PREFACE

The purpose of this thesis is to analyse whether the rural development programmes launched by the governments and other agencies have benefitted the rural agricultural labourers in general and female agricultural labourers in particular in Palghat District.

Of all workers, women workers are the most oppressed strata of the society as such. In India like in any other backward, Post Colonial Country women workers are treated as cheap labour. This is more true about the women working in the field of agriculture, the major unorganised sector of Indian Economy. A large number of women who depend mainly on this economic activity in rural India live below the subsistance level. Though agriculture received considerable attention from the planners, government agencies and researchers, concrete information regarding the role and conditions of work of the female agricultural labourers is not available to explain this social phenomenon.

The female agricultural labour despite contributing to the rural economy on par with men encounter innumerable difficulties in the field in the existing socio-economic frame work of Indian Society. Casual nature of employment, segregation of work, unequal wages, exploitative conditions of work, ignorance and less vocal nature of the workers, unemployment, lack of avenues, commercialisation and mechanization of agriculture, sexual exploitation are some of the
problems that have oppressed the female agricultural labour. Fortysix years of independance, constitutional safeguards and various developmental programmes adopted by Govt. have not altered the basic life conditions of agricultural labour in general and female labour in particular.

The researcher selected 3 taluks at Palghat District, Kerala, and had fruitful discussions with social and political leaders, public and social scientists.

The data has been collected by both formal and informal techniques of interview, observation and recall while examining the life styles of certain women involved in the agricultural labour. The researcher has personally contacted some of the workers to get the first hand information about their problems and their working conditions. Two hundred and forty female agricultural labour households from Palghat district were chosen at random and were interviewed.

The study on various facets of agricultural women's life in rural areas raises several theoretical questions for an understanding of the nature of the problem. It also highlights the level of exploitation that is being carried out on the oppressed in general and women belonging to lower classes in particular. The study also deals with the various bureaucratic organisations engaged in the implementation of welfare programmes to improve the lot of the rural poor. Though these programmes could raise some hopes among
the 'dependent' classes including women, they in practice helped the dominant classes of the society defeating the very purpose for which they were created.

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P. Jacob George.