Chapter 6

REORIENTING AGRICULTURE IN NEOLIBERALISM

Kerala in neoliberalism accelerated its shifts to cash crops, marking an overall decline in food crop cultivation. But such attempts in Kuttanad in the 1990s were abandoned, setting in a phase of return to paddy in the 2000s. Even as this marks a deeper recognition of the ecological specificity of Kuttanad, the new operations function through a larger penetration of capital, with an unprecedented level of labour elimination. The spatial practices changed radically through large scales of operations through leasing in, and the entry of harvesters for the first time in Kuttanad. Through these two processes, capital overcomes the limits set by land ceiling and by higher wages, that had altered Kuttanad's spatiality from the 1970s onwards. The elimination of labour from farm operations and thereby from agricultural profits, hold differing implications for women and dalits. Assertions to save rice fields for the cause of labour and of the environment in the 1990s were crucial in paving way for state supports for paddy cultivation, prices of paddy as well as its marketing. But the trajectory through which paddy cultivation is reinstating in Kuttanad, is paradoxical because the environmental and labour issues have got sidelined, with capital predominating the region's spatiality. The ecological implications continue to marginalise the livelihoods of fishing and other activities based on Vembanad Lake.

Introduction

My paternal home in Thayankary village (in Kuttanad) was a beautiful tiled house with a wooden granary. In the 1970s during our visits to the home, we used to walk down the flight of steps that led to the water where we brushed in the morning and greeted persons plying boats. This house and others that faced the waters, are today reconstructed to face the road. The water sides have become neglected backyards. Formerly the water at the doorstep is where people used to wash vessels and clothes, and used to bathe. Ferries and boats plied the waters and took students to schools and colleges. But today water hyacinth (popularly called 'African paayal') clog the waterways and has in many places made the plying of boats impossible. The innumerable roads
and bridges built across water bodies have made the dependence on water transport much lesser than before.

The landscape of Kuttanad has also been greatly modified through increased construction of large houses, even as its clayey soil cannot withstand presence of up to 20 tonnes per sq. km. Strong foundations were necessary because of the peculiarity of the soil. Many concrete buildings built on ordinary foundations were found shaking (The Hindu, Aug 20, 2006). The same logic should also apply to the building of roads and bridges. But in the past one and a half decades or so, '...alarming number of roads and bridges built in the last one decade resulting in water body shrinkage... roads built across the far stretches of paddy now cater to tipper lorries zooming at unimaginable speeds to landfill some ... farm land' (Krishnakumar 2013).

The transitions in the landscape are outcomes of changed spatial practices. The represented spaces built through technological interventions and the various aspects of 'green revolution' in the 1960s and 1970s resulted in both planned and incidental implications on ecology and landscape of the region (discussed in Chapter 5). The spatial layering of economic stagnation that set in by the late 1980s gave way to yet another layering by early 2000s, making sharp transitions in spatial practices of contemporary Kuttanad. This phase of neoliberalism (NL) is characterised by an unprecedented level of capital-intensive paddy production and the expansion of tourism. All aspects of space became sharply re-ordered through these changes. What are the regional and global underpinnings of the changing spatial practices of contemporary Kuttanad? And what are the implications on labour and ecology? These are examined through field observations and secondary sources of information.

Within the macro-patterns of spatial implications and thrusts of NL, what happens at the regional levels are governed by a number of aspects. These are not only dynamic outcomes of the historic layerings of region formation in the past, which would show continuity and change in the contemporary phase, but also an outcome of how the region gears up in to formulate a renewed space of Kuttanad in NL.

**Reinstating Paddy Cultivation**

The implications of neoliberal international agreements on trade, as noted by Patnaik (2012) has created the acceleration of non-food crop cultivation in the third world. This trend is observed to be well-developed in Kerala (see Table 6.1) where the already existing prominence of cash crops
became more profitable through neoliberal policies, thus enhancing increases in area under non-food crops and decline in area under food crops.

Rateesh Mon (2014) observes that the shift from food crops to cash crops is opted by land owners because of greater profits in the latter. Pepper, cardamom, tea, coffee and rubber are fetching more foreign exchange in contemporary times. Moreover, he underscores the importance of the role of the state in actualising such decisions:

As an agrarian state with export-oriented crop production, Kerala's agriculture is very much exposed to each government decision on international trade and commerce (Rateesh Mon, 2014: 22).

Table 6.1 Area under crops (in .000 hectares) in Kerala

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Crop/ Year</th>
<th>1975-76</th>
<th>1985-86</th>
<th>1995-96</th>
<th>2005-06</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total food crops</td>
<td>1909</td>
<td>1606</td>
<td>1441</td>
<td>1342</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total non-food crops</td>
<td>1072</td>
<td>1107</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>1653</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paddy</td>
<td>885</td>
<td>678</td>
<td>471</td>
<td>290</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Source: Department of Economics and Statistics, Kerala, 1998)

Mohanakumar and Sharma (2006) note that the association of farmer distress is linked to neoliberal policy regimes, and is greater in the regions that are dependent on export-oriented crops.

In addition to the export-oriented productions, the state's economy benefited directly by the liberalisation of the foreign exchange rate since 1991 and by mid-nineties, its relative magnitudes have assumed a crucial place in the Kerala economy (Kannan and Hari 2002). This along with the wind fall gain varied from nearly Rs. 525 crores in 1991-92 to Rs.3,339 crores in 1999 (pp7)
the full convertibility of the Indian Rupee in 1993 that helped NRIs to bring in more Rupees in exchange of foreign currencies (Joseph 2010) were boosting up the fiscal situations of the state. Economists are often relieved as this situation seems to take care of the economic component of the 'Kerala model'\(^2\), whose weakness had been heavily critiqued in the 1980s. This sigh of relief (for instance, *Human Development Report of Kerala, 2005*) emerges from the fact that the state needs money to be executing the welfare-oriented policies, which is exactly what is being curtailed in neoliberalism. But this argument needs to be expanded because the most important factor underlying Kerala experiences is the concerted and organised efforts of people. Without this aspect, there is no guarantee that pro-people measures would be taken by the state. The role of this important aspect would be kept in mind in the present chapter that examines the region's agriculture in NL.

Kuttanad, just as other paddy producing regions of the state, saw decline in net sown area from the 1980s onwards. Just as happened in most parts of the state, the 1990s saw an attempt by landed persons to abandon paddy and opt for other crops in Kuttanad. But this met with resistance from trade unions and civil society. Moreover, Kuttanad's below sea level elevation, water-abundance and its proximity to floods, does not make it the best location for most crops other than paddy. Prominent cash crops of Kerala that fetch good money value, need well-drained soil. Even coconut palms in Kuttanad are not grown in the form of gardens as in other parts of the state, but occupy tiny patches of elevated lands on the fringes of paddy fields, literally dotting the paddy fields.

Tables 6.2 indicates that in Kerala the area under HYV rice and its production declined between 2002-3 and 2011-12. The only two districts that show a detour from the general trend are Alleppey and Kottayam, which represent the Kuttanad region. All other districts of the state show marked decline in area of cultivation and in the production of paddy. Even Palakkad that is a dominant rice-growing region, shows a decline in area under paddy cultivation and only a very marginal increase in production.

\(^2\) Even as economic indices like per capita income was fairly low in Kerala, the social indices like education were exceptionally high. Public distribution system, and public systems of education and health were functioning well, and poverty was not drastic as in most other parts of the country.
Table 6.2: Area under HYV rice (in hectares) and production of HYV rice (in tonnes)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>District/Year</th>
<th>Area 2002-03</th>
<th>Area 2011-12</th>
<th>Production 2002-03</th>
<th>Production 2011-12</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Trivandrum</td>
<td>5539</td>
<td>2385</td>
<td>12317</td>
<td>6118</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kollam</td>
<td>7024</td>
<td>1349</td>
<td>5371</td>
<td>3139</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pathanamthitta</td>
<td>4438</td>
<td>2803</td>
<td>11468</td>
<td>8988</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alappuzha</td>
<td>27871</td>
<td>36076</td>
<td>89237</td>
<td>111794</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kottayam</td>
<td>12130</td>
<td>21389</td>
<td>30635</td>
<td>63534</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Idukki</td>
<td>3379</td>
<td>979</td>
<td>7718</td>
<td>2528</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eranakulam</td>
<td>28076</td>
<td>7480</td>
<td>54403</td>
<td>16008</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thrissur</td>
<td>27873</td>
<td>20522</td>
<td>70642</td>
<td>61129</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Palakkad</td>
<td>100055</td>
<td>80438</td>
<td>217998</td>
<td>218063</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Malappuram</td>
<td>11863</td>
<td>5388</td>
<td>26064</td>
<td>14718</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kozhikkode</td>
<td>1441</td>
<td>883</td>
<td>2665</td>
<td>1929</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wayanad</td>
<td>9524</td>
<td>7864</td>
<td>24455</td>
<td>21297</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kannur</td>
<td>7587</td>
<td>4537</td>
<td>14660</td>
<td>10019</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kasaragod</td>
<td>4004</td>
<td>2642</td>
<td>9667</td>
<td>6234</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>250804</td>
<td>194734</td>
<td>587300</td>
<td>545498</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Source: Facts and Figures of Agriculture in Kerala 2013)
Within a period of nine years from 2002-3 onwards, there has approximately been 44% increase in area of paddy cultivation in Kuttanad and an increase of approximately 5% in production. The data indicates that Kuttanad is revitalising paddy production, as compared to the situations of the previous two decades.

**Outlining the Contemporary Spatial Processes**

In order to analyse the spatial processes of contemporary Kuttanad, Lefebvrian categorisations are utilised and outlined below:

(a) **Spatial Practice**

In the late 1990s landowners attempted to cultivate crops other than paddy, thus making a change in spatial practices. But this did not take off due to ecological reasons and due to strong resistance from trade unions, civil society and environmental groups. By the 1st half of 2000s, Kuttanad started to re-establish commercial paddy cultivation, after a gap of nearly 10-15 years, through unprecedented inputs of capital-intensive farm operations.

(b) **Represented space**

in contemporary Kuttanad operates through capital-intensity, in which the new entrant is the harvester, which was previously resisted by trade unions on grounds of labour displacement. What spatial underpinnings made possible the entry of harvesters and its widespread usage today in Kuttanad? And what are the spatial and social implications unfolding through it?

(c) **The lived space**

is conceived here as that which is lived by the labourers, with special nuances of women and dalits, as well as of the fishers, toddy tappers and mussel gatherers. What are the lived experiences, and spatio-social responses?

**Changing Spatial Practices**

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3 described by Lefebvre as the spatial practice of a society which secretes that society’s space.

4 described by Lefebvre as the planned space, the abstract space of capitalism, the space of the scientists, planners, technocrats and social engineers.

5 described by Lefebvre as the space that is directly lived through its associated images and symbols.
Since the later part of 1980s, the tendency to leave paddy lands fallow was growing in Kuttanad (discussed in Chapter 5) as in other parts of Kerala. According to the State Planning Board, Kerala lost over 5,00,000 hectares of paddy fields between 1980 and 2007 (Mukesh 2015). Upper Kuttanad is more prone to this trend than Lower Kuttanad. Often whole *padashekharams* are left fallow. There are many instances of paddy fields being converted for brick-making in Upper Kuttanad. Jayan⁷, a KSSP activist from Champakulam, said that the decisions taken by the wealthy farmers impact entire *padashekharams*. Requirements of farming like dewatering can happen only with the co-operation of wealthy farmers. He observes that the small farmers cannot contest much because most operations in *padashekharams* are done through collective decisions. Apart from the economic issue of profit and loss, some farmers of Kuttanad point out social reasons for abandoning paddy cultivation. They observe that the amount of hard work involved in farming does not provide a matching social acceptance, and contradict the situation with that of emigrants to the Gulf countries, who have greater social status.

By late 1990s the pan-Kerala trend of converting paddy lands in to other land uses, was resisted by KSKTU, KSSP, and environmentalists. The resistance, which came to be known as 'Save Rice Field Agitation' (SRFA), was most intense in Kuttanad. Even as the conversion of farm lands was legally restricted through the Land Utilisation Order of 1967, the farmers converted paddy lands illegally and argued for their rights to cultivate crops of their choice. But the agricultural labourers demanded the continuation of paddy cultivation, which is labour intensive. Any change in land use would drastically displace them, and they argued for their right to work.

Farmers had organised as 'Kuttanad Karshaka Sangham' as early as 1932 and had formed a federation called 'Akhila Kuttanad Karshaka Sangam' in 1960. The 'Upper Kuttanad Karshaka Sangham' has a clear affinity to the Kerala Congress (Mani). Nevertheless, the situation of 1990s is described by Narayan (2003:24) as an amorphous class of farmers who bear the cost of low productive rice cultivation and cannot come together as an interest group because of their multiple identities and cleavages...and nobody except a few are full time farmers. At the same time, he notes that the situations of the labourers were crucial because:

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⁶ A *padasekharam* is a large stretch of agricultural land owned by different persons, and where farming is jointly managed. There are elections every year to decide on the secretary of the *padashekharam*. The practice of *padashekharams* has been a feature of Kuttanad for long.

⁷ In my interview with him
...there is a loss of 147 labour days per hectare per season that cannot be compensated by any other crop. Nobody has precisely calculated the quantum of displacement or where these labourers get ‘absorbed’. Therefore, there is the larger question of increasing unemployment and marginalisation of one of the most vulnerable sections of which the majority are the lowest caste women (Narayan, 2003:35)... the drastic reduction of number of labour days have been cutting in to wage gains that had been made by the trade union movement (Narayan 2003:20).

Jayan narrates the SRFA experiences as follows:

After the widespread construction of roads in Kuttanad, people started to build houses on the farm lands along the road. Thus roads play an important role in creating several prominent changes in the region. When the trend of conversion of paddy lands became rampant in the 1990s, we campaigned against it...Landowners asserted that they could do anything on their land. SRFA became a political polarisation between the Communists and the Kerala Congress (Mani). Later as it gave way to the destruction of banana plantations (which were planted on converted paddy fields) by agitators, the agitation generally lost steam. But this agitation later paved way for the development of the ‘Wetland Conservation Act’ of the Kerala State formulated in 2008.

Multiple perspectives were emerging on the issue of paddy cultivation. The farmers' position was contested by labourers and environmentalists because of the labour displacements and ecological disruptions respectively, and the state was concerned on food security. But the farmers held on to a commercial right to make profits. They pointed out that labour scarcity and trade union militancy were making paddy cultivation unprofitable, and saw mechanisation of farm operations as the way out. Thus Kuttanad was by the end of 1990s reaching a junction as far as paddy cultivation was concerned, which way would the region turn to?

The Cultivation of Fallow Lands

In the decade of 2000, land started to be leased in for paddy cultivation. Though this was nothing new, the socio-economic pattern of leasing, as documented by Eswaran in the 1980s, changed sharply in the 2000s. The subsistence farming of the latter part of the 1980s, was replaced by large scales of commercial operation and increased mechanisation. The re-establishment of paddy cultivation was enhanced through situations in which the commercial farmers ensured ample profits. Again, this is nothing new for Kuttanad, in which the 1970s had marked peak productions through commercial operations. But the sharp change is of the entry of harvesters, which almost completely eliminated labour in paddy cultivation. The landscape of Kuttanad in the 1970s could not be described without the large numbers of labourers working the farms like a well-rehearsed orchestra. The prominence of women labourers harvesting paddy was then a strong imagery of Kuttanad. But today the farms during harvest are solely occupied by the harvester, accompanied by one or two men labourers.
I approached Josichen, a 48 years old full-time farmer of Kainakary village, for two reasons: firstly, his interest in bringing fallow land under cultivation in Kuttanad, for which he has obtained recognition, and media attention; and secondly, through his farming operations extending to 500 acres today (through leasing in), he represents one of the large-scale operators of Kuttanad. He is not a 'new' farmer, but been farming for more than 25 years. He belongs to a landed Syrian Christian family in Kainakary, and has been able to expand his prospects not only through paddy cultivation in Kuttanad, but also through cash crop cultivation in Palakkad, where he is settled with his family. His experiences of bringing fallow lands under cultivation in Kuttanad are narrated as follows:

In the past 10 years I have been trying to cultivate the fallow lands of Veeyapuram, Chennitala and Mavelikara (upper Kuttanad). 600 acres of land in Muppayikari muttam padashekham have been lying fallow for 25 years. These places situated at a higher elevation than Lower Kuttanad did not have sufficient drainage channels for excess water. This was the problem that had to be solved. Moreover the general problems of labour scarcity had impacted them. In one of my travels I happened to see these fallow lands and talked to the padashekham committee President. We held 3-4 meetings with the panchayat and the Krishi Bhavan. They were of the opinion that those lands cannot be successfully cultivated. Several years ago the rains had destroyed the harvests very often. Even as they agreed to lease out the land to me on a trial basis, they were skeptical on whether they would get their lands back. This fear was overcome by making formal agreements. In cultivating lands left fallow, it takes 3 years to attain successful yields. With the backing of the panchayat and the Agricultural Department, the padashekham committee agreed to lease out land to me.

As an enterprising farmer, he tried to solve the drainage problem by adopting the methods used in Lower Kuttanad. But as the fields became ready, the landowners withdrew from their agreement. Yet they called him again and he demanded conditions of formal agreements on stamp paper including the statement of lease amounts for every year. After 3 years, he withdrew from the farms, and the landowners took on the cultivation, and today all of the 600 acres are being cultivated.

Q: Do they cultivate their own lands today?

J: Some of them do, others lease out.

Q: What is the most important aspect that made the revival of these fallow lands possible?

J: The harvesters, through which they are today confident that paddy production can be profitable.

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8 Panchayat level offices of the Department of Agriculture, Govt. of Kerala

9 After the land reforms of the 1970s, landowners fear whether their land would be lost, and handed over to the tenants
Q: Do you have such experiences elsewhere?

J: Yes, 200 acres of land in Chennittala kunja- that falls under Mavelikara taluk and under Maanmar Krishi Bhavan. During that time, there was no support from the government. But later, with the state's increasing concern on food security, it extended support for the cultivation of fallow lands. The Kerala state also passed legislation in 2008 against conversion of cultivation lands for any other purposes.

Q: Through land reforms several middle level people got land. Do they lease out?

J: Many do

Q: What about the dalits?

J: Only some of them lease in land and cultivate. They get money from the government to buy land. A few of them have been able to do that.

Jayan also estimates that very few dalits actually lease in land. Many of them had obtained land in Rani-Chittira area through land redistribution. Ranni, Chithira and Marthandam (in Kainakary panchayat) are the lands famously reclaimed by Muricken. Through land reforms, these lands were redistributed to around 2,000 farmers. But due to rains and vagaries of nature, the farmers faced losses and they left the land fallow in 1994. They gave permission to Travancore Cements to mine white mussels from the *kayal* land. Huge craters were formed on the land through mining. Once mining was abandoned, these lands became unsuitable for cultivation.

**State Support for Paddy Cultivation**

The articulations in favour of paddy cultivation from the late 1990s onwards acted as pressure on the government, paving way for some supportive moves in 2000s, which are examined below:

(a) The Kerala Conservation of Paddy land and Wetland Act, 2008 - An Act to conserve the paddy land and wetland and to restrict the conversion or reclamation thereof, in order to promote growth in the agricultural sector and to sustain the ecological system, in the State of Kerala.

The Act becomes a useful regulatory legislation. But people have been seeking loopholes in its following clause:

... for the reclamation of paddy land, for public purpose or for construction of residential building for the owner of the paddy land. Provided that the Committee shall not recommend for filling of paddy land of more than ten cents in a Panchayat or five cents in a Municipality / Corporation, as the case may be, for the construction of residential building for the owner of the paddy land.

There are many instances of land owners landfilling more than the permitted 10 cents of land, which is then sold to others, they use influential officers and politicians for the purpose.
The Act has provisions for a local level monitoring Committee, with the Agricultural Officer as the convener. One of the responsibilities of the Committee is to examine the reason for keeping the paddy land fallow and to suggest remedial measures so as to persuade the holder of paddy land to cultivate it with paddy or any intermediary crops. The Act elaborates the role of the Committee in actually executing the cultivation of fallow lands either by persuading the land holder to cultivate himself/herself or the Panchayat to cultivate it. If the Panchayat is not directly cultivating the paddy land, it can entrust the cultivation for a maximum of two years to the Padasekhara Samithis (Joint Farmers Societies); self Help Groups; or the Kudumbasree units functioning in the Grama Panchayat/Municipality where the paddy land is situated. The persons who get the right to cultivate the paddy land need to pay in advance, the remuneration as per the agreement, to the land owner. It is also noted that the above-mentioned Act lends more powers to the panchayat, and thereby enhances decentralisation.

(b) Procurement of paddy from the farmers

Even a few years ago there were instances where Kuttanad farmers lost their produce after the harvest was done. This was mainly due to rains damaging the grains. The transportation of the grains to safe destinations after harvest was often not viable as the fields are located far away from the houses with the granaries. Merchants and middle men who bought grains from the farmers often only increased their woes:

Merchants from Kalady and other places used to buy grains from the farmers of Kuttanad. There are several instances when the farmers have been cheated by the merchants. Since the past 10 years the situation is much secure and we need not give commission to anyone (Josichen).

It was in 2005 that the State government announced that the Kerala State Civil Supplies Corporation (Supplyco) would directly procure paddy from the farmers to bypass the role of mediators. Special procurement centers were planned for the purpose:

In the absence of remunerative prices the farmers had given up cultivation of paddy in the State for the past several years. However, indications are there that they are now encouraged by the procurement, as the price of Rs.7 per kg offered now by the Government is good when compared with that of Rs. 5 - 5.50 offered in the past...(Business Line, February 13, 2006)

Supplyco procures paddy directly from the farmers. The farmers register their names at the Paddy Procurement Office and obtain an identity card. Once the harvest begins, registered rice mill owners collect the grains from the farmers and issue paddy receipts to the farmers. Supplyco

Kudumbasree is one of the largest women-empowering projects of the country. It is a poverty eradication programme in Kerala.
verifies these receipts and once the government sanctions the payment, it reaches the Bank accounts of the farmers. After processing the paddy, the rice mill owners sell them to Supplyco from where it goes to the Public Distribution System (PDS). This was a farmer's response in 2014:

_The farmers obtain Rs 1800 for a quintal, which is likely to become Rs 1900 soon. Sometimes there is a delay in obtaining the money, but in most cases we get it in time._

The rate had been Rs 1400 in 2012 (Abraham 2012) which increased to Rs 1900 since January 2015. 'Supplyco offers the highest procurement price for paddy in the country, the official claimed...Paddy sells between Rs.15 and Rs.16 a kg in the open market in Kerala' (The Hindu, March 11, 2014).

(c) Kuttanad Package - is a package of the state government for the implementation of the Swaminathan Committee Recommendations (SCR), 2007\(^\text{11}\). One of the objectives of Kuttanad Package is to bring the fallow lands under cultivation. New bunds are being constructed (see Photographs 1 and 2) to mitigate floods. Bunds play a crucial role in the process of paddy cultivation in Kuttanad, as they create the walls from within which dewatering is done. The bunds are made of _katta_ or clayey soil from the Lake and strengthened by beating down manually to compress the clay. But the bunds constructed under the Kuttanad Package, called 'side bund protection', has a different objective, they are constructed along major canals as a protection against floods. Such protection ensured by the state was perceived to encourage the land owners to cultivate fallow lands.

It could be gathered that there is a two-pronged reaction to SCR and its outcomes. People overwhelmingly felt that the recommendations are good for Kuttanad because it has many features that could improve the conditions of cultivation and the environment, for instance:

_The high bunds proposed under SCR would be useful and at the same time very costly if individual farmers have to build them. The new bunds are being built with the aim of resisting floods. Compared with our usual bunds, these are taller (Sasidharan)._  

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\(^\text{11}\) The contexts of SCR is that Alappuzha district along with Kuttanad region was chosen by the Ministry of Agriculture, Government of India, for special consideration in view of the prevailing agrarian distress in the country.
People are critical about the techniques through which the bunds are being built, the idea of cement slabs being placed by JCBs is being critiqued as many of them are already falling down:

The pile and slab method of construction of bunds under the Kuttanad package had been criticised right from the beginning. The bund breached in Kainakary panchayat and 260 hectares of fields were inundated (Newsletter vol 2, issue 10, Oct 2012)

The flow of water in the area is quite swift and it is therefore difficult to be able to hold the heavy slabs in place. Biju, a small farmer, observes that instead of cement slabs they could have used stones. Why was this way of bund building pursued when Kuttanad has a good tradition and expertise on the field? Sasidharan reasons that the traditional bunds require a lot of labour and demands another sort of field commitment. A popular response was: “What is going on now involves a lot of corruption”. Lying just opposite to these new bunds were the traditional bunds made of lime and stone that holds good after around 50 years or more of its construction. These bunds in Kainakary were built when the lands still belonged to Muricken (Photograph 4.1 of Chapter 4).

In 2013 when I visited Kainakary, the work on the bunds was in progress. In the proceeding year, The Indian Express had reported:
The proposal for making the land cultivable was taken up as part of a government policy to utilise barren lands to bolster food productivity. Over 60 per cent of the outer bunds of the land has been strengthened utilising the funds of the Kuttanad package. The Agricultural Department expects Rani and Chithira to produce 3,500 tonnes of paddy worth more than 7 crore in a season. The State government had sanctioned 90.67 lakh for drawing electric lines to the polders to facilitate their dewatering (Paul 2014).

From the 2000s the state has been playing an important role in re-establishing Kuttanad's paddy cultivation.

Large-Scale Farm Operations

In the 2000s the harvesters brought such impacts in Kuttanad that almost like a prophesy, the observations of Narayan (2003) whose field work was done in the late 1990s came true:

When resources get monopolised by dominant sections, conflicts and struggles over resources are initiated. The responses might be overt and open like SRFA or fought with ‘hidden transcripts’ depending on the power relations in the social structure. However, the land use decisions still rests with the powerful in the society... which largely decides the change or continuity of land use (Narayan 2003: 37).

Abraham (2012) observes that the paddy procured from Kuttanad has increased over the past few years. The procurement price provided by the government has increased over the years and the younger generation is taking to paddy cultivation, either cultivating own land or leasing in land or doing both. He observes that the farmer today obtains a decent earning and the lessors also get a good amount as rentals have increased. These observations were confirmed by several persons. Sasidharan (who belongs to the Ezhava caste) who is 60 years of age, and lives in Pallathuruthi, does not cultivate any longer. But 7-8 years back he and his wife used to lease in and cultivate a small plot of land. He observes:

The lease which was only Rs 4000-5000 then has increased to Rs 20,000 today. Agriculture is profitable today. Now people are running around to lease in land. For 1 acre, the profit obtained today would be around Rs 20,000. The harvester is used, so women need not to be employed in large numbers for harvesting, as in the past.

Biju (who belongs to the Ezhava caste) owns 5 acres of land in R- Block, which he had bought as small plots at different times. His parents had not owned any land and they had lived off a tea stall and a toddy shop. He cultivates only one crop annually. He and his wife also run a small hotel and tea shop. He also pointed out that agriculture is profitable today and that the introduction of the harvester in Kuttanad is the main reason for this change in affairs.

Isaac (a Syrian Christian by caste) is a 50-year old farmer of Nedumudy. He has been farming for the past 30 years, and cultivates 100 acres of land today. He singles out the harvester to be the
most important factor that has saved Kuttanad from a situation of complete abandon of paddy cultivation. The rejuvenation of paddy cultivation that has become a reality, he notes, has also enhanced the social status and confidence of the Kuttanad farmers.

Josichen (a Syrian Christian by caste) cultivates 500 acres, of which he owns 15 acres, permitted under land ceiling, and the rest is leased in. He observes that the biggest factor that has impacted Kuttanad's cultivation today is the harvester:

Earlier, farmers faced situations of labour shortage. Those who became agricultural labourers 25 years ago are perhaps the youngest of them today, because the next generation's entry into this engagement is extremely scarce. The harvester filled in the gap of labour shortage.

Thus small farmers as well as large-scale operators report paddy production as being profitable and point out the harvester as being the biggest reason. But Jayan points out the development of a skewed pattern of leasing in the phase of the harvester: “Small farmers who lease in are few, those who lease in do it on large scale”. Many farmers are cultivating 100 acres and more by leasing in. Josichen notes that these are persons who are interested in agriculture, in the organisation of farm operations, and who have the money to invest. Sometimes the lease is taken for a period of 5 years. The land owners are often not cultivating, but leasing out. Jayan observes that contemporary cultivation, being done through large-scale tenancy, fulfills the important role of retaining the kayal cultivation of Kuttanad. Nevertheless, the nature of commercialisation of cultivation has become very intense:

The farmers of Kuttanad today sell their entire produce. They do not depend on these grains for their food. Earlier, grains were stored in the granaries for an year, but not so any more. The entire harvest is sold off from the farms. De-husking and other post-harvest jobs are no longer done on site. The rice mills do those jobs. And the people of Kuttanad buy rice from the grocery shops, they no longer consume their own produce.

The government gives Rs 2500 per acre as subsidy for paddy cultivation. Moreover, farmers confirmed that the State government provides Rs 21,000 per acre today as subsidy for those who cultivate fallow lands. Subsidies were given earlier also, but in the past two decades, they regularly reach the farmers: “Today the arrangements are systematic. The subsidy reaches us in our Bank accounts” (a farmer).

Spatio-Economic Pattern of Large Scale Farming

Large-scale operators look for large stretches of land, which is difficult to be leased in from the padashekharams of Lower Kuttanad. Hence they opt either for kayal lands or for
**padashekharams** of Upper Kuttanad, both of which have been most prone to being left fallow. Leasing in of these lands by farmers becomes a convenient arrangement for both the landowners and the tenants. *Kayal* cultivation implies greater expenditure, risk and strain. The *kayals* are situated at distances away from the places of residence (unlike the *padashekharams*) and therefore demands greater commitment and expenditure. Even as profits are large, uncertainties of weather can sometimes bring in large losses:

*Due to their locations near rivers, the vulnerability of kayal cultivation to madaveezhcha (breaking of bunds) is higher, as compared to padasekharams (Isac, Nedumudy).*

Given the above-mentioned situations of economics and geography, for a landowner of the *kayal* farm, who does not want to be a full-time farmer and/or who is in a salaried job, it is quite difficult to cultivate those lands by himself.

Large operators require a lot of money to be invested in farming. The contemporary *kayal cultivators* mostly belong to the landed families of the Syrian Christian community. Even as remittances from NRIs in the family and income from plantation cultivations in the Western Ghats cannot be ruled out, as observed by Isac, it is gathered that the major sources of capital are those invested by the large-scale operators and those based on Bank loans. A socio-economic and geographic pattern of *kayal* cultivation is evident, but the situation is different in the case of tenant cultivations in the Upper Kuttanad, where it is a mixed social situation of involvement in farming. The scale of operation (in a continuous stretch) is relatively smaller as compared to the *kayal*. The ecological situations of Lower Kuttanad is relatively more amenable for paddy as compared to that of Upper Kuttanad. That is why a spatial pattern of fallow lands is spread over the latter, and not so much in the former. There is larger involvement of landowners in cultivation in Lower Kuttanad.

**Representations of Space: The Harvesters**

Trade unions had in the past resisted the entry of harvesters because of the large displacement of labour that they entail. How did the region, that has a strong trade union of agricultural labourers, overcome the resistance in the 2000s?

*We had initially approached the trade union with a proposal to use harvesters in areas that were lying fallow for long. These areas had not been absorbing labour and had become areas of acute shortage of labourers. 10-12 years ago we started to bring in harvesters in such areas. Later the use of harvesters spread all over Kuttanad (Josichen).*
Harvesters used in Kuttanad are hired from Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh. Prior to the harvest, meetings are held by the farmers with the harvester owners. The latter do not demand advance payment. They are paid around Rs 1500 per acre after the harvesting is finished. Where farmers used to spend a few months in harvesting 5 to 10 acres, the harvesters do it in 24 hours. The farmers are very happy with the radical change in efficiency and time management. Since the harvester operators are not paid wages for working hours, they have no qualms in working late into the night. These aspects associated with the operations of the harvesters are perceived as crucial, when say, an unexpected rain can cause much losses. Data shows that the yields of paddy have increased in recent years: “Earlier we used to lose 10% of the grains in the harvesting process itself. But as grains do not fall off from the harvester, we have no losses.”

In April 2015 intermittent summer rains during harvest time made the mud soggy and the harvesters became stuck in several places. Josichen notes, “Now we would require other machines to pull them out.” Timing becomes very crucial not only because of the vagaries of rains, but also because once the harvest starts in Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka the harvesters would not be available for the Kuttanad farmers.

The State government attempted to purchase harvesters and rent them to farmers, so that they are available locally. There is a provision in SCR for the purchase of 300 machines. The initial purchase of 50 harvesters did not serve the purpose as they were unsuitable for the water-logged terrain of Kuttanad. Later more than 100 'Paas' machines were bought, the maintenance and the issuing of which are undertaken by the State government officers. A farmer pays Rs 20,000 as caution money, and Rs 1000 per hour as rent. Diesel costs and the wages of the driver are also borne by the farmers. Farmers observe that the work arrangements with private harvesters are more convenient because no caution deposits are required, no dealing with local labourers are required, and the harvest operators are very efficient. Hence the harvesters bought by the state remain most often underutilised.

**Spatial Underpinnings Enhancing Harvesters**

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12. These are combine harvesters that combine the work of reaping and separating the paddy from the stalks

13. Implying that there would be no issue of trade unions
What made possible the entry of harvesters and thereby the revival of paddy cultivation in Kuttanad, sharply undercutting the organised presence of the agricultural labourer's union? This is a process that needs to be analysed through the spatial underpinnings that evolved in the region in the one and a half decades prior to the 2000s. This would also help to unfold why even as KSKTU has a huge presence in Kuttanad, we cannot envisage today a labour assertion as happened in the past. The most popular reason is attributed to the educational attainments of the present generation, and hence its non-preference of employment in agriculture. Even as that is factually true, it becomes only part of the story. The crux of the development lies in the withdrawal of land owners from cultivation from the end of 1980s. As land was left fallow for more than a decade in Kuttanad, there was no employment opportunity for agricultural labourers. This category of labour therefore did not evolve from the new generation. Instead they searched for other employment avenues. So in 2000s when farmers ventured again to cultivate in Kuttanad, there was no existing younger generation of agricultural labourers. As Josichen had observed, the cultivation of fallow lands that used harvesters in the late 1990s, was not displacing labourers on the job. It is also to be noted that these initial moves were done with the consent of the trade unions. The latter can be explained through the shift in perception of the CPM happening from the 1980s onwards (discussed in Chapter 5), that took positions of less assertions and pro-production. This implies a reduction of militancy as a matter of policy. Heller (1995) takes note of the critical review done by CPM and CITU leaders in educating workers about productivity.

**Labour, Capital and Environment in the Harvest-Centred Cultivation**

The capital-intensive paddy cultivation developed in the 2000s, has the following characteristics:

1. A deeper recognition of the ecological specificity of the region, in which paddy is reinstated as the most feasible agricultural option.

2. The curtailing of agricultural labour as a category. Only the older generation of labourers remained in the category, drastically unemployed.

3. Capital investments by the rich, and to some extent through Bank loans, and to a lesser extent through cash crops in other geographical locations, and NRI remittances.

4. State interventions have been enormous and of a wide range, such as ban on land use shifts, subsidies and incentives for cultivation of fallow lands. This has also perhaps
helped to create a competitive environment for private harvest owners from neighbouring states like Karnataka and Tamil Nadu, whereby cost is kept under control.

(5) Changed orientations of CPI(M)'s trade unionism, that has the largest and most vibrant presence in Kuttanad.

Through the above-mentioned aspects Kuttanad can be described as holding a controlled status of labour contestations, increased investments of capital, and an ecological compulsion for paddy.

**Lived Spaces**

The lived spaces in Kuttanad have been impacted by the harvesters- centred paddy cultivation. The lived experiences of labourers, women and dalits, and the situations of the trade unions have been impacted. The present section also takes in to count the lived spaces of toddy tappers, of people depending on the Vembanad Lake for their livelihood, and the duck rearers.

**Yield and Labourers**

The impact of harvesters is described generally as being very positive in terms of (1) reviving agriculture in Kuttanad (2) increasing yields by minimising loss of grains during harvest; and (3) radical reduction of harvesting time. These facts have been quite convincing that even trade unions, labouring women and men, and institutions express the opinion that there was perhaps no other way to retain cultivation in Kuttanad. But it is also to be noted that most of the rationalisations do not take in to count the changing relationships on ground in which the labour category has been eliminated. In capitalist relations of production, the machine is not something that operates to reduce the drudgery of human labour, but something that is capable of eliminating the participation of labour and therefore its share in production. Marx (1857-61: 633) had observed that only in the imagination of economists does machinery leap to the aid of the individual worker, instead it enters to reduce labour to its necessary measure. The harvester in Kuttanad helps to capitalise not only through lessening of time spent, and wages saved, but also through 'minimising of wastage' of grain. The latter point is reinterpreted by Thankamma, a dalit woman agricultural labourer from Nedumudy, that represents a perspective that is usually not recorded, written or listened to, but important in understanding the spatial nuances of capitalist production whose rationalisations can camouflage the needs of the deprived:

*The earth gives us an yield, but it is difficult to ascertain its quantity. During harvest, during its packing- in every step, some grains fall back on the earth. What we measure is what is*
gathered after all these processes. The rest has already fallen in different parts of the earth. Therefore no one can say what exactly the yield is. What ultimately comes to our hand is what we call the yield. In the past, after the harvest, we could gather a lot of grains that dropped on the earth. But today, the harvester does not let much grains fall on the earth. And immediately after the harvest, they fill the field with water and the duck rearers bring their ducks in to those waters.

So what is called the saving of wastage of grains by the harvester, are grains that were perhaps saving people from dire poverty. Moreover, the efficiency of time management seals the remaining possibility (of gathering whatever grains the harvester might have left behind) as land owners immediately reorient the space for duck rearers. Space and time efficiency leaves nothing for the labourers to gather, and to make life a little easier than it is otherwise.

Women Labourers

Division of labour on the basis of sex has deep roots in the agricultural practices of Kuttanad. Kamalasanan (1999) provides a detailed narrative of the traditional work done by women and men in paddy cultivation in Kuttanad. A similar pattern is described by Aniruddhan of Alleppey:

In the field, women make small channels for water flow; this is done with their hands. Weeding, transplanting and harvesting are women's work. There are 5 main types of work done by men- the making of small channels with spades to bring in water (called vettiyeru), the collection of clay from the lake, the making of bunds, sowing of seeds, and the carrying of the harvest outside the field.

Changes in the division of labour are seen to happen when some farm operations are altered through technological, biotechnological or chemical applications, for instance, the processes of removal of pests. Till pesticides came in to use, pests were mechanically removed by women (described in Chapter 4). A number of women involved in the farm operation was replaced by a man spraying pesticides. More recent displacements are in the weeding and harvesting operations, that traditionally employed women in large numbers:

They no longer employ women for weeding. They use the chemical called 'round up'; a man is employed to do the job. If it does not rain, the weeds dry up within 24 hours (Janaki, Nedumudy).

Till about 8 years ago Sashidharan was an agricultural labourer, but later he leased in and cultivated a small plot of land. Today he engages with the tourism sector. It is interesting to note how such locational shifts in the economy, even as they be small, changes perceptions towards a commercial ethos:

If women's labour in the field increases, you are in for a loss because if you employ 100 women in an acre of land, it means Rs 20,000 is gone.
He observes that 8 years ago the wage for men which was Rs 150 for 5 hours, has today become Rs 650. And women's wages which was only Rs 75 has increased to Rs 330, both cases showing an increase of more than 4 folds.

The male-female differences in wages have not been questioned or a change demanded. The responses from both men and women indicate that lesser value is attached to women's labour traditionally, established as society's common sense. For instance, Aniruddhan of Chettutozhilali (toddy tappers) union emphasises that the men's work in paddy cultivation is harder in terms of physical labour and at the same time more skilled. Prasannan of KSKTU also cites similar reasons for not being able to equate men's and women's labour in farms, justifying the unequal wages on the basis of sex. But Rateendran, KSKTU state office bearer and editor of the magazine 'Karshaka Thozhilali' disagrees with the perception that men's labour has more monetary value. He observes that the huge difference in wages marks the historical continuity of the exploitation of women, who spend long hours in bent-positions working in the field. The trade union, he says, has not raised this issue. Every year there is some increase in wages brought forth through trade union efforts in Kuttanad, but the issue of equal wages for women and men in farming, has not been raised.

In Nedumudy there was an interesting instance of the perceptions of the male-female wage differences, from women themselves. These women were engaged in the Employment Guarantee Scheme (EGS). As the wage offered by EGS is less than that of the Kerala State, men do not usually take up these jobs. Women, for whom the difference between the Central and the State rates are comparatively less, are the ones who engage with EGS. There was only a single man working amongst them, and both men and women get Rs 212 as daily wage. The women themselves felt that the man deserves to get more wages and they demanded that, though of no avail. Thus the society, largely governed by patriarchal values, upholds the naturalisation of men's labour as a superior category. There seems to be a social consensus on maintaining the hierarchy between the sexes. Such spatio-social practices benefit capital through lesser money spend on wages.

In the contemporary phase of intensely mechanised agriculture in Kuttanad, the sexual division of labour is as follows: Men make the outer bunds, sow seeds, apply fertilizers, pesticides and weedicides; and pack the grains after harvest. Women are left with the sole labour of transplantation. There are a few locations where harvesters cannot be used due to the land layout, most often these are small plots of land or very small portions of big farms, where the machines
cannot operate. Such occasional labour is done by senior women labourers. The younger generation is generally reluctant and unskilled, as 32 year old Sheeja of Kainakary village observes:

> If some work like weeding is available sometimes, the older women go for it. We do not know the job, have never done it.

On an average, women obtain only around 20 days of farm labour annually, and are paid Rs 330 per day. The EGS wage rates, governed by the Central government, are lower than those attained in Kerala. The employment obtained through EGS is not related to agriculture, but to fence- and road-making:

> We made a road here that was very essential- 800 to 850 metres long. It has not only provided a path way, but also helped in preventing the water from entering these houses in some seasons (Women from Kainakary)

The senior women remarked that the younger women's activities can hardly be called 'labour', there are no hardships involved compared to what they themselves had to endure in their younger days. They do not even have the guts to face the sunlight! The response from the young women was:

> We have to finish off the work at home and then attend to the studies of our children. In the older days who cared for children's studies? We have to take children to the tuition teachers after their school. So we try to balance out the responsibilities of our family with other jobs.

The role of women in labour here is seen to be very different from those of the previous generation, for instance the descriptions of the 1950s and 1960s of Kamala in Chapter 5. The economic advancement of families/communities is accompanied by an increased recognition of women as home maker. This is similar to the findings of Lindberg (2004) who studied the cashew workers of Kerala, that indicate the strengthening of patriarchal structures of women's and men's roles both in the family and in the labour market.

**Dalit Labourers**

In the course of my field work, after a large number of discussions and interviews with agricultural labourers, mussel gatherers, duck rearers, fisher folk and toddy tappers, it came as a huge surprise that not a single person I met in the process belonged to the dalit community. There was an overwhelming presence of Ezhavas (who belong to the OBC), some Christians and an occasional Muslim. Sasidharan remarked that “Harijans do not go for these work now, it is mostly the Ezhavas who engage with it.” The surprise emerged from the historical fact that right
from land reclamation to labouring in the fields; their presence had been enormous in Kuttanad. Moreover, they also represent that section of people who did not overwhelmingly benefit from land reforms, like the Ezhavas and others did. Hence I made a much focused field inquiry on the issue.

The most interesting and revealing discussions was one that was done with four dalit women at Nedumudy village. They were all in their late 60s or early 70s. Especially notable among them was Thankamma, who is 68 years of age, vibrant, still an active labourer and who had a lot to say both in terms of concrete details of life and of philosophical outlook. She is Pulaya by caste, two other women are Paraya and another one a dalit Christian. Most of them have been working in the farms since the age of 18, but since the past several years, they have been experiencing serious situations of unemployment.

Q: What does the younger generation, - your children do for a living?

Woman 1: They work in some private companies. My eldest son studied up to pre-degree and works at Perumbavoor as a superintendent. Not that he earns much, but the younger generation does not want to work in the farms.

Woman 2: My eldest son died. The second son works in a company in Bangalore. My third son is at Mararikulam from where his wife hails; he also works in a private company. The youngest son lives here with me- he goes for construction work, like building of bunds and roads.

Woman 3: My two sons work in the farms- but they have very little work. Big land owners here lease out land and those who lease in try to manage things on their own and not to hire anyone!

Q: The spouses of your sons?

Woman 3: They get some employment through the Employment Guarantee scheme or work in some companies.

Two of the women own 3 cents of land each in which they have a hut to live in. In one case it is part of what her father obtained during land reforms in the 1970s. A third woman owns 12 cents, but most of it is of very low elevation, like a ditch, and not easily amenable for any activity. All the four women are members of KSKTU and also members of dalit organisations like 'Kerala Pulayar Mahasabha'. Even as they clearly identify unemployment and underemployment as the main problem of their community, that they say, are not discussed in the dalit organisations:

There are perhaps crores of people like us who are underemployed- and whom should we discuss these with ? From Trivandrum in the south to the northern part of Kerala, everything
seen are products of our labour. In Kuttanad the land reclamation was entirely done by us. If you go to the hills you will still find our community working the estates. Yet this is our plight!

Q: What are the discussions happening in the dalit organisations?

We meet every month. After some initial prayers, the discussions are mostly on the need to discontinue with the lifestyles and ways of the past. We need to bring up our children properly and move forward in life.

It was clear that whereas the trade unions engaged with economic issues like wages and agricultural labourers' pension, the dalit organisations focused on issues of dignity and social status. The women narrated that in the olden days there was a saying among the upper castes that you should bathe if you see a Pulaya, but today they dress in good clothes and do not labour in the farms, even if they be underemployed:

Government jobs are few. So our youth search for other jobs, but will not go in to the farms. When you go back, on the way you will see 10-15 young men who are well dressed- they do not want to do the traditional labour that was assigned through caste. They engage with welding, electric works and so on. The young women are also that way. No one wants to work in the hot sun. They are moving forward. They go to Alleppey and work in some companies or as sales girls in shops, but not to the farms. Even if at times, their mothers try to coax them in to such labour, they run away from the muddy fields and just refuse to do such jobs (Thankam, Nedumudy).

I was introduced toThankam's youngest son who owns the van which was then parked by the road side, and which was bought through a Bank loan; he transports goods from one place to another.

Prasannan of KSKTU remarks that the tradition that the children of agricultural labourers should continue in that occupation is a caste- based practice. The radical change happening in that is to be seen as a positive social move. There is some social and economic mobility, and they can come out of the stigmatised traditional social roles.

The Trade Unions

Within one decade (between 2001 and 2011), Alleppey and Kottayam districts which together more or less, represent the Kuttanad region, record a decline of 90,000 persons in the category of agricultural labourer. The rate of decline could possibly be sharper if we were to look only at paddy labourers because the data given below also includes the labourers of rubber, spices and other plantations of Kottayam district:
Table 6.4: Number of agricultural workers in Kuttanad region

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>District/Year</th>
<th>2001 census</th>
<th>2011 census</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alleppey</td>
<td>1,40,000</td>
<td>90,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kottayam</td>
<td>1,50,000</td>
<td>1,10,000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Source: Facts and Figures of Agriculture in Kerala, 2013)

Thankamma remarks that the landowners no longer need any labourers. If they need any one occasionally, they would just call one person whom they like and say -“Please come tomorrow”.

Q: If the number of labourers employed are so few, then is there any scope for the party to examine issues like parity on wages?

Thankamma: It is because of the higher wages of labourers acquired through trade union that the landowners really don't want to employ us. Ultimately that reason is at the core of the situations today.

She also observed that agriculture is highly profitable today, but the attitude of the land owners towards the erstwhile labourers is very discouraging. Recently they had approached the landowners to allow a small strip of land for the construction of a pathway in the village under EGS. But drawing upon some excuse or the other, no one agreed to do so, she reports. She also notes that the landowners in the village are mostly those who obtained land through land reforms, that is erstwhile landless people. Yet they do not see the plight of the landless today.

The trade union of agricultural labourers is loosing teeth in the changed situations. They are well-organised, but the drastic decline of labour absorption and the changed nature of tenancy have today become huge challenges for them. In a crux, the major thrusts of the trade union that had climaxed in the 1970s have changed. Heller (1995) notes the thrust of the CITU today is to decrease the conflict between agricultural labourer's union and farmers. This was articulated by CITU leader, K.N.Ravindranath in 1979 as:

We need to back up the farmers. Supporting their interests is in the interests of labourers. The hue and cry about higher wages of the labourers result from the poor economic conditions of the majority of farmers who live in villages (Heller 1995: 662).

Rateendran of KSKTU observes that Kerala as a whole is deficient in agricultural labour – a situation that can partly be attributed to the educational achievements of people. People seek
economic security which the agricultural sector is not able to enhance. Today all existing labourers are above the age of forty. After a few years, when they are also out of the ambit of work, the question of surplus labour would cease to exist. In sectors like construction, there is an inflow of migrant labour from other states. But that has not become a norm in the agricultural sector, especially in Kuttanad. Women are partially absorbed in EGS and small sales, but the returns are too less to make both ends meet. Men do not engage with EGS as the wage rates are quite low compared to those existing in the state. KSKTU brings up a demand of government support and subsidy to reinstate agricultural labourers with assured monthly salary and dignity. They demand the supply of working gears to work in the muddy fields. But these efforts can only assure that the labourers enter the agricultural sector in spaces that are actually available for them. The spaces of labour has been overwhelmingly taken over by capital-intensive farm operations.

Both men and women agricultural labourers obtain Rs 400 as pension after they are 60 years of age. Such provisions that are perhaps not existent in other parts of the country, are consequences of the organised efforts of the trade union. But there has been a decline in vibrancy among agricultural labourers in Kerala after the 1970s. Heller (1999) notes that changes in the economy have removed the 'objective conditions' for class conflict either by absorbing much of the rural wage class in industry or by stimulating higher wages through increases in agricultural productivity. But the situations in Kuttanad show that all phases of increased productivity has been accompanied by capital-intensive methods which has decreased the number of labour days and thereby not actually helped the Kuttanad labourer to experience the benefits of increased wages. At the same time, the improved material position is a result of state intervention in Kerala like the pension and provisions of public distribution, and public health and education facilities. As in other parts of Kerala, NRI remittances also play a certain role in improving material conditions of families.

**Toddy Tappers**

Just as in the case of paddy, coconut plantations had also gone through a phase of neglect by the land owners. Whereas for paddy, it meant leaving of land fallow, for coconut it meant neglect of the existing palms and not planting new ones. Hence production declined, and the palms are infested with diseases. The toddy tapper climbs the palms thrice daily to do the slitting.

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14 This is an observation made on the basis of field visits. No deeper enquiry was done to ascertain its dimensions and scale in the region.
operations. In the morning and evening he collects toddy. Whereas each palm used to yield 4 to 5 litres of toddy per day, it has declined to around a litre. The tappers have to look for additional work elsewhere to be able to make ends meet.

Vasudevan of Kainakary, who has been a toddy tapper for 34 years, observes that in earlier times, it was sufficient to tap 4 palms: “But today we exert more and get less”. The toddy tappers are unemployed and underemployed. Sudhakaran of 'Chettutozhilali union' (toddy tappers’ union), a subgroup of KSKTU, says that it is difficult for a tapper to get 10 good palms today. The trade union sought a solution to the problem of Kuttanad in 1996 whereby licensed tappers were sent to the coconut plantations of Palakkad, which is about 188 km away from Alleppey town by road, and 208 km by rail. Due to their existence as separate spatial entities, coconut as cash crop plantations in Palakkad did not decline even as paddy did. But in Kuttanad, the paddy and coconuts are part of a single continuum. As the landowners withdrew from cultivation, both paddy and coconut production declined. Even as paddy is revived through increased mechanisation, there are no such moves for coconut. In Palakkad, a toddy tapper who taps 10 palms gets 40 to 50 litres of toddy every day. For licensed tappers moving to Palakkad, their boarding arrangements are done, and toddy is transported to the shops of Kuttanad.

Coconut palms are taken on lease by the toddy tapper, rent is paid to the landowners. In Kuttanad the rent varies between Rs 150 and Rs 250 per month per palm. In Palakkad the rate is Rs 350. The licensed toddy tapper is provided with ropes and other requirements for the tapping operations. Toddy is supplied to the toddy shops and the shop keeper pays the tapper. Each tapper is attached to a particular toddy shop:

_Eight of us here are all linked to the toddy shop nearby. It is we who are assigned to supply toddy to that shop. The persons who sell toddy through the shops are all included in the category of toddy workers (Vasudevan)._  

The toddy tapper is supposed to supply 6 litres to the shop every day and the payment received is Rs 260.78\(^{15}\) as on March 2013. Those who collect more toddy get more payment. When the licensed tapper retires from work, the practice is that his son can take over that place. But that is not happening now-a-days:

\(^{15}\) The figure is a sum of wages and the DA. The wages are Rs 9.50 per litre and the DA Rs 213 per day. The full DA is obtained by those who collect 5 litres and more. But in the field it was noted that the toddy shops insist on 6 litres as a minimum instead of 5 litres.
Vasudevan: Our generation represents the last entrants in to toddy tapping. Our children do not come in to this field.

Their view is to improve their lives through education and thereby enter new job opportunities.

Tapper 2: There is a risk factor involved in the job, in spite of our labour there is no guarantee that we get sufficient quantities of toddy.

Tapper 3: I have no desire for my daughter to become an agricultural labourer or my son a toddy tapper.

As discussed in the previous chapter, the Ezhavas as a caste (OBC) benefited much in comparison to the dalits:

There is hardly anyone among the toddy tappers who are landless. Through land reforms we obtained 10 cents of land for hutment. But people have bought land in later times. Now everyone has his own plot of land and house (Sudhakaran).

Ecologically sustaining acts like 6 months of no-tapping in which palms were left to rejuvenate, and to treat diseases, are no longer practiced. The decline of production enhances desperate moves, for instance, today as they climb up for tapping, some chemicals are applied that would obviously get in to the toddy then tapped. Jayan sums up the situation:

The coconut palms are facing severe problems. The sick palms need to be removed and new ones planted. The landowners do not seem to be enthusiastic to do all that. That is why the toddy tappers of Kuttanad have to depend on the plantations of Palakkad. Care, which is important in agriculture, seems to be losing ground in Kuttanad.

Livelihood Activities From Vembanad Kayal

Fishing, mussel gathering and white clam mining are three branches of production in Kuttanad that are based on the Vembanad kayal. The kayal is common property. Whereas the fishers and mussel gathers have been impacted by the pesticides flowing into the Lake from the paddy fields, this does not seem to impact the white clams.

Mussels, like fish, are an important ingredient of food. But white clams are sources of calcium which are deposits of shells of the mussels that get hardened over time. Whereas the former has shells that are black and hard, the latter gets much thicker and becomes white in colour. Whereas mussels thrive in the upper water levels of the Lake, white clams are mined from deeper levels. White clams have several industrial uses such as of lending whiteness to newsprint. They are also used as an ingredient in the manufacture of cattle feed as well as of cement. Due to its calcium content, they are mixed with the soil in Kuttanad farms to reduce the soil's acidity. White clam mining as well as mussel gathering are organised through co-operatives. There are a dozen co-
operative societies whose areas of operation in the Lake are separately demarcated. The livelihood activities based on Vembanad Lake are examined below:

(a) Fishing – Pearl spots and shrimps are well-known delicacies of Kuttanad. The former costs Rs 300 and the latter Rs 550 per kg. Shrimps have become an export item. The fishers sell to merchants at whole sale rates. Sateesh (54-years old) from Nehru Trophy Ward has been a fisherman for the past 27 years. He says that the entry of saline water in to the Lake is very beneficial for the growth of fish and mussels, but it is regulated through TSWB for the benefit of paddy cultivation:

Fish die due to pesticides entering the water bodies and often dead fish float on water. Strangely people are seen to gather the contaminated fish for consumption. Once I saw a man washing the pump used for spraying of pesticide, in the Lake. Within a short while dead fish started to float on the water. When agriculture benefits from pesticides, fishing suffers! We are not seeing a situation where everyone benefits.

(2) Mussels – Earlier people used to dip themselves in the Lake to collect mussels in a basket tied around the waist. In shallow waters, this traditional method of gathering is still done. But in deeper waters, an equipment that is a combination of a net and a stick, is used for the gathering operation.

Two men usually go together for mussel gathering, one person drives a motorised canoe and the other gathers mussels with the equipment. Once the mussels are brought home, the women take over the processing. They are cleaned and boiled to separate the meat from the shell. The merchants come to buy the meat at whole sale rates of Rs 80, the retail rate being Rs 100 per kg.
The shells are sold (used in the cement industry) at a rate of Rs 38 per 20 kg. Sateesh observes: “The occupation is not very profitable, but saves us from poverty.”

(3) White clam mining –The white clam deposits occur at depths of 1 to 4 ft in the Lake, whose reserves have been exhausted in several locations. Even for a person skilled in mining in the clayey soil, it is difficult to go deeper than 4 ft through conventional ways. The clams are brought to the co-operative society from where it is sold. The Co-operative societies together have an Action council which decides the sale value. The Co-operative society decides the payments of workers in consultation with the trade union, and bonus amounts get decided on the basis of the quantity mined. Royalty and sales tax are paid by the Co-operatives to the government. At deeper levels in the Lake, Travancore Cements, a public undertaking, mines by dredging.

Fig 6.3: White clams or lime shells mined from the Lake

Duck Rearers

Duck rearers who came to Kuttanad every year from nearby places, were the owners of the flock of birds. They came after harvest, and reared their ducks in the farms filled with water. They sold eggs and meat. These situations of the past have considerably changed. The duck owners today are investors owning very large flocks, and they hire labourers on daily wages to take care of the birds. The scale of operation and profits has grown. They do not sell eggs as in the past, they only sell ducks for meat. Ducks lay eggs only after they are 5 months old, but they are sold for meat after the third month. Hence entrepreneurs buy ducklings from hatcheries today. The greatest challenge in this business is to safeguard the ducks against diseases, which can plunge the owners
in to great losses. So they are alert in vaccinating and injecting the birds as per the guidance of the Veterinary Department. The ducklings obtain the first injection at government cost. The duck owners get compensation from the government in case of losses through diseases.

Even as duck rearers still seasonally take farms of Kuttanad on rent after harvest, the seasonal nature of this occupation has declined. Sasi, a 49 year old duck rearer in Kainakary village takes care of a large flock of ducks, around 7000 in numbers. He takes advantage of spaces near canals and rivers located very near the roadside, from where wholesale becomes viable. Wholesale rate is around Rs 150-200 per duck, with the retail price being around Rs 300. Sasi gets around Rs 750 as daily wages. The duck rearers do not constitute any particular caste group as is usually the case with the other peripheral branches of production in Kuttanad. Sasi narrates that the owner of the flock of ducks was an erstwhile farmer, who faced losses in paddy cultivation a couple of times. So he abandoned farming and took to duck rearing. Sasi is not a permanent labourer for any particular entrepreneur, but opts for the entrepreneur from whom he can procure a higher wage. He narrates his daily routine as:

*I walk with the ducks wherever they go. At night they are enclosed by nets. I sleep nearby and safeguard them from dogs and other animals.*

Photograph 6.4: Sasi’s flock of ducks near a boat jetty in Kainakary

Duck rearing as a peripheral branch of production in Kuttanad, is not impacted detrimentally by the increasing commercialisation of paddy. It has become highly commercial, and the impact of tourism (discussed in Chapter 7) has also favourably impacted them.
'Spatial' Becomes 'Social'

SRFA of the late 1990s that was exceptionally vibrant in Kuttanad, was premised in saving the labourers and the environment by retaining paddy cultivation. But paradoxically, even as Kuttanad reinstated paddy cultivation, and the state has put forward many supportive legislations and processes, labour and environment were not saved. The environmental issue raised then, of ground water sustenance through paddy fields, is more significant for other parts of Kerala than for the water- abundant ecology of Kuttanad. The specific ecological issues of Kuttanad like the arrest of natural water flow through TSWB and the accumulation of chemical fertilizers and pesticides in the stagnant waters, continue without change. The issue of labour shows a stark contradiction as the highly mechanised contemporary farming operations have completely eliminated labour. The neoliberal phase of agriculture in Kuttanad is a process of re-ordering of the relationships between capital, environment and labour, with capital predominantly occupying the space of operation and profits, without any sharing with labour. The agricultural space has thus transited to an unprecedented level of capital extraction. The predominance of capital in this phase converts the 'spatial' in to the 'social' more sharply than the earlier decades, implying an acceleration of spatio-social marginalisations:

1. Large scale farming being mostly spread over the kayal areas, with its large risks and expenditure, this activity has become directly linked to the well-to-do strata, especially of Syrian Christians, who organise capital and take on entrepreneurial risks.

2. With no farm hands required, the earlier generation of agricultural labourers (above 40 years of age) has become unemployed or severely underemployed. This situation also applies to the toddy tappers.

3. Women labour shows increasing trends of being drawn in to the domestic spaces, and of losing their economic independence. The patriarchal norms take over the family and the employment spaces of women labourers.

4. Dalits are conspicuously absent from the agricultural labour category through a process of displacement as well as of voluntary withdrawal from caste- based labour.
5. The ecological implications of paddy cultivation through pesticides and TSWB, extend negative economic impacts on the fishers and mussel gatherers of Vembanad kayal, who are socially placed in the lower rungs of the caste system (mostly OBC).

6. The ecological and spatial relations of duck rearing have not been detrimentally impacted. Their spatial mobility and entrepreneurship has made this a flourishing business. Dalits and women do not form part of this enterprise.

Impacting the whole region are serious health issues, for instance studies like that of Dr Indira Devi (2010) demonstrate the high incidence of cancer in the region, and attribute it to the continued accumulation of pesticides in the waters. Thomas Isaac, erstwhile Finance Minister of the Left democratic front, in an interview points out that the planned development of Kuttanad did not take in to count the social costs of the situations, and if social costs are involved in a cost-benefit analysis of development, then we would reach a realistic scenario of various social deprivations associated with it.

**Women and Dalits in Labour**

In the traditional divisions of labour in Kuttanad, the dalits, like women were employed only as agricultural labourers in the paddy fields. Other occupations like those associated with coconut palms and with fishing and mussel gathering were predominantly done by Ezhavas. Dalits and women were not traditionally allowed to become tenants, but only labourers. Some changes were observed only in the late 1980s when production stagnated in Kuttanad and dalits became tenants for subsistence cultivation. This was the phase in which they were trying to survive in the face of severe unemployment as landowners opted not to cultivate. But this was a brief transitory period. As capital investment and large scale cultivation emerged again in the 2000s, these categories of people faced complete dispossession, to operate neither as tenants nor as labourers.

Throughout the field surveys, it has became evident that all traditional labour available in Kuttanad is in contemporary times occupied by the OBCs, dominantly the Ezhavas. The labour categories of women and dalits are not seen in these spaces. These two social categories, through different routes of spatial practices, arrive at the same status, that is, of unemployment in agriculture. On one hand, it is inferred that the distancing of the dalits from positions of capital

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16 Source: Rajagopal’s educational film on Kuttanad, which was developed for the Kerala SCERT as an innovative class room teaching programme
accumulation or the sharing of profits, which is a deeply ingrained aspect of social structure, continues to be practiced. On the other hand, dalit consciousness seeks not to occupy the traditional social divisions of labour. This deep rooted operation of the caste system is something that dalit groups seek to throw away by rejecting those spaces of labour. The trend is to seek jobs in the modern sectors, as sales girls in shops, in small jobs in private companies, involving both skilled and unskilled jobs. So the compatibility seen between the upper castes and the OBCs are generally not very forthcoming in the case of dalits. Through land reforms of the 1970s, the OBCs have become landed. Coupled with the social changes happened through education, their upward social mobility is very notable. The alignment of the OBCs tends to move towards the upper castes as compared to the pre-reform days, when the category of labourers was formed of a combination of the Ezhavas and dalits. The changed structures through land reforms have made a socio-economic distancing between the dalits and the OBCs. Even as capital-intensive farm operations have minimised labour, and as toddy tapping and fishing are declining in the region, all existing primary labour slots today are occupied by OBC men.

The status- and capital-associated trajectory of women is a different story. Traditionally women in agricultural labour implied dalit and OBC women. The well defined sexual division of labour in farming was such that women’s jobs were those that required persistence and continuity for long hours. These were nuanced with the requirement of patience and were relatively more monotonous. Removal of weeds with baskets, weeding, transplanting and harvesting were all women’s category of work, and all of them are characterised by the above mentioned qualifications. This character of labour was associated with femininity, and contrasted with masculinity that required more muscle power, as in the case of making of bunds, and carrying of harvested grains to other locations. The socially created masculinity obtained more monetary value as compared to the socially created femininity in labour.

Another aspect of the sexual division of labour is seen in the family. Apart from the reproductive roles of women, sharp division of labour in the working class families was not evident till the end of 1960s. But as economic prospects increased through different ways, like men of the families acquiring land through land reforms, or their obtaining salaried jobs through education, the erstwhile labour families experienced an upward socio-economic mobility. The sexual divisions of labour in the families started to be defined, by reproducing the patterns of the upper class-caste. With improved economy, the socio-economic aspirations on education, living styles and procurement of commodities grew, expanding the domestic labour, which inevitably became the
women's jobs to attend to. Men became defined as sole bread winners. These patterns are sometimes more and sometimes less defined depending on the actual economic situations of families. So in many cases women are employed in EGS, even as they consider the domestic as their primary space of responsibility. The changed pattern of sexual division of labour in the family is more a reality for OBC women than for dalit women. The differences arising in Kamala's (OBC) life, but a continuity of the past in Thankam's (dalit) life, discussed in Chapter 1 demonstrates this point. The economic prospects in real terms have been less for dalits, and both men and women are occupied in labour (in non-agricultural sectors). But the younger generation of dalits, have a satisfaction of being socially more dignified today as compared to the previous generation. Therefore in the case of OBCs, than in the case of dalits, we see a trend of women losing out on economic independence and on socio-economic engagements with the world outside their homes.

Debates on Planned Space: TSWB

TSWB has historically made the deepest impact through planned space in Kuttanad. There have been debates on whether changes should be made in its operation, so that the social and environmental costs that it entails can be reduced. In contemporary times, the issue is again being debated, especially as it is portrayed in SCR, 2007 as a core factor, capable of restructuring the economy and ecology of Kuttanad. SCR (discussed in detail in Chapter 7) foregrounds the continuing role of TSWB, that requires more technological inputs to upgrade it. In an interview, Swaminathan, the well-known agricultural scientist critiques the incomplete status of the TSWB and the A-C canal. He observes that a new Kuttanad needs to be built on 'principles of ecology', for instance, the production of biogas from water hyacinth, which grows abundantly in the water bodies of Kuttanad. His critique of the situation of Kuttanad is that the technological plans so far have not been satisfactorily executed and the future plans envisaged by him do not critique in any fundamental way the directions of development followed so far. He says that the solutions need to be sought through 'mass production type of technology'.

17 Source: Rajagopal's educational film on Kuttanad
Thomas Isaac, in an interview\textsuperscript{18} done while he was a Minister of Kerala State, critiques SCR for its attitude of seeking solutions through increased engineering projects, like computerised shutters to be built in TSWB:

\begin{quote}
I do not agree with the approach. Many of our friends\textsuperscript{19} are involved in the formulation of SCR, which says that by spending Rs 250 crores of money, the TSWB can be reconstructed. But I would like to point out that even the interest that you get out of that amount of money would be sufficient to compensate the farmers. So I don’t understand the wisdom of going in to such an engineering intervention. Instead it can be planned to open the shutters of TSWB for an year and to allow the natural flow of water. The risks of agriculture would obviously increase. The government and the farmers should work together towards the making of a new agricultural calendar. In such an intervening period, if there are losses to the farmer, the government can compensate it fully.
\end{quote}

Environmentalists have also been very critical of TSWB. V.S.Vijayan, a renowned environmentalist, observes\textsuperscript{20} that wetland management should never mean the stopping of water flow, as was done by TSWB. On the contrary, it should mean the maintaining of the system, implying that the water flow from the sea to the Lake, should be maintained.

TSWB was a radical spatial transformation in Kuttanad from the 1970s onwards, that not only altered the ecology, but also attempted a homogenised farming practice. It was only after TSWB that double-cropping became a reality in Kuttanad. Usha, who is an environmentalist and an erstwhile agricultural scientist, in an interview\textsuperscript{21}, calls attention to the homogenising process that coaxed the region to make adjustments for production of certain kind. The represented space, of technocrats, scientists and planners, operate through the agricultural universities, and the government departments, along with the farmers, attempt to increase the yields through the new seeds and other inputs. Usha observes that we could have made seeds to suit the peculiarities of the region, and thereby face lesser risks, and lay the foundations for sustainable agriculture. The HYV seeds, she notes, came to be later known as the 'high input variety', signifying the crucial importance of the inputs for high production, which were hence not sustainable.

**Conclusions**

The role of the state in Kerala need to be positively, yet critically recorded because in the neoliberal phase of India, with the rolling back of welfare schemes, Kerala has developed new

\textsuperscript{18} Source: Rajagopal's educational film on Kuttanad
\textsuperscript{19} The formulation of SCR was done through a process of consultations with civil society groups and NGOs, including KSSP.
\textsuperscript{20} Source: Rajagopal's educational film on Kuttanad
\textsuperscript{21} Source: Rajagopal's educational film on Kuttanad
legislations and schemes to ensure support to farming. These are in addition to the already existing ones, and they actually deliver as noted by the farmers of Kuttanad. This process, happening in NL can be analysed only by contextualising the socio-economic and political history of Kerala, with special implications for paddy regions like Kuttanad. The crux of the process revolves around the strong contestations over land use in late 1990s, and the situation of impasse in production that surfaced very prominently in Kuttanad. The emergence of SRFA, can be interpreted as a climaxing of economic, ecological, social and political processes, all of which that had been intensely engaged with in the social geography of Kuttanad prior to NL. The debates rose above the individual claims of decisions by the land owning strata. It claimed a larger social and economic platform to reinstate paddy cultivation for the general good of the state, people and ecology. This was also the time when the CPM was articulating a recognition of the need to safeguard production, that trade union militancy should not spill over to harm production itself. The Left-front being in the helm of affairs in the state almost after every alternating electoral exercise since independence, and having initiated a large number of pro-people legislations and their delivery, the economics needed to sustain welfare programmes, became a deeply recognised problem area. NL added a new challenge as it held a national level implication of withdrawal of welfare programmes. Kerala was sharply facing the limits to a welfare-oriented state being located in a pro-capitalist and neoliberal system.

In the contemporary situations of paddy production again becoming a lucrative business in Kuttanad, the impact of land reforms seem to act as a safety valve, because even as a large number of land owners are not cultivating themselves, they obtain rents through leasing out. Kuttanad goes through a new layer of accumulation in the hands of the upper socio-economic strata. As many persons have observed, the kayal cultivation which is exceptionally difficult and risky, has been reinstated by the entrepreneurship of the large scale operating farmers with remarkable support from the Kerala State. At the same time, there are several socio-economic categories of people who are being moved further to the fringes. This includes dalits, the fishers, mussel gatherers, and toddy tappers. In the case of OBC women, loss of economic independence is seen, with notable involvement of women in domestic responsibilities.

NL, interpreted as an accelerated domination of capital (Harvey 2005), and as a process of rejuvenation of class power in society (Harvey 2006; Mitchell 1999; Moyo and Yeros 2011) is the contemporary experience in Kuttanad's agriculture. It follows a specific regional pattern as it detours from the general trend of NL of the 'third world' countries abandoning food crops and
adopting cash crops. The question of the crop apart, the pattern of relations of production that shows a dominant input of capital, and that which thereby impacts the spatial and the socio-economics of the region, follows the trends of NL. All the subaltern people of Kuttanad are pushed to the fringes. But resistance from labour is not emerging as it did in earlier times. Part of the answer lies in the fact that from the end of the 1980s onwards, a time span of more than a decade through stagnation in cultivation, had already made the new generation of labour draw other road maps for economic survival. The continuing welfare measures of the Kerala state like PDS and pension schemes also gave economic support to the people. Hence even as the NL impacts have been of dispossession of labour, the implications on the lived experiences of people are not of stark and widespread poverty as happened in the 1940s (discussed in Chapter 4). Kerala is forced to extend welfare measures because of its specific political history, but at the same time it has conditions for the forces of NL. Another aspect labour non-resistance lies in the changed strategies of pro-production adopted by the trade unions of the CPI(M).

The chapter had begun with an observation of 'representation of space' in neoliberal Kuttanad manifested through an accelerated growth of roads and bridges. In contemporary Kuttanad harvesters need to reach the farms, for which roads have become a basic necessity. This requirement is also developed in the increasing tourism in Kuttanad in NL, discussed in Chapter 7.

A process of inclusion-exclusion unfolds in the region, the dalit men and women seen to be not participating in or not included in the major and minor primary economic activities of Kuttanad. In the NL phase, the reinstatement of paddy cultivation through unprecedented capital intensity brings in a process of re articulation of caste-class-patriarchy. The traditional contours of these disparities are revoked to shape the socio-economic prospects in favour of upper caste-class men. Almost at the same time as paddy cultivation was reinstating in Kuttanad in early 2000s, tourism saw a pace of expanded growth in the region. For the first time in Kuttanad's history, the primacy of economic/commercial production is beginning to be shared by an economic activity other than paddy cultivation. Tourism enters the region through rationalisations based on NL discourses on the environment. A more intensified impact of NL emerges from the discussions on tourism in Kuttanad in the following chapter.