44 percent of the sample households females meet more than 50 percent of the family expenditure. However, majority of them spend more than 80 percent of the family expenditure from their own income. In Alathur, it is about 60 percent. Other blocks in this category are Attappady (58%), Chittur and Kuzhalmannam. In Thrithala, Malampuzha, Mannarkkad and Nenmara it is less than the average. The lowest is in Thrithala (26 percent)

Table 6.7
Palakkad District
Women Agricultural Workers – Expenditure pattern

| Blocks | Expenditure on food | | | Females share in Expenditure | | |
|---------|---------------------|--------|------|------------------------------|-----------|--------|
| | < 50 | 50- 75 | > 75 | < 25 % | 25 - 50 % | > 50 % |
| Alathur | 30.0 | 50.0 | 20.0 | 0.0 | 40.0 | 60.0 |

| | | | | | | |
|-----------------|------|------|------|------|------|------|
| Attappady | 10.0 | 30.0 | 60.0 | 16.0 | 26.0 | 58.0 |
| Chittur | 20.0 | 52.0 | 28.0 | 13.3 | 33.3 | 53.4 |
| Kollengode | 10.0 | 72.0 | 18.0 | 13.3 | 40.0 | 46.7 |
| Kuzhalmannam | 14.0 | 74.0 | 12.0 | 13.3 | 33.3 | 53.4 |
| Malampuzha | 12.0 | 60.0 | 28.0 | 12.0 | 60.0 | 28.0 |
| Mannarkkad | 02.0 | 68.0 | 30.0 | 18.0 | 46.0 | 36.0 |
| Nenmara | 14.0 | 60.0 | 26.0 | 16.7 | 50.0 | 33.3 |
| Ottappalam | 06.0 | 66.0 | 28.0 | 15.0 | 35.0 | 50.0 |
| Palakkad | 12.0 | 70.0 | 18.0 | 10.0 | 40.0 | 50.0 |
| Pattambi | 24.0 | 60.0 | 16.0 | 06.0 | 44.0 | 50.0 |
| Srikrishnapuram | 15.0 | 80.0 | 05.0 | 12.5 | 42.5 | 45.0 |
| Thrithala | 20.0 | 78.0 | 02.0 | 14.0 | 60.0 | 26.0 |
| DISTRICT | 15.0 | 63.0 | 22.0 | 12.5 | 43.1 | 44.4 |

Source: Field Survey 2010

Among the respondents, 43 percent of the women agricultural workers contribute to meet 25 to 50 percent of the family expenditure. Thrithala and Malampuzha have a higher concentration of such respondents while the lowest is in Attappady. Mannarkkad, Nenmara, Attappady and Ottappalam a comparatively higher concentration of women workers contribute less than 25 percent of family expenditure.

6.3.2.6 Burden of Loan

The expenditure pattern among the worker households shows that since the major part of the women's income earnings is exhausted on food articles and for meeting other items of expenditure, they have to resort to borrowing. Hence, majority of them availed loan for various purposes. In many cases after availing loan, they find it difficult to repay due to non-availability of regular working days.

Table 6.6 gives details regarding the loan availed of by the respondents. Many of them have availed loan for the marriage of their children, for the completion and maintenance of the houses and for domestic purposes. Huge expenses are incurred for ceremonies and rituals associated with birth, puberty

(especially of girls), marriage, death, etc. In addition, major ailments and cases like abortion force them to borrow large amounts. Expenditure on medical treatment has been increasing exponentially in recent years due to increase in drug prices as well as in other costs associated with treatment.

On the whole 32 percent of the respondents availed loan for various purposes. When considering the variation among the blocks, Kollengode (60 percent) and Alathur (56.7 percent) have a higher share of respondents who availed loans (Fig 6.8). In Srikrishnapuram, Pattambi and Palakkad also women workers availed loan, which is more than average for the district. Lowest percent of respondents who availed loan is in Malampuzha (2 percent).

6.3.2.7 Household Appliances

Yet another indicator to assess the economic condition of agricultural workers is the ownership of various household appliances. For the present study ownership of Television, Radio, Bicycle, Motor Bike, Mobile Phone and Pressure cooker are considered. About two-thirds of the respondents own television sets. Fig.6.9 shows that this share is less in Attappady (48%) and Malampuzha (54%). Since Television has come, radio becomes comparatively less significant. Still about 43 percent of the respondents own radio. Mannarkkad, Pattambi, and Attappady have a comparatively lower number of respondents who own radio (Table 6.9).

Table 6.8
Women Agricultural Workers - Availability of Household Appliances

| Blocks | Availability of Household appliances | | | | | | |
|-----------|--------------------------------------|-------|------------|---------|------------|-----------------|------------|
| | TV | Radio | Mob. Phone | Bicycle | Motor Bike | Pressure Cooker | News paper |
| Alathur | 70.0 | 63.3 | 76.7 | 23.3 | 0.0 | 0.0 | 23.3 |
| Attappady | 48.0 | 38.0 | 12.0 | 0.0 | 0.0 | 0.0 | 0.0 |

| | | | | | | | |
|-----------------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|
| Chittur | 66.7 | 56.7 | 66.7 | 23.3 | 3.3 | 16.7 | 13.3 |
| Kollengode | 73.3 | 30.0 | 60.0 | 13.3 | 13.3 | 16.7 | 0.0 |
| Kuzhalmannam | 66.7 | 60.0 | 56.7 | 33.3 | 10.0 | 13.3 | 26.7 |
| Malampuzha | 54.0 | 56.0 | 40.0 | 08.0 | 0.0 | 08.0 | 12.0 |
| Mannarkkad | 68.0 | 24.0 | 60.0 | 12.0 | 12.0 | 08.0 | 12.0 |
| Nenmara | 73.3 | 63.3 | 66.7 | 40.0 | 03.3 | 30.0 | 06.7 |
| Ottappalam | 55.0 | 52.5 | 47.5 | 05.0 | 10.0 | 10.0 | 15.0 |
| Palakkad | 67.5 | 45.0 | 0.0 | 37.5 | 05.0 | 07.5 | 07.5 |
| Pattambi | 58.0 | 28.0 | 64.0 | 16.0 | 0.0 | 16.0 | 20.0 |
| Srikrishnapuram | 70.0 | 42.5 | 77.5 | 20.0 | 0.0 | 20.0 | 25.0 |
| Thrithala | 68.0 | 44.0 | 68.0 | 18.0 | 02.0 | 16.0 | 0.0 |
| DISTRICT | 63.5 | 44.8 | 58.1 | 17.3 | 04.2 | 10.4 | 12.1 |

Source: Field Survey 2010

Ownership of bicycle is very limited. Only 17 percent own bicycles. However, in Nenmara, Palakkad and Kuzhalmannam more respondents own bicycle. Only 4 percent of the households own motorbike. Out of 13 blocks, no respondents own motorbike in 5 Blocks. Similarly having a pressure cooker, which helps cooking faster, is also very low with only 10 percent of the respondents owning it. Since wood is used as a major fuel, need and use of pressure cooker is limited among the families of women agricultural workers.

The most striking aspect is that nearly 58 percent of the respondents own mobile phone. In fact, the percentage of mobile phone owners is higher in Srikrishnapuram (77.5%), Alathur (76.7%) and Nenmara (66.7%). This brings out the fact that mobile phone is no longer a luxury but has become a common need in the modern world (Fig 6.10).

The social and economic condition of the respondents discussed so far have provided a broad based idea about the need for improving the condition of women agricultural workers in Palakkad district. Suitable planning measures have to be initiated in this regard. However, effective implementation of any planning measure requires cooperation from the target population. For this, an assessment about the perception of this target population is essential which is attempted here.

6.3.3 Perception and Problems of Women Agricultural Worker

“In a society where the rights and potential of women are constrained, no one can be truly free.”

Mary Robinson

From the primary survey, information is collected to understand the perception of women agricultural workers with regard to the following aspects:

- Opinion about working condition
- Gender disparity in wages, decision making and control of resources
- Health parameters and child welfare activities
- Participation in trade union movement
- Other Major Problems.

6.3.3.1 Opinion about Working Condition

Historically, agricultural workers had been treated as slaves; they had been denied proper wages and food despite heavy work under inhuman conditions. The landowners prefer women for agricultural workers as ‘women work for longer hours than men’. Often they employ women for even hard labour, which is usually done by men, but for lower wages. Conditions have improved vastly. Present working time is between 8 in the morning to 4 in the evening and one hour lunch time is the schedule the labourers are following.

Opinion about the condition of work is one of the questions asked while interviewing the agricultural labourers. Response to this is grouped as poor, satisfactory and good. Table 6.6 indicates that majority of the workers are satisfied with condition of work in the agricultural field. About 70 percent of them opined that condition is satisfactory. Above 80 percent respondents in seven blocks have the opinion that the condition of work is satisfactory. 87 percent respondents of Nenmara and Kollengode have of this opinion. About 14 percent of the respondents felt that the working condition is good. Only 16 percent of the women

agricultural workers felt that the working condition is poor. Respondents are of the opinion that in Kuzhalmannam, Nenmara, Srikrishnapuram and Kollengode blocks, the working condition is better than the other blocks, while in Mannarkkad, Alathur and Palakkad the working condition is comparatively poor.

6.3.3.2 Gender Disparity in Wages, Decision-making and Control of Resources

Despite often being the substantial providers and sustainers of the family women workers are even more deprived of their rightful position in the family due to low wage rates and limited access to food, arising out of the unequal power relations in the family and the society. Gender discrimination against women manifests itself in intra-household relations and in the social space. Within the household, women and men are differently positioned in relation to the allocation of responsibilities, processes of decision-making, and access to and control over resource. Irrespective of the differentials in socio-cultural dimensions across communities and classes, women shoulder the entire responsibility of domestic labour, which is true for agricultural worker households also. In addition, they attend to paid work in the farms. During work days, these women wake up at around 4.30 to 5 am to finish cooking, cleaning and feeding of children before going to work by 7.30 to 7.45 am; they get back to bed only by 10 to 10.30 pm.

Nearly 80 percent of the women reported they do not get any help from their men in the discharge of domestic responsibilities such as cooking, fetching water, washing clothes, cleaning floors or caring of children. There is no difference in this regard even in the better off families among them. The few women who get support get it either in fetching water or in the care of children. The gendered relations have created an environment at home, which does not allow women to take rest a little even after long hours of tedious, backbreaking work such as

transplanting, weeding or harvesting. After collecting wages, these women rush to the nearby shops for buying food articles and then to their kitchen for preparing dinner. Usually, women do errands and fetch food articles and other household items, in addition to the work in the kitchen. Obviously, most of these works are invisible and not reckoned as work at all. They are considered women's responsibility. It will not be entirely correct to believe that all women internalise such gender roles uncritically. It is largely the social pressures that impose such burdens on them.

Decision-making and property ownership are two important areas where distinct gender disparity prevails in most families. The role of decision-making in the household is decided based on sex and age. The role of women in economic and other important decision-making for the households is insignificant. Gender disparity is analysed considering wages, decision-making process and property ownership aspects between men and women in the family.

Table 6.9 reveals the details regarding opinion of the respondents about the gender disparity. About three-fourths of the respondents are of the opinion that difference in wage is the major disparity because women's wages are less than half to that of men. Even for same work, women get lower wage than men do. In Chittur (93%), Kuzhalmannam (90%) and Kollengode (83%) respondents expressed their dissatisfaction in the wage disparity. This opinion is lowest in Mannarkkad with 54 percent.

About 28 percent of them expressed that the same work should get same pay; it is improper for them to get less wage. In Malampuzha about 48 percent of them are in favour of same work same pay but in Attappady only 8 percent of the respondents have this view. However, 51 percent of the respondents wanted to reduce the disparity in wages. Even though 93 percent of the respondents in Chittur expressed that wage is one of the major points of gender disparity, only 13 percent

of them in favour of same work same pay, but the remaining 80 percent wanted to reduce the disparity in wages. However, the social taboo is so explicit that some of the respondents agree that men do more work than women do and so they may be paid more wages.

37 percent of the respondents felt that the disparity exists in the property ownership and another 18 percent are of the view that decision-making is another dimension where there is disparity. Regarding property ownership, 60 percent of the respondents consider it as a social custom. Due to the lack of property ownership, they find it difficult to get loan for the benefit of the family. Nevertheless, in some of the families women have an important role in decision-making together with men. In 18 percent of the households, women take decision because they are households with only women, or of widows or without older male members.

Table 6.9
Palakkad District - Women Agricultural Workers
Views Regarding Gender Disparity

| Blocks | Opinion about Wage Disparity | | | Opinion about Gender Disparity | | |
|-----------------|------------------------------|-------------------|------------|--------------------------------|--------------------|-----------------|
| | Same work same pay | Reduce difference | No comment | Wage | Property ownership | Decision making |
| Alathur | 26.7 | 66.7 | 06.6 | 76.7 | 40.0 | 6.0 |
| Attappady | 08.0 | 40.0 | 52.0 | 72.0 | 36.0 | 6.0 |
| Chittur | 13.3 | 80.0 | 06.7 | 93.3 | 46.7 | 40.0 |
| Kollengode | 26.7 | 40.0 | 33.3 | 83.3 | 33.3 | 36.7 |
| Kuzhalmannam | 16.7 | 70.0 | 13.3 | 90.0 | 26.7 | 13.3 |
| Malampuzha | 48.0 | 24.0 | 28.0 | 68.0 | 48.0 | 28.0 |
| Mannarkkad | 40.0 | 50.0 | 10.0 | 54.0 | 28.0 | 18.0 |
| Nenmara | 40.0 | 46.7 | 13.3 | 66.7 | 30.0 | 13.3 |
| Ottappalam | 35.0 | 57.5 | 07.5 | 67.5 | 30.0 | 22.5 |
| Palakkad | 30.0 | 62.5 | 07.5 | 70.0 | 37.5 | 12.5 |
| Pattambi | 22.0 | 58.0 | 20.0 | 76.0 | 32.0 | 14.0 |
| Srikrishnapuram | 20.0 | 30.0 | 50.0 | 77.5 | 55.0 | 20.0 |

| | | | | | | |
|-----------|------|------|------|------|------|------|
| Thrithala | 34.0 | 56.0 | 10.0 | 66.0 | 36.0 | 8.0 |
| DISTRICT | 28.3 | 51.0 | 20.7 | 72.5 | 36.9 | 18.5 |

Source: Field Survey 2010

Table 6.10
Palakkad District - Women Agricultural Workers
Views Regarding Condition of Work and Problems

| Blocks | Condition of Work | | | Problems of Workers | | |
|-----------------|-------------------|--------------|------|---------------------|-----------|--------|
| | Poor | Satisfactory | Good | Less Labour days | Low wages | Others |
| Alathur | 40.0 | 60.0 | 0.0 | 40.0 | 76.7 | 30.0 |
| Attappady | 10.0 | 74.0 | 16.0 | 52.0 | 48.0 | 22.0 |
| Chittur | 6.7 | 83.3 | 10.0 | 76.7 | 90.0 | 0.0 |
| Kollengode | 0.0 | 86.7 | 13.3 | 23.3 | 66.7 | 36.7 |
| Kuzhalmannam | 0.0 | 83.3 | 16.7 | 73.3 | 60.0 | 26.7 |
| Malampuzha | 28.0 | 54.0 | 18.0 | 72.0 | 64.0 | 24.0 |
| Mannarkkad | 44.0 | 36.0 | 20.0 | 52.0 | 48.0 | 16.0 |
| Nenmara | 0.0 | 86.7 | 13.3 | 73.3 | 56.7 | 26.7 |
| Ottappalam | 5.0 | 80.0 | 15.0 | 55.0 | 67.5 | 22.5 |
| Palakkad | 40.0 | 60.0 | 0.0 | 55.0 | 75.0 | 25.0 |
| Pattambi | 10.0 | 74.0 | 16.0 | 34.0 | 64.0 | 26.0 |
| Srikrishnapuram | 0.0 | 80.0 | 20.0 | 85.0 | 57.5 | 20.0 |
| Thrithala | 6.0 | 80.0 | 14.0 | 84.0 | 34.0 | 4.0 |
| DISTRICT | 15.6 | 70.6 | 13.8 | 59.8 | 60.4 | 21.0 |

Source: Field Survey 2010

Gender inequalities are often reflected in women's lack of access to and control over resources including their own wages. Their labour power is practically the only economic resource they have. Even over women's wages, men wield considerable control. Nearly one-half of women in the sample reported that they have little freedom in spending their wage income; they have to hand over their earnings to their husbands. The women, who are 'free' to spend their income, exhaust it entirely on household expenditure. Thus, the 'freedom' they have is to spend it on household consumption mainly on food articles.

Many of the women who conceded that they are forced to hand over their wages to husbands reported that they are not allowed to enquire into the ways their husbands spend the money. In addition, for many of them, any reluctance on their part to hand over the money would invite abuse and assault. Men wield control not only over economic resources but on their women's mobility and freedom to work as well. Men and women have more conflicting than co-operative priorities. Open conflicts affect women adversely.

6.3.3.3 Health Parameters and Child Welfare Activities

Morbidity among the sample women workers is not very high. Less than half of them reported that they were suffering from one or more ailments. The higher incidence of chronic skeletal muscular and postural health problems such as joint pain and back pain are common diseases, indicative of their work-related health hazards. Usually women work for longer hours than men and stooping in backbreaking positions. Table 6.11 reveals that nearly 39 percent of them are suffering from back pain and joint pain. Nenmara record the maximum incidence of back pain (57 percent) followed by Srikrishnapuram (52 percent). In Kuzhalmannam and Mannarkkad the reported cases are the lowest with 23.3 and 24 percent respectively. Anemia and Asthma are some of the other diseases prevalent among women agricultural workers. Anemia is mainly due to the low intake of proper food. Despite working on par with men and contributing all their earnings to food, attending to additional work at home and taking care of children women agricultural workers do not get enough nutritious food. Discussions brought out the fact that women see these diseases as part of their lives and rely on medical help only when the ailment becomes unbearable.

The women in the sample and their household members depend on medical shops for treatment of small ailments. As expected, with regard to the utilisation

of different systems of medicine, about 90 percent of the workers depend on the allopathic system. Even here, government hospitals are used by more than 80 percent of the respondents. The workers who depend on the private health care system point out that they depended on it primarily due to nearness of the facility.

The utilisation of maternal health care services is the highest in Kerala among all Indian States due to better availability and accessibility of such services. For instance, antenatal check up is almost universal (99 per cent) in Kerala as compared to India (65 per cent) as per National Family Health Services -II (1998-99). However, the use of full antenatal services (at least three Anti Natal Care visits and at least one Tetanus Toxoid vaccine taken and IFA tablets taken during pregnancy) in Kerala is 86 per cent. Although there was little variation across districts, the use of full antenatal services is below the State average in the districts of Thiruvananthapuram (71.8 per cent), Kasaragod (75.4 per cent), Malappuram (78.8 per cent), Idukki (82.1 per cent) and Pathanamthitta (84.8 per cent) while in Palakkad it is almost same as that of the state average of 86 percent (Kerala Development Report, 2008). Nevertheless, almost all deliveries (97 per cent) took place at the medical institutions in Kerala, except in Malappuram district (88 per cent). In Palakkad it is 93.4. In the case of sample respondents it is 81.5 percent. Compared to the district average institutional delivery the samples show a lower value not only because of the low socio economic status but also due to the age structure. Only 28 percent of the respondents are below the age group of 40 years (Table: 6.3). Majority of the present generation depends on Hospital for delivery. The variation across the blocks shows that in Palakkad, Mannarkkad and Attappady the delivery at home is above 25 percent (Fig 6.11). This higher percentage is more among the SC/ST communities.

Like the use of maternal health care services, the coverage of complete child immunisation is the highest in Kerala (84 per cent). However, the coverage of complete immunisation is the lowest in Malappuram district (60 per cent) followed by Palakkad (75 per cent) (Kerala Human Development Report 2008). The present study shows that among the respondents, coverage of immunisation of their children is 90 percent.

A higher level of immunisation coverage than the district average is found in Thrithala, Mannarkkad, Alathur, Kollengode and Malampuzha. Awareness campaign from the government is the main reason for this very high coverage even among the agricultural labourers. There is not much variation among the blocks. The lowest 84 percent immunisation coverage is noticed in Pattambi (Fig 6.12).

The major responsibility for practising birth control measures falls on women irrespective of the methods adopted. From among the 503 respondents who were married, 53.7 percent adopted various contraceptive methods. Not surprisingly, men seldom followed any method of contraception, except two. Among the women who adopted contraception, sterilisation accounts for more than 90 percent. Men's role of fatherhood enables them to evade such responsibilities. The recognition of motherhood as the women's role imposes on them the entire responsibility of bearing the burdens of contraception, more or less solely. The cultural construction of sexuality of men and women in the backdrop of unequal power relations reinforces and legitimises such discrimination against women. Visualising women as the cause and therefore the potential solution for population issues, all the burden of controlling reproduction is imposed on them, a practice, which has had far-reaching implications for their lives and health. Gender disparity is observed very clearly in this respect.

Among the blocks Alathur ranks first in adopting birth control measures with a share of about 76 percent of the sample workers. Mannarkkad,

Srikrishnapuram, Kollengode, Nenmara and Palakkad also record more number of workers who adopted family planning measures than the district average (Table 6.11). However, only 38.8 percent of women agricultural workers in Thrithala and 40 percent in Kuzhalmannam adopted birth control measures (Fig. 6.13).

6.3.3.4 Participation in Trade Union Movement

The trade union movement in the agricultural sector of Palakkad district has a history of a few decades from the late 1960s onwards. Unionisation among the agricultural workers was strongly associated with their appallingly poor conditions of work and life. Historically, the majority of the agricultural workers in the district were SCs and OBCs and they were labourers under High caste Hindus such as Bhramins and Nairs. Prior to the commencement of unionisation and collective bargaining, the agricultural workers especially from the Scheduled Castes had been treated by the landlords like slaves. According to the local office-bearers of Kerala State *Karshaka Thozhilali* Union (KSKTU), the workers used to be forced to work for more than 18 hours a day starting from about 4.30 a.m. until as late as 10 p.m. They were not given proper food and not even regular wages. The workers were subjected to strict surveillance and even physical assault. The punitive measures taken for absence from work especially during the peak agricultural seasons included beating, retrenchment and eviction from their huts. The highly exploitative and oppressive system under which the labourers had to live and work was so unbearable that in course of time they began to organise themselves into unions. The organisational efforts soon became widespread throughout the State. Under the leadership of the Communist Party of India (Marxist), the KSKTU was formed in Palakkad in 1968. The organisational efforts and the agitational methods coupled with progressive legislative measures radically changed the situation in a

short period. Indeed, the status of the agricultural workers improved significantly and now the majority of them own at least a homestead to dwell.

The 1960 has also witnessed the enactment of progressive land reforms in the State by which poor hutment dwellers in the lands of landlords were given ownership rights of their homesteads. Trade union activities, rising wage rates and ownership status on homesteads raised the status and the level of social awareness of agricultural workers. They increasingly took part in political activities. In the process, they became acquainted with political process and political leadership. Women workers also participate in these activities in large numbers.

Table 6.11
Palakkad District - Women Agricultural Workers
Health and Labour Union Membership

| Blocks | Health problem | Institutional delivery | Birth control measures adopted | Child Immunisation | Labour Union Membership |
|-----------------|----------------|------------------------|--------------------------------|--------------------|-------------------------|
| Alathur | 46.7 | 89.7 | 75.9 | 93.1 | 63.3 |
| Attappady | 42 | 72.9 | 47.9 | 89.6 | 50.0 |
| Chittur | 46.7 | 92.6 | 51.9 | 88.9 | 60.0 |
| Kollengode | 30.0 | 80.0 | 63.3 | 93.3 | 66.7 |
| Kuzhalmannam | 23.3 | 80.0 | 40.0 | 90.0 | 47.7 |
| Malampuzha | 28.0 | 82.6 | 34.8 | 91.3 | 64.0 |
| Mannarkkad | 24.0 | 72.9 | 70.8 | 95.8 | 76.0 |
| Nenmara | 56.7 | 83.3 | 60.0 | 86.7 | 50.0 |
| Ottappalam | 40 | 84.2 | 52.6 | 89.5 | 32.5 |
| Palakkad | 40 | 70.0 | 57.5 | 85.0 | 67.5 |
| Pattambi | 52.0 | 80.0 | 48.0 | 84.0 | 54.0 |
| Srikrishnapuram | 42.5 | 81.6 | 68.4 | 84.2 | 55.0 |
| Thrithala | 38 | 95.9 | 38.8 | 95.9 | 54.0 |
| DISTRICT | 38.8 | 81.5 | 53.7 | 89.9 | 56.3 |

Source: Field Survey 2010

However, the women's contributions went largely unrecognised or were considered supplementary to men's efforts. Here also women continued to be

viewed as subordinate to men rather than as persons capable of leading political processes and setting development goals for the community. Women's absence in leading and decision-making bodies of trade union at the local level is conspicuous.

Labour Union membership of the women agricultural workers were given in the Table 6.11. More than 56 percent of the respondents are members of a union. Majority of them are aware of the benefits of becoming the member. Their bargaining power and the high wage they are getting all are the benefits of the union. The wage rate of Agricultural labourers of Kerala is the highest among all the major States of India. This is the result of Union membership. Maximum union membership with 76 percent is seen in Mannarkkad (Fig 6.14). The blocks with a comparatively higher rate of union membership than that of the district average is noticed in Palakkad (67.5), Kollengode (66.7), Malampuzha (64), Alathur (63.3) and Chittur (60). Union members are the lowest in Ottappalam (32.5).

6.3.3.5 Other Major Problems

In addition to the problems discussed above, three more problems were identified while interviewing. They are less labour days, low wages and insecurity of job. About 60 percent of the respondents expressed that number of labour days and wages are insufficient for them to manage their day-to-day affairs. In Chittur 90 percent of respondents are of the view that the wage is less for them to manage the regular expenses of the household. In Alathur, Palakkad, Ottappalam, Kollengode, Pattambi and Kuzhalmannam respondents are not satisfied with the amount of wage they are getting. At the same time, more than 60 percent of the respondents in Srikrishnapuram, Thrithala, Chittur, Kuzhalmannam, Nenmara and Malampuzha have opined that less labour days is also one of their major problems.

21percent of them have other problems like poor health conditions, non-supportive attitude of the male members, insecurity in the work, etc.

Majority of them are of the view that the agricultural work in the field is a tedious manual job, in the mud and in the sun, which induces health problems. Nearly half of them are facing back pain and problems in the leg and foot. Once they are affected by diseases and they have to face it on their own without any financial help from anywhere. The landowners are not providing them with any assistance other than wages. Hence, the insecurity of agriculture labour is one of the major problems identified while discussing with the respondents.

Economic condition, peace, and tranquility in the family of the women agricultural workers are further deteriorated with men's addiction to liquor and smoking. A large section of the male members in the family spent a large sum of their income for liquor and smoking, which in turn affected their women and family. However, the respondents were hesitant about telling the problem of alcoholism, but the information obtained is collected indirectly from the neighbours and others. In the drunken state men beat women with no fault of theirs. The respondents wanted to improve their income level either by increasing their labour days or by increasing their wage.

6.4 Conclusion

The varied socio-economic and psychological dimensions of the women agricultural workers have exposed a wide array of inter twining factors that span over the physical, demographic and social aspects of the study area. For making an effective planning strategy, it is essential to understand the relationship among the socio-economic and psychological parameters. This is possible only with the help