CHAPTER IV

FARMER’S MOVEMENT IN KERALA

Part I

The Farmers movement in Kerala had its origins during the days of the national movement. The farmers of Kerala had been illtreated by their landlords in various ways in those days. Different types of levies and taxes were imposed upon them and their women were illtreated by the landlords. The first native peasant revolt that took place in Malabar was the Kurichiar revolt of 1812, i.e., just two hundred years ago. Then, it was Ayyenkali the champion of the backward communities who spearheaded the most important revolt in 1907. He opposed the illtreatment of the backward people by the high caste Hindus. This chapter consists of two parts. The I part gives a history of farmers movement in Kerala and the II part presents a profile of the farmers and the challenges they face.

The farmers of Kerala had become politically conscious during the 1930’s. The message of independence slowly began reaching the remote villages of Kerala during this period. The world economic depression affected very badly the farmers of Kerala. The economic depression and the arrogant behaviour of the colonial masters accelerated the process of mobilization of the farmers along with other sections of the society. In 1935 the Kolenchery Karshaka Sangom was formed with Bharatheeyan as President and Keraleeyan as Secretary. In the same year the Karivalloor Karshaka Sangam also took its birth in Malabar with A.V. Kunjambu as President and Appu Master as Secretary. The leaders were KPR Gopalan,
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Keralayeean, Bharatheeyan and Ipe Koran. In July 1936 a Pattini Jatha (Hunger Strike Rally) was organized under the capta incy of A.K. Gopalan which reached Madras to protest against foreign rule and farmers plight. There were 32 members in the Jatha and it made tremendous impact upon the people of Malabar. The people’s mind was against the Britishers and the landlords who illtreated the farmers. In 1943 March 29th, four farmers were executed in Kayoor, Kannur District. The farmers were protesting against the government demanding concessions. It is said that the protestors killed a police constable. The police had resorted to persecutions and arrests after the Kayoor incident in Malabar. In South Kerala Kodungaloor and Kochi were important centres of farmers movement.

4.1 Farmers’ Movement in Kerala

Farmers’ movements have a remarkable place in the history of Kerala. Agrarian movements in Kerala have their specific distinctive characteristics which make Kerala unique in the Social, Political and Economic, history different from other states of India.¹ The ‘Land Reforms Act of 1957’, the first in its type in India, is the best example of distinctiveness of Kerala.

Farmers’ movements made revolutionary changes in the agricultural field and in agrarian relations. It is a historical fact that the children of the soil gained their due place in the democratic process of the country. Agriculture and farmers’ problems are fundamental in the socio-economic and political life of Kerala. The origin of The National Movement itself is in agrarian distress. Among the Indian states, Kerala has the credit of having passed the first Comprehensive Land Reforms Act. Land ceiling was made compulsory for all crops except Rubber, Coffee, Tea and Cardamom. The
law enacted in 1957 was implemented in 1970. Though late it could be implemented in Kerala because of the right vision of the Political parties especially of the communist parties and the Congress Socialist Party. The socio-economic and political structure based on feudalistic exploitation and the super imposed colonial political and economic structure caused poverty, famine, ill health, illiteracy, social inequality and such other social evils in the state. It led to the creation of a social consciousness among the farmers and agrarian workers. This was the main cause for the origin of farmers’ movements which eventually led to the National Movement.

Agrarian movements were first strengthened by the struggles against imperialism and feudalism under the leadership of Congress Socialist Party and Communist parties. The world economic crisis of 1930’s seriously affected Indian social life. Poverty, famine and economic regression created crisis in agrarian families. Many farmers were deprived of their agricultural land. The salt satyagraha of 1930, the Congress propaganda of 1931, the Guruvayoor temple satyagraha of 1931, the Second Civil Disobedience Movement of 1932-33 and the Abstention Movement of Travancore all influenced the political history of Kerala. These movements actually made Congress a party of farmers, labourers and middle class men rather than a party of educated youth from the families of land lords and feudal lords. These struggles united together the scattered farmers and workers. All the Indian states except Kerala enacted land reforms Act half-heartedly. No other state has such a comprehensive and effective land reform Act as that of Kerala and it so happened because of the bargaining power of farmers and agrarian workers. The social struggles of 1930’s and 1940’s changed the mindscape of majority of Kerala’s population, including that of the
landlords.\textsuperscript{4} It caused revolutionary changes in the agrarian life of Kerala. All these efforts together could eradicate feudalism from Kerala.

\subsection*{4.1.1 The history of Farmers Movements in Kerala}

The historical studies show that feudalism has a history of nine centuries in Kerala. Known by other names like Malodi, Pathivaram, Melvaram it existed in Kerala even before Kulashehara dynasty. Later on Casteism started in Kerala and it slowly strengthened in north Kerala. The ‘Chittary’ system existed in Kerala even in twentieth century. According to this System, the tenants had to work freely for the land lords. During British Rule Kerala was divided into three provinces: Travancore, Cochin and Malabar. But these three parts have basic similarities in their social life. Malayalam language was the unifying link. The British tried to prevent the natural growth of the economy and retained this area as underdeveloped. They made Kerala a place for the production of raw-materials only. The landlord tenant relationship in Travancore, Kochi and Malabar did not have a uniform nature. In general, there were three types of titles, Pandaram Vaka (Government owned), Devasom Vaka (Temple owned) and Janmi Vaka (Land Lord owned). The tenant who produces the resources did not have the right over the land. Three fourth of the land in Travancore and one third of the land in Kochi were owned by concerned governments. The biggest landlord in Malabar was Zamorin. In the early periods, the land was owned by the community. The mutual dependence of the farmers and landlords was based on customs and traditions. But by the arrival of British these relationship collapsed. Before the arrival of British, land lord did not have absolute right on the land, but a common right with the tenants. When the British took over Malabar from Mysore Kingdom, the authority of native
Kings, feudal lords and native rulers were sustained and feudalism was strengthened. William Logan wrote on the reform in Malabar (1793).

“Land Lord had right only over a limited area, but the commissioner made him the lord of the land. Later on, land lords with the help of judiciary and courts started to neglect the rights of the tenants. With the introduction of the concept of full settlement, farmers were degraded to the status of mere labourers. In Malabar Sixty to Eighty percent of the products were taken as tax. In addition, there were also other means of exploitation. Land Lords were known by different names such as Janmi, Madambi, Vazhunnor, Yejaman, Thambrakal, Achnmar, Udayor, Urulanmar etc. Confiscation of the houses of the tenants and workers were common. Eviction and forceful taxing also were common. In 19th century slavery was legalized in Travancore. In Kochi also there were similar means of exploitation.”

It is this unhappiness and dissatisfaction caused by these exploitations which led to the emergence of farmers’ movement in Kerala. The history of farmers movement can be classified into six phases.

4.1.1.1 First Phase

The early years of 19th century witnessed a number of farmers’ riots in different parts of Malabar, Kochi and Travancore. The most prominent among them were Pazassi Riots of Malabar, Riots of Veluthambi Dalava of Travancore and riots of Paliathachan in Kochi. These were anti British agitations initiated by local Kings. We could see the spirit of strong protest against the social evils of the day in these riots especially in Pazassi and Kochi riots (1797-1812). Kurichi riot was against the practice of levying land tax in the form of money. This agitation was staged in different places like Mananthavady, Kuttiyadi and Sultan Bathery. Agricultural distress and
dissatisfaction paved the way for the Veluthambi Dalava riots of Travancore (1801-1809). It was a protest against the Land Reforms introduced by the British Government. This persuaded thousands of farmers to join the agitation.

### 4.1.1.2 Second Phase

Even though the British crushed the majority of the riots during the first phase, they failed to extinguish the spirit and enthusiasm enkindled by these riots. The different riots of second phase which occurred in different parts of Malabar testify this fact.

The background of Malayali Memorial Agitation of 1891, was the agricultural distress in Travancore. This was led by the Western educated young people who hailed from agricultural families. ‘The Anti - Planting’ agitation of Ayyenkali was against the land lords in order to secure a rise in wages.

### 4.1.1.3 Third Phase

The continuing Mappila riots attracted the attention of British Government to the problems of farmers and tenants. This was a new phase in the evolution of farmers’ movement in Kerala. This phase was characterized by a ‘law abiding agitation’ for tenant reforms in Malabar, Travancore and Kochi. In Travancore and Kochi, this move started from the higher level. ‘But in Malabar the governing class was against such a reform. So, in Malabar, this agitation started from the lower levels. By 1919-1930, a good number of Mappilas were recruited to national movement by the joint efforts of congress, Khilaphat and tenants committee. The most important peasant uprising of this period was the Moplah rebellion.
4.1.1.3.1 Malabar Rebellion

4.1.1.3.1.1 Malabar Rebellion - Mother of Peasant Uprising in Kerala

The moplahs of Malabar in Southern India present a fascinating case for study. The study of peasant movements in Kerala cannot overlook the Moplah rebellion because it is the mother of peasant uprisings in Kerala. A series of Moplah uprisings against both Hindu land lords and the British occurred throughout the nineteenth century and culminated finally in the greatest sustained armed revolt to breakout in Malabar in the first quarter of 20th century. Nowhere in India has foreigners trading, commercial and religious interests interacted with the indigenous socio-economic and political factors more intimately than in Malabar. The history of Arab trading contacts with Malayali society dates back to ninth century. Local Hindu ‘Cheiftain’ in this coastal region needed the support of the wealthy and enterprising Arab traders and hence granted them liberal concessions in their trade and business. Subsequently those Arab traders who settled in Malabar married local women mostly Nayar and Tiyas, their descendents – a mixed race are called Moplahs or Mappilas. Majority of moplaha were employed as petty traders and merchants, but a large proportion of those in the interior had taken to agriculture. Most Moplahs who lived in these areas were governed by Hindu chieftains.

4.1.1.3.1.1 Background

Land Ownership in Malabar

Historically, the agricultural system in north Kerala (Malabar) was based on a system of hierarchy of privileges, rights and obligations for all the principal social groups in the society. William Logan, the British administrator sometimes referred to as the ‘Father of Tenancy legislation in
Malabar’, describes this as a system of corporate unity or joint proprietorship of each of the principal land right holders. The agricultural system in Malabar comprises of three important elements.

(a) The Jenmis – It mainly consists of the Namboothiri Brahmins who were at the highest level of the hierarchy. They were given the title ‘Naduvazhis or Rulers’ which was followed in a hereditary order. The rights conveyed by ‘janmam’ was not a free-hold in the European sense but an office of dignity. They were a priestly class and would neither cultivate the land nor supervise it. Instead, they would provide a grant of ‘kanam’ to Kanakkaran as a hired share of the produce of the soil. As a result a jenmi would have a large number of Kanakkaran under him.

(b) The Kanakkarans - They belong to the Nayar community. The security and supervision of the land and the distribution of the respective shares was done by the Kanakkaran. The Kanakkaran was also a part-proprietor of the soil to the extent of one third of the net produce. A number of Verumpattakkarans will be under each Kanakkaran.

(c) The Verumpattakkarans – They include ‘Thiyyas’ and ‘Mappilas’ who were the actual cultivators. They were also part-proprietors. These classes were given a ‘Verum pattam’ (Simple Lease) of the land that was typically valid for one year. According to the custom which prevailed, they too were entitled to one-third or an equal share of the net produce. The net produce of the land was the share left over after providing for the ‘Cherujanmakkar’ or all the other birthright holders such as the village carpenter, the goldsmith and the
agricultural labourers who helped to gather, prepare and store the produce. According to this system no Jenmi can evict the tenants under him except for reasons of non-payment of rent. This land tenure system was generally referred to as the janmikana – maryada (customary practices).\textsuperscript{11}

4.1.3.1.2 Land reform and Mappila Outbreaks (1836-1921)

At the time of Mysore attacks (1788-1792), the Malabar Government reached settlements with the Kanakkaran in the absence of the ‘jenmis’ who had fled persecution to take refuge in the southern state of Travancore. As a result a new system of land revenue was introduced for the first time in Malabar region and the government share was fixed on the basis of the actual produce from the land. By the end of 18\textsuperscript{th} century, Malabar had come under British rule and the land owners (jenmis) who had lost their lands and authority during the Mysore interlude (1788-1792) had returned and retrieved their lost lands with the intervention of British government and its law courts. The British, after that, superimposed upon the existing system, several Anglo – Roman juridical concepts such as that of absolute property rights which was unknown to the people of the region. As a result they were provided with the right of eviction of tenants by the help of newly erected British civil courts.

William Logan says,

“The British authorities recognized the janmi as absolute owner of his holdings, and therefore free to take as big a share of the produce of the soil as he could screw out of the classes beneath him… Hence harder and harder terms was imposed by the janmi on the Kanakkaran as time went on. The British courts backed up by Police and Magistrates and troops and big guns
made the janmi’s independence complete. The hard terms thus imposed on
the Kanakkaran had, of course, the effect of hardening the terms imposed by
the Kanakkaran on those below him, the Verumpattakkaran. The one third of
the net produce to which the Verumpattakkaran was customarily entitled,
was more and more encroached upon as the terms imposed on the
Kanakkaran became harder and harder.”

At this time British administrative
and judicial institution thus worked directly to restore the landed aristocracy
of the Nambudiri jenmis and Nayars. Besides corruption was rife in the ranks
of the revenue staff, who made a common cause with the land lords,
tampered with deeds and contracts so as to best serve the ‘landlord’ interests
and by such means, also made their own fortunes. With newly established
law courts, jenmis were able to extort more renewal fees and rents from their
leaseholders whom they simply threatened with legal eviction if they refused
to pay. By such means, each superior ‘right holder’ could extract a larger
share than previously from the one immediately below him in the chain of
subinfeudation, and the worst sufferers of all were the ‘Verum pattakars’ and
the landless labourers, whether Moplahs or Hindus.”

The British land policy and its implementation, although not much
questioned until 1880, seriously affected the agrarian social structure of
Malabar. In 1871, the first census reports revealed that while in Madras
presidency as a whole the proportion of cultivator - owners to the total male
population was 31.3 percent, in Malabar itself it was only 15.9 percent; and
the proportion of agricultural labourers was 27.4 percent in Malabar but only
some 13.1 percent in the Madras Presidency as a whole. This reflects the
concentration of land-ownership in fewer lands in Malabar. It is worth noting
that although this exploitation had affected both the Moplah and lower caste
Hindu tenants alike, they chose different ways to respond to the situation.
Significantly, as soon as the jenmi, landlords, backed by the police, the law courts and the revenue officials, tightened their grip on the subordinate classes, the moplah peasantry in its turn started to revolt against its’ oppressors. The first such outbreak occurred in 1836 and thereafter between 1836 and 1854, twenty-two similar uprisings occurred of which two, one in 1841 and the other in 1849, were quite serious. In general, outbreaks followed a similar pattern; almost invariably it would involve a group of Moplah youths attacking a Brahmin ‘jenmi’, a Nayar official, or a ‘jenmi’s servants’; sometimes it also involved the burning or defilement of temples and occasionally the burning or looting of landlord’s houses.

As condition worsened, rents became as high as 75 - 80 percent of the net produce, leaving the ‘verum pattakkar’ cultivators mostly with ‘only straw’. This caused great resentment among the Mappilas who in the words of Logan were ‘labouring late and early to provide a sufficiency of food for their wives and children‘. This kind of agrarian resentment caused by this inflamed into a long series of violent outbreaks by the Mappilas among the ‘verum pattakkars’. This involved the murder of a number of Hindu jenmis. Between 1910 and 1921 both population and pressure on land increased still further whereas evictions, rack-renting, excessive lease renewal fees and poor compensation for tenant’s improvements reached their peak, leaving the peasantry in a state of abject poverty and desperation. The Moplah peasants in the southern taluks were worst hit by the oppression of the ‘jenmi landlords’. The power politics, whether operating through the Malabar Congress or through the two elitist Moplah organizations between 1885 and 1920, alienated the Moplah peasants particularly those in the southern taluks. Gross neglect of the basic questions of tenurial security, the deterioration of landlord tenant relations and the political alienation of poor peasantry were the most
important formative conditions of the Moplah rebellion which occurred in 1921. Immediately prior to the outbreak of the 1921 rebellion there developed in Malabar three different political movements, which later merged together. One of these, the tenancy movement was rooted in local agrarian grievances (particularly in south Malabar), the other two were the Khilafat (Caliphate) Movement and the Non-Cooperation Movement, launched jointly by the all-India Khilafat Committee and the Indian National Congress.

In February 1921, the Government authorities prohibited all Khilafat meetings in the ‘Ernad’ and ‘Walluvanad’ taluks, fearing that there was a possibility for anti-government and anti-jenmi feelings of the Moplahs and they arrested Congress and Khilafat leaders such as K. Madhavan Nair, P. Moideen Koya and U. Gopala Menon. Between March and August 1921, non-cooperation and Swaraj were no longer the focal points of the agitation, since many Congressmen had withdrawn from the campaign as a result of provocative speeches from Khilafat platforms. In April different Muslim organizations called upon Moplah masses to launch a jehad or holy war. In August 1921 police raided the famous Mambrath mosque of Thirurangadi and arrested various Moplah leaders including Ali Musaliar. Angered by this, bands of armed moplahs, mostly peasants rushed to the Mosques and had a clash with police. The police opened fire. In the first phase the hostility of the Mopla rebels was clearly directed against the government and the jenmi landlords. Many jenmi landlords were attacked and their houses looted. After that it became beyond the control of Muslim leaders. By the end of December 1921, the Mopla rebellion had been completely suppressed. According to the official sources 2,337 rebels had been killed, 1652 wounded and 45,404 surrendered. The vast majority of the rebels were poor peasants either tenants at-will or landless labourers and coolies.
The 1921 rebellion, like the uprisings that occurred throughout the nineteenth century was in essence an expression of long-standing agrarian discontent, which was only intensified by religious and ethnic identity of the Moplahs and by their political alienation, above all in the years between 1885 and 1920. Like those of the past, it drew its strength primarily from the poor Moplah peasantry. Even some of the rebel leaders and the mollah religious cadres came originally from poor peasant families. Lacking systematic organization, effective leadership and ideology, the mollah revolts were essentially pre-political in nature. Finally, the militant Islamic egalitarianism of the Moplah peasants did provide an impulse for armed uprising from time to time. The outcome of these revolts once again demonstrated that ardour for a cause as expressed by the willingness to ‘kill or be killed’ does not suffice to make a successful peasant revolution. The Malabar Rebellion was the first systematic movement of the farmers in Kerala. This rebellion provided them with self confidence and enthusiasm. They recognized the power of unity. The succeeding peasant revolts in Malabar and Thiru-Kochi received impetus from Malabar rebellion. So Malabar rebellion may be called as the ‘Telangana’ of Andhra Pradesh or Tehbaga of West Bengal. Peasanthologists consider it as the mother of the peasant uprisings in Kerala.

4.1.1.4 Fourth Phase

The fourth phase of farmers movement in Kerala begins with the origin of well organized socialist movements by 1934 -1935. Some independent farmers movement originated during this period. Here, there developed an idea among the farmers that their problems can be settled only by securing the freedom of the country. A meeting of farmers, held at Pattambi on March, 1934, gave birth to the first farmers’ movement in Kerala. From now onwards a speedy growth of the movement can be seen adopting new methods
of agitation. The town centered well developed labour movements gave impetus to the growth of agricultural movements in villages too.

In Kochi state, the first farmers movement originated at Kodungalloor by 1932-1933. The leaders of the movement organized farmers against the practice of Hoondikka agreement. It was the first organized agitation of farmers in the state. Majority of the leaders had a socialistic outlook. The first well organized farmer’s movement of Kochi state was started at Amminisseril in Trichur District in 1940. It was known by the name Kochi Karshaka Sabha.

It was as a part of anti imperialistic struggle that farmers movement first originated in Malabar. Even the cultivations were impeded by the economic crisis of 1930. The first well organized farmers movement originated at Chirackkal of Malabar by July 1935. The farmers’ meeting elected Vishnu Bharatheeyan as the President and K.A. Keraleeyan as the Secretary. The name of the movement was ‘Kolecherry Karshaka Sangam’. Since then farmers movements were started in Vadakara, Koilandi, Naripatta, Karivallor, Mokkeri and Vattoli. Thus the ‘All Kerala Malabar Karshaka Sangam’ came in to existence in 1937. Later, by 1942, the ‘Malabar Karshaka Sangam’ was modified to include farmers from Travancore and the name was changed to ‘Kerala Kisan Sangam’. Farmers movements at that time was not so active in Travancore and Kochi as that of Malabar.

The farmers meet at Poonjar in 1943 gave birth to a well organized farmers movement in Travancore by the name ‘Travancore Karshaka Sangam’. It was the problems of the tenants which persuaded them to start such a movement.
4.1.1.5 Fifth Phase

The fifth phase of farmers movements in Kerala began after 1947. Even though the much debated landlord tenant issue was settled by the Land Reform Act of 1957, farmers problems persisted in other forms. The fluctuation of the prices of most agricultural produce was the most serious problem of this phase. In response to this, here and there, there originated a number of big and small farmers movements. The most prominent among them were the farmers organization sponsored by different political parties. The concept of ‘Vote Bank Politics’ persuaded different political parties to form such farmers’ movement. Again, even farmer oriented political parties also came into existence. The very strength of Congress in Kerala was farmers. The well being of farmers was the main motto of these political parties.

Farmers’ movement began to face problem in this stage also. The love and care for farmers were limited at the time of election. Majority of ‘farmer oriented’ political parties kept a hidden agenda. As a result, they gave more importance to the needs of the industrialists than that of farmers. The hope of farmers on political parties began to fade. This caused split in some of the political parties. In course of time the one party rule gave way to coalition government. It seems that the deviation of the Congress from its proclaimed path of ‘farmer concern’, caused further split in this party. The socialistic outlook slowly waved in the Congress party and thereby its popular support was weakened. This further strengthened coalition politics in Kerala.

4.1.1.6 Sixth Phase

The Sixth Phase of farmers movement in Kerala starts from the 1990’s. The New Economic Policy is the main issue in this phase.
Globalization has created an alarming crisis in the agricultural scenario. The constant fluctuation and regression of the prices of agricultural products topsy-turvyed the hope of the farmers. The major crops of Kerala especially Rubber, Cardamom, Pepper, Tea, Coconut etc. faced acute price instability. The culmination of agrarian distress was farmers suicide. The districts of Wayanad and Idukki were the abode of farmers suicide. Political parties and their peasant organizations failed miserably in protecting the interests of the affected farmers. The net result was that farmers began to abandon agriculture and turned to other business. Even the food security of the state was threatened. Kerala depends on neighbouring states for vegetables and other food items. Agricultural land is used for commercial purposes. Agriculture has become an unprofitable profession today. At this juncture social organizations and religious institutions came forward to protect the interests of farmers and they began to organize farmers. Many religious leaders took lead in organizing the farmers. Malanadu Development Samithi, Kuttanadu Development Samithi, Karshakavedi, are the prominent among them. As a result a number of independent localized farmers movements took their birth. The complete distancing from political parties was the landmark feature of these movements. As far as Christian religion is concerned 80% of its members are farmers. It is this fact which persuaded them to form a farmer’s organization. These movements attracted the attention of the people very soon and this consequently increased their membership. Sensing the threat the so-called farmers oriented political parties began to destabilize these movements. So it follows that farmers movement in Kerala can be classified into two.

4.2 Politically inspired farmer’s movements

4.3 Apolitical farmer’s movements
4.2 Politically inspired farmer’s movement

Those agrarian movements which have close and intimate relations with Political parties are known as politically inspired farmer’s movements. They work in line with the policies and programmes of the parental political party. They have to blindly support the policies of the concerned party even if they are anti farmer. Independence of opinion and action are alien to these movements. They are only silent observers when their parent political party takes anti peasant policies. They can be further divided into two.

- farmer oriented political parties
- farmers movement sponsored by political parties.

4.2.1 Farmers oriented political parties

Majority of political parties in Kerala claim themselves as the parties of farmers. Two important political parties of Kerala wish to be known as political party of farmers.

4.2.1.1 Indian National Congress (INC)

The famous slogan raised by Lal Bhahadur Sastri, the well known congress leader and late Prime Minister, was ‘Jai Jawan and Jai Kisan’. This itself portrays the intimate relation that exists between Congress party and farmers. Indian National Congress was the real power behind India’s independence. It is known as a party of farmers. The main programme of the party is to organise farmers and bring them to the forefront of democratic process. As a result Congress does not have a separate farmers organization. Congress itself is an organization of farmers is the argument put forward for this. But in Kerala INC has got a peasant wing by the name Kerala Karshaka Congress.
4.2.1.2 Kerala Congress

In 1964, there occurred a split in congress party and “the Kerala congress” was born under the leadership of late Sri K.M George. According to the constitution of Kerala Congress, it is a political party of farmers. The promotion of agriculture and farmers are the proclaimed aims of the party. Today, in Kerala, there are four factions of the Kerala Congress which sometimes merge and split among themselves.

4.2.2 Farmers movements sponsored by political parties

In Kerala, majority of political parties have their own farmer’s wings

4.2.2.1 Kisan Sabha

The farmers wing of communist parties of India is known by the name Kisan Sabha. The socialist wing of congress was known by the name Karshaka Sangam in 1930’s. Then it changed its name as Kisan Sabha. Kisan Sabha has given ample contribution to the emancipation of farmers in Kerala. The enactment of Land Reforms Act may be the most important contribution of Kisan Sabha to the Agricultural sector in Kerala. Kisan Sabha has initiated a number of praiseworthy peasant agitations in Kerala.

4.2.2.1.1 Morazhe Case

The economic crisis created by Second World War crippled the life of farmers. The so called ‘War Ordinances’ made farmers angry against the Government. So a protest day was observed on Sept 15, 1940. The farmers of Chirackkal Taluk conducted a protest Rally at Morazhe. Police blocked the rally and lathi charged the farmers. It was followed by a clash between police and farmers in which one Sub Inspector and a police man were killed. In this case K.P.R Gopalan the first accused was sentenced to death. But as a
result of the timely intervention of Gandhiji the punishment was commuted to life imprisonment.

4.2.2.1.2 Elleringi Agitation

In 1941, farmers were scourged at Irirkkoor in Chirackkal Taluk. By 1942, it spread over to Karumbai, Payyavoor, Uratham and Erumedy. The members of Kisan Sabha actively participated in this agitation.

4.2.2.1.3 Kayyoor Agitation

There was a clash between the members of Kisan Sangam and police on March 20th, 1940. In this clash a police man was killed. As a result four members of Kisan Sabha were hanged to death on March 29th, 1943.

4.2.2.1.4 Karivalloor Agitation

The members of ‘Kisan Sabha’ blocked the paddy which was transported to the Payyavoor Land lord as tax on 20th December 1946. The police fired against the mass and two farmers were killed.

4.2.2.1.5 Kavumbai Agitation

The members of Kisan Sabha encroached the forest of Kavumbai on 30th December 1946. The police blocked the encroachers and blockaded Kavumbai. The clash ended in police firing killing four members of Kisan sabha.

4.2.2.1.6 Punnapra-Vayalar Agitation

By 1946, farmers movements were strengthened in Travancore. Small scale farmers (Marginal, agricultural labourers, fishermen) joined the peasant movement and agricultural labourers strongly demanded reasonable wages during harvest and for other agricultural activities. All these agitations had a clear cut anti-imperialist colour because the authorities usually sided
with the landlords. The agricultural economic conditions which prevailed in Cherthalai and Ambalapuzha areas were completely exploitative in character. As a result the farmers and agricultural labourers declared an armed rebellion. The British Government crushed all these agitations with the help of police force. In the clash a number of farmers were killed and some were seriously injured.

4.2.2.2 Kisan Sabha Of CPI

The peasant wing of CPI is also known as Kisan Sabha. The organization, ideology, etc. is same as that of Kisan Sabha of (CPIM).

4.2.2.3 Kerala State Karshaka Congress

Indian National Congress does not have a specialized farmers movement. But in Kerala, it has got a peasant wing by the name Kerala Pradesh Karshaka Congress. The programmes and policies of this organization go in line with those of Congress party.

4.2.2.4 Kerala Karshakka Union

In Kerala there are four factions of Kerala Congress. Each Kerala Congress has got a farmers wing by the name Kerala Karshaka Union. The most prominent among them is Kerala Karshaka Union headed by Sri K.M Mani faction.

4.2.2.5 Bharatiya Kisan Sangh

It is the peasant wing of Bharatiya Janatha Party (B.J.P). This peasant organization works in accordance with the ideology of B.J.P. It is not so strong as other peasant movements, because of the fact that B.J.P is not powerful in Kerala.
4.3 Independent Peasant Movements (Apolitical Farmers Movement)

Kerala’s agricultural scenario presents itself with a number of Independent Peasant Movements. A critical analysis of these movements will reveal that these movements are theoretically well structured. One of the most striking features of these independent peasant movements in Kerala is that they aim at the integral development of farmers. But many of the political parties find a potential threat to their existence in these movements. So to a certain extent political parties try to destroy these movements.

4.3.1 Farmers Relief Forum (F.R.F.)

It was founded by Shri. A.C. Varkey, a famous farmer and an activist of North Malabar. It came into existence on September 1, 2005.

The Farmers Relief Forum was formed at the background of globalization. Majority of farmers of Malabar are immigrants from Central Travancore. The deficiency in agricultural land and increase in population compelled them to migrate to the fertile Malabar area. The Malabar migration is a saga of tears and hard work. By hard work, the farmers have changed Malabar into a paradise. But by 1990, with the introduction of new economic policy, the situation has been topsyturvyed. Globalization has transformed this paradise into a valley of tears. The important crops of the region like pepper, coconut, arecanut and cashew witnessed steep decline in prices. This region has become an abode of farmers’ suicides. Wayanad district has registered the highest rate of farmers’ suicide in the state. As a result farmers have abandoned agriculture and they have turned to other non-agricultural activities.

As the very name indicates the aim of the movement is to provide ‘a relief’ for the afflicted farmers.
The following are the important objectives of the movement:

(a) Persuade the government to write off the loans of farmers.
(b) Pressurise the government to provide adequate financial assistance to the remaining family members of farmers who committed suicide.
(c) Adopt and educate the children of farmers who commit suicide.
(d) Oppose the anti-agricultural policies of the commercial banks.
(e) Stop the activities of ‘blade banks’ in the locality.
(f) Pressurize the government to withdraw all the cases against the farmers who participated in agitations.
(g) Work for the implementation of a special package for the Malabar region.
(h) Provide education loans for the children of farmers at a reduced rate.

**4.3.1.1 Important activities of F.R.F**

**4.3.1.1.1 Agitation for prohibition**

In September 2006 hundreds of people were killed in Bangalore by drinking fake alcohol. This persuaded the members of F.R.F to conduct an agitation against alcohol consumption. The F.R.F stands for complete prohibition in the country. This agitation was conducted at Nadavayal in Wayanad district. The agitation succeeded in creating an awareness among the farmers about the evil effects of alcohol consumption. Besides, about twelve toddy shops were closed as the after effect of this agitation.

**4.3.1.1.2 Buffalo Agitation**

The ‘adivasis’ of Wayanad were provided with buffalos at a reduced rate of Rs. 3,000 by the government. But the buffalo’s were old and had low productivity. This happened because of the corruption on the part of the
Farmers Movement in Kerala

The F.R.F conducted an agitation by the name ‘buffalo agitation’ to make an awareness about this corruption among the farmers. As a result, the movement could prevent the corruption and the adivasis were provided with high quality buffalos.

4.3.1.1.3 Local Loan Fund

This was another project put forward by the movement. Majority of the farmers of the region faced the threat of confiscation of their properties by the commercial banks. In order to help the debtors the movement launched a new programme by the name ‘Local Loan Fund’. By giving Rs. 200, any farmer can be a member of this scheme. By this project, the movement collected a sum of Rs. 12 crores. The afflicted farmers were given loans from this fund, at a lower interest rate. The F.R.F was successful in giving financial assistance to 500 farmers.

4.3.1.1.4 Farm Umbrellas

The movement started a small scale industry to make umbrellas at Konichira in Wayanad district. The industry manufactured one lakh umbrellas and were sold at a lower rate. The project also started a stitching unit for making school uniform and another unit for producing chappals.

4.3.1.1.5 Organization of and participation in National and International Seminars

The leaders of the movement conducted and attended a large number of seminars both national and international. The following are the important seminars attended by A.C. Varkey and other leaders.


b. Inter continental Caravan at Mexico on 23-09-2006.
Besides the movement conducted a good number of seminars at national, state and local level. For example, the farmers were constantly given courses in selling their agricultural products at sustainable prices.

### 4.3.1.1.6 Neera Agitation

The coconut farmers of Malabar faced a severe crisis due to the steep fall in prices of their products. At this juncture, the movement started a special agitation by the name ‘Neera Agitation’. The movement propagated the idea that coconut water could be used for making a variety of food products. About 75 different items can be made with the ‘Neera’ (coconut water) like toddy, soft drink, chocolate etc.

### 4.3.1.1.7 Agricultural Budget

The movement demanded an agricultural budget after the model of ‘Railway Budget’. To propagate this idea the movement published a mock budget by the name ‘Agricultural Budget 2004-05’. This was widely accepted and a lot of discussions were conducted on it. Moved by it, the state government tried to implement many of its suggestions.

The other important programmes of the movement were called:

a. ‘Deathbell to Agriculture’.

b. ‘Kidney and Uterus Auction’.

### 4.3.1.1.8 Electoral experiment of F.R.F

The F.R.F makes use of all possibilities for the integral development and protection of farmer’s rights. So it made an experiment at polls.

As a result, F.R.F contested the 2004 Lok Sabha election. The ‘INFAM’ gave unconditional support to F.R.F. The Chairman of the Forum
A.C. Varkey contested from Kozhikode Parliamentary Constituency. F.R.F Kannur District Chairman M. Thomas tried his luck from Kannur Constituency. In other places, it supported independent candidates. A.C. Varkey secured 34,005 votes out of 1110149 votes. In some panchayats especially Pulpally and Mullenkolli panchayats the F.R.F candidate came first. In Kannur constituency Mr. M. Thomas secured 8958 votes. The F.R.F conducted a huge rally at Kannur on 31st December, 2004. It was organized as a protest against the anti-agricultural policies of the government. It is estimated that one lakh people participated in the rally.

Even though F.R.F lacks strict organizational structure, it is very active. A.C. Varkey can be considered as the Tikayat or Njanjundaswamy or Sarad Joshi of Malayalees. It must be pointed out here that lack of sound financial background cripples many of the activities of the organization. Amidst many obstacles, it has succeeded in giving a ray of hope to the afflicted farmers of the Malabar region.

4.3.2 Karshaka Vedi (Reg. No. K477/977) (‘Farmers Forum’)

Karshakavedi is an independent farmers’ movement started at Palai in Kottayam district in 1997. It is very active in Central Travancore consisting of the districts of Kottayam, Idukki, Pathanamthitta and Ernakulam. It aims at the integral development of farmers in Kerala. The anti-agricultural policies of both central and state governments persuaded the farmers of this region to form such an organization.

Karshaka Vedi promotes and propagates the idea of sustainable agriculture which protects soil, water and air. It stands for the use of bio-fertilizers. It is an ardent exponent of the practice of mixed crops and stands for food security.
Chapter IV

The organisation has its own constitution and laws. It has a two tier system of organizational structure. At the lower level it has panchayat committees and at the upper level it has Central Committee which consists of elected members from panchayat committees. At present it has 21 panchayat committees.

The following are the important objectives of the movement.  

- To organize farmers irrespective of caste and religion
- To cultivate organizational awareness in the farmers
- To participate in the creation of a welfare state by cultivating mutual trust and concern among the farmers
- To protect soil, air and water from pollution
- To propagate traditional agricultural knowledge and make use of this valuable ‘local knowledge’ for the betterment of agricultural scenario
- To organize farmers against the anti-agricultural policies of the governments
- To settle the disputes between farmers and thereby to create a unity among the farmers
- Inculcate the values of honesty, justice, non-violence and patriotism in farmers

4.3.2.1 Important achievements of the movement

The movement has conducted a number of agitations for the cause of farmers. It has submitted a number of memoranda to the government officials for the protection of the rights of farmers. It has filed a petition in the Kerala High Court for the implementation of labour tax. It conducted a
huge satyagraha before the KSEB office, Pala, against the hike in electricity charges on 28-05-2008.

The protection of the rights of rubber cultivators with regard to the sale of rubber wood is the most important achievement of the movement.

The movement has 25 panchayat committees and 10 self-help groups. It conducts 2 agricultural shops at Thidanad and Parathode, both in Kottayam district.

The Meenachil taluk in Kottayam district is the stronghold of Karshakavedi. The complete independent way of activity is the hallmark feature of Karshakavedi. Financial deficiency stands in the way of its effective functioning. Amidst, diverse difficulties, it fights for the cause of the farmers of Kerala.

4.3.3 Karshaka Raksha Samithi (Save Farmers’ Forum)

This is another independent farmers’ movement which originated in Malabar under the leadership of Fr. Jose Manippara, a catholic priest.

Karshaka Raksha Samithi stands for the protection of the rights of the farmers irrespective of caste and religion. It is the continuing farmers’ suicide which took place in different parts of Kerala that persuaded the leaders to form such a movement. It is a plain fact that globalization has increased the misery of the farmers. Majority of the crops of this region witnessed steep fall in prices. It was a time which no agency was coming forward to protect and fight for the survival of farmers’ community.

The most important demand of this movement is to write off the loans of the farmers. Special agricultural packages should also be announced.
Many programmes were conducted for the actualization of these objectives. Satyagraha and road blocks were conducted to protest against the anti-agricultural laws of the government. It gives special attention to the protection of the rights of coconut farmers. The movement has tried to spread the message that coconut water can be used for a number of useful purposes. To conscientise farmers about it, it launched a programme by the name ‘Neera Agitation’. The farmers began to collect toddy from coconut trees. The government banned the collection of toddy on the ground of violation of excise laws. The chairman himself then climbed the tree and collected the toddy. He was arrested and imprisoned for a week.

Eventhough this movement was concentrating only in a district its activities attracted the attention of all the farmers of Kerala. The use of moderate ideology separates it from other farmers’ movements of the state.

4.3.4 Kuttanad Farmers Association

The Kuttanad Farmers Association (Kuttanad Karshaka Sangham) was formed by large farmers cultivating fields reclaimed from the backwater (Kayal), extending to several hundred acres. They formed the Kuttanad Farmers Association (KFA) in 1932 to make representations before the state government for obtaining various concessions and facilities for the cultivation of their fields. Its stated objectives are: (1) to organize the farmers of Kuttanad for the progress and development of the country and of the area in particular, (2) take measures for furthering the overall interests of farmers, (3) to propagate technical knowledge required for modern agriculture so as to increase productivity, (4) to establish credit institutions for the economic welfare of farmers, (5) to settle disputes among farmers, (6) to lobby for legislations for the protection of farmers’
interests and to work for their legitimate political rights, and (7) to collect and maintain funds and property for the realization of the above-mentioned objectives.28

Membership in the KFA is open to any adult person residing or owning land in Lower Kuttanad. One can become an ordinary member of the Association by paying a membership fee of Rs. 5 per year, and a life member by paying 50 kilograms of paddy or its price equivalent.

The Association has a two-tier organizational structure with branch organizations at the village level and a general body at the centre. A branch is organized with a minimum of one hundred members in an area. Members of a branch should be registered with the head office, and half of the amount collected through membership fees should be paid to the centre. While the governance of the branch is the responsibility of its members, the central body has the right to audit its accounts, to disaffiliate it, and to wind up its activities.

The general body is constituted by representatives elected by the branch bodies at the rate of two persons per branch. In addition, the central committee of the general body can nominate 15 members and 5 non-members to the general body. To look after the day-to-day functioning of the Association, there is a managing board with eleven members elected from the central committee.

The KFA has a membership of 3000 farmers, of whom more than 60 per cent own more than ten acres of land and who, by local criteria, are rich. About 85 per cent of the members are Christians; most of the remaining are Nairs, although there are a few Ezhavas and Brahmins also.
Chapter IV

The KFA is predominantly an organization of educated, upper class farmers, and is dominated by Christians.

4.3.5 Upper Kuttanad Farmers Association

The stimulus for the middle and small cultivators to organize themselves was provided by the coming into power of the first communist government in 1957. Soon after this, the Travancore Agricultural Labourers Union launched agitations in many parts of Alleppy for higher wages. In the eastern part of Kuttanad (Upper Kuttanad), where small cultivators dominated, they did not concede the demands of the labourers and tried to harvest the fields themselves with the help of fellow-cultivators and their own women folk (who by custom did not work in agricultural fields). On the other hand, in their anxiety to make the strike a success, labourers tried to stop the cultivators from harvesting the fields. In the incidents that accompanied this, some women were assaulted. This infuriated the farmers and led to spontaneous mobilization to suppress the labourers. The leadership for the mobilization was provided by E. John Jacob, a retired army officer belonging to a rich Christian family.

The activities of the Communist Party and the labour union created apprehensions about security of life and property among certain sections. This led Nairs and Christians, the two important landowning communities in the area, to transcend their narrow communal interests and form "self-defense" organizations. Such organizations enlisted able-bodied male members of well-to-do families in a locality and organized physical training, including the use of indigenous weapons for an eventual confrontation with the workers of the Communist Party. By 1958, an anti-communist movement had emerged in Kerala, particularly in the
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Travancore Cochin area. The movement, later referred to as "Liberation Struggle" (Vimochana Samaram), brought about mass action of a magnitude never witnessed in Kerala; and the charged political atmosphere provided a favourable environment for the rapid growth of farmers organizations in different parts of Alleppy, particularly in Kuttanad, where the communist threat was most prominent. Under the circumstances, the cultivators of Niranam village organized the Upper Kuttanad Farmers Association (Upper Kuttanad Karshaka Sangham–UKFA) in 1958, with E. John Jacob as president, and extended its activities to cover Tiruvalla, Chengannur, Kuttanad, and Changanacherry taluks.

The stated objectives of the UKFA are: (1) to establish a uniform agrarian policy and programme in its area of operation by organizing farmers; (2) to enforce a uniform system of agricultural wages and employment; (3) to settle disputes between farmers and labourers, (4) to work for the welfare of agricultural labourers and to establish, maintain, and increase harmonious relations between them and farmers; (5) to cooperate and to affiliate with other organizations working for the welfare of agrarian population; (6) to print, publish, and circulate relevant literature keeping in mind the interests of agriculture and its improvement; (7) to establish and run libraries, recreation clubs, exhibitions, cultural programmes, etc., for achieving modernization of agriculture; (8) to establish and/or press the government for the establishment of research institutes for agricultural development; (9) to make efforts for the introduction, experimentation, and propagation of scientific modes of agriculture, (10) to correspond with and to represent to higher authorities about the problems of farmers; (11) to store and distribute modern agricultural inputs to farmers and to work for the establishment of agencies which engage in
these activities; (12) to establish and to work for the establishment of cooperative banks, societies, and cooperative farming societies; (13) to undertake contracts for dewatering, bunding, etc.; (14) to acquire agricultural machineries and implements to be leased to members; (15) to press the government for the construction of roads, canals, bridges, culverts, etc., for the benefit of the people in general and the farmers in particular; (16) to establish schools, craft schools, hospitals, hostels, orphanages, etc., or to work for the establishment of these organizations; (17) to facilitate the promotion of training in technical and higher education; and (18) to work for the welfare of backward classes. Notwithstanding such a wide ranging set of objectives, the activities of the Association are centered mainly around the problems posed by farmers of the region.

The UKFA has an elaborate organizational structure with a central body, branch organizations, affiliated units, and association and individual members.

At the centre, the UKFA has a general body, a central council, and a central executive committee. The general body is composed of representatives elected by local units at the rate of one representative for every 25 active members, but not less than two, members irrespective of the size of local membership.

The central council has a maximum strength of 100 members, composed of persons nominated by local units at the rate of four for a membership of 50 or more; otherwise one representative. The council is entitled to nominate a few members.

At the local level, the Association might have either a branch or an affiliated organization, generally covering a village or a part of a village.
While the affiliated units can have their own rules and regulations, local branches should function within the overall framework of the Association.

The main sources of income for the Association are membership fees and donations. The membership fee is collected at the rate of 50 paise per acre of owned land and 25 paise per acre of rented land.

At the time of its formation in 1958, the UKFA had eight branches and six affiliated units. This increased to 17 branches in 2000, when it had 8,200 primary members, 2,000 associate members and 12,000 sympathizers. Even though this is no match to the large membership of KSALU, the fact that farmers can respond to union activities in an organized way has created a new situation.

The UKFA is primarily an organization of small cultivators, with as much as 85 per cent of them owning less than ten acres of land. About 75 per cent of the members are Christians, 18 per cent Nairs, and the rest are Ezhavas and Brahmins.

The leadership of the UKFA generally reflects the composition of its membership. Among the 27 executive committee members in 1959, 17 were Christians, 9 were Nairs, and the remaining 1 was an Ezhava. Among these, 22 were full-fledged farmers, while 2 were lawyers, 2 were doctors, and 1 was a member of the state legislative assembly. The situation at the local level is similar; educated persons belonging to well-to-do families, the members enjoy a large network of relations, formal and informal, connecting them to police, administration, developmental bureaucracy, and political structures, which they could both mobilize and fall back upon in their quest to confront organized labourers.
Farmers in Kuttanad used to get 40 per cent of the cost of draining their fields as a subsidy from the state government. In 1972 the Kerala Government decided not to give this subsidy any more. On this occasion farmers took collective action under the auspices of All-Kuttanad Farmers Association and boycotted all dewatering operations for some time. As the disruption of agricultural operations had a marked effect on the economic situation in the state, government was compelled to yield and restore the subsidy.

Another issue disturbing the farmers for a long time was the procurement of paddy under the "levy system", through which government procured a certain amount of paddy at a price lower than the market rate. Procurement of paddy at a uniform rate from farms varying in size and productivity was resented by the farmers. They organized meetings and demonstrations, and the issue was raised in the state legislative assembly. These activities compelled the government to modify the earlier scheme and to procure paddy on the basis of a sliding scale, varying with farm size and productivity. This was a great relief to small cultivators. Through such activities the Association defended the interests of the farmers.

4.3.6 Palghat Farmers Association

Following formation of a branch of KSALU (CPIM) in Palghat there was a series of agitations and strikes to allow increase in wages, regulation of working conditions, and other benefits. The main target of these struggles was the erstwhile tenants, who generally supported the CPIM and were members of the Tillers Association. While these activities led to a substantial increase in wages and improvement in the working conditions of the labourers, they alienated the erstwhile tenants from the
CPIM and forced them to form a separate organization. Under such circumstances, certain educated persons from the ranks of these cultivators emerged as their leaders. They met the leaders of Kuttanad Farmers Association and sought their help; and the Palghat Farmers Association (Palghat Karshaka Samajam) was organized in 1971. By 1974, the Association organized about 100 branches in Palghat alone. It expanded rapidly to the neighbouring areas and emerged as a strong anti-communist force in Palghat.

The declared objectives of the Association are:\(^{30}\) (1) organized effort to get a continuous right of members in the land in their possession, (2) protection of the interests of farmers, (3) securing for farmers a fair price for their produce, the right to dispose of surplus product at open market prices, and freedom of agricultural operation, and (4) resisting the efforts of government to impose such arbitrary measures on farmers as heavy "levy", high wages, and other undue benefits to agricultural labourers. The main aim of the Association was to resist the labour-oriented policies and actions of government and the anti-landowner programmes of the CPIM. It was the opinion of the leaders of the Association that political parties would not listen to farmers unless they were organized as a strong force. Towards this end, they tried to extend their area of influence to other areas of Malabar.

The membership of the Association is drawn mainly from the ranks of erstwhile tenants belonging to Ezhava caste; its top leaders are also Ezhavas.
4.3.7 Kerala Farmers Federation

In 1972 the Kerala Government made provision for a Provident Fund Scheme for agricultural labourers and introduced the Kerala Agricultural Labourers Bill in the State Legislative Assembly. The Kuttanad Farmers Association and other farmers organizations were not against the provision of a social security scheme for agricultural labourers in principle, and were willing to share a part of the cost of any worthwhile programme. However, farmers opposed the Bill as it contained many proposals which would seriously affect their interests and requirements, such that each cultivator should keep separate accounts for each labourer. In place of such an impractical proposition, the farmers advocated the creation of a welfare fund for agricultural labourers, from which grants or assistance could be given to the labourers in old age, sickness, or other difficulties. The All-Kuttanad Farmers Association took the lead to organize meetings and other forms of protest against the Bill and conducted mammoth demonstrations in front of the State Legislature. These had some effect, and the government exempted cultivators owning less than one hectare of land from the provisions of the Bill. The Bill brought home to the cultivators that unless they worked as an organized pressure group, capable of exercising influence at the political level, their very existence was in danger. The familiarity and cooperation that developed among the leaders of farmers from different parts of the state in the course of the agitations enabled them to plan the formation of a statewide organization.

In January 1973 the leaders of the Kuttanad Farmers Association and Palghat Farmers Association organised at Ernakulam a convention of the leaders of farmers associations not affiliated to any political party, wherein it was decided to form a statewide farmers organization, with a federal
structure and affiliated associations in different parts of the state. Following
the decision, the Kerala Farmers Federation (KFF) was formed, bringing into
existence at the state level a politically independent organization of the
farmers. During 1973, the Farmers Federation organized its branches in most
of the districts. The second annual conference of the Federation was held at
Trichur in June 1974. At this conference the non-political character of the
Federation was emphasized. It was stressed that farmers would not be able to
obtain benefits from any political party unless they were organized on a class
basis as an important force.

The important demands of the Kerala Farmers Federation (KFF)
are:  
(1) There should be a definite guarantee from government for no
further reductions in the ceiling on land-holding. (2) Government should
take initiative to call tripartite meetings of government, labourers, and
cultivators for arriving at long-term agreements on wages and conditions of
work; and once such agreements were arrived at, no agitations like strikes
should be allowed for the duration of the agreement. (3) All agricultural
inputs like seed, fertilizers, insecticides, and herbicides should be equitably
distributed at reasonable prices. (4) The price of paddy taken from the
cultivators by the government under the levy scheme should be at least
Rs. 150 per quintal, or sufficient to meet the cost of cultivation, including a
reasonable margin for the cultivators. (5) The Kuttanad Development
Corporation formed by the government should be reconstituted, with the
chairman and majority of the members representing the cultivators. (6)
There should be a paddy development board with branches at district and
block levels, whose advise would form the basis of all irrigation and land
development activities and the fixation of paddy prices. (7) There should
be no obstruction to mechanization designed to economize and increase production of any of the agricultural operations.

The KFF is not formally related to any political party, but an informal relation exists with the Kerala Congress, as many of the leaders are active in both organizations. The emergence of the Federation as a strong organization of the farmers was one of the factors which led to the induction of the Kerala Congress into the coalition government ruling the state; the president of the KFF was made a member of the state cabinet and an important portfolio was allotted to him. The emergence of a powerful organization of farmers also necessitated the state government move for the implementation of the Agricultural Labourers Act of 1975.

4.3.8 Kerala State Farmers Congress

The informal relation that developed between the Kerala Congress and the All-Kuttanad Farmers Association weakened the influence of Indian National Congress among the farmers. In the election to the State Legislative Assembly held in 1970, there was a strong contest between the Kerala Congress and Indian National Congress; (Congress), particularly in central Travancore, which was traditionally a Congress stronghold. In the election, Kerala Congress emerged as an important political force in Kuttanad and adjoining areas. It was thought that the influence of the Kuttanad Farmers Association was the main cause of this success. The Congress began to think of adopting measures that would strengthen its influence among the farmers, and as a first step in this direction it formed the National Farmers Association of Kuttanad (Kuttanad Deseeya Karshaka Sangham) (National Association) in 1972. They maintained that the National Association was formed to save the small cultivators of
Kuttanad from the "Kerala Congress Farmers Association", which, in the opinion of the Congress leaders, was not interested in the problems of small cultivators.

The introduction of the Kerala Agricultural Labourers Bill in the State Assembly created considerable apprehension among the cultivators. The Kerala Farmers Federation tried to capitalize on this dissatisfaction and organized a series of meetings and demonstrations. Thousands of cultivators participated, demonstrating their opposition to the Bill. The Congress, a partner of the coalition government that had introduced the Bill, was a little jittered by the opposition the Bill had created among the cultivators from whom it derived its political support. This further made the Congress leaders aware of the need to have an organization of the party to take care of the interests of the cultivators. These forces led to the formation of the Kerala State Farmers Congress in 1974, with M.K. Devassykutty, then president of the Trichur District Congress Committee, as its president.

The main stated objectives of the Farmers Congress are: 1) to launch organized efforts for the development of farmers; 2) to increase agricultural production; 3) to establish cooperation between farmers and agricultural workers to develop villages; 4) to eradicate intermediaries who hinder the economic improvement of farmers; and 5) to give leadership to farmers to bring about a socialist society.

### 4.3.9 Kuttanad Development Samithy

This is an independent peasant organization of Kuttanad area. Fr. Thomas Peeliyanickal is the founder of this organization. It stands for the cause of small scale farmers in the area. It has introduced a number of
new programmes for the protection of farmers of the locality ‘one fish and one rice’ attracted much attention of the public. Now, it stands for the realization of ‘Kuttanad Package’ recommended by Dr. M.S. Swaminathan Committee. Slowly Kuttanad Development Samithy has become the voice of the farmers of the locality.

4.3.10 Chengara Land Struggle

Land struggle in Chengara, Pathanamthitta district, Kerala by landless dalits and adivasis from all part of Kerala, started on August 4, 2007. The movement is a fight to reclaim ownership of land that has been part of a long standing promise of the government. Nearly 5000 families, more than 20,000 people entered the Harrison Malayalam Private Ltd. Estate living in makeshift arrangements. The Chengara land struggle demands permanent ownership of agriculture land through transfer of ownership from the Harrison Company to dalits and adivasis. The Sadhu Jana Vimochana Samyuktha Vedi (SJVSV), the collective that leads the struggle, has opted for the land takeover as a strategy reminding the tradition of the great leader Ayyankali, the militant dalit leader, whose mission was to ensure liberation of dalits from various forms of slavery, right to agricultural land, as well as to right to education in Kerala. The Sadhujana Vimochana Samyuktha Vedi (SJVSV) is a radical departure in people’s initiative to attain land rights. It exposes the socio-cultural reasons for landlessness among dalits and adivasis in Kerala. It says that 85 percent of the landless in Kerala are the Dalits and Adivasis, who were also traditionally excluded from attaining wealth, power, titles and assets.

Chengara explains a land question in colonial and post colonial era. The welfareist democratic state has failed to address the illegality involved
in the transfer of the land to the Harrisons company, of the illegal possessions of land as cited in Kerala High Court Judgement on 24 September 2007. The Government however agreed later to provide fertile agricultural land in sufficient quantities elsewhere which the families in struggle could use and as means of survival.

The above description gives a picture of Kerala’s agricultural economy and the challenges faced by the farmers. Even though land reform measures have been implemented in Kerala agricultural production has not increased proportionately. Political parties are also not sincere in implementing long term projects for the promotion of agriculture. The most important two recent challenges are the creation of the WTO and the Indo ASEAN trade agreement.

Kerala is one of the smallest states in India, the per capita land of Kerala is 0.12 hectare and agricultural land per person is just 0.10 hectare. Hence the pressure on land in Kerala is the highest in India as the state’s economy is dominantly agrarian. Because of the nature of its agricultural products Kerala is most affected by global market changes. About eighty percent of Kerala’s agricultural products depend on Indian and international markets. Kerala infact produces 45 percent of the plantation crops in the country and almost 20 percent of the people of Kerala’s population find their means of life through agriculture.
4.4 Survey

Part II

In order to understand the attitude of farmers in general and towards INFAM a survey has been conducted. The results of the survey are also given in this part.

Profile of the respondents

An opinion survey has been conducted to have a firsthand knowledge about the agricultural sector and farmers’ movements in Kerala with reference to INFAM. INFAM was the chief point of attention in the survey. Kottayam and Wayanad were the two districts selected for the study. Kottayam is selected because it has a good number of farmers movements consisting of both independent and non-independent ones. Besides Kottayam is the most literate district of the state. Wayanad was selected because it is the strong hold of INFAM and also a recent centre of farmers’ suicide. The survey was based upon random sampling method. 277 farmers were randomly chosen from INFAM list and the remaining 233 farmers were randomly chosen from the list provided by agricultural offices.
Table 4.1
Distribution of Sample

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of the INFAM Unit (Reg. No.)</th>
<th>Sample Size</th>
<th>District</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Padichira Unit (Reg. No. 131)</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Wayanad</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mullankolli (Reg. No. 175)</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>Wayanad</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<tr>
<td>Plassanal (Reg. No. 458)</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Kottayam</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chittar (Reg. No. 175)</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Kottayam</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neeloor (Reg. No. 183)</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Kottayam</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meenachil (Reg. No. 190)</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Kottayam</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Palakad (Reg. No. 210)</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Kottayam</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>277</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Seven units of INFAM in Wayanad and seven units of INFAM in Kottayam are selected for survey. These units are very powerful. These units have an average membership of 400. Of them 20 farmers were selected for study. Farmers from all categories of age and different types of farmers (medium, rich, poor, educated etc.) were included.

**The Criteria for Selecting Farmers**

The farmers other than members of INFAM were also selected randomly. Farmers from ten districts of Kerala were selected. The name of the farmers were collected from different agricultural offices who have direct contact with the agricultural office.

**Table 4.2**

**Criteria for Selecting Farmers**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Panchayat</th>
<th>Agricultural Office</th>
<th>Sample Size</th>
<th>District</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Melukavu</td>
<td>Melukavumattom</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>Kottayam</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meenachil</td>
<td>Paika</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Kottayam</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elanji</td>
<td>Marangoli</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Ernakulam</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kudayathoor</td>
<td>Kanjar</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Idukki</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pulpally</td>
<td>Kurumani</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Wayanad</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Panamaram</td>
<td>Panamaram</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Wayanad</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thiruvalla</td>
<td>Mannar</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Pathanamthitta</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thiruvampady</td>
<td>Thiruvampady</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Kozhikode</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kalikavu</td>
<td>Kalikavu</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Malappuram</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alackode</td>
<td>Udayagiri</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Kannur</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mulankunnathukavu</td>
<td>Mulankunnathukavu</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Thrissur</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pulinkunnu</td>
<td>Champakkulam</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Alappuzha</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>233</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
These ten districts were selected because they are strongholds of farmers movements. Besides, the majority of people of these districts mostly engage in agricultural activities.

**The important Problems of Agriculture in Kerala**

Kerala is predominantly an agricultural state. The most significant feature of Kerala farmers is that majority of them are educated and have thorough knowledge about various dimensions of agriculture. But the state faces severe problems in the field of agriculture. So the first part of the survey tries to understand the alarming problems of agricultural sector in the state. The study of the inherent problems are a must to have a substantial knowledge about the agricultural sector.

**Table 4.3**

**Problems of Kerala Agriculture**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Labour Deficiency</th>
<th>Price Fluctuation</th>
<th>Climate Change</th>
<th>Govt. Policy</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Count</td>
<td>262 (52.40%)</td>
<td>218 (43.60%)</td>
<td>12 (2.40%)</td>
<td>8 (1.60%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Graph 1**

Graph showing the distribution of problems in Kerala agriculture.
As per the Table 4.3, the most important problem of agricultural sector is the deficiency of agricultural labourers. 52.40% opined that this factor destabilizes Kerala’s agricultural sector. It is a proved fact, because now-a-days majority of labourers in Kerala hail from other North Indian states. The second most important problem of the state is the constant fluctuation in the prices of agricultural produce (43.60%). The climate change is another alarming problem of agricultural sector in the state (2.40%). The entire climate has undergone significant variations. 1.60% of the farmers of the survey worried about the anti-agricultural policies of the government. They held the opinion that the centre and state governments stand in favour of industry at the cost of agricultural sector.

Another realm of academic enquiry is the relation between new economic policy and Kerala agriculture.

**Table 4.4**

**Knowledge about New Economic Policies**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Knowledge</th>
<th>Number of farmers</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>470</td>
<td>94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>500</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

According to table 4.4, 94% of farmers who attended the survey have some knowledge about globalization. This exhibits the distinctive feature of Kerala farmers. This is the hallmark feature of Kerala farmers which distinguishes them from other parts of the country. Only 6% donot have any knowledge about new economic policy, globalization, ASEAN agreement etc.
Table 4.5  
**Effect of New Economic Policy on Kerala Agriculture**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Opinion</th>
<th>Number of farmers</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Negatively affected</td>
<td>442</td>
<td>94.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>5.96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>470</strong></td>
<td><strong>100</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*only 470 farmers respondent out of 500

As per Table 4.5, 94.04% held the view that globalization negatively affected Kerala agriculture. Only 5.96% were of the opinion that globalization had a positive effect on Kerala agriculture. This indicates that majority of farmers of the state hold a negative attitude towards globalization.

Table 4.6  
**Challenges of New Economic Policy**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Main Effects</th>
<th>Number of farmers</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Price Fluctuation</td>
<td>410</td>
<td>82.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Onset of Multinational Companies</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>10.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Competition</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>3.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other reasons</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>3.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>500</strong></td>
<td><strong>100</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

According to Table 4.6, the most important negative effect of new economic policy is the price fluctuation of agricultural produce. 82% people strongly uphold this view. 10.8% are of opinion that encroachment of
multinational companies is the most important negative effect of new economic policies. 3.8% upholds that competition is the most important negative effect of new economic policies. 3.4% possess other reasons.

Table 4.7
Age wise distribution of farmers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Number of farmers</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Below 25</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>5.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25-50</td>
<td>389</td>
<td>77.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Above 50</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>16.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>500</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Graph 2

Another shocking finding about Kerala’s agriculture is that young generation are disappearing from the field of agriculture. It indicates that the future of Kerala’s agriculture is disappointing. As per table 5, only 5.5%
youth engage in agricultural activities. Majority of farmers (77.9%) come under the age category of 25-50. The farmers above 50 years of age constitute only 16.6%. This points out that the future of Kerala’s agriculture is alarming. The deficiency of agricultural labourers coupled with the disinterest of the youth in agrarian activities pose a serious challenge to the agricultural scenario in the state. The state is already at the mercy of neighbouring states for food grains and vegetables. There is every possibility for an increase in this trend.

Table 4.8

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Land area (in acres)</th>
<th>Percentage of farmers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Below 1 acre</td>
<td>52 (10.40%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 – 2.5</td>
<td>243 (48.60%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.5 – 10</td>
<td>139 (27.80%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Above 10</td>
<td>66 (13.20%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Graph 3
As the table and pie diagram reveals, in Kerala, the area of agricultural land is diminishing at an alarming rate. Thus fragmentation of agricultural land is another important problem of agricultural sector in the state. Majority of farmers have only a small piece of land for cultivation. As per Table 4.8, for 48.60% of farmers the area of agriculture land is between 1–2.5 acres. 10.40% farmers have below 1 acre of land only. 27.80% farmers have an agricultural land between 2.5 – 10 acres. 13.20% have more than 10 acres of land.

Out of 52 marginal farmers who possess below 1 acre 25 are attached to political party affiliated farmers movement. Out of 243 medium farmers 233 are attached to independent farmers movement. The farmers in Kerala can be divided into four categories on the basis of the possession of agricultural land. The farmers having less than 1 acre of land is known by the name marginal farmer. Farmers having the agricultural land between 1 acre and 2½ acres can be called medium farmers. Farmers having the agricultural land more than 2½ acres and less than 10 acres may be called rich farmers and the farmers having the agricultural land more than 10 acres is known by the name land lord.

**Table 4.9**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Affiliation with Farmers’ movements</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Movements type</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-affiliation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Majority of farmers who attended the survey belong to any of the farmers’ movements (55.4%). 37.6% do not have any affiliation with any of the farmer’s movements. 7.0% are active members of political party affiliated farmers movement. From this, it is clear that farmers in Kerala have an inherent orientation towards farmers’ movements. As literate ones, they understand the necessity of organization of farmers in agricultural sector.

### Table 4.10

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Opinion</th>
<th>Number of farmers</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Satisfactory</td>
<td>461</td>
<td>92.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>5.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not satisfactory</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>2.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>500</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The farmers of Kerala are not satisfied with the performance of farmers’ movements in the state. As per the Table 4.10, 92.2% have answered the question with the answer satisfactory. 5.4% has got a very good opinion about farmers’ movement in Kerala, while 2.4% do have a very negative opinion about farmers movement in the state. This reveals the fact that farmers are not fully satisfied with the existing farmers movements in the state. So it can be concluded that the absence of effective farmers’ movements may be one of the major problems of agricultural sector in the state.

### Table 4.11

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Challenges to Farmers’ movements</th>
<th>Number of farmers</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Negative attitude of political parties</td>
<td>235</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No opinion</td>
<td>133</td>
<td>26.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of awareness</td>
<td>105</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of unity</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>5.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>500</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

According to Table 4.11, the most important problem faced by the farmers’ movement in Kerala is the negative attitude of political parties towards different farmers’ movements. The respondents of the survey opined that political parties do have an inimical attitude towards independent farmers’ movements. About 47% people uphold this view. The lack of effective awareness among farmers about the necessity of farmers movement is another problem faced by the farmers movement in the state. The lack of unity among farmers is another problem of farmers movement in the state. 5.4% of farmers in the survey uphold this opinion. Majority of farmers have lost all confidence
in various political parties. They held the view that government and political parties have utterly failed to protect the interest of farmers.

**Table 4.12**

**Steps to Improve the Working of Farmers Movement**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Steps</th>
<th>Number of farmers</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Common platform between govt. and farmers</td>
<td>375</td>
<td>75%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adopt an independent way of working</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adopt the style of pressure groups</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creation of a confederation between different farmers movement</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As per Table 4.12, the farmers suggested different measures to strengthen farmers’ movement in the state. Majority of farmers suggested the importance of consensus between government and farmers. They are of the opinion that a common platform should be created between government and leaders of farmers movement to discuss and chalkout different measures to settle the various problems of farmers. 75% of farmers who attended the survey are of this opinion. 20% of farmers suggested that farmers movement in the state should adopt an independent way of working. It means that the political affiliation with different political parties should be softened. Nowadays majority of farmers movements remain under the control and guidance of different political parties. Another group of people are of the opinion that farmers should adopt the style and methodology of pressure groups (3%). Another group of farmers suggested a confederation of various peasant movements should be established (2%).
The survey tries to understand the relevance of INFAM as an independent farmers’ movement. The origin of INFAM as an independent peasant movement is very peculiar and it necessitates scientific investigation. The INFAM was very strong and powerful in its beginning. Of course the glory and splendour of INFAM has faded a bit now.

Table 4.13
Challenges Faced by INFAM*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Challenges</th>
<th>Number of farmers</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Religious colour</td>
<td>363</td>
<td>72.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative attitude of political parties</td>
<td>162</td>
<td>32.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of ideology</td>
<td>118</td>
<td>23.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aversion to electoral politics</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>3.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* A person has given more than one opinion.

Challenges faced by INFAM

Graph 5
As per the Table 4.13, the most important challenge of INFAM is its religious identity. 72.6% of farmers in Kerala consider INFAM as a peasant wing of Kerala Catholic church. The lack of clear cut ideology is the second important reason which reduces its prominence among other peasant movements (23.6%). The negative attitude of various political parties also reduced the glamour of INFAM in Kerala (32.4%). The aversion to electoral politics too destabilized INFAM in the state (3.4%).

Table 4.14

Opinion about the performance of INFAM by members of INFAM*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Appraisal</th>
<th>Percentage of farmers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Excellent</td>
<td>14 (5.05%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Satisfactory</td>
<td>250 (90.25%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unsatisfactory</td>
<td>13 (4.69%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* This question has been asked to only 277 persons who are members of INFAM.

As per Table 4.14, majority of members of INFAM are not satisfied with the performance of INFAM. So 90.25% of members of INFAM who attended the survey cast their opinion as satisfactory. 5.05% of the members of INFAM have high esteem about the activities of INFAM. 4.69% of members of INFAM are not fully satisfied with the performance of INFAM.
### Table 4.15

**Appraisal about the performance of INFAM**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Opinion</th>
<th>Number of farmers</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Satisfactory</td>
<td>408</td>
<td>81.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>11.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bad</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>7.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Graph 6**

81.6% of the farmers have given the opinion as satisfactory. Only 11.2% of them have very good opinion about the activities of INFAM. 7.2% of the farmers have a very bad opinion about INFAM.
Table 4.16
Suggestions to Improve the working of INFAM

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Suggestions</th>
<th>Number of farmers</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Avoid religious colour</td>
<td>310</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Effective leadership</td>
<td>405</td>
<td>81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction of awareness program</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>6.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inculcation of ideology</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>10.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* A person has given more than one suggestion.

Another quest of enquiry was about the suggestions to improve the performance of INFAM. 62% have opinion that religious colour of INFAM should be eliminated. The provision of secular character should increase the relevance of INFAM as an independent farmers’ movement in the state. 81% opined that efficient leadership should be given to INFAM. The success of a social movement depends on the leading capacity of the organization. This is particularly true in the case of peasant movements. The efficient leadership of Sarad Joshi, Tikait and Prof. Nanjundaswamy increased the relevance of their respective peasant movements. Another group stands for the introduction of an awareness programme among the members which will conscientize the farmers about the relevance of peasant movements in the state (6.4%). 10.6% asks for the inculcation of clear cut ideology in the objectives and working of INFAM.
Table 4.17
Main Contribution of INFAM

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Contributions</th>
<th>Number of farmers</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Increased the relevance of farmers</td>
<td>434</td>
<td>86.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independent style of working</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>9.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pressure group style of functioning</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>3.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>500</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The other question was about the contribution of INFAM in the arena of peasant movements in the state. According to Table 4.17, 86.8% of the farmers in general opined that INFAM increased the relevance of farmers in the state. As a result, once again, farmers have become the centre of attention. The various political parties and government were made aware of the relevance and power of peasant movements by the activities of INFAM. Another 9.8% of people considered the independent style of working of INFAM as a peasant movement as its important contribution. The linking of pressure group style with peasant movement is the other important contribution of INFAM (3.4%).

4.5 Some alarming problems of Kerala Agriculture

The changes in the cropping pattern and low growth rates in crop productivity have been two noteworthy features in the pattern of agricultural development in Kerala since 1980s. As producers area allocation are always influenced by the profitability of various crops that can be cultivated in their fields. Profitability in turn is a function of both cultivation costs and farm
level prices of agricultural products. Over the past several years, the successful operation of the public distribution system in the state has acted as a price stabilizing factor of food articles and thereby it has dampened down the rate of increase in the prices of food crops.

In the 1980s and from 2010 onwards there was an overall increase in the whole-sale price index of cash crops. The shortage of farm labourers and the rapid increase in their daily wages have also induced farmers to convert their land from the cultivation of highly labour intensive food crops to commercial crops, for which per hectare labour requirements are relatively lesser. During the period 1980 – 2009, the average daily wages of farm labourers in the state increased by 898 per cent. Again the mere conversion of land from the cultivation of food crops to cash crops in itself enhance the property value. The alarming rate at which area under food crops is being converted to the cultivation of cash crops deserves serious concern in a food deficit state like Kerala.

4.5.1 Lack of Agricultural researchers and scientists

Majority of developed countries are planning new agricultural strategies and programmes to tackle the forthcoming food scarcity problem. As a result they are concentrating on research and allied activities.\(^{33}\)

Even though private companies are providing Rs 2.5 lakh per month and more for the agricultural scientist, Kerala is struggling without sufficient agricultural scientists. As per the report of Indian Council of Agricultural research in India, there is only 157 agricultural scientists for 10 lakh people. In this place China has got 545 scientists and USA has 4099 scientists.\(^ {34}\)

The scarcity of agricultural scientists would adversely affect the agricultural scenario, says C.D Mayi,\(^ {35}\) Director of Agriculture Scientist
Recruitment Board. Besides the condition of agricultural research centres are pathetic. Kumarakom Agricultural Research Centre has only 11 scientists. It has got the potentiality of 17 scientists. The Agricultural research centre of Thrissur has got only 25 scientists which has the capacity of 50 scientists. Agricultural Research Centre Thiruvananthapuram too lacks sufficient scientists.\footnote{36}

As a result, the farmers of Kerala use outdated methods and techniques. They are not in a position to cope with the changes in the climatic condition of the state technically. The high yielding varieties of seeds are not sufficiently introduced in the state. The diseases of majority of the plants are not identified and treated.

4.5.2 Climatic change

Agricultural land is declining year after year across the state and food grain production is stagnated mostly due to weather aberrations. In Kerala 1972, 1979, 1987 and 2009 were the severe drought years during which the kharif food grain production was adversely affected to a considerable extent. Crop stimulation models indicate that area under rice in Kerala is likely to decline in coming decades and food grain production is under threat as a result of increase in temperature and rainfall uncertainties.

In highranges annual maximum temperature revolves round 24 – 28°C, while in summer maximum temperature revolves round 35 to 37°C in plains. There was an increase in maximum temperature over Kerala by 0.64°C during the last fifty years. Increase in minimum temperature was 0.23°C. Overall increase in annual average temperature was 0.44°C.\footnote{37} A clear upward trend was noticed in surface air temperature in Kerala. Like that,
there was an increasing trend in post monsoon rainfall indicating shift in rainfall pattern. Rainfall trends are uncertain in several locations.

As a result of climatic change a clear shift was noticed from food grain crops to non food grain crops in Kerala over a period of time. Increases in area under coconut, arecanut, banana, black pepper and rubber was noticed at the cost of phenomenal decline in rice area. It resulted in wide difference between production and demand of rice in addition to frequent floods in monsoon season and droughts during summer season. The prolonged wet spell in 2007 and unusual rain in 2008 devastated the paddy production to a large extent.

A decade ago Kerala stood first in cashew production. At present it has got only fourth position. It was due to steady decline in cashew cultivated area and also occurrence of weather aberrations during the reproductive phase of cashew. Crop projection models indicate that a rise of 2$^0$ C in temperature is likely to affect the area under tea and coffee production in Kerala adversely. Increase in maximum temperature of 1-3$^0$ C will adversely affect thermo sensitive crops like pepper and cocoa. Deforestation and declining wet lands along with the high intensity of rainfall may lead to frequent occurrence of floods and droughts and their ill effects on all the crops will be manifested much more in addition to human and property losses.

4.5.3 Over dependence on rainfall

Kerala’s agriculture mainly depends on monsoon and the over dependence on rainfall has its negative impact on production. The proportion of irrigated area in Kerala is less than 15 percent of the total cropped area, and hence the role of irrigation is marginal. In most years between 1980 –
2009 the state experienced a shortage of rainfall. This erratic monsoon during the past several years has adversely affected the productivity of agricultural crops.

4.5.4 Low profitability

Labour and fertilizer costs together account for more than 75 percent of the paid out cost of cultivation for all major crops cultivated in the state. The absence of any major improvement in farm technology, the rapid increase in the daily wages of farm labourers, the increase in fertilizer prices along with the relatively lower growth rate in farm prices of agricultural products have adversely affected the profitability of crops.

4.5.5 Shortage of farm labourers

Factors like migration to other states and the combined loss of land and labour to the non-agricultural sector have acted as a pincer movement on Kerala’s agriculture starving it of resources. In spite of the substantial increase in wage rates, the gap between demand and supply in the agricultural labour market has been widening in recent years. Growing deficiency in the supply of farm labourers can be attributed to the following factors. The widespread implementation of various poverty alleviation programmes in the state that has rendered substantial employment opportunities to the rural people outside the farm sector, the sprouting up of many small – scale and auxiliary industrial units in rural and semi – urban areas and their labour requirements largely met by the rural people, the large scale migration of rural youth to other states and foreign countries, the hectic construction work that employs much rural labourers, the slow pace of mechanization in the farm sector and the growing dislike of rural youth to
take up farm labour as their full time occupation have worsened the labour shortage problem in agricultural sector.

4.5.6 Abnormal Increase in Land Prices

At present, land prices are so high in Kerala that if interest on land value is added to the paid out costs of cultivation, none of the major crops cultivated in the state is economically viable. Thus, land is not always treated as a means of production in the state but is often regarded as an asset that can be used for speculative exchange. Many speculative investors without genuine interest in farming entered the land market as buyers. Moreover, as land is a safe asset with fair liquidity, a considerable portion of foreign remittance coming in to the state is used for the purchase of land, which leads to a sustained increase in its prices.

4.5.7 Conversion of Agricultural land for other uses

Since beginning of the 1990’s, the annual rate of increase in the portion of land put to non-agricultural uses has been relatively higher. The density of population is very high in the state. With the growing pressure of population and development, agricultural land throughout the state is being converted for construction of residential buildings, commercial establishments, roads, health and educational institutions etc. which in turn reduce the total area under cultivation.

4.5.8 High increase in wages and cost of production

The wages of agricultural labour are the highest in Kerala, among all other states of India. Besides the already existing high wages, there was an unprecedented increase in the wages of agricultural labour of all types. The daily wages for a male labour has been increased five times between 1999 (113.10) and 2009 (450). This was following the increase of prices for
essential commodities. But the wages continued to increase even when the prices of commodities declined steeply.

In addition to these factors, drawbacks in the formulation and implementation of agricultural development programmes, environmental degradation, poor soil management, inadequate plant protection measures etc have played their role in bringing down the pace of agricultural development in the state.

4.6 Impact of Globalization on Kerala Agriculture

India is a signatory of the Uruguay Round Agreement of the General Agreement of trades and Tariff (GATT). This *interalia* mandates India and other member countries to open up their economics to world market forces. The Uruguay Round, for the first time brought agriculture under multilateral trade regime through the World Trade Agreement (WTA) which has been institutionalized under the World Trade Organization (WTO) on January 1, 1995. The three principal commitments incorporated in the AoA to establish fair and market oriented agricultural trading system and to more operationally effective GATT rules and disciplines are (a) Market access (b) Domestic support (c) Export subsidies. Apart from AoA, a few other agreements under WTA, such as the Agreement of Trade Related aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS), the Agreement on the application of Sanitary and Phytosanitary (SPS) measures and Agreement on Technical Barriers to Trade influence the Agricultural Trade in varying measures. India had its concern whether the WTO will act impartially to protect the interests of all or act unilaterally as a pro-rich multilateral organization.
4.6.1 The Kerala Context of Agriculture under WTO

4.6.1.1 Unique vulnerabilities of Kerala farm economy

Among the farm economies of different states in India, that of Kerala is the most vulnerable and far more pervasive to WTO and AoA related concerns because of the high proportion of trade dependence of the commodities produced. The specific characteristic features of the static farm economy that are most viable to WTO impact are the following.

(1) Vast majority of holdings are small and tiny. About 85% of the total of 54 lakh holdings is below a half hectare with an average size of 0.13 ha, hence low risk bearing ability and high vulnerability to income loss due to price decline and significant deprivation of livelihood opportunity.

(2) Being predominantly based on perennial tree crops (80% of the net cultivated area), flexibility in the cropping patterns to adjust with market conditions is limited, and in fact practically nil in the short and medium term.

(3) High proportion of unproductive tree crop population due to the over age and endemic disease infestation results in low productivity.

(4) High degree of instability in price regime (in comparison with other food grains and cereals) on account of the export and raw material orientation of the commodities produced.

(5) Relatively low proportion of family labour participation in farming and resulting high wage labour component in the cost of production render Kerala agriculture costliest in the country and debilitate its competitiveness despite good climatic condition.
(6) Inherent conflicts between the interests of the farmers (seeking always a higher price) and that of the manufactures who utilize the raw materials accessible at a low price and the exporters who gain from the international trade.

(7) Most crops (Rubber, coconut, pepper, cardamom) do not enjoy strategic advantage in the national context of food security in contrast to cereals such as rice, wheat or commercial crops like cotton and sugarcane.

(8) Among various sectors, the agriculturalists are the least organized. Nearly 95% of agriculturalists having small holdings, being unorganized, are unable to defend their rights and resist the exploitation by globalizing powers.

The Kerala economy is basically a regional economy, a sub national entity in the national economy of India. In contrast to other states in the country, Kerala has a greater outward orientation. Kerala’s agricultural wealth is based on trade, since most of the farm commodities produced in the state are for trade within or outside the country. Within India the state of Kerala stands apart in respect of its sensitivity to changes in the national and international trade environment. As foreign trade plays an important role in the economy of state; most of its traditional crops are dependent upon overseas exports. This implies that any change that happens to Kerala’s overseas exports will have a striking impact on the state’s economy.

4.7 Kerala Agriculture and Indo ASEAN Free Trade Agreement

India signed a Free Trade Agreement (FTA) with Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) on 13th August 2009, which came in to the force by 1st January 2010. As a result India and ASEAN member
countries have offered to eliminate tariff on specified tariff lines listed in schedules of the Trade and Goods Agreement. The Agreement will lead to growth in bilateral trade and investment resulting in economic welfare gains to India. The FTA aims at widening the market base of agricultural and industrial commodities of India in ASEAN countries. It is schematized that the tariff protection offered to the products in India shall be phased out during the period between 2010 and 2019. Tariff elimination process in the context of the total absence of non-tariff restriction on external trade would increase Indian’s competitive edge and production base with respect to ASEAN as well as world market. This is true and logical as the ten member nation of ASEAN has a population of 588.2 millions with a per-capita income of $ 4702 which is 40 percent higher than Indian per-capita income under comparable estimates in 2008.

The agreement encompasses 3666 commodities ranging from agricultural produce to electronic goods. The tariff lines are divided into five broad categories viz Normal Track, Sensitive Track, Highly sensitive, Special products and Excluded products. The exclusion list has 489 commodities of which 303 are from agriculture sector, 27 fish products, 81 textile products, 56 automotive products and another 17 goods from the Chemical Industry. During the stipulated period of 10 years, trade in commodities listed under ‘normal track’, shall be made totally free of any tariff restrictions, while the Most Favoured Nation Tariff (MFN tariff) of those items included under sensitive track would be phased out to 5 percent. The Highly Sensitive List of commodities has again been categorized into three-

(1) Commodities with a tariff reduction target by 25 percent in 2019, (2) reduction target by 50 percent; and (3) tariff reduction target by 25 percent by the terminal year of the Trade pact. Natural Rubber is included
under exclusion list of commodities while MFN tariff rate of coffee shall be reduced to 51 percent from its prevailing rate of 70 percent and for pepper. MFN tariff reduction target is to reduce to 50 percent from its prevailing rate of 100 percent.

There are two different views about the treaty. The proponents are of the opinion that agriculture is not at all profitable in India and therefore the sector fails to attract investment and remain under developed. Opening up of agricultural commodity market would make the sector more competitive and efficient for which agriculture production system needs reorganization. On the other hand opponents are of the view that land holding, structure and the character of production of agriculture in India demand state protection to subsist, without which small and marginal farmers in particular will face devastating consequences. It is also argued that the removal of restrictions on the external trade of food articles would jeopardize the food security of the people in India as food crops will be substituted by the cash crops for the export market.

4.7.1 Impact on Kerala Agriculture

Under the agreement, Natural Rubber has been included under exclusion or negative list and therefore its external trade is unlikely to have serious impact as in the case of coffee and pepper. For coffee, import duty will be reduced by 5 percent every year to arrive at the agreed MFN tariff rate of 50 percent in 2019, and MFN tariff rate of pepper will be reduced from its current level of 70 percent to 51 percent by 2019.
End Notes


4. K. Raman Pillai, *op.cit.*, P.70.


34. *Ibid*.
35. *Ibid*.
36. *Ibid*.


