Chapter V

A Structural-Locational Analysis of Classes and Social Groups in Keralam

'Society chooses its expendables.'
—Jean Paul Sartre

Following the general introduction to this chapter, we first seek to locate the prime 'Social Structures of Accumulation' in Keralam by taking a macroscopic view of social contradictions in the state. We, then, briefly mention the character of the coalition of dominant classes as it had historically developed in the state. We touch upon the impact of labour migrating out of the state particularly since the mid-1970s. We take a brief overview of the changing poverty levels in the state. Then we come to a core focus of this chapter, namely, 'Class Relations in Agriculture and the Land Question'. We recognise the legitimate place of agriculture as the priority sector and the vital importance of food grain production within agriculture. We, then make a detailed Re-examination of the impact of land reforms in the state: the abolition of intermediaries being a non-starter, the relative success of tenancy reforms and the failure of ceiling reform and designate the land reforms in the state as an 'Agrarian Transition from Below', after the broad, two-fold classificatory framework of T.J. Byres. We note the decline of food economy and other baneful after-effects of the land reforms and harp on the still unfinished agenda of land reforms. We also do not hesitate to make a contemporary reflection on the mode of production in the state. Subsequently, we make an empirical examination of the Land Question and the Agrarian Classes, in relation to the landholding pattern in the state. We make particular focus on the incidence of landlessness and land concentration in contemporary Keralam based on Rural Labour Enquiry Reports that bank on National Sample Survey (NSS) rounds. Further, we also focus on the incidences of landgrabs in recent years by powerful interests in the state, which are by no means a marginal phenomenon. Thereupon, we seek to examine in some detail the caste-class interface in the state, with particular focus on the agricultural labour participation and landlessness profile of Adivasis and Dalits, admittedly, the lowest in the socio-economic ladder vis-à-vis other agrarian sections. Once again, we bank on Rural Labour Enquiry Reports here making a comparison between the post-land reforms phase and the contemporary phase in both Keralam and India as a whole. In a sketchy manner though, we also examine the class dimensions and non-class specificities of the deprivation/marginalisation faced by

1 Jean Paul Sartre, as cited in Ronald J. Herring 1983: Land to the Tiller: The Political Economy of Agrarian Reform in South Asia, Oxford University Press, Delhi, p. 5.
other deprived social groups, namely, the fisher community, religious minorities and migrant labourers within the state. Thereafter, we examine in some detail gender and its interfaces with class within the state. We also do not leave out of purview the Class-Nationality interface in Keralam, a recurring theme throughout this thesis. Before drawing the conclusions of this chapter, we also make an overview of classes, social groups and their political outlook. This may be considered the skeletal form of this rather complex chapter.

To begin with, a structural-locational analysis of Class is considered to be the rather conventional mode of class analysis. And yet we would hold that it is an indispensable method. It is the class-in-itself approach in Marx's own category of analysis. Following the analogy of the high-profile Computer Science of our times, we would call it the 'hardware' of class analysis. It is an analysis of the economic position of classes. We would hold that this should be the point of departure of class analysis. Class-in-itself holds within itself the potential to engage in class-for-itself struggles and indeed, turn into class-for-itself. Mao Tse-tung, himself the most renowned revolutionary in the Third World, made his class analysis on the basis of a distinction between “economic status” of classes and “attitudes towards the revolution”.

To underline the importance of the ‘hardware’ of Class analysis, it is crucial in the context of India to distinguish between a vertically integrated coalition of classes as may be constituted by the orientation of public policy namely, a ‘benefit coalition’ from a Class (A more detailed analysis of ‘benefit coalition’ is made in Chapter VI). Nor can an elite-led mobilisation within a particular Weberian status group like caste be passed off as a class struggle, under normal circumstances. It is important to enquire not only about struggles taking place but also about their socio-economic basis and their political orientation.

How does the overall development of underdevelopment/dependant development of Keralam as a Nationality have an overriding constitutive effect upon the formation of the Classes (seen in relation to castes) within it? A prime focus of this study is intended to be the Class-Nationality interface in the case of Keralam as these two social categories may be identified as the principal ones, at this stage of social development of Keralam, shaping, in turn, gender, caste, community relations and also the human-nature relationship.

Both Class and Nationality are held to be SSAs herein. Class analysis is being attempted as a study of the historical process of the political struggles of the masses, and not merely by defining classes by their economic position or position in the production relations. A "scientific" class analysis should entail a close study of the historical process of the struggles of the masses for freedom, democracy and socialism, rather than merely defining classes by the criterion of a "defined range of income" or the position in the production relations. Hence, we would also seek to examine how caste/community identity provided the social basis for cross-class mobilization through a peculiar variety of identity politics propelled by the dominant classes in Keralam over the years.

I. 'SOCIAL STRUCTURES OF ACCUMULATION' IN KERALAM

We have examined in detail the theoretical dimensions of the 'Social Structures of Accumulation' (SSA) approach in Chapter II. As we apply it in a study on the political economy of Keralam, our prime points of focus are Class and Nationality and their mutual interface. This is because these two social categories may be identified as the principal 'Social Structures of Accumulation' (SSA), at this stage of social development of Keralam, shaping, in turn other SSAs, namely, gender, caste, community relations, besides space and also the human-nature relationship. (As labour is the sole producer of value a la Marx, it is only rightful that we consider Nationality itself as a Social Structure of Accumulation (SSA), from the vantage point of the labourers or the basic producing classes.)

We have examined the constitution of the Kerala nationality in terms of its political economy in Chapter III. We have further examined the implications of Globalisation in Chapter IV. The formation of classes and social groups within the nationality is to be viewed as integrally linked to the dynamics at the macro-level that we have examined in these preceding chapters. At the conceptual level, the macro-level forces at work shaping and constituting the hitherto inegalitarian society may be identified as: global monopoly capitalism with its overwhelming and ever-deepening impact under globalisation, the Indian big capital that has apparently struck a cosy alliance with the former and the Indian state, where these forces along with the semi-feudal forces in India's countryside hold dominant influence. The emerging society can be identified as a primarily class-divided society, albeit a class society assuming national and global dimensions. Hence the importance of Class and Nationality as categories of social analysis needs to be

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We need to examine the crucial links between Class and non-class subalternity in general and Class and Nationality in particular.

Our inquiry is also directed towards locating what is happening to the marginalised social groups of the traditional society under the new dispensation. As we have already discussed in Chapter IV, the already vulnerable sections of the traditional society bear the brunt and get further marginalised under the intensified exploitative drive under globalisation, which is apparently a generalised onslaught on the broad masses of the population.

If we embark on a class analysis of most Third World societies, we find working class and peasantry as the two most basic classes, with the peasantry as a numerical majority in most cases. Besides, petty bourgeoisie or the amorphous collection of middle classes (ranging from white-collar workers to small and middle trading interests) also constitutes an important section of the broad masses of people. Among the dominant classes, it is common to find big capital that developed under colonialism and a remnant semi-feudal class in the countryside.

The oppressed non-class social entities, in the case of India may, mainly be identified as oppressed nationalities and the marginalised social groups, viz. women, Dalits, Adivasis, fisher people and minorities (religious and linguistic). In the advanced capitalist countries of the West, race and gender are the principal non-class categories. As we have observed earlier, these non-class categories can also be related to the process of surplus accumulation and designated as Social Structures of Accumulation (SSAs). The individuality of the non-class contradictions involving these non-class social entities needs to be duly recognised. In other words, these non-class contradictions cannot be mechanically reduced to a class angle.

Any agenda for a democratic transformation of the social order must also take into account the political outlook and level of consciousness of the various classes and social groups in society and identify the possible allies and rivals in the event of a struggle for such social transformation. In its most generalised form, contradictions that could lead to the democratic transformation of society may be brought under the following heads: class, nationality, gender, caste, community and environment. Except the one mentioned last, viz. environment, all other contradictions have to do with the contradictions within human society. Environment, here, refers to the contradiction between human beings and nature. Contradictions within human society and between human beings and nature may be conceptualised as the two most fundamental contradictions. In a capitalist society, or more significantly, in a world-order dominated by the capitalism of oligopolies, the
principal aspect of the human-nature contradiction can also be seen as an intra-societal contradiction. In the fierce competition among capitalist monopolies to outbid the others, nature turns out to be the biggest casualty. It is the struggle of the oppressed classes with a view to overhaul the system of production for profit in the market with production for human needs that could alleviate the problem of overexploitation of nature leading to environmental degradation. Hence, at this stage of social development, our emphasis can rightly be on the contradictions within human society itself.5

With such a generalised view of contradictions in human society at large and third world and Indian societies in particular, we could proceed towards analysing the specificities of the classes and social groups in the society under our focus i.e., Keralam. We have considered the year, 1970 as a landmark since this is widely considered to be the year that marked significant re-alignment of classes within Keralam, through the land reforms.

Towards understanding classes and social Groups formations in Keralam, we would first try to understand dominant class formations, and in particular, the development of trading classes, through a brief glimpse back into Kerala history. We would look at the implications of migration on class/social relations in the state and survey the poverty estimates on Keralam. Much more importantly, agriculture being the principal productive sector within the state, we would try to locate, in some detail, the agrarian classes with reference to the land question in the contemporary scenario. Further, we shall go on to identify the specificities of the oppression on non-class social groups, etc.

II. HISTORICAL CONSTITUTION OF DOMINANT CLASS FORMATIONS IN KERALAM

First of all, let us briefly mention the historically handed down dominant class formations within the state, with particular reference to the trading classes:

Among the major elements of the colonial transformation in Keralam, the positive features may be briefly mentioned as below: abolition of slavery, inauguration of an era of formal caste equality, introduction of a modern legal system and public administration, creation of an English educated elite, monetisation of the economy, introducing private ownership over land and other resources, restrucructuration of the dominant labour process by introducing wage labour and commodity production through commercialisation of agriculture and setting up of industries, development of transport and communication networks, development of overseas trade, and creation of nouveaux riches sections, however weak, even from among the lower castes (except from among the slave castes).

Among the pernicious fallouts of the colonial transformation were: The ecological ruin brought about by the encroachment of forests, first, for the cultivation of timber and subsequently, for setting up plantations,\(^6\) the decline of traditional indigenous crafts like pottery and the abolition of matriliny\(^7\) and the cross-caste, pan-Hindu community formation of a regressive character\(^8\), both under the influence of colonial modernity.

Apart from the other transformations that came about under colonialism in the economic sphere, overseas trade also picked up in a manner hitherto unprecedented. Corresponding to this transformation, trading sections developed.\(^9\)

Census of 1891 in Thiruvithamkoor had clearly shown emergence of significant non-agricultural sections in Thiruvithamkoor society by late 19th century.\(^10\) Among males engaged in different classes of occupation, industrial class constituted 17 per cent and commercial class, over 6 per cent. Agricultural sections constituted over 42 per cent of the total.\(^11\) It may be recalled that in the agriculture sector, plantations were already begun to be established on a large scale by late 19th century.\(^12\) In subsequent Kerala history, the plantations came to dominate the agriculture sector and the trading classes came to

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\(^{9}\) There was demand for coconut products in America and Europe. Thus in the large southern princely state of Thiruvithamkoor, between 1870 to 1890, export of coconut products more than doubled. The value of coconut products like copra and other fibre articles rose from rupees 30.43 lakhs in 1871 to 68.59 lakhs in 1891 (P. Chandramohan, Social and Political Protest in Travancore: A Study of the SNDP Yogam (1900-1938), M.Phil. dissertation, CHS/SSS, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, 1981, p. 50).

\(^{10}\) The present Kerala state was constituted on 1 November 1956 out of the large southern princely state of Thiruvithamkoor (Travancore), a small central princely state of Kochi (Cochin) and the Malabar region that was under direct colonial rule as part of the Madras province. Thiruvithamkoor and Kochi were under indirect colonial rule through the British residents stationed in these states.

\(^{11}\) Based on Census of Travancore 1891, p. 578; cited in P. Chandramohan 1981: Social and Political Protest in Travancore: A Study of the SNDP Yogam (1900-1938), M.Phil. dissertation, CHS/SSS, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi.

\(^{12}\) Thus the first coffee plantation was established in 1862 by J.D. Munro on Hope estate and in 1864, a tea plantation was started in the government gardens in Peerumedu. The largest plantation companies, Kannan Devan Hill Produce Company was registered in 1878 and Anglo-American Direct Tea Trading Company in 1897 (P. Chandramohan, p. 47). In Malabar region, East India Company had already started a spice plantation as early as in 1797 at Anjarakkandy (R. Prakasham, 1978: "Keralathile Thozhilali Vargavum Thozhilali Prashthanavum Roopam konda Kalaghatam" in G. Priyadarshanan (ed.), 1978: SNDP Yogam
dominate over the economy as a whole. Economic historian of the industrial sector, Raman Mahadevan had in a well-documented piece, traced the beginnings of industrial development in Thiruvithamkoor in the context of colonial rule.\textsuperscript{13} We would, in turn, like to suggest as an "ad hoc hypothesis"\textsuperscript{14} that the native trading classes in the state that developed under colonialism and in nexus with it were likely to have been of a 'comprador' character, meaning that these trading classes were not merely 'agents' of colonialism/global capitalism but that they had their interests historically intertwined with the interests of the latter. Quite akin to many of the colonised regions of the world, they have been much less intent on developing the productive sector of the economy by engaging in productive activities, rather were engaged in the easy route of enriching themselves through trade.\textsuperscript{15} Over the years, the trading classes in the state have also built up a powerful pressure group under the name, \textit{Vyapari Vyavasayi Ekopana Samiti}, which is a vertically integrated coalition of classes.\textsuperscript{16} This can more easily be understood from the contemporary scenario wherein the Regional Dominant Classes (RDCs)\textsuperscript{17} that are dominant within the national formation of Keralam did not have a problem in opting for a Structural Adjustment loan from the ADB.\textsuperscript{18}  

\textbf{III. The Micro-level Impact of Migration}  

At the state level, there were altogether 3.75 million migrants, with an estimated 6.35 million households in 1998, which meant that about 40 per cent households in the state had at least one migrant in them. 'Outmigrants' are those who migrated out to other parts of India and 'emigrants' are 'external migrants' who migrated out of the country. Out of the 3.75 million migrants in 1998, 1.70 million were persons who had returned back; and...
again, 1.65 million were internal migrants i.e., within the territory of India. The number of return out-migrants was higher by 39 per cent of the out-migrants.\textsuperscript{19}

The major place of origin of out-migration was central Thiruvithamkoor: Alappuzha and Pathanamthitta districts each accounting for 13 per cent of the total. The secondary location was Thrissur district with 14 per cent of the total. The principal place of origin of the emigrants from Keralam is the Malappuram-Thrissur area. Malappuram contributed one-fifth of the total. Thiruvananthapuram was next in the order, but only with 10 per cent of the total.\textsuperscript{20}

51 per cent of the emigrants were from Muslim households and Muslim households received 50 per cent of the remittances. Malappuram, a very backward, Muslim majority district contributed the largest number of emigrants and overseas remittances.\textsuperscript{21} 13 per cent Ezhavas, 12 per cent Syrian Christians, 8 per cent Latin Christians, and 8 per cent Nairs. No such skewed distribution is seen among the out-migrants.\textsuperscript{22} Emigration and out-migration have, apparently, been important factors for individual and family social mobility. But it has benefited little for the marginalised communities like Dalits and Adivasis.

A case study of two districts, Alappuzha and Kasaragod, by Kerala Migration Study (KMS) showed that whereas the outmigrant households have an average of 87 cents and emigrant households, 64 cents per household landholding, non-migrant households had only 57 cents.\textsuperscript{23} This might indicate that only those who had relatively better economic conditions were able to take advantage of migration, with land apparently being the principal productive asset.

KMS showed that 80 per cent of Kerala emigrants had no formal technical education, with only 20 per cent having a certificate, diploma or degree in technical education. Most of the emigrants seem to have worked as construction labourers, under very bad working conditions. Remittance per emigrant, 'literate without schooling' was Rs. 14 thousand and those with a degree was Rs. 47 thousand.\textsuperscript{24}

\textsuperscript{24} Ibid, p. 48.
IV. Changing Poverty Levels in Keralam

In early 1980s, the consumption poverty in Keralam was as serious as in other parts of India. Thus in 1983, incidence of poverty in the state was 40.42 per cent i.e., at par with the all-India figure of 44.48 per cent.²⁵ Dreze and Sen had pointed out that even in 1987-88, the incidence of poverty in Keralam was very similar to that in Uttar Pradesh and Keralam and was very close to the all-India average.²⁶ By 1993-94, the figure fell to 25.43 per cent in Keralam i.e., well below the all-India average of 35.97 per cent, which also had declined by about 6 percentage points over the decade. Supposedly, 1990s witnessed a rapid decline in poverty and by 1999-2000, the incidence of poverty in the state was merely 12.72 per cent with a corresponding all-India figure of 26.10 per cent. It is admitted, however, that the figure was not comparable to the figures for earlier years.²⁷ The factors that might have led to any possible reduction in poverty level are not entirely clear. D. Narayana (2003) holds the view that urbanisation and diversification into non-farm employment has greatly to do with decline in poverty rates. He argues that during 1981-91 the process of urbanisation gathered momentum and this period also witnessed a corresponding sharp reduction in poverty.²⁸

Keralam is one of the five states with the least incidence of poverty (as per the 45th round of NSS 1993-94 figures) but the problem of hunger persists. Households having two square meals a day was the lowest in Keralam among 17 states both in 1983 and 1993. The calorie intake in Keralam was just 1965 calories as against 2400 for all India in 1993-94. However, it may be argued that the diversified nature of food availability and the habit of eating out might account for the disparity in figures with National Nutrition Monitoring Bureau (NNMB) data in 1988-90 that shows Keralam’s average calorie intake as 2140 calories.²⁹ Given the benign climatic conditions, the need for calorie intake was also considered low in Keralam.

²⁶ D. Narayana 2003, p. 27.
²⁸ D. Narayana 2003, p. 31.
At all-India level, Abhijit Sen had spoken of the use of criteria in measurement of poverty that were inconsistent with earlier periods. Hence, according to him, it would not be possible to speak of a reduction in poverty during the 1990s. Utsa Patnaik had pointed out that going by the last NSS survey which uses the same reference period as the earlier ones, in 1998 poverty affected 45 per cent of the rural population, much higher than a decade ago. In any case, it was to be expected that the State withdrawing from its social welfare functions under neo-liberal reforms could mean an increase in levels of deprivation for the already marginalised sections. One motivation for showing a decline in poverty level since 1990s could be to indicate that liberalisation has not resulted in an increased incidence of poverty. Moreover, reduced poverty level in the states could reduce the need for Central transfers to the states on this count. These could be the plausible political motivations for adopting indicators in poverty data that are not consistent with the earlier periods.

V. CLASS RELATIONS IN AGRICULTURE AND THE LAND QUESTION IN KERALAM

Further, let us look at the classes in agriculture, the principal productive sector within the state, with particular reference to the land question of the agrarian classes. The question has huge relevance in the context of the enormous hunger for land by the subaltern classes and social groups in the state. We would further rely on this hardware of Class analysis in order to contextualise the cases of Adivasi and Dalit land struggles in Chapter VI.

It has been a significant aspect of the Indian economy that despite the impressive growth of the manufacturing and services sectors, there has not been a marked decline in the workforce employed in agriculture and allied activities. At all-India level, agriculture still remains the largest single sector. While its share in the economy shrank from 41 per


31 More on this in Chapter IV.

32 More on the notion of ‘subalternity’ and land hunger in Chapter VI.

cent in 1965 to 29 per cent in 1994, its share in total employment hardly changed from 73 per cent in 1921, persisting still at 73 per cent in 1965 to 67 per cent in 1994. Keralam presents a different scenario in this respect. Thus, according to C.T. Kurien, one significant statistic about Keralam is that the percentage of agricultural workers (including both cultivators and labourers) in the total workforce of the state is just 37.8 per cent in 1991 as compared to 66.5 per cent for all-India. Writing around mid-1990s, Thomas Isaac & Michael Tharakan say that non-agricultural employment in Keralam accounted for 45 per cent of the workforce even in rural areas. Similarly, Mridul Eapen says that over the years, there has been significant expansion of non-agricultural activities in rural areas, from a little over one-third of the workforce in 1971 to almost 50 per cent by 1991. Nevertheless, the other side of the same picture is that in rural areas, agriculture is the single sector that still employed more than 50 per cent of the workforce in 1991.

According to Central Statistical Organisation (CSO) estimates, the total sector-wise contribution to Gross State Domestic Product (GSDP) in Keralam during 1997-99 was 59.72 percent for Service sector, 26.6 percent for Agriculture sector and 13.51 percent for Manufacturing and Mining (with Mining contributing only 0.21 percent of GSDP).

Based on CSO data, during 1991-92 to 1996-97, the Service sector in the state recorded the highest growth rate among the sectors at 7.9 per cent, even higher than the corresponding all-India figure, which remained at 6.5 per cent. Agriculture grew at 5.9 per cent in the state, i.e., marginally higher than 3.2 per cent at all India level and the corresponding figures for Industry were 5 per cent for Keralam and 6.9 per cent for all India. As for the sectoral contribution to total NDP growth in the state during 1991-92 to 1996-97, Services occupied an overwhelming 59 per cent. The commodity producing sectors of the economy in the state were faring badly, even as the Service sector was surging ahead. Thus the corresponding contribution of Agriculture to the total NDP growth was only 29.3 per cent and that of Industry only 11.7 per cent. Herein the

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35 The share of agriculture in the total GNP has been steadily falling. In 1947, it was 60 per cent. It came down to 45 per cent in 1971 and further fell to 31 per cent in 1991 (P.S. Appu 1996, p. 196).
booming activity of construction is included in the Service sector. But even when construction is excluded from the Service sector, it occupied the largest share (at 45 per cent) in NDP growth during 1997-98. This pattern of growth may be considered a cause for concern since growth in the Tertiary sector is often regarded to be of a rather volatile kind when it is unmatched by a corresponding growth in the commodity-producing sectors within the economy.

Following NSSO estimates for employment and Union Planning Commission figures for income, Human Development Report 2005 for Kerala state provides that as of 1999-2000, Agriculture contributed 26 per cent of the total income in the Kerala economy as against 28 per cent at all-India level and it contributes only 32 per cent in employment as against 60 per cent at all-India level. This is indicative of the decline of the primary sector of the economy, which could have provided the very foundation for a self-reliant economy for the national formation. The concerns it raises are ever more serious on this count against the backdrop of the great volatilities brought in during an era of globalising finance.

Rural Labour Enquiry 1999-2001 indicates that 30.8 per cent of the Rural Labour Households (RLH) in the country had agriculture as their ‘usual occupation’ whereas the corresponding figure in Kerala state was just about half this figure at 14.7 per cent. The 16 per cent of non-agricultural labour within the RLH for Keralam is the second highest in the country after 17 per cent for Rajasthan. The other states in the high range in this respect are Tamil Nadu with over 10 per cent, Haryana with about 10 per cent and Punjab with over 9 per cent (Table A.13 in Appendices).

The secondary sector in 1999-00 contributes only 19 per cent in the total income as against 24 per cent at all-India level and an impressive 28 per cent in employment as against only 16 per cent at all-India level. It is the tertiary or service sector that contributed an overwhelming 55 per cent of the income in the Kerala economy as against 48 per cent at all-India level and 40 per cent of the employment in the economy as against only 24 per cent at all-India level. The share of employment in the agricultural sector in

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42 Subramaniam and Azeez 2000, pp. 7-8.
46 Ibid.
the state has come down from 49 per cent in 1993-94 to merely 32 per cent in 1999-00 marking a decline of 17 per cent. In spite of all these, the fact remains that agriculture in the state still remains the single largest/principal commodity-producing sector. Apparently, it is agriculture that provides livelihood to the largest segment of the deprived classes and social groups within the state. For these reasons, agriculture or the priority sector as it is rightly called could be neglected only at great peril. Keralam is not one of the highly urbanised states of India. Nevertheless, the level of urbanisation has risen from 15.11 per cent in 1961 to 25.97 per cent in 2001. This also means that 74 per cent of the population in Keralam live in rural areas.

In spite of being the state having had one of the best land reforms in the country, largely abolishing feudal mode of land relations, Keralam even today, is in the top bracket in terms of land concentration and has a significant percentage of the landless. Again, in the opinion of C.T. Kurien, the lower rates of employment in agriculture sector in Keralam vis-à-vis all-India level may signify a movement of people away from agriculture in the state. Thus, on the recent visits of this author to his home-village in the remote cash-crop growing hills of the northern district of Kannur in the state, those in the neighbouring agricultural households spoke of the prospects for a white-collar or even a non-agricultural employment as an “escape” route. The Situation Assessment Survey of the National Sample Survey Organisation has revealed that 48 per cent of the farmers were indebted and that 61 per cent of them in rural India were prepared to abandon agriculture. It could be the adverse terms of trade and the general neglect of agriculture that make people perceive it this way. Volatile prices, often falling prices, of agricultural commodities coupled with high money wages have, apparently, been strong disincentives to cultivators. The share of cultivators [as proportion of the total workforce in the state], had come down from 17.8 per cent in 1971 to 12.24 per cent in 1991 and further declined to 7.2 per cent in 2001, as per the Census figures cited in table 5.1. Out of the 37.8 per cent of the agricultural workforce in 1991, the share of agricultural labourers is 25.55 per cent, double the percentage of cultivators, i.e. 12.24 per cent. The relative share of agricultural labourers vis-à-vis cultivators only increased marginally in 2001 over 1991 as in table 5.1. The agricultural labourers are, in the main, supposed to find employment

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from the cultivators owning tiny plots of land. So there is basis for a sharp contradiction between the cultivators and labourers. Census estimates show that agricultural workforce as proportion of the total workforce further declined to a new low of 23.3 per cent in 2001, marking a decline in the share of both agricultural labourers and cultivators, each by over one-third.

Table 5.1: Comparative Picture of Categories of Workers by Percentages 1991 & 2001

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>1991</th>
<th>2001</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Other Workers</td>
<td>59.6</td>
<td>73.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Household Industry</td>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>3.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agricultural Labour</td>
<td>25.6</td>
<td>16.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultivators</td>
<td>12.2</td>
<td>7.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


That agriculture is not being able to provide employment is, perhaps, the reason for the high incidence of non-agricultural pursuits even in rural areas. This may be seen in relation to the high levels of land concentration discussed in a subsequent section on land relations. Over the years, agriculture has fallen into dire straits. Case studies have shown that despite increase in money wages, the agricultural labourers in certain areas live in utter penury. For instance, a study by Joan P. Mencher among agricultural labourers in Kuttanad, shows that they have fewer days of work than decade ago. It needs examination whether the position of the 'actual tillers on land' has been rendered more insecure with land reforms. With the liberalisation of agricultural trade during the post-WTO years, i.e. with effect from January 1, 1995, there has been a serious price crisis of agricultural commodities. This has particularly affected the cash-crop dominated areas like Wayanad district. During the first five years of the decade of 2000s, around 1500 pauperised (indebted) peasants committed suicide, mainly in the districts of Wayanad and Palakkad.

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52 The turning away from agriculture, may also be viewed as the result of the white-collarisation of culture, which in turn, is a possible effect of the dominance of the Service sector in the economy. Even when sections of erstwhile agrarian people turned away from agriculture, there was, apparently, a majority of the sections such as Dalits and Adivasis who were actual tillers of land and did not have land in their possession.

53 See the sections, ‘Land Question and the Agrarian Classes’ and ‘Landlessness and Land Concentration in Contemporary Keralam’ later in this chapter.


**Agriculture as the Priority Sector**

Agriculture is rightly classified as the primary sector of the economy, particularly when self-reliance is marked out as a prime goal of economic development in the country. It is, often, the surpluses generated from agriculture that contribute to growth in the other sectors of the economy, namely Industry and Services. There could also often be developmental linkages between Agriculture and these sectors. They were consciously sought to be built up during the days of planned economic development. Agriculture may be considered the very base of developmental activities even while industry might take the lead. Being the two commodity-producing sectors, Agriculture and Industry rightly have the pride of places as the Primary and Secondary sectors.

Keralam has been one state where agricultural production was oriented to external markets right from the beginning, perhaps more than any other state in India. The growth of plantations since the colonial times is a case in point. Today, agricultural land is increasingly becoming an object of speculation by the real estate business, signalling quite an undesirable trend for the basic producing classes in agriculture sector. This may be considered to be the state of affairs that emerges out of the superficial abundance of capital (from domestic sources as well as foreign remittances) that is not ultimately being used for productive purposes within the state.

**Food Grain Production**

Within the primary sector, food production may be identified as the crucial productive activity. Food production is not only essential for human survival but food self-sufficiency of a region, nationality or country may be considered the very demarcator of its relative independence from the powers-that-be at the global level.

According to 1991 census, Keralam had 3.4 per cent of India’s population, but produced only 0.6 per cent of the total food grains in the country. The average per capita food grain production in Keralam between 1989-92 was 38 kg., compared to the all-India average of 203 kg. More than 80 per cent of the food grain requirements of Keralam in 1991 were met through imports. This is inclusive of the imports by private traders.

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56 If planning was a safeguard against the anarchy of production and the crisis of overproduction during the yester-years, we would view that planning and the goal of self-reliance are evermore important in an age of neo-liberal reforms marked out by great volatilities such as price crises, economic crises and their contagion effect all across the world.


58 B.A. Prakash, 1994, p.18. There are also other food items like vegetables, eggs, meat, etc. which are being imported. Thus for more than 60per cent of its food requirements, Keralam depends on other states (T.G. Jacob, 1998).
Food grain production declined sharply since the 1980s, at the rate of 2.06 per cent, as compared to only 0.2 per cent rate of annual decline during the 1970s. The area under food grains has fallen from around 40 per cent in early 1970s to 18 per cent today. The decline in food grain output has been at the rate of minus 1.89 per cent per annum during the 14 years ending in 1996. Similar decline in production has also occurred with other food products like tapioca.

The area under food grains in the state declined by 37 per cent and output by 33 per cent during the 1990s. The food deficit in Kerala in the case of rice, the main staple diet, was at 50 to 55 per cent in early 1950s to mid 1970s i.e. until after the land reforms legislation in 1970. The deficit has steadily increased and by the end of 1990s, it stood at more than 75 per cent. Kerala contributed only 1.3 per cent of the total rice production at all-India level till mid-seventies when Kerala accounted for 4 per cent of India’s population; by the end of 1990s, it came down to merely 0.5 per cent and its share of population declined to 3.3 per cent. Going by latest figures, although rice is the staple diet in Kerala, the state annually produces only three weeks’ requirement. In 1998-99, rice production in the state has declined to only around 20 per cent of its consumption requirements i.e. 7.3 lakh tonnes. In other words, Kerala has ceased to be a food grain producing state of any significance.

Going by Table 5.2, there was sharp decline during 1990-91 to 2003-04 in the cropped area of paddy and tapioca, the two important food crops produced by the state. The decline in the cropped area of paddy was to the tune of −49 per cent and that of tapioca was to the tune of −36 per cent. The rate of decline in the area under food crops is rather startling and is perhaps, unmatched by precedents elsewhere. The highest increase among crops in cropped area was noticed in the case of the horticultural crop, ‘Banana and other plantains’ to the tune of 67 per cent. However, this may not be considered a substitute for paddy/rice, which is the staple diet. Nevertheless, it may be considered as an encouraging signal as far as the concerns of food production in the state is concerned. On the other hand, the cropping area under vegetables declined by −22 per cent which should be a cause for concern.

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61 K.P. Kannan 2000, pp. 4-5.
Table 5.2: Cropping Pattern in Keralam (1990-91 to 2003-04) (area in 00 ha)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Crop</th>
<th>Area in 1990-91</th>
<th>% Share</th>
<th>Area in 2003-04</th>
<th>% Share</th>
<th>% Change (5-3)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cardamom</td>
<td>669</td>
<td>2.22 (9)</td>
<td>442</td>
<td>1.50 (11)</td>
<td>-33.93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coconut</td>
<td>8700</td>
<td>28.81 (1)</td>
<td>9850</td>
<td>30.41 (1)</td>
<td>3.28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paddy</td>
<td>5595</td>
<td>18.53 (2)</td>
<td>2873</td>
<td>9.72 (4)</td>
<td>-48.65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rubber</td>
<td>4116</td>
<td>13.63 (3)</td>
<td>4784</td>
<td>16.19 (2)</td>
<td>16.23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vegetables</td>
<td>2211</td>
<td>7.32 (5)</td>
<td>1729</td>
<td>5.85 (6)</td>
<td>-21.80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pepper</td>
<td>1685</td>
<td>5.58 (6)</td>
<td>2164</td>
<td>7.32 (5)</td>
<td>28.43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tapioca</td>
<td>1465</td>
<td>4.85 (7)</td>
<td>942</td>
<td>3.19 (9)</td>
<td>-35.70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coffee</td>
<td>751</td>
<td>2.49 (8)</td>
<td>847</td>
<td>2.87 (10)</td>
<td>12.78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Banana &amp; Other plantain</td>
<td>656</td>
<td>2.17 (10)</td>
<td>1094</td>
<td>3.70 (7)</td>
<td>66.77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Areca nut</td>
<td>648</td>
<td>2.15 (11)</td>
<td>1025</td>
<td>3.47 (8)</td>
<td>58.18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tea</td>
<td>346</td>
<td>1.15 (12)</td>
<td>383</td>
<td>1.30 (12)</td>
<td>10.69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ginger</td>
<td>141</td>
<td>0.47 (13)</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>0.29 (14)</td>
<td>-39.72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coca</td>
<td>119</td>
<td>0.39 (14)</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>0.32 (13)</td>
<td>-21.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other crops</td>
<td>3098</td>
<td>12.47 (4)</td>
<td>4097</td>
<td>13.87 (3)</td>
<td>32.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gross cropped area</td>
<td>30200</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>29544</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>-2.17</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Note: We have added the ranking in the brackets.

The reasons for decline in food grain production may be the explicit bias in State policy since the land reforms in favour of cash crops (eg: no ceiling limit on land under cash crop plantations, and the relative absence of subsidies for food crops), the higher returns yielded from cash crops; the higher cost of inputs like labour on food grain production, etc. A majority of the irrigation projects in the state have been pending for over twenty to twenty-five years. As for water control measures beyond irrigation like water-shed management, hardly any progress has been made.64

The minimum support-price of rice at 7 rupees per kg. (Rs.707 per quintal) guaranteed by the state government during the UDF regime of 2001-06 was scuttled in the process of implementation. The support price is intended to rescue the peasants from being swindled by the private mill owners and middlemen during the harvest season. Ironically, however, some licensed rice mills – one each within a panchayat – were entrusted by the Kerala State Civil Supplies Corporation to procure the grains and pay this price to the peasants. They, in turn, deferred payments, which forced the peasants to sell the grains for around 4

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64 K.P. Kannan, 2000, p. 33.
or 5 rupees in the open market, defeating the very purpose of the support price. On the other hand, rice was sold by traders in the open market at around 15 rupees per kg. It is argued that if the producers could get just half the market price, paddy cultivation could have been sustained. Another issue that plagues the paddy cultivation in the state is the non-availability of water from the inter-state Parambikulam Aliyar Project (PAP). Under the agreement, Tamil Nadu is supposed to release 7.25 TMC of water for Chittur taluk in Palakkad district. But in most of the years, apparently under the influence of the water lobbies in T.N., the state does not release the agreed amount of water. This has led to the belief that the PAP and Mullaperiyar agreements have been prejudicial to the interests of the state. The drop in paddy cultivation is attributed to the farmers not finding it remunerative. However, switching over to cash crops has left them at the mercy of the world market, gripped by ‘price crisis’. The prices of cash crops like coconut, tea, coffee, cardamom and pepper have fallen steeply during the last few years, with only rubber prices remaining steady. According to the Department of Economics and Statistics, total paddy cultivation in Keralam is spread over 3,10,521 hectares, mainly concentrated in two rice bowls, namely, Palakkad district and the Kuttanad area of Alappuzha district. The decline in paddy cultivation has also led to environmental problems since paddy fields have been water conservation reservoirs.65

The accentuation of dependence on external markets does not seem to bode well for Keralam in the long run. The volatility of prices is very much a danger since prices are not determined within the state, (but by agencies outside the state) nor are external markets of a dependable nature, particularly in the context of a free trade regime.

There have been a number of arguments advanced in favour of a shift over from cash crop cultivation to food crop cultivation.66 The cultivators would be less vulnerable to the volatilities of the markets controlled by monopolies and the people of the state would be relatively free from the uncertainties of the food pricing policies of the central government. It also makes for better labour absorption, reduced import bill of the state government, and an assured market. The real subsistence wages in Keralam is higher because of the higher consumer price index for workers, arising from the fact that Keralam is situated at the tip of the continent and import of essential commodities involves transportation costs. Indigenous food production could help bring down real wages and prevent flight of industries due to higher money wages. Moreover, in comparison to food crops, the price elasticity of supply is lower in cash crops like rubber and coconut, due to longer gestation periods. It is said, greater emphasis on food grain

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production could also achieve greater forward and backward linkages to other sectors of the state economy. But most importantly, it is necessary for the very survival of people in a crisis-ridden and unpredictable world order of today.

Re-examining the Impact of Land Reforms in Keralam

The land reform in the state is widely perceived to have been one of the most thorough and well implemented in the country. Ronald J. Herring had also designated the reform as a “radical reform”. Thus he describes Keralam as “the only Indian state to abolish landlord-tenant nexus in a serious way.” M.A. Oommen says, the thoroughness and speed with which tenancy abolition was carried out in Kerala has no parallel elsewhere in India and the feudal landlordism stands abolished in the state and yet land has not passed on to a class of self-cultivating peasantry. As P.S. Appu says, “Of all the States, the best performance in the field of tenancy reform was that of Kerala.” According to V.C. Koshy, this was the best possible land reforms within the confines of the Indian

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69 Although it is not counted among the major states in India, the state of Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) is known to have had a thorough land reforms, particularly, with respect to the measures of abolition of intermediaries and ceiling reforms under Sheikh Abdulla, with significant re-distribution of land. Thornor (1955) had classified three types of areas following the abolition of intermediary interests. The areas of greatest change were Kashmir and Andhra. (Daniel Thornor 1955: The Agrarian Prospect in India, Delhi University Press, New Delhi, pp. 28-53; as cited on P.S. Appu 1996, p. 197). All the provincial laws except that of Jammu and Kashmir provided for payment of compensation to intermediaries (P.S. Appu 1996, p. 183). Except in Jammu and Kashmir and West Bengal no limit was put on the area of “personally cultivated” land that an intermediary could retain (P.S. Appu 1996, p. 184). The law of J&K enacted in 1950 had fixed a ceiling of 22.75 acres for an individual landholder without making any allowance for differences in the quality of the land (P.S. Appu 1996, p. 145). No compensation to the landowners was envisaged. On the implementation of the ceiling law, about 1.8 lakh hectares of surplus land was vested in the state government (P.S. Appu 1996, p. 144). As percentage of the total operated area, the surplus land distributed under ceiling legislation was 17.4 per cent for J&K (P.S. Appu 1996, p. 190). According to the 37th round of the N.S.S., the incidence of tenancy (area leased in) in J&K in 1981-82 was the second lowest in the country with 2.37 per cent, as compared to 7.18 per cent of the operated area at the all-India level (P.S. Appu 1996, p. 119). How a separate constitution and the special constitutional status under Article 370 of the Indian Constitution have helped J&K to accomplish this needs exploration.
70 P.S. Appu 1996, p. 112; See also Ibid, p. 199. 

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Constitution and existing legal framework in the country. Similarly, other scholars have also hailed the land reforms in the state.

Land reforms in India had followed a three-fold strategy: (1) Abolition of intermediaries, (2) Tenancy reform, and (3) Ceiling reform.

**Abolition of intermediaries: A non-starter**

P.S. Appu who had served as the Land Reforms Commissioner at the Centre during the 1970s, rightly says that the reform process that began with the Abolition of intermediaries led to large-scale eviction of tenants-at-will, under-tenants and share-croppers everywhere. Nevertheless, the abolition of intermediaries was implemented less inefficiently in the country as compared to the later tenancy reforms and ceiling reforms on agricultural land. The first round of land reforms, i.e., abolition of intermediaries was successful because they were few in number and had made themselves obnoxious by aligning with the colonial power. So the measure of abolition was easy enough and it was done without hurting them much. As against the all-India scenario, abolition of intermediaries that was carried out all over the country since the establishment of provincial governments in 1946 hardly took off and had little impact in Kerala. Thorner (1955) had classified three types of areas following the abolition of intermediary interests. Malabar and Thrivithamkkoor-Kochi, together covering the whole of the present state of Kerala, were identified among areas of least change.

At all-India level, as of 1992, only in 4 per cent of the operated area have tenants been made secure or ownership rights conferred. Tenancy reforms, however, was by and large successful in the state and the ceiling reforms was a relative failure.

**The Relative Success of Tenancy Reforms**

"[A]s of January 1, 1970, landlordism was in effect terminated. Tenants were no longer liable for rent and became *de facto* proprietors unless challenged by owners." When in August 1968, K.R. Goury introduced the bill, the abolition of landlordism would prove effective because the burden of proof regarding tenancy status was being shifted from the

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72 P.S. Appu 1996, pp. 192, 184, 185, 190, 206.
75 Herring 1983, p. 196.
tenant to the landlord. “Because large owners leased out most of their holdings (63.8 per cent of the land for large owners), their land was redistributed mostly through the tenancy provisions, not through the ceiling.” By 1980, the land reforms had been essentially completed. In 1980, Herring had estimated the number of tenant beneficiaries of the land reforms to be almost 1.3 million (13 lakh), or 43.3 per cent of the agricultural households in the state in 1971. The aggregate area transferred through the abolition of landlordism was almost 2 million (20 lakh) acres or 36.5 per cent of the net cultivated land in the state and 42.9 per cent of the area excluding plantations. Going by other estimates, there is some exaggeration in these figures. Thus according to the State Bureau of Economics and Statistics in 1967, the total area under tenancy was 19.21 lakh acres constituting 42.5 per cent of privately owned land. The tenancy reforms conferred ownership rights (or protected) on 28.42 lakh tenants over 14.50 lakh acres by 1992, says P.S. Appu, the Land Reforms Commissioner at the Centre during the 1970s. It was no mean achievement for the state to have transferred ownership rights on land on such a wide scale, if the land transfers had taken place to the deserving sections.

P.S. Appu had pointed out that the enforcement of ceilings and implementation of tenancy laws, together led to the redistribution of only 6 per cent of the operated area in India. This is rather insignificant compared to the redistributive impact of land reforms implemented in post-War China. Thus between 1950-52, 43 per cent of the agricultural land changed hands in the People's Republic of China. It is incomparable to other countries because it was done under a revolutionary situation. However, India compares poorly with Taiwan where redistribution was to the tune of 37 per cent; South Korea where it was 32 per cent and Japan where it was 33 per cent. The 1966-67 Survey divided the tenantry into two strata: kudiyirippu tenants and “other tenants”. "Other tenants" who were little more than half of all tenants, controlled more than 95 per cent of the land held by tenants. Herring observed that "vesting of land in the leasee, regardless of the class and stratum of the leasee, would benefit a large number of agriculturists of relatively high position in the agrarian hierarchy. Indeed, "other tenants" stand out as a category for having by far the highest percentage of households in

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70 Herring 1983, pp. 186-7...
78 Herring 1983, p. 212.
79 Ibid, p. 211.
80 P.S. Appu 1996, pp. 115, 266.
the wealthiest stratum, though a very high percentage belonged to the poorest."\textsuperscript{83} Again he says, "Though the landlord-tenant system was equated with "feudalism" in the policy logic, in fact distinct privileged strata within the landholding class, including landlords, leased land."\textsuperscript{84}

\textit{Kudikidappukar}, mostly from the Dalit castes (Scheduled Castes), the hutment-dwellers who lived and worked on the land of the landowners, were granted not merely security of tenure and heritable tenures but the right to purchase the plot at 25 per cent of the market value. Half the purchase price was to be paid by the government and the balance spread over twelve annual instalments.\textsuperscript{85} An estimated number of 2,84,203 hutment dwellers acquired permanent rights over homestead land.\textsuperscript{86} They gained house and homestead land of an average of 8 cents, which provided them considerable security, in contrast to their historical condition of slavery and serflike bondage. It also marks a significant advance over the bad position of the labourers in the rest of the region.\textsuperscript{87} Certainly, it had a telling impact on enhancing the security and self-confidence of the Dalits.

Nevertheless, the hype on the land reforms in the state is unwarranted since the flipside of it is too stark to be overlooked. On the basis of the sample survey conducted by the Indian School of Social Sciences, Thiruvananthapuram, Herring estimated that the primary beneficiaries were the rich peasants. As per the sample, rich peasants (defined as those who do some agricultural work but depend primarily on wage labourers) were 13.3 per cent of the households but received 38.7 per cent of the land redistributed via tenancy reforms.\textsuperscript{88}

Grouped by size of holdings, Middle peasant households possessing less than 5 acres constituted 84.2 per cent of the sample but received only 36.2 per cent of the redistributed area. Small peasants holding less than one acre of land, i.e. excluding those whose primary occupation was agricultural labour, received only 0.9 per cent of the land redistributed. On the other hand, those who held land above 5 acres (15.8 per cent of the sample) gained land to the tune of an overwhelming 63.8 per cent of the redistributed acreage.\textsuperscript{89}

"Those who held land on lease were beneficiaries.... It is clear from prereform data that though most of the tenants were poor smallholders, most of the tenanted land was held by

\textsuperscript{83} Herring 1983, p. 183.
\textsuperscript{84} Ibid, p. 185.
\textsuperscript{85} Ibid, pp. 188-9.
\textsuperscript{86} P.S. Appu 1996, p. 116.
\textsuperscript{87} Herring 1983, pp. 213-14.
\textsuperscript{88} Herring 1983, p. 211.
\textsuperscript{89} Ibid, pp. 211-12.
the upper echelons of the agrarian hierarchy." At the conceptual level, the central attack was on rentiers and thus the principal beneficiaries were those who leased (in) land. "The rentiers have thus been replaced by a new tier of proprietors who, as a class, are not unambiguously tillers or even primarily engaged in agriculture." As for the political rationale of policy orientation in this direction, Herring says, the Marxists are left in the ideological quandary as to how the plight of the labourers – the largest agrarian class – and poor peasantry be alleviated without fracturing the rural social base of the left movement. Apparently, the compromise formulae could have been necessitated by the imperatives of electoral politics. The rationalisation of the policy logic by Namboodiripad that the correct tactical line in that historical situation was an attack on feudalism that all non-feudal classes could be rallied behind an agrarian reform. He considered the distinction between "parasitic" feudal landlords and "entrepreneurial" capitalist landlords critical and argued for concentrating attack on the former because "capitalism in agriculture" is an advance in a "semi-colonial, semi-feudal country".

No evictions from tenanted land were reported after the 1969 legislation came into force but a large minority of tenants eligible to become owner-cultivators "voluntarily surrendered" their land, either as a compromise or under threats from landlords. Nothing like an ‘Operation Barga’ in West Bengal for recording oral tenancies was accomplished before the land reforms. It may also be considered as a major failure of the Communist movement. Where no formal lease deeds were available, many of the tenants could not secure ownership rights because the project of recording informal tenancies that had begun in late 1960s had made little headway before the implementation of the land reforms in 1970 and the land tribunals faced threats from landed interests and had to play safe. Yet specific legal protection and immunity from eviction was given to tenants belonging to Dalit (SC) and Adivasi (ST) sections.

The slogan given by the Communist Party during the years of land struggle in Kerala was, ‘Agricultural land to the agriculturists’? This is distinct from the slogan, ‘Land to the tiller’. This may be viewed in the context of measures to favour the tenantry, particularly from the backward caste, Ezhavas, who constituted the principal social base of the Communist party in those days. Tenantry, belonging to the Ezhava caste (the presently Backward Caste) are said to have been the prime beneficiaries of the surplus land

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90 Ibid, p. 211.
91 Ibid, p. 212.
92 Ibid, p. 212.
94 Herring 1983, p. 207.
95 Herring 1983, pp. 208.
distribution in Keralam. It has been rightly pointed out that land reforms in Keralam conferred land ownership 'to those standing at the edge of the field' rather than to the actual tillers. The actual tillers of the land in wetland cultivation from Dalit castes received mostly a hutment land of 10 cents each (i.e., in rural areas) by virtue of their status as kudikidappukaar (hutment dwellers). In addition to the cultural legacy of casteism handed down through generations, the fact that most Dalits are landless could be the economic reason for the persistence of deep-rooted casteist mindset and caste prejudices in Kerala society despite the trappings of a democratic orientation.

It was following the Planning Commission’s guidelines that Kerala Land Reform (Amendment) Act (KLRA) had included ‘supervision’ in the definition of ‘personal cultivation’, thus favouring tenants over the actual tillers, nullifying in essence the slogan of ‘land to the tiller’. 'Land to the tiller' was a slogan for mobilisation of the Indian National Congress during the anti-colonial movement. This was contrary to the original stipulation of the Congress Agrarian Reforms Committee (1949), which had recognised only the rights of those farmers engaged in ‘personal cultivation’. This meant that they needed to "put in a minimum amount of physical labour and participate in actual agricultural operations", with exceptions granted only to widows, minors and the disabled. The insistence therein that the tiller contribute physical labour to the production process presents a striking contrast to the modern capitalist notions since employing wage labour is the dominant form of organising agricultural production under capitalism, according to Herring.

The land reform model set forth in the Five-Year Plan documents of the Government of India too had clearly excluded the agricultural labour. The guidelines set forth by the Union Planning Commission were restrictive of a full-fledged implementation of the land reforms. Nevertheless, Agriculture, and therefore, land reforms was a subject in the state list as per the division of powers in the Constitution. It falls under entry 18 of the State List, which read: 'Land, that is to say, rights in or over land, land tenures including the relation of landlord and tenant, and the collection of rents; transfer and alienation of agricultural land; land improvement and agricultural loans; colonization.' The state had the prerogative to exercise a wide range of policy options as only the state legislatures are authorised to enact Land Reform laws. The tenuous constitutional basis for the

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96 V.C. Koshy 1976.
97 M.A. Oommen 1994, p. 120.
98 All India Congress Committee (AICC) 1949: Report of the Congress Agrarian Reforms Committee, New Delhi, p. 7; as cited in Herring 1983, p. 154; M.A. Oommen 1994, p. 120.
101 M.A. Oommen 1994, p. 120.
Government of India's role in land reforms is entry 20 in the Concurrent list, which speaks of Social, and Economic Planning. Therefore, the principal responsibility for favouring one section or the other is to be placed on the state government itself and the political movement that articulated the demands of the subaltern classes, primarily the Communist Parties.

There is hardly any doubt that it was the capitalist relations in agriculture that were sought to be promoted under the land reforms in Kerala. The 1969 Act provided legal rights over land to a broad range of cultivators provided they bore the risk of cultivation. "Cultivation was defined, as in the 1959 law, to include supervision of wage labour." The criteria for "cultivation" and "risk of cultivation" are clearly those of capitalist agriculture. ... Curiously, contribution of land alone or labor alone would not qualify the contributor as a cultivator, whereas contribution of working capital alone (wages and farm inputs) would define the contributor as a cultivator entitled to land ownership.

Presumably, the land reforms in Kerala did benefit the landless. Thus the percentage of landless households in 1960-61 was 30.9 whereas it came down to 15.7 in 1971-72 and 12.8 in 1982, as shown by the National Sample Survey rounds.

**A Failed Ceiling Reform**

If the standard Tenancy reform could procure legal ownership only to the tenants who are in possession of the land already under their cultivation, it was through the ceiling reform that land could be redistributed to the tillers below the status of the tenants in the agrarian hierarchy.

The ceiling set by the 1969 legislation in the state ranged from five standard acres (6 to 7.5 ordinary acres) for a single adult to a maximum of 20 ordinary acres for a very large family. The land reforms in Kerala as per the 1969 legislation allows "a greater concentration of wealth than seems justifiable when so many are landless". Cultivable

103 See K. Mukundan 1995: "Marxistukal" Thozhilaalivargathe Vanchicha Charithram (The History of How Marxists have Betrayed the Working Class – Malayalam), Dalit Sahithya Academy, Kozhikode.
105 Ibid.
106 C.T. Kurien, p.54.
land per capita was just 0.32 acres, less than one-third the figure for India as a whole.\textsuperscript{109} And yet it may be noted that the ceiling limit set was the lowest in the subcontinent.\textsuperscript{110}

The exclusion of plantations, religious institutions and trusts from the land ceiling laws left the project of land reforms a very unfinished one. Thus the Western Ghats comprising around 48 per cent of the land area of the state was almost wholly left out of the purview of land reforms. As was also the case with the 1957 Bill, plantations remained exempt even under the 1969 Act but the definition of plantation was narrowed, subjecting to ceiling a number of crops previously exempted such as, pepper, areca, cashew, coconut and so on. Moreover \textit{kayal} (polder paddy) lands in Kuttanad [that employed wage labour on a large scale] were also brought under ceilings.\textsuperscript{111} In 1973, M.A. Oommen had noted that the revenue minister in 1957 had estimated surplus land to the tune of 17,50,000 acres but in the 1966-67 Survey, it came down to merely 1,50,000 acres although the ceiling was essentially the same.\textsuperscript{112} This constituted merely 2.7 per cent of the net sown area.\textsuperscript{113} That ceiling reforms in the state was a failure is clear from the fact that out of the 45 lakh acres of agricultural land in the state,\textsuperscript{114} \textit{Economic Review} acknowledges that ultimately only 1.41 lakh acres of land was declared surplus, out of which only 0.96 lakh acres was actually distributed to 1.66 lakh beneficiaries. This means that 0.45 lakh acres still lies undistributed under government ownership. It also means that the average area of land received by the beneficiaries under ceiling reforms was only 0.58 acre.\textsuperscript{115}

The total area of agricultural land (total operational holding) in the state was 45,16,000 acres according to \textit{Survey on Land Reforms 1966-67} i.e., before land reforms.\textsuperscript{116} This had not substantially changed in 1980-81 during the \textit{Agricultural Census} which showed it as 45.12,500 acres\textsuperscript{117} and in 1990-91, it remained 45.04 lakhs as per the \textit{Economic Review – 1995}, as mentioned in the table above. It is shown as 42.77 lakh acres (17,10,709


\textsuperscript{110} Herring 1983, p. 189.

\textsuperscript{111} Ibid, p. 189.

\textsuperscript{112} As cited in Herring 1983, p. 203.

\textsuperscript{113} Herring 1983, p. 213.

\textsuperscript{114} See below for clarification in this respect.


\textsuperscript{117} Ajith 2002: \textit{Bhoomi, jathi, bandhanam – Keralathile karshikaprasnam} (Land, caste, bondage – the agrarian question in Keralam – Malayalam), Kanal prasidheekarana kendram, Kochi. September, p. 20.
hectares) according to Agricultural Census 1995-96. The decline of over 2 lakh acres may be owing to the problem of data.

It is worth recalling that in 1956, total holdings above 25 acres was 14,36,088 acres. This got substantially reduced to just 5,59,984 acres by 1966 and to merely around 3.22 lakhs by 1976/77. The extent of leakage prior to land reforms, i.e., between the state formation in 1956 and after one decade, i.e., in 1966 was a massive 8,76,104 acres. The extent of reduction in large landholdings between 1966 and 1976/77 – the period characterised by land reforms – was merely 2,37,984 acres.119

The only records generally available for determining surplus land were the returns filed by landowners.120 It is alleged that the Kerala Land Reform (Amendment) Act (KLRA), 1969-which was implemented from 1 January 1970 primarily achieved a re-distribution at the top as through partition of landholdings under joint family and gifts of land validated since Agrarian Relations Act 1960 up until 16 August 1988.121 The long time-lag between the initial proposal for land ceilings in 1957 and its actual implementation since early 1970 made this amply possible. Landlords had seriously resorted to transfer mechanisms like partition and transfer of tenancies particularly during the decade of 1957-1966 i.e., until the second ministry under E.M.S. Namboodiripad came to power in 1967. Moreover, an amendment to KLRA in 1978 made the gifts of surplus land to major children during from 1 January 1970 to 5 November 1974. The legal suits in the High Court before the land reforms legislation has been placed under Schedule 9, i.e. beyond the purview of the judiciary, had reduced the surplus land under the ceiling law to the tune of 8,600 hectares.123 There was a loophole in the KLRA for creation of bogus tenancies by the joint declaration of landlord and the tenant, as oral tenancies were held valid. Some owners had used phony tenants to file joint declarations to evade the ceiling provisions.124 The callousness of the bureaucracy was also to be blamed for the non-implementation of surplus land distribution.125 P.S. Appu had pointed out that even at the all-India level, ceiling reforms was undermined by the generally high levels of ceilings, numerous exemptions and widespread transfers resulting in a reduction of the area of land that could be declared surplus.126 Thus in the whole country, by 1992, only about 2

119 Ajith 2002.
120 Herring 1983, p. 208.
million hectares of surplus land could be distributed to some 4.76 million beneficiaries. This constituted only less than 2 per cent of the operated area.\(^{127}\) M.L. Dantwala, C.H. Hanumantha Rao and V.S. Vyas argued for enforcement of the existing ceiling laws rather than scaling down the existing ceilings. P.S. Appu rightly suggests that the question of abrogating ceiling laws should be considered only when the rural population dependent on agriculture falls below 20 per cent or so. This is because if ceiling limits are relaxed, there would be a scramble for purchase of land by rich farmers and speculators.\(^{128}\)

Although land reforms in Keralam has been hailed as one of the best among Indian states, the facts and figures above may serve to validate the view that the ‘land reforms’ may well be designated as a ‘reformation of the system of caste-based landlordism’ in continuation of the colonial transformation in agriculture\(^{129}\) – often, ‘the feudal jenmi turning the capitalist jenmi’.

**An Agrarian Transition from Below**

"Kerala represented the agrarian crisis of India in acute form when the present state was created; in 1956-57, per capita sown area was 0.38 acres, the lowest of all states, compared to an all-India average of 1.09 acres.\(^{130}\) ...Kerala had a much lower percentage of peasant proprietors than the rest of India, and consequently larger percentages of tenants and laborers and a relatively larger rentier class."\(^{131}\)

There were differences in the agrarian structures of the three regions that came to constitute the state of Keralam in 1956. Whereas owner-cultivators had come to constitute the largest agrarian class in Thiruvithamkoor, in Malabar and Kochi, landless labourers and tenants were the largest agrarian classes.\(^{132}\) Nearly two-thirds of the entire cultivated area had come under the direct ownership of the princely state in Thiruvithamkoor by the first half of the nineteenth century. And the tenants on these lands were conferred complete ownership rights through a royal proclamation in 1865. This brought forth an era of peasant proprietorship in Thiruvithamkoor. The princely state of Kochi also followed suit towards the end of the 19\textsuperscript{th} Century.\(^{133}\) Both these regions were under ‘indirect’ colonial rule. By contrast, in Malabar, which was under direct British colonial

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\(^{127}\) P.S. Appu 1996, p. 190. As percentage of the total operated area, the surplus land distributed was 17.4 per cent for J&K, 6.36 per cent for West Bengal and 5 per cent in Assam (Ibid).


\(^{129}\) Aijith 2002, pp. 44, 63.


\(^{131}\) Herring 1983, p. 160.

\(^{132}\) Ibid, p. 160.

rule, as part of the Madras province, there was land concentration in the hands of upper caste landlords and more seriously, the customary rights of even the upper strata of 'Kanam' tenants were denied and they were all reduced to mere tenants-at-will, subject to eviction at any time.\textsuperscript{134} By late 19\textsuperscript{th} century, South Malabar had gained notoriety as "the most rack-rented country on the face of the earth".\textsuperscript{135} Militant struggles called 'Malabar rebellion' were waged against this highly oppressive tenurial structure during the late 19\textsuperscript{th} and early 20\textsuperscript{th} centuries. The main social base of this movement were the Mappila Muslims so these peasant revolts are sometimes nick-named as 'Mappila revolts', with communal overtones.\textsuperscript{136}

Herring attributes the extreme disjuncture between ownership of land and labour on the land prior to the 1970 land reforms to the high ratio of landlessness, widespread unemployment, concentration of peasantry on tiny holdings, modernisation of the economy with high rates of literacy, non-agricultural employment and commercialisation of agriculture.\textsuperscript{137}

It is amply borne out by the history of the land reforms in the state that it could not have been achieved without intense pressure from the popular classes. Commenting on the rash of debates in the Legislative Assembly in early 1970, Herring remarked, "The important aspect of this political debate is that all sides assumed that a radical land reform was something meritorious, not a political liability. Long and intensive politicization had translated the tenurial structure into effective redistributive political forces."\textsuperscript{138} In the end, there was "the universal political recognition in Kerala that the agrarian underclass must be answered."\textsuperscript{139} And yet, in the process of implementation, "[t]he government had to be goaded, threatened, and shamed into responding...."\textsuperscript{140} Again, he says, "[L]andlordism can be abolished in Kerala because of the historically rooted left mobilization of the agrarian underclasses and their numerous urban allies, and because tenants and laborers outnumber cultivators and landlords...."\textsuperscript{141} Elsewhere he says, "Kerala represents the

\begin{footnotes}
\footnotetext[134]{Ibid.}
\footnotetext[136]{These rebellions are historically well-documented. See, K.N. Panikkar 2001: Against Lord and State: Religion and Peasant Uprisings in Malabar, 1836-1921, Oxford University Press. New Delhi.}
\footnotetext[137]{Herring 1983, p. 185.}
\footnotetext[138]{Herring 1983, p. 195.}
\footnotetext[139]{Herring 1983, p. 195.}
\footnotetext[140]{Herring 1983, p. 205.}
\footnotetext[141]{Herring 1983, p. 268.}
\end{footnotes}
agrarian crisis in extremis, but demographic pressures throughout the subcontinent are generating comparable situation." 142

When the 1969 Act came into force from 1 January 1970, its implementation depended on the very forces that had opposed the legislation and not the ones who had [mainly led the agrarian struggles and] drafted the Bill, namely the CPI-M. The government was led by Achutha Menon of the CPI, with the informal support of the Congress and the Kerala Congress. 143 It is also worth recalling the context of the political equation: 1969 witnessed a sudden revival of interest in the ceilings in the context of the split in the Indian National Congress and the adoption of populist policies by the ruling group. 144 Throughout 1969, there had been serious incidents of agrarian violence between rival agrarian forces. CPM claimed that nearly hundred activists were killed. 145 So also the month of January 1970 witnessed major incidents of violence, some on a very large scale. 146 The coalition government headed by Achutha Menon, had faced charges of brutal suppression of agrarian agitations and retorted in turn that there was a growing Naxalite (agrarian revolutionary) threat to the State. 147 Violence, however, imparted impetus to land reform implementation measures. 148 It was partly in response to the failure to show progress in implementing ceiling reforms and threats by the Marxists to occupy plantations, the government made a legislation to take over without compensation, sections of the huge Kannan Devan tea estate, running into 137,424 acres, i.e., nearly the total land expected from ceiling reforms. Similarly, a legislation was initiated for nationalising without compensation private forests. The threat of rural violence acted as an effective lever for prying rapid consent from the Centre for inclusion of all the land reform legislations on the Ninth Schedule of the Constitution. This was accomplished by the Twenty-Ninth Amendment on May 31, 1972. 149

Together, all these facts indicate that the land reforms in Keralam should more convincingly be characterised as a ‘transition from below’ towards capitalist transformation in agriculture after the broad classificatory scheme in T.J. Byres into ‘transition from above’ and ‘transition from below’. According to Byres, important instances of the basic impulse towards agrarian transition coming from above have been Prussia, Japan (before 1945) and the American South; while archetypal examples of the operation of impulses from below have been England, the American North and West, and

147 Ibid, p. 197.
149 Ibid, p. 204.
France. The concern herein has been with the processes of class formation, the constellation of class relationships and the class structure that characterized each transition. In the cases of transitions from below, in American North and West it was characterised by a ‘dynamic petty commodity production from below’, with relative absence of tenancy, a remarkable absence of wage-labour, with farms worked with family labour. In the case of England, it was a ‘landlord-mediated capitalism from below’, with the emergence of a class of large capitalist tenant-farmers working the land with wage-labour. In France, it was a ‘significantly delayed capitalism from below’, in which a differentiated peasantry for long failed to usher in a metamorphosis towards capitalist agriculture in the context of a long struggle waged by the small peasantry.

While acknowledging that the basic impulse for the agrarian reforms came from below, we need to refrain from naïve idealisation of the reforms in the state. The land reforms in Keralam was basically a tenancy reform as the redistribution of land took place mainly under the tenancy reform. Ceiling reform failed particularly because of the dismissal of the first Communist ministry in 1959 by the Union government. Agricultural labourers and Dalits in particular were not envisaged to receive major concessions, especially ownership of land even under the 1959 legislation and the culpability of the State and even of the Communist parties in this respect cannot be overlooked.

The class/social basis of the agrarian movement led by the CPI-M is revealed in that tenants in general (not tillers per se) and rich peasants in particular were the beneficiaries of the land reform. After a decade in opposition, the CPI-M returned to office after the January 1980 elections leading a coalition of Left Democratic Front, with CPI also part of it. One could not fail to take note of a convergence in the political discourses of the CPI(M)-led Left Democratic Front and the Congress-led United Democratic Front since early 1980s. Referring to the effects of embourgeoisement on electoral politics, Herring says, "In an important sense, the CPI(M) is a victim of its own success." Narrowing of the gap between the two fronts had also to do with the Congress-led UDF in turn, indulging in populist welfare measures in order to secure votes in elections.

Decline of Food Economy and Other Baneful After-effects of Land Reforms

The considerable decline in food production may legitimately be viewed as a major negative fall-out of the land reforms in Keralam. The interests of plantation owners was

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151 Byres 2002, p. 64.

well protected under the KLRA as there was no land ceilings on holdings on plantations engaged in producing cash-crops like rubber, tea, coffee and cardamom, in conformity with the guidelines set forth by the Planning Commission of the Union government. This led to large-scale crop conversion of land to these crops.\textsuperscript{153} Thus land reforms achieved an undeclared objective of forcing big landowners to shift from the cultivation of coconut and food crops like rice and tapioca (cassava) to plantation crops, particularly cash crops like rubber. Thus the percentage of area under cash crops has consistently increased over time. The area under paddy cultivation dwindled to almost half from 1965-66 to 1995-96.\textsuperscript{154} Similarly, the area under cultivation of another food crop namely, tapioca (cassava), also came down to less than half during the period. On the other hand, the area under rubber more than doubled and the area under coconut increased substantially. Coconut in 1995-96, had the major crop area (30.3 per cent), followed by paddy (16.4 per cent), rubber coming third (14.5 percent), pepper coming fourth (6.1 percent), tapioca coming fifth (4.1 per cent), etc.\textsuperscript{155}

With reference to the Table 5.2: Cropping Pattern in Keralam (1990-91 to 2003-04), cited earlier in this chapter, as for the percentage share of the area cultivated in 2003-04, coconut occupied the first position with 30 per cent, rubber followed in the second position with 16 per cent, paddy in the third position with 10 per cent, pepper in the fourth position with 7 per cent, etc. During the period after the initiation of the Structural Adjustment Policies (SAP), i.e., 1990-91 to 2003-04, areca nut recorded the second highest increase with 58 per cent. Despite the price crisis, pepper recorded the third largest increase in cropped area at 28 per cent and rubber followed in the fourth position with 16 per cent during this period of neo-liberal reforms.

It may be recalled that in 1966, i.e. prior to land reforms, the peasant sector was heavily dependent on paddy, coconut and tapioca; these crops together accounted for 64 per cent of the cropped area.\textsuperscript{156} By contrast, the situation has reversed in 2003-04, with the major cash crops, namely, coconut, rubber, pepper, areca nut, coffee, tea and cardamom accounting for 60 per cent of the gross cropped area in the state.\textsuperscript{157} As K.P. Kannan says, in 1965-66, paddy had the largest area under cultivation in the state with 32.1 per cent, followed by coconut with 22.5 per cent area in the second position, tapioca with 8.6 per
cent in the third position, rubber with 5.9 per cent in the fourth position, pepper with 4.0
per cent in the fifth position, etc.\textsuperscript{158}

Apart from the exemption on ceiling limits to plantation crops, there was another major
reason for the change in the cropping pattern in the state. Thus M.A. Oommen had rightly
observed that conferring land ownership under land reforms to all categories of tenants,
including those who do not engage in agriculture had led to a shift towards perennial
crops like coconut and rubber from seasonal crops like paddy and tapioca, since the
former does not require constant personal supervision.\textsuperscript{159}

The shift to cash crops was, apparently, beneficial to metropolitan capital both Indian and
global, as cash crop production catered to their market requirements. This, in turn, led to
increased dependency of the Kerala economy and thereby placed the fortunes of its
people at the mercy of the global capitalist market characterised by anarchy of production
and volatility of prices.

While appreciating the substantial transformation brought about by the land reforms in
the state. on the negative side, we also need to acknowledge that land reforms led to the
eventual decline in the area under food crops and increased dependency of agriculture on
external markets, considerable land concentration and the widespread exclusion of the
actual toilers on land from rights over agricultural land.\textsuperscript{160}

Land reforms had given a fillip to the capitalist relations in agriculture. Today, however,
in spite of the predominantly capitalist relations in the agriculture sector of the state,
several varieties of rent (pattom) appropriation methods and other semi-feudal modes of
exploitation are becoming prevalent. It also indicates that land reforms in the state is not
something that was achieved once and for all. Quite importantly, it also betrays the social
contradiction between the non-cultivating owners and non-owning cultivators.

In the context of development widening disparities, the trend could only have got further
pronounced with the growth of the service sector and non-agricultural employment in the
rural areas, as landowners could diversify into these sectors. And the prevalence of these
is, by no means, marginal as studies indicate.\textsuperscript{161} According to the 37th round of the

\textsuperscript{158} K.P. Kannan 2000: \textit{Food Security in a Regional Perspective A view from ‘Food Deficit’
Kerala}. Working Paper no. 304, Centre for Development Studies, Thiruvananthapuram,
Keralam. India. July.

\textsuperscript{159} M.A. Oommen 1994, p. 132.

\textsuperscript{160} For further studies on land reforms in Keralam, please refer Ajith 2002; Balakrishnan 2001;

\textsuperscript{161} See K.N. Nair & Vineetha Menon 2005: “Lease Farming in Kerala: Findings from Micro
Level Studies”, Working paper 378, Centre for Development Studies, Thiruvananthapuram
which draws on five other micro-level studies. They are in Pathanamthitta, Kottayam,
Thrissur, Errnakulam and Wayanad districts, respectively. See also Ajith 2002, Appendix II:
National Sample Survey (N.S.S.), the incidence of tenancy (area leased in) in 1981-82 was 7.18 per cent of the operated area at the all-India level. In Keralam, it was recorded as the lowest among 16 major states with just 2.05 per cent. However, of late, Nair and Menon (2005) argue that micro-level evidence indicates that the incidence of tenancy is much higher than what is revealed by N.S.S. Economic Review 2005 acknowledges that 21,554 hectares of land is being cultivated under the lease farming programme, 'Harithashree' in 895 grama panchayats all over the state, involving 33,519 neighbourhood groups and 3,27,063 families. Through such lease farming, mainly food crops such as paddy, tapioca, other tuber crops, vegetables, etc. are cultivated. This should be considered as something quite positive given the heavy dependence of the state on the neighbouring states for food items. P.S. Appu had pointed out that all over India the tenancy reforms have resulted in "tenancies being pushed underground" and land being left uncultivated, particularly "in states like Kerala where the rural poor are politically conscious and well organized".

The prevailing trend of agricultural land being used as a speculative asset has serious implications for agriculture in the state. Apparently, the inflated price of land does not match up to the productivity levels in agriculture. So it becomes near impossible for the basic producing classes in agriculture to gain ownership over land, the principal productive asset, leading to their being in a permanent state of penury. The external influence of the remittances-driven 'Gulf boom' since the mid-1970s and the lack of regulation by the State in this respect may be held primarily responsible for agricultural land turning a speculative asset.

**The Unfinished Agenda of Land Reforms**

The foregoing analysis speaks of the need for a renewal of the project of land reforms. It is clearly not a model of land reforms brought forth in mid-1990s under the auspices of the World Bank, one committed to "accumulation from above" that we intend to advocate but one that has the "potential to break the political structures that foster underdevelopment". We would like to recommend the following as initial measures: 'Stipulating minimum productivity requirement on land' or imposing a fine on the owners of fallow land and its recovery for contribution to the welfare fund of agricultural

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labourers and poor peasants could be the first step in this direction. This may be helpful in bringing more fallow land under cultivation and/or boost the revenues of the State for welfare needs. A similar suggestion had come up from P.S. Appu who recommended the measure of laying down minimum standards of cultivation with regard to absentee landowners. He recommends that good agricultural land owned by landowners who are unwilling or unable to cultivate their land should be acquired under the Land Acquisition Act. Secondly, recording clandestine tenancies on lines of the 'Operation Barga' in West Bengal is required in order to assure the actual cultivators' rights over land and could help in the formulation of further policies. Thirdly, the proposal that the State assume control over uncultivated land of those whose primary occupation is not agriculture needs to be considered seriously. There is need for an important caveat here that middle class persons like professionals have small plots of land in the rural areas, which they do not cultivate and yet it is a collateral against economic vulnerabilities like disease or other economic crises. Ajith is right that such a section need to be adequately compensated and their land be taken over for cultivation by the impoverished agriculturists.

As feudal/semi-feudal modes of rent appropriation have been legally abolished, the revival of tenancies has created a policy dilemma for the state government. There have been proposals for legalising the leasing-out practices without adversely affecting the legal owners since much of the land has been remaining uncultivated out of fear of losing ownership to tenant-cultivators to whom the plots are leased out as the provisions for abolition of tenancies under the KLRA, 1969 are prejudicial to the interests of the owners in such cases. It was proposed since the left-front government during 1996-2001 that the land laws be amended in such a way that 'agricultural land is available for cultivation to peasants without jeopardising the ownership rights of the present land owners'. Similarly, Nair and Menon (2005) also propose that the lessors' rights over land needs to be protected under a new policy framework. Even at all-India level, scholars like P.S. Appu had recommended a complete reversal of the all-India policy on tenancy reform. He says, "If the restrictions on leasing are removed and government make an irrevocable declaration that the tenancy law will not be amended in future to confer ownership rights

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171 More on this in the next sub-section, “A reflection on the mode of production”.
172 It was proposed by Shri K.E. Ismael who was the Revenue minister, under the erstwhile LDF government during the 1996-2001 period.
on tenants, quite a few absentee landowners will agree to lease out their land." He estimates that this single measure could enable the rural poor to lease in about 10 per cent of the arable land in the country. In a similar vein, M.L. Dantwala, C.H. Hanumantha Rao and V.S. Vyas advocated the removal of restrictions on leasing out of land and permitting clandestine tenancies to come to the surface.

Although this measure might be useful for utilising the uncultivated land in the state and for bringing more land under cultivation and could, in the short term, bring more tenancies overground, in the long term, this might tantamount to legalising the various forms of pattom (rent) appropriation prevailing in the state today. Moreover, in the long term, this may not be considered a feasible proposition if we need to overcome the mismatch in agrarian relations that has brought tenancy to the fore, in the first place. Thus they had said, "It [tenancy] is the consequence of the simultaneous increase in two categories of people, [']those who have land but unable to cultivate' and 'those who have the labour and skills, but no lands or not enough lands of their own to cultivate'."

A Reflection on the Mode of Production

The state had distinct specificities with early monetisation of the economy and early initiation of commodity production as a result of the colonial transformation in agriculture, especially through the setting up of plantations. These, in turn, led to significant restructuration of the labour process and considerable regeneration in the social sphere, including the abolition of slavery in the Thiruvithamkoor (Travancore) princely state of southern Keralam in 1854. Keralam, perhaps, was the first state to have had a production system primarily for external markets. Remittances-driven growth of service sector and consumption boom in the state since mid-1970s are notable facts.

Are we not, rather witnessing an accentuation of 'semi-colonial' relations, by neo-colonial or indirect means? The latest observations by an activist on the cash-crop dominated Wayanad district is pertinent in this context: Before 1995, there were only about 40 "blade companies" (the popular term for usury firms in the state) in the district. Today, there are more than 500 of them operating in the district. Their proliferation was

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175 Ibid, p. 214.
176 Ibid, pp. 218; 208.
177 K.N. Nair & Vineetha Menon 2005, pp. 4, See also pp. 6-7.
178 T.H.P. Chentharasseri 1970: Kerala Charithralile Avaganikkappeita Edukal (The Neglected Aspects of Kerala History - Malayalam), Prabhat Book House, Thiruvananthapuram, pp. 152-3. This is despite the colonial plunder of the economic resources of the land, resulting in considerable ecological ruin as well. "As the forest ceased to be, with the coming of plantations, the river ceased to be, with the building of dams." (Rammohan 1996, p. 288). See the section, 'Historical Constitution of Dominant Class Formations in Keralam' earlier in this chapter for an overview of the positive and negative aspects of the colonial transformation/colonial modernity in the state.
necessitated by the pauperisation of the peasantry owing to the drastic fall in the prices of cash crops like coffee and pepper as a result of the liberalisation of imports as part of the policies of imperialist globalisation. This is the picture of Wayanad district where one peasant commits suicide in every five days. The ‘blade man’ does not turn into a feudal lord but employs his earnings into illegal/criminal channels such as smuggling of ivory, spirit (concentrated alcohol), robbing vehicles, financing and the like.

Ajith (2002) argues to the effect that the Mode of Production (MoP) in Keralam is ‘semi-feudal, semi-colonial’. In support of his semi-feudal thesis, he says, “Semi-feudalism in the agrarian structure is expressed through the highly skewed land relations, the continuing relationship between land ownership and caste, the landlessness and land poverty of the bottom of the agrarian hierarchy that engages in agricultural work, the rural overlordship of landlordism and non-economic coercions, land ownership that does not require agriculture, subsistence tenant-cultivation, severe usury-mercantile exploitation.”

It is quite important to note that graded caste-based inequalities persist in the state with respect to landholding is indicated by the fact that OBC Rural Labour Households (RLH) in the state hold only 0.06 hectare land per cultivating household during 1999-01 as compared to 0.07 hectare for All RLH, 0.09 hectare for Adivasi RLH and merely 0.05 hectare for Dalit RLH.

The aforementioned phenomena of ‘the feudal jenmi turning capitalist jenmi’ through land reforms and the revival tenancies and rent appropriation may be cited in defense of the claim. The revival of tenancies since the 1990s in particular has involved mostly subsistence farming by agricultural labourers and poor peasants showing how non-capitalist forms of ‘rent’ appropriation by non-cultivating owners co-exists in certain segments of the economy along with capitalist modes of ‘profit’-earning and ‘wage’ payment to the labourers. Thus leasing in is also engaged in as a commercial proposition

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179 Ibid, p. 28.
180 Ajith 2002, pp. 183, 185, 22-29, 5 et passim.
by large landholders and persons whose major occupation is not agriculture. These two kinds of tenancies need to be viewed on entirely different terms. As tenancy was equated to feudalism in the policy logic of land reforms in the state, the revival of subsistence tenancy does put a question mark on the nature of the relations of production in agriculture.

Panku (share) pattom, pana (money) pattom, palisa (interest) pattom are some of the methods becoming prevalent. It may be borne in mind that the revival of tenancy has occurred despite a formal ban on it under under sections 72L, 73, 74 of KLRA, 1969. Whether these relations are to be designated as ‘semi-feudal’ is also a bone of contention. Ajith (2002) tends to view the resurfacing of tenancies as the reflection of ‘semi-feudal, semi-colonial’ relations in the agriculture sector of the state. This approximation of the mode of production in the state to the pre-colonial Chinese one, however, is disputable given the predominance of the plantation sector, early and highly monetised exchange relations in the state, etc. For contrary arguments see Saju Janardhanan (2005) examining the case of the proliferation of usury firms in backward Wayanad district. He argues that it is a reflection of the accentuation of ‘semi-colonial’ relations, as related to the price crisis of cash crop commodities, as against ‘semi-feudal’ ones.

It has already been cautioned that it is erroneous to view tenancy as a feature of pre-capitalist mode of production. Thus during the mode of production debate itself, Aparajita Chakraborty had pointed out that tenancy, which in India was part of the pre-capitalist relations until recently, has been becoming compatible with emerging capitalist relations. Similarly, Gail Omvedt had disparaged the assumption that “immiserisation, pauperisation, growing landlessness, etc, are themselves signs of ‘semi-feudalism’ or lack of capitalist development”. It is not logically inconsistent to view them as part of capitalism itself and quite appropriately, in its oligopolistic phase.

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The rationale of the argument by Ajith was after Marx that the relations of production under which the surplus-producing basic classes exist has to be considered the Mode of Production itself. Thus Marx had said, ‘The relationship between owners of the means of production and the direct producers reveals the innermost secrets of the whole social system...’

Focusing on agriculture, Ajith says that the colonial transformation in agriculture and even the subsequent land reforms since 1957 had taken the Dalits and Adivasis out of the old adiyaala system and yet they being the prime source of surplus extraction continued to prevail and they continued to be deprived of land as well. However, the phenomenon of surplus extraction from the basic producing classes exist across different segments of the economy. The basic producing classes exist not only in the plantations and the rest of the agricultural sector, but in modern industries, rural non-farm sector – in traditional industries in particular, and the booming service sector. Unlike in other states of India, it would be rather naïve to designate the MoP in Keralam to be ‘semi-feudal, semi-colonial’. There is difficulty in arguing that ‘semi-feudal, semi-colonial’ is the dominant Mode of Production given the predominance of plantations since colonial times, early monetised economy, etc. The plantation economy had already created a mode of capitalist agriculture since the colonial times. On the basis of the Farm Management Survey conducted one year before the 1966-67 Survey, Ronald Herring (1983) had observed, "Capitalist agriculture was well established in Kerala, and the policy means of separating tenants who were victims of "feudalism" from tenants who were small-scale operatives of capitalism were by no means clear." Thus even on farms less than one acre in size, family labour constituted an average of only 47 per cent of total labour; the remainder was hired. The percentage of hired labour increased with the size of holding: for farms between 2.5 and 5 acres, it was 76 per cent; on farms larger than 25 acres, 97 per cent.

Ajith may be held guilty of the fallacy of approximating the MoP in Keralam to the pre-revolution Chinese reality. And yet, it may be rightly argued as we did theoretically in Chapter II that capitalist MoP articulated with pre-capitalist social relations so as to generate greater surpluses for capitalist accumulation. Moreover, relations of production and Mode of Production need to be viewed as distinct phenomena.

Tenancy per se was considered synonymous to feudalism of the rentiers and sought to be abolished but the capitalist mode of production in agriculture was

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considered legitimate and encouraged in that the land under capitalist production relations, notably the plantations were left out of the purview of the land ceiling provisions. It may, however, be borne in mind that although capitalism in agriculture is an advance over feudal relations and is considered to be less oppressive than the latter, exploitation through surplus expropriation takes place either way. The debate on the land question also gives rise to 'the uncomfortable question' on the character of private property as such, "If rents are illegitimate, are profits?" Labour being the sole producer of value, the labourers have the legitimate right to ownership of the means of production even under capitalist relations, plantations not exempted. Moreover, the decadent and rentier capitalism of the oligopolies need not necessarily be less oppressive because it is often seen to articulate with the oppressive pre-capitalist forms of exploitation, in turn, boosting the surpluses of capital.

**The Land Question and the Agrarian Classes**

The question arises as to what would be the place for the land question in any agenda of social transformation for Keralam? How relevant would be the land question as was raised during the years of land struggles? The question becomes rather complicated since Keralam is said to be a state where agrarian transition to capitalism has already taken place and feudal production relations have nearly gone extinct. However, we would view that under the new dispensation, the land question in a plantation-dominated economy, assumes added significance in the context of the need to attain food self-sufficiency and with a view to develop the indigenous production base against the volatilities of the global finance capital. Control over land, the principal productive asset, by the actual toilers could enhance the incentive for agricultural production, and could even reduce the dependence for productive capital abroad in capital-scarce economy, as was acknowledged in the Soviet industrialisation debate. Moreover, control over productive assets by the broad majority of the population could generate 'effective demand' and thus provide assured markets for the goods produced.

Although it may be granted that the rhetoric on land reforms contained in the Five Year Plan documents of the Government of India are merely 'full of sound and fury signifying nothing' in Shakespeare's words, in terms of actual policy measures, they did contain an important element of truth. Thus the Seventh Plan (1985-90) document says:

"Land reforms have been recognised to constitute a vital element both in terms of the anti-poverty strategy and for modernisation and increased productivity in agriculture."

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196 Herring 1983, p. 11.
197 More on this theoretically in Chapter II and both theoretically and empirically in the case of Keralam in Chapter IV.
Redistribution of land could provide a permanent asset base for a number of rural landless poor for taking up land based and other supplementary activities."\(^{198}\)

Dreze & Sen explain the rationale for land reforms in terms of equity for the sake of growth. Dreze & Sen point out that Philippines, one of the least significant growth performers among east Asian economies, is also an example of deep failure to carry out adequate land reforms.\(^{199}\) "The Indian record is even worse than the general situation in the Philippines; some success in land reforms has been achieved in West Bengal and Kerala, but the overall achievements in most Indian states are quite dismal."\(^{200}\)

While himself not being averse to collectivist/radical alternatives to the land question, Ronald Herring rightly says, 'land', in the slogan, 'land to the tiller' could take on a spectrum of meanings once it is conceptualised as a "bundle of rights" from specified share of product, hereditary security, transferability, to full-fledged ownership and not merely as a commodity or a patch of soil.\(^{201}\)

Land fragmentation and on the other hand, land concentration in the landholding pattern in Keralam merit attention. Let us examine the case of landholdings prior to and subsequent to the land reforms in 1970:

### Table 5.3:

**The long-term trend in the number and area of landholdings in Keralam**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Holding Size (acre)</th>
<th>Number of landholdings (in lakhs)</th>
<th>Area of landholdings (in lakh acres)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Below 2.5</td>
<td>20.28</td>
<td>18.80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.5-5</td>
<td>2.30</td>
<td>2.29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5-10</td>
<td>1.39</td>
<td>1.26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10-25</td>
<td>0.51</td>
<td>0.27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Above 25</td>
<td>0.11</td>
<td>0.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>24.79</td>
<td>23.06</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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\(^{201}\) Ronald J. Herring 1983, p. 13. More on the theory of land reforms in Chapter VI.
There may be a problem with the data with regard to the huge decline in the total land area during 1970/71 and 1976/77. A decline to the tune of around 5 lakh acres is rather implausible. Similar is the case with the decline of 2 lakh acres in 1985/86. So only a rough comparison is possible from this table.


Table 5.4: Average area of landholdings in Keralam (in acres)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Below 2.5 acres</td>
<td>0.71</td>
<td>0.72</td>
<td>0.59</td>
<td>0.50</td>
<td>0.45</td>
<td>0.44</td>
<td>-0.27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.5-5</td>
<td>3.55</td>
<td>3.99</td>
<td>3.43</td>
<td>3.43</td>
<td>3.36</td>
<td>3.39</td>
<td>-0.16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5-10</td>
<td>6.89</td>
<td>6.72</td>
<td>6.77</td>
<td>6.68</td>
<td>6.44</td>
<td>6.48</td>
<td>-0.41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10-25</td>
<td>13.88</td>
<td>13.85</td>
<td>14.19</td>
<td>13.61</td>
<td>13.00</td>
<td>13.48</td>
<td>-0.41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Above 25</td>
<td>50.91</td>
<td>125.50</td>
<td>107.33</td>
<td>108.33</td>
<td>105.75</td>
<td>145.00</td>
<td>+94.09</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Based on Table 5.3 above, “The long-term trend in the number and area of landholdings in Keralam” (Area/number of holdings). Ajith 2002.

About 89 per cent of the landholdings in Keralam are below half a hectare, the average size of landholding in the state being less than 0.41 hectares. As per Tables 5.3 and 5.4 on landholdings above, in 1990/91, 92.6 per cent of the total landholdings in the state come under the category of below one hectare (i.e., 2.5 acres), the average size of which was merely 0.44 acre. However, the below one hectare category constituted only less than half (48.8 per cent) of the total agricultural land in the state in 1990/91. The average land area of holdings below 2.5 acres declined from 0.71 acre in 1966/67 to 0.44 acre in 1990/91, marking a decline of -0.27.

The question of fragmentation of landholdings in the state has been something very much harped upon. It has been pointed out that except in Punjab, Haryana and Uttar Pradesh where the consolidation of holdings has been completed, all holdings, whether large, small or marginal are subdivided and fragmented. The other side of the picture of land fragmentation in Keralam is that there is also particularly high concentration of land. Going by the Tables 5.3 and 5.4 above, in 1990/91, landholdings above 25 acres (10 hectares), constituted only a miniscule 0.1 per cent of the total number of landholdings in the state and yet they constituted 9.7 per cent of the total land area in the state.

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203 P.S. Appu 1996, p. 196. It is worth recalling that these are, indeed, areas of capitalist agriculture.
204 Considering the aforementioned fact that the large plantations have encroached upon huge tracts of forestland in the state and the actual control exercised over large tracts of leased government land, even this figure looks to be a gross under-estimation.
downward trend in the land area of holdings above 25 acres in 1976/77 may be explained with reference to the formal partition of joint landholdings to circumvent ceiling laws. However, from 1980/81 onwards, i.e., following the decade of land reforms, there was consistent increase in the land area of large holdings. There has been substantial rise in the average land area of holdings above 25 acres from about 51 in 1966/67 to 145 in 1990/91, marking a rise of over 94 acres over this period.

As compared to other states, in terms of land concentration, Keralam does not fare well in comparison with most other states. Thus in 1982, the top 1 per cent of the households in Keralam held 14.01 per cent of land, fairly close to the all-India average of 14.35 per cent. Keralam comes third with only A.P. (16.78 per cent) and T.N. (14.7 per cent) having higher figures than Keralam. As for the top 5 per cent of the landowning households in Keralam, they hold 37.45 per cent of the land, ranking Keralam as the fifth (A.P. T.N., M.S. and Punjab & Haryana take the first four positions in that order). As for the top 10 per cent of the households, Keralam once again ranks third with only A.P. and T.N. ahead of it. The exemption of ceiling limit for plantations could be an important reason for such land concentration. There could be big disparities in the distribution of agrarian income as well, corresponding to such land concentration, as suggested by C.T. Kurien himself. As for the sections that own the large holdings, Indian big capital, a section of the regional dominant classes and religious institutions hold significant chunks of land in the state, particularly in plantations. The foreign owners made an exit from the scene with the transfer of power.

**Landlessness and Land Concentration in Contemporary Keralam**

*Rural Labour Enquiry* (RLE) based on the National Sample Survey (NSS) rounds conducted by the National Sample Survey Organisation (NSSO) is considered to be a reliable source of understanding the agrarian scenario in the country. By late 1970s land reforms in Keralam was somewhat accomplished according to scholars in this field. An examination of the landholding pattern in 1977-78 reveals the post-land reforms scenario. The contemporary scenario is revealed by the figures for 1999-01.

In 1999-01, the number of Land poor (0.01 to 0.2 ha) is the highest among Rural Labour Households (RLH) in Keralam among 15 major states at 44.8 per cent vis-à-vis 17.6 per cent at all-India level. By contrast, as for Landless RLH in 1999-01, Keralam is the fourth lowest among 15 major states at 46.1 per cent as against the all-India average of 58.9 per

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This is understandable because land reforms had effectively distributed homestead land to hutment dwellers. In 1999-01, the landless and the land poor, together (designated by us as 'All Land poor') constitute 90.9 per cent of RLH in Keralam vis-à-vis 76.5 per cent at all-India level.208

In 1977-78, the number of Land poor (0.01 to 0.2 ha) RLH in Keralam was already the highest among 15 major states at 74.7 per cent vis-à-vis only 33.2 per cent at all-India level.209 The category of Landless RLH is unavailable in 1977-78. So the above figure should be comparable to the 90.9 per cent in the state during 1999-01, comprising of both Landless and Land poor. This reveals a rise in the number of 'All land poor' in the state during 1977-78 to 1999-01 from 74.7 per cent to 90.9 per cent, indicating that land poverty in the state continued to remain at the already high level but also rose further and the all-India average of land poverty marked a phenomenal rise from 33.2 per cent to 76.5 per cent.210

According to National Family Health Survey (NFHS) estimates in 1992-93, with respect to the rural households not owning any agricultural land, the 63 per cent for Keralam is disproportionately higher vis-à-vis the all-India average of 36 per cent. The figure for Keralam in 1992-93 is even higher than that of the 41 per cent for Bihar and 45 per cent for A.P., the states where serious land struggles are being waged. The widespread development of capitalist relations in agriculture may be the reason for that, even similar to the case in Punjab where landlessness is high at 49 per cent and Haryana where it is high at 43 per cent.211 As Marx had noted, labourer in capitalism is 'free' in a double sense: free from feudal bondage and free from any ownership of the means of production.212

Again, as per Census 1991,213 the proportion of agricultural labourers in rural population in 1991 at 9 per cent was comparable to the all-India figure of 11 per cent. The disparity between 63 per cent of the rural households not owning agricultural land and only 9 per cent of the population being agricultural labourers may be explained by the fact of the high growth of non-farm employment in the state. Average wage rate of casual

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211 Cited in Ajith 2002.

212 Table A.1 in Appendices; cited from Dreze and Sen 2002.
agricultural labourers in the state in 1997-9 was rupees 6.78 per day at 1960-1 prices at a much higher level than the corresponding all-India figure of rupees 2.97 per day. And even the growth rate of real agricultural wages over the decade of 1990-2000 was at 7.9 as compared to the low level of 2.5 at all-India level. Although the real wages have kept increasing, studies show that the days of work available per year has come down drastically.\textsuperscript{214}

In 1999-01, land concentration is the highest in Keralam among 15 major states with merely 0.1 per cent RLH controlling all the holdings above 2 hectares. West Bengal and Orissa also figure in the same highest range at 0.1 per cent. In 1977-78, i.e., following the land reforms, land concentration was the highest in Kerala state among 15 major states with merely 0.17 per cent of RLH controlling all the holdings above 2 hectares. West Bengal and Assam followed in the second and third positions in this respect.\textsuperscript{215} In 1999-01, it marked an even higher concentration from 0.17 per cent controlling it in 1977-78.\textsuperscript{216}

Such a high level of land concentration is a matter of concern since the average size of holding per cultivating household in the state is merely 0.07 hectare, as compared to 0.18 hectare at the all-India level in 1999-01. In other words, the average size of holding in Keralam is less than 40 per cent of all-India in 1999-01. Keralam figures as the fourth lowest among 15 major Indian states in this respect. The average size of holding per cultivating household in the state in 1977-78 was merely 0.16 hectare, as compared to 0.61 hectare at the all-India level. Keralam had figured as the state holding the lowest average landholding in 1977-78 among 15 major Indian states in this respect.\textsuperscript{217} While the average holding in the state came down to less than half from 0.16 hectare to 0.07 hectare during 1977-78 to 1999-01, the all-India average dwindled to less than one-fourth during this period, possibly due to contrary trends in demographic transition.\textsuperscript{218}

\textit{Landgrabs}

Over the decades, thousands of acres of forestland has been encroached by large owners in Wayanad district, at Moonnar and Mathikettan in Idukki district and Nelliampathy in

\textsuperscript{214} For growth of real wages, see Table A.1 in Appendices; and for decline in the number of workdays, see Joan P. Mencher 1990: "The Lessons and Non-Lessons of Kerala: Agricultural Labourers and Poverty", \textit{Economic and Political Weekly}, vol. 25, no.1, 6 January.

\textsuperscript{215} Land concentration in Keralam, West Bengal and Assam in 1977-78 and in West Bengal and Keralam in 1999-01 might well have been a reflection of the presence of large plantations in these states.

\textsuperscript{216} Government of India 1999-2001: \textit{Rural Labour Enquiry Report on General Characteristics of Rural Labour Households}, Statement 3.3 (1); and Table A.10 in Appendices for 1977-78 figures.

Palakkad district, often, with the connivance of the forest department. It has been ironic that even as the government is not honouring its agreement for redistribution of land made in 2001 with the impoverished Adivasis, it continues with its legally given lease of 1.08,695 acres of land to those close to the establishment for nominal lease amounts. Thus Tata-tea Limited (TTL) under Tata Finlay group alone enjoys lease over 58,583 acres of government land around Moonnar in Devikulam taluk in Idukki district, at nominal rates that does not exceed 50 rupees per acre, per annum even today. In addition to it, Tata-tea had illegally encroached on 50,000 acres of forestland at Moonnaar in Idukki district, as admitted by the Legislative Assurance Committee reports of 1996, 1997 and 2000. Allegedly, government land under its control was also being sold out by the company. Even to this day, Tata remains the biggest landholder in the state.

Against the backdrop of the price crisis in the tea plantations since the year 2000-01, spurred by unrestricted imports with low import duty on Sri Lankan tea and a sharp fall in the international prices of tea, Tata-tea has decided to gradually move out of the plantations business to focus on promotion of branded teas. The company decided to sell its 17 tea estates in the state to a new private limited company being formed by the employees of the firm and hold only less than 20 per cent equity. “For TTL, we want to manage a gradual phased exit from plantations, because ownership of a plantation is not necessary to source the product.” said Percy Siganporia, Managing Director, TTL. The tea plantations in the state could not cope with globalisation owing to poor productivity – old plants, obsolete technology, etc. Thus M.S. Swaminathan Commission on WTO concerns in agriculture in the state had had recommended the improvement of productivity and quality, and focus on value-added products like instant tea and tea

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221 Government of Kerala (GoK) 1996, 1997: Legislative Assurance Committee Reports, dated 14 November 1996 and 29 July 1997 submitted to the Tenth Legislative Assembly; Prakash 2002, p. 84; Ajith 2002, p. 18. The Legislative Assurance Committee reports pointed out that out of the 70,522 acres of land taken over from Tata-Finlay group under the Kannan Devan Hills (Resumption of Lands) Act in 1971. The expert committee of the government that submitted its report in 1976 had recommended this land for distribution to the Adivasi tribes like Muthuvan and Mala Pulayan who were originally displaced by plantations under the British. No land was distributed to the Adivasis under this scheme. Legislative committees pointed out that 50,000 acres of this land was, however, re-encroached by Tata-tea and that the encroached land and land leased out by the government were being sold out by them as plots for construction of private tourist resorts (Prakash 2002: 81, 84).


Given the undistinguished past record of the company, this might be interpreted as an attempt by the beleaguered company to shift the risks of plantations business to its employees and yet maintain its control over the value added products. Moreover, the sale of leased government land and grabbed forestland is quite a disputable proposition. Similarly, A.V. Thomas & company has been leased out 7,500 acres and is required to pay only Rs.5.30 per acre per annum.

Local activist accounts from Wayanad district speak about extensive landgrabs by large and small plantations there. The case of Harrison Malayalam Plantations (HML) in Wayanad is instructive. Based on authentic documents, an account says that the lease period for around 90 years, of HML in Wayanad had expired way back in early 1970s and yet the state government failed to take back the land running into around 15,000 acres of land. Another 15,000 acres of land was encroached upon by the HML plantation. Moreover, the plantation was allegedly selling off plots of land from the area under its control. There were also several smaller estates in the district which had also engaged in encroachment into adjoining forestland. Besides, there were prominent individuals in the mainstream political parties who have grabbed large tracts of forestland in the district. Wayanad having been and still being a hot-bed of wrangling over the Adivasi land question, such landgrabs into forestland should have attracted much greater attention in public debates. This, however, has not happened and the debate in this respect has centred around how migrant settler Christian-peasants and large owners have alienated the forestland that has traditionally been inhabited by the Adivasis. This, in turn, should cast a reflection on the character of the debates in the public sphere and in the media and more importantly, it should cast a reflection on the class (and communal) reality in the state.

The state government has been reluctant to implement the Supreme Court order of 23 November 2001 to evict the encroachments of forestland in the state that occurred after 1 January 1977, involving 10,038 hectares as identified in the "Statement Showing

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225 Ibid.
226 Ravi Raman 2004, p. 39; Peoples Plan Campaign 1996, p. 1-8; Ajith 2002, p. 224. On 22 October 2003, in a conference on ‘Adivasi land, politics, power’ at the University of Kerala, Thiruvananthapuram, C.K. Janu claimed that there is 11 lakh acres of surplus land in Kerala and even if only 2.5 lakh acres were distributed, all Adivasi households in the state would get five acres of land each. (It is assumed that there are roughly 50,000 landless Adivasi households in the state.)
227 Soju Janardhanan (personal communication).
228 IA No. 703 in Writ Petition 202/95.
Details of Encroachment” prepared by the state government. The end-result of all these land-grabs, particularly on the Western Ghats has been the fast depletion of the forest cover in the state. Thus the rich canopy of forests in Keralam may be only less than 7 per cent and there could be another 7 per cent of degraded forests. Other recent unofficial estimates indicate that the forest cover in the state has dwindled to less than 5 per cent of the land area.

Further, the state government has done precious little to stop the ganja (cannabis sativa) cultivation in at least 20,000 acres of ‘forestland’ within the state. The ganja cultivation goes on unimpeded in the inaccessible terrains of the ‘forest-land’ in the High Ranges in Idukki district and increasingly, of late, in Palakkad district.

There have been recent reports of encroachments by powerful interests at Mathikettan in Idukki district, Wagamon (bordering Kottayam and Idukki districts), Nelliampathy in Palakkad district, etc. with the connivance of the forest department. Similarly, Poabson company has allegedly encroached on vast tracts of forestland at Nelliampathy in Palakkad district.

This includes encroachments upon 2,974 hectares at Mannarkkad forest division in Palakkad district, 1,034 hectares at Moonnar in Idukki district, 732 hectares in Wayanad south, 633 hectares in Kozhikode division, 405 hectares at Nilambur division in Malappuram district, 391 hectares at Nemmara in Palakkad district, 130 hectares at Malayattoor and 699 hectares at Kothamangalam in Ernakulam district and 106 hectares in Kottayam division. According to this report, the state government had identified for eviction 7,652 hectares of land encroached upon and verification of another 4,064 hectares of land was yet to be completed. This would total to 11,716 hectares, i.e. higher than what is mentioned in the official statement (Hindu 2003: “Government apathy makes forest officials go slow on evictions”, 23 December, Thiruvananthapuram edn., p. 5).

Sugathakumari 2005: “Vanavivaadangal” (Forest controversies – Malayalam), 16 December, Friday, Mathrubhoomi, Thiruvananthapuram edn., edit page.


For an account of ganja cultivation within the state, see: Desabhimani 2002: “Adhikrutharude arivode kanjavu krushi vyapaakam” (Ganja cultivation thrives with the knowledge of the authorities – Malayalam), 2 February, Thrisur edn.; Hindu 2003: 21 Nov; Hindu 2003: 3 November, p. 5; Vattapara 2003, pp. 30-32. The high ranges or the western ghats region is infamous for ganja cultivation. Ganja cultivation in around 5000 acres at Kampakkallu in Vattavada panchayat, and around another 5000 acres at Bandar near Koviloor top-station has been continuing for many years. Around 5000 acres near Manhappetty in the catchment area of Amaravathi dam near Chinnar wildlife sanctuary, Pachakkanam near Vandiperiyar with a cultivation of around 3000 acres and around 1500 acres near Sooryanelli are other major areas of ganja cultivation (Desabhimani 2002). Since early 2000s, the ganja mafia has expanded its sphere of operation from its traditional strongholds in Idukki district to hundreds of acres of the inaccessible areas of Attappady in Palakkad district (Hindu 2003a: “Ganja cultivation thriving in Attappady”, 3 November, Thiruvananthapuram edition, p. 5). Tribal belts of Anavai, Thudukki, Galazi and Kadukumanna are the main centres of ganja cultivation in Palakkad district. Large-scale ganja cultivation goes on in 29 places in the Attappady forests. They have posed a threat to the protective outside forest cover of the Silent Valley tropical evergreen forest and could lead to the drying up of Bhavani, Siruvani and Kunthi rivers (Hindu 2005: 21 Nov.).

P.K. Prakash 2003: “Muthangayile yaatharthayam Marayoorile swapnam” (The reality at Muthanga, the dream at Marayoor – Malayalam), Madhayamam weekly, March 7, vol. 8, no. 263, pp. 10-19, p. 16. Similarly, around 1200 acres of surplus land was encroached upon at Vadakkemunda in Kannur district in 2003.
Palakkad district. The land-grabs at Mathikettaan and Wagaman are infamous. It is widely known that in 1995, it was those close to the state revenue minister himself who had encroached the environmentally sensitive Mathikettan forests in Idukki district. 12.500 hectares of government land here has been appropriated by private individuals on nominal lease amounts at Kolaahalamedu near Wagaman which is the sole spot in Kerala with pine forests. Wagaman hill ranges dot the border areas of Kottayam and Idukki districts. Wagaman is the richest reserve of biodiversity in the Sahya mountain range. National Geographic traveller had included Wagaman as one among the ten tourist spots to be definitely visited. Achankovilaar and Pambayaar rivers would also cease to be, if the encroachments continue.

It was in 1995, i.e. towards the end of the tenure of the 1991-95 Congress-led United Democratic Front government wherein K.M. Mani was the revenue minister that encroachments had taken place on the environmentally significant Mathikettaan forests. It was 15,000 hectares of forestland that was encroached at Mathikettaan hills. Apparently, only those armed with enormous political clout could engage in such ‘primitive accumulation’ in each of these cases.

The state government took advantage of the hue and cry at the all-India level after Muthanga firing and built up pressure on the central government and got allotted 7,693.2

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234 At Chinnakkanaal in Idukki district, the ruling party leaders themselves encroached upon the land distributed by the government to the Adivasis, even before the latter could take possession this land (Prakash, P.K. 2004: “Muthanga vaarshikathil uyarunna chodyangal”. Muthuvaram weekly; 27 February, p. 24).


237 K. Rajanbabu 2003, p. 24. Unlike at Muthanga in early 2003, where the Adivasis who set up their huts were forcibly evicted and even fired upon, the upper caste Christians with political clout who had mostly encroached upon the land at Mathikettaan were evicted subsequently through gentle persuasion.

238 The following are accounts of land-grabs on forestland in recent times:


Venugopal 2004, p. 5; Hindu 2004a; and Hindu 2004b (On encroachments on 17,922 acres of shola grassland terrain in the Kannan Devan Hills).


Hindu 2003c: “No action yet on Nilambur forest encroachment: PUCL”, 22 December, Thiruvananthapuram edn., p. 4 (On encroachments of 1,241 acres of forestland at Kannath Malavaram in Nilambur, fringe areas of the Silent valley National Park).

See also: Prakash 2003a; Prakash 2003b; Prakash 2003c.


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hectares (around 19,000 acres) of forestland in five districts – Kasaragode, Kannur, Wayanad, Palakkad, Malappuram – for distribution to Adivasis. It is intended to benefit 13,000 Adivasi families. In return, the state government is supposed to take up afforestation in 13,223.2 hectares of land, as protected forests. If more land is required, the state government is required to remit an amount of five to nine lakh rupees per hectare according to Supreme Court directive. What is implied in the latest policy stance is the essentialist notion that Adivasis are forest-dwellers and have to be rehabilitated within forests. Apparently, the motive could be not to incur the displeasure of the entrenched classes and not to disturb the status quo in land relations within the state. Indeed, ideology takes the back seat where material interests of powerful classes and hard economic gains come to the fore.

The unfolding scenario is that big plantations in Keralam who have leased in large tracts of government land or have illegally encroached upon adjacent forestland are trying to sell off their landed property as small plots, as in the case of Harrisons Malayalam (HML) Plantations under R.P. Goenka group and Beenachi estate in Wayanad, the latter held by the Madhya Pradesh government. The other option they are taking recourse to is to shift ownership rights to the workers’ cooperatives and retain their brands and procurement rights of the product, as in the case of Tata-tea at present. Such moves could be viewed as a result of turning the heat of public opinion on big plantations for the undue benefits cornered by them over the decades and also a result of the recent ‘plantation crisis’ following the fall in the prices of plantation crops.

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241 Madhyamam daily editorial 2004: February 21. Admittedly, this willingness to distribute forestland to Adivasis indicates a turnaround in the government’s stance from the dualistic thinking mentioned in the section, ‘Contending Discourses on the Adivasi Land Question in Keralam’ in Chapter VI.
242 Geethanandan, leader of AGMS is of the view that effective agricultural practices could be adopted on forestland without disrupting the natural economic system unlike in the case of the dominant plantation economy in the state (personal communication, 19 February 2005).
244 Thus before the 10 May 2005 rally to Beenachi estate and Land Board Commission office, Thiruvananthapuram, the AGMS pamphlet says, 2,500 crore rupees remains as unrecovered arrears on government land leased out on nominal rates to the various plantations (AGMS 2005a). 42 crore rupees was paid by the Kerala government from the tribal rehabilitation fund to the central government for obtaining the 7500 acre Aralam farm and yet there are attempts to transfer the land to a private company instead of taking it over and distributing to the tribals (AGMS 2005a). The government projects like Vanalakshmi and Vanarani have only served to cater to vested interests in course of time. As a fallout of the land reforms legislations excluding plantations from ceiling laws, 60 per cent of the agricultural land was converted into plantations (AGMS 2005a). Moves have been afoot to partition and sell off the Beenachi estate in Wayanad held by the Madhya Pradesh government to various real estate interests (AGMS 2005a). Harrisson plantations had received the plantation from East India Company and now proposes to give it out to Pepsi for pineapple cultivation and is illegally evicting the plantation workers (AGMS 2005a). The pamphlet claimed that Tata-tea alone holds 1,60,000 acres of land out of which 60,000 was supposed to be taken over from Tata under the
Of late, a Central Empowered Committee of the Supreme Court expressed concern over the continuing unabated land grabbing by 'the rich, the powerful and the influential' in the Cardamom Hill Reserves (CHR) of Idukki district. The committee observed that even after the regularisation of pre-1977 encroachments on 20,363 hectares (50,297 acres) of CHR area, the state revenue department during the post-1977 period issued title-deeds on 9,367 hectares to thousands of persons,\(^245\) allegedly *benamis* of powerful encroachers. These were issued without the mandatory clearance by the Union Ministry of Environment and Forests. In an apparent bid to legitimise the land grabs, there were efforts from within the revenue department of the state to show the extent of land in CHR as merely 24.56 square miles or 15,720 acres based on a 'bona fide mistake' in the original notification in 1897, although ironically, more than three times this area has already been legally allotted out.\(^246\) Controversy has brewed over the hectic efforts within the state government to extend the leases\(^247\) on some of the forest estates running into thousands of acres at Nelliampathy in Palakkad district\(^248\) and in roughly 10,000 hectares of reserved forest in the CHR in spite of the denudation and resale of leased lands by the lease-holders being officially acknowledged facts.

Another aspect of the controversy has been that the government wanted to assign prime government land with rich biodiversity around Mankulam in the Moonnar area of Idukki district to the tourism lobby. Both the proposals – for extension of leases and land assignment - had full support from within revenue department of the state government and they wanted to ensure these well ahead of the term of the UDF government ended before mid-2006.\(^249\)

In yet another instance, the Opposition Leader, V.S. Achuthanandan pointed out how the R.P. Goenka group was selling out as plots 5,344 acres of leased government land in Pathanapuram taluk in Kollam district, while the state government failed to take over the land after the expiry of the lease in March 2005.\(^250\) V.S. Achuthanandan had also pointed

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\(^{245}\) Venugopal 2005: 1.
\(^{246}\) Venugopal 2005b.
\(^{247}\) The lease amounts have been nominal ranging from Rs.3.50 to Rs.50 per acre, per annum and yet the unpaid tax arrears by lease-holders ran into several crores (Ravi Raman 2004).
\(^{248}\) Following Supreme Court verdict, government has got back three estates including Rosary estate from private hands (Sugathakumari 2005).
out about encroachment into around 4000 acres forestland in the catchment area of Pooyamkutty project. 251

As we would go on to argue in Chapter VI, 252 the low profile landgrabs in thousands of acres of the remote forestland in the state should be considered much bigger scams, than many scams that have rocked Indian in recent times. Moreover, these landgrabs have disastrous implications for the ecological balance on the Western Ghats.

VI. CASTE-CLASS INTERFACE IN KERALAM

Barbara Harriss-White (2003) spoke of how many a caste or religious community in India has carved out a niche for itself in the accumulation process. Thus the Muslims have excelled in activities considered polluting to the caste Hindus, such as, leather works, waste and scrap recycling, butchery, etc.; the Dalits have near monopoly over employment in urban sanitation work; belief in ahimsa (non-violence) turned Jains away from farming to business; production and exchange in the Punjab are compartmentalised along religious and caste lines. Analysing economic power by religion and community, she finds Marwaris, Parsis, Punjabis and Gujaratis to be ranking dominant in that order and finds Muslims at the bottom. 253 Niched economic activities among castes and communities may rightly be identified as a significant feature of the Kerala economy and society as well. 254 The historical development of these castes/communities has contributed to their current position in the socio-economic structure.

A general idea of the extent of democratisation of Kerala society as a result of the protective discrimination through reservations provided to the deprived castes can be had from the recently submitted Narendran Commission Report on reservations to Backward Classes in the public sector employment in the state. Reservations in public employment has been initiated in the state since the Abstention movement in the erstwhile Thiruvithamkoor-Kochi states during 1930s. The Commission Report observes, "[T]here is clear inadequacy of the representation of backward communities taken as a whole, though the extent of inadequacy varies from community to community." 255 The Report also admits that there are instances where the "excess over the reservation quota" 256

251 V.S. Achuthanandan pointed this out in the state assembly on 15 February 2006; telecast on India Vision Malayalam news channel at 1.40 p.m. onwards.
252 See Section 1 in Chapter VI, "Identifying the Dominant Classes within Keralam".
254 Please refer Appendix I: "The Caste Composition of Kerala Society – An Introduction" for the links between caste and occupational structure in the state.
through channel of merit is substantial in some categories of posts, as in the case of Ezhavas but that is not the general pattern. The real picture of representation emerges from the data relating to Group I – Government Departments and the Judiciary, where Public Service Commission has strictly been following a policy of reservation. In Group I – Government Departments, the actual position of representation for all the Backward Classes taken together is 48.23 per cent, where the quota is 40 per cent. The Forward Classes have got a representation of 38.73 per cent. In Group I, Ezhavas got a representation of 20.41 per cent in all the categories together. In Category I of jobs, they got a representation of 20.69 per cent as against a quota of 11 per cent. As against a quota allocation of 14 per cent in every other Category, in Category II, they got 20.40 per cent, in Category III, 20.44 per cent, etc. Muslims are under-represented in Group I, getting a total representation of 10.45 per cent as against their quota of 10 per cent in Category I, and 12 per cent each in every other Category.

The total deficiency in the fulfilment of reservation quota for Backward Classes is 7383 posts. This includes 1069 posts in Category I, 3308 posts in Category II, 1969 posts in Category III, 979 posts in Category IV, and insubstantial number of posts in Category V and others. Thus the highest number of unfilled quota remains in Category II, followed by Category III. The total number of posts where the shortfall is noticed includes 4370 posts for Latin Catholic/Anglo Indian, 2614 posts for Nadars, 2290 posts for Scheduled Castes converted to Christianity, 256 posts for Dheevera (Hindu fisher people) community, 460 posts for Other Backward Communities, 147 for Viswakarmas and 5 for Ezhavas. Thus the Latin Catholic/Anglo Indians, Nadars and Dalit Christians in that order remain the worst sufferers in this respect. The shortfall cannot be attributed to the exclusion of creamy layer in the matter of recruitment for Backward Classes, which was insisted upon only since 16 February 2000. A point that logically follows is that every caste/community within the category of ‘Backward Classes’ is not in similar stages of social development and therefore there is need to target protective discrimination to the weaker sections among Backward Classes for the amelioration of their conditions.

In the traditional caste structure in the state, Brahmins were a miniscule minority. Below them came, Kshatriyas (Varma’s, etc.) who belonged to the royal lineage and were likewise a miniscule category. Nairs who were ritually Sudras were recruited as warriors

257 Ibid, p. 43.
258 Ibid, Clause 6.6, p. 34.
259 Ibid, Clause 6.7, p. 34.
260 Ibid, Table 1, p. 54.
261 Based on ibid, Table 1, p. 54.
262 Ibid, Tables 1-8, pp. 54-57. The shortfall of the actual number of posts held by Muslims is not mentioned herein.
and a section of them were conferred with higher Kaanam tenancies. The category of Vaishyas was absent in ritual terms—Syrian Christians and Mappila Muslims (an ethnic mix of Arab Muslim traders with local population) filled this role. These sections came to be designated as religious minorities with the emergence of the ‘Hindu’ identity. Ezhavas were ritually ‘untouchables’ or outcastes until the early 20th century. Below them were the agrarian slave castes of Pulayar, Parayar, Kuravar, etc. The social structure of caste, in pre-colonial India could have been the principal medium through which redistribution of surpluses took place. Nevertheless, it is to be noted that class divisions did prevail within these communities. Thus it is widely accepted that the landlordism of the Nairs, who were considered Sudras in ritual terms, had a history of no more than six centuries now. P.K. Balakrishnan had pointed out that there was scant development of productive forces in pre-colonial Keralam and that most Nair soldiers under the princely states had subsisted on bare means.

Keeping in view our concern for social transformation, our focus is on the subordinate classes, dealing in detail with the processes of class formation at the bottom. Nevertheless, we would proceed with an important caveat that these subordinate economic classes are, by no means abstract categories but exist in interrelation to non-class deprived categories like caste and gender. This is to harp back to the ‘multidimensionality of the social being’ that we mentioned in Chapter II, particularly in a Third World country like India which is considered to be “such a bastion of disparity” with its “massive inequalities”. Let us take the cases of the economic location of two deprived social categories, namely, Adivasis and Dalits whose political struggles we deal with in detail in Chapter VI. These social categories, by far, find themselves at the lowest rungs of the socio-economic hierarchy in Kerala society. Let us, first, examine the economic profile of Adivasis, who are widely considered to be at the lowest bottom of the Kerala society.

Let us now look at the major marginalised social groups, namely, Adivasis, Dalits, fisherfolk in Keralam that constitute an important chunk of the deprived classes in the state. Let us also take the case of women in general, as a non-class social category at the receiving end of discrimination, exploitation and marginalisation. Within this chapter, we would deal mainly with the structural-location/socio-economic position of Adivasis and Dalits. The process of their relationship with the rest of the society and in particular, their

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struggles are dealt with in detail in Chapter VI. As we are unable to do a similar exercise in the case of women and the fisherfolk, their social position and the relational process of their struggles are, to some extent, covered in this Chapter itself. A similar analysis in the case of immigrant labour, particularly, of the Tamil immigrant labour is desirable given the fact that most of the menial labour in the state are increasingly being performed by immigrant labourers from other states. Nevertheless, we would express our inability to engage in such an analysis herein.

**Adavis: Demographic and Landlessness Profile**

Going by Census 2001, Adavasis in the state constitute a minuscule 1.14 per cent of the total population of the state as compared to the percentage share of the tribal population in the country as a whole at 8.20 per cent (Table A.4 in Appendices). Anthropologically, the Adavasis in Keralam have been of the Negrito-Austroloid group of people and have been living in the forests of the state for several centuries. The demographic concentration of the Adavasis is mostly in the eastern mountainous belt of Keralam. The forests of the Western Ghats in Keralam were almost completely under the control of Adavasis before the colonial incursions began.

There has been some decline in the Adavasi population in the state as proportion of the total population of the state during 1971-81. In 1971, it was 1.26 per cent; in 1981, 1.03 per cent, indicating a decline of 0.23 per cent (See Table A.3 in Appendices). The corresponding figure for 1991 was 1.10 per cent and for 2001, 1.14 per cent. The two decades from 1981-2001 indicates only a marginal increase of 0.11 per cent in the tribal population of the state. The all-India population share of Adavasis of 6.9 per cent in 1971 went up to 7.8 per cent in 1981, to 8.01 per cent in 1991 and to 8.20 per cent in 2001, indicating a steady increase except for the slow growth of 0.3 per cent during 1981-91 (See Tables A.3 & A.4 in Appendices).

The decadal growth rate (percentage change) of the Adavasi population in the state has drastically come down from 22.75 per cent during 1981-91 to 13.5 per cent during 1991-2001, whereas the corresponding figure for tribals at all-India level during 1991-2001 was 24.5 per cent. As compared to the growth of STs, during 1981-91, the overall population growth rate of Keralam was much lower at 14.32 per cent and marginally lower than the all-India growth average of 23.85 per cent. The corresponding figures

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269 Prakash 2003, p. 19.
for 1991-2001 are 9.4 per cent for the whole of Keralam and 21.5 per cent for all-India, respectively (See Table 5.5 below).

Table 5.5:
Decadal population growth rates of STs and total population in Keralam and all-India, 1991-2001

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Total population</th>
<th>1991</th>
<th>2001</th>
<th>Decadal growth</th>
<th>Growth @ All</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Keralam</td>
<td>29098518</td>
<td>31841374</td>
<td>2742856</td>
<td>9.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>India</td>
<td>846302688</td>
<td>1028610328</td>
<td>182307640</td>
<td>21.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ST population</th>
<th>1991</th>
<th>2001</th>
<th>Decadal growth</th>
<th>Growth @ ST</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Keralam</td>
<td>320967</td>
<td>364189</td>
<td>43222</td>
<td>13.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>India</td>
<td>67758380</td>
<td>84326240</td>
<td>16,567,860</td>
<td>24.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


The ST population in the state is, to some extent, concentrated in Wayanad, Palakkad and Idukki, these districts accounting for almost two-thirds of the total ST population in the state. SC population is not similarly concentrated.\(^{272}\) Wayanad district contributed to 35.82 per cent of the ST population in the state and 0.96 per cent of the SC population in the state. SC and ST together constituted 21.25 per cent of the population within the district, which is the highest among the districts. Palakkad district contributed 13.11 per cent of the total SC population in the state and 11.05 per cent of the total ST population in the state. SC and ST together constituted 17.38 per cent of the total population of the district. Idukki district contributed 15.66 per cent of the total ST population in the state and 5.44 per cent of the total SC population in the state. SC and ST together constituted 11.92 per cent of the district population.\(^{273}\) Kannur has the lowest proportion of SCs and STs together constituting 4.86 per cent of the population.\(^{274}\)

Both in 1991 and 2001, the highest concentration of Adivasis was in the northern district of Wayanad with over 17 per cent Adivasi population in the total population of the district and with a concentration of 36 per cent of the total Adivasi population in the state in 1991 and over 37 per cent in 2001 (Table A.4 & A.5 in Appendices).\(^{275}\) The first five positions in respect of the percentage of ST in the total population in the district, remain unchanged under Census 2001 (Table A.4 in Appendices).

\(^{272}\) D. Narayana 2003, p. 31.
\(^{275}\) Historically, Wayanad was an Adivasi-dominated district. And there have been evidences of a Veda princely state of the Adivasis in Wayanad, which in course of time faced the deception of the Kodagu rulers as mentioned by the historian, Sreedhara Menon.
In terms of the share of the total Adivasi population in the state in 1991, Wayanad district is followed by Idukki, the hilly district in the south with less than 16 per cent; Palakkad came third with 11 per cent; Kasaragode, fourth with over 9 per cent and Kannur, fifth with about 6 per cent. During 2001, Idukki with 14 per cent, Palakkad with about 11 per cent and Kasaragode with over 8 per cent continue to be in second, third and fourth positions, respectively. But Thiruvananthapuram district with nearly 6 per cent of the tribal population in the state has taken over the fifth position in 2001, pushing back Kannur to the sixth and Kottayam to the seventh positions. Similarly, Ernakulam has improved its rank from the eleventh position in 1991 to ninth position in 2001, pushing back Pathanamthitta from the ninth to the tenth position and Kozhikode from the tenth to the eleventh position. The share of total ST in the state of Ernakulam district has gone up by 1.22 per cent during the decade and of Thiruvananthapuram by 0.70 per cent. These are the two districts with major cities and also with a significant district-level presence of Adivasis. The tribal population of Ernakulam district has more than doubled from 4,941 in 1991 to 10,046 in 2001 (Table A.4 & A.5 in Appendices). However, this cannot be considered primarily as a reflection of the urbanisation of ST population as evidence indicates to the contrary. Thus the growth of urban ST population as percentage of the decadal growth of ST in the district in Thiruvananthapuram showed only 13.2 per cent growth during 1991-2001 and the corresponding figure for Ernakulam district was only 12.5 per cent.\(^{276}\)

During 1991-2001, the percentage share of total ST in the state of Idukki district has shown the most remarkable decline of 1.66 per cent. Kasaragode came second in this respect with a decline of 0.79 per cent, Kottayam came third with a decline of 0.57 per cent. The biggest decline in the share of the tribals in the total population of the district has taken place in Kasaragode district, with a decline of 0.21 per cent. Idukki followed with a decline of 0.15 per cent. Wayanad has shown a significant increase of 0.32 per cent in the share of ST in the total population of the district (Table A.5 in Appendices). It may also be noted that there has not been a decline in absolute terms in the tribal population of any of the districts of the state during the decade (Table A.4 in Appendices).\(^{277}\)

Going by Census 2001, it is notable that the lowest percentage of Adivasi habitation is found in the coastal districts and the highest in the hilly districts in the eastern parts of the

\(^{276}\) Based on Census 1991 & 2001: Final Population Totals, Kerala & India.

\(^{277}\) In end 2003, there have been reports in the 'India Vision' Malayalam news channel and elsewhere about sterilisation programmes among Adivasis being undertaken by the government health department in Waynad district of the state. Thus it has been reported that 1090 out of 1230 sterilised have been Adivasis until till October 30 (http://www.countercurrents.org/dalit-cc301103.htm - 30 November 2003; Warrior 2004). The Directorate of Health Services denies this report saying that while 4,622 persons underwent
state. Moreover, in the northern districts tribals constitute 1.5 per cent of the total population in these districts. On the other hand, the southern districts had an average of only 0.75 per cent distribution of tribals in the total population, i.e. just half of the proportion in the north.

There was higher concentration of Adivasis in the northern districts both during 1991 and 2001 with around 68 per cent of the total Adivasi population in the state as compared to the southern districts for which the corresponding figure was only around 32 per cent. The share of the southern districts was seen to be marginally declining in 2001 (Table A.4 & A.5 in Appendices). So the erstwhile Malabar province had a higher percentage of Adivasis. Migration of non-tribals from the southern districts, particularly from the erstwhile Thiruvithamkool adversely affected them. However, the problems faced by the numerically smaller proportion of Adivasis in the southern districts, as victims of the 'development process' also merit attention. The Adivasis in the southern districts constitute 0.75 per cent of the total population i.e., just half of their corresponding proportion in the northern districts (See, Table A.4 & A.5 in Appendices). However, the issue concerning their landlessness, even to the extent of not being able to bury their dead, has not attracted much public attention. This could be because the dominant streams of the debate on the Adivasi land question have focused their attention on land alienation by settler peasants from Christian background who had migrated to the northern districts prior to 1960s.

The Adivasi masterplan committee set up following the agreement reached in October 2001, officially known as the Tribal Resettlement and Development Mission's data (See Table A.2 in Appendices) reveals that there are a total of 22,052 landless tribals in the state and 32,131 tribals who own less than one acre of land. The highest share of landless tribals in the state were found in Wayanad (60.33 per cent), followed by Palakkad in the second position (24.44 per cent), Kannur in the third position (6.33 per cent), etc. In the case of tribals with less than one acre of land, Wayanad (37.92 per cent) once again tops the list and is followed by Idukki in the second position (16.92 per cent), Palakkad (8.20 per cent) at the third position, Kannur (7 per cent) at fourth position, etc. Taking together the landless and small holders of land (i.e., those who hold land below one acre), there were 54,183 tribals in the state. The highest number of them are found in Wayanad district which had 25,487 of them. It is followed by Palakkad with 8,026 of them. Idukki

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sterilisation operation in Wayanad during the year, there were 985 tribals among them and it was not surprising given the higher proportion of tribals in the district (Times of India 2003). During the colonial period, the present state of Keralam consisted of the princely states of Thiruvithamkool and Kochi and the Malabar region which was part of the Madras presidency directly under colonial administration.

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came in the third position with 5,626, Kannur in the fourth position with 3644 and Malappuram in the fifth position with 2,563.279

*Rural Labour Enquiry Reports* throw light on the landlessness profile of the Adivasis. In 1999-01, the figure for ‘Land poor’ ST Rural Labour Households (RLH) in Keralam is the second highest among 15 major states in India at 38.1 per cent as against the all-India average of 15.4 per cent. ‘Landless’ ST RLH, however, are less at 51.9 per cent as against the all-India average of 47 per cent. Keralam comes fifth from below in this respect. The figure for land poverty among Adivasis in the state continues to be in keeping with the trend in the state for both 'All' and SCs. The Kerala average of ST RLH, Landless and Land poor households together (designated by us as ‘All Land poor’) constitute 90.0 per cent during 1999-01. During the 1999-01 to 1977-78 period, land poor ST RLH rose from 55.4 per cent to 90.0 per cent, marking a very sharp increase of 65.4 per cent. Meanwhile, the all-India average of 17.8 per cent also rose more than 4 times to 62.4 per cent (Table A.8 & A.12 in Appendices).

It is interesting to note that the Adivasi RLH in the state have an average landholding size of 0.09 hectare during 1999-01, which is higher than for All RLH at 0.07 hectare and for Dalit households at 0.05 hectare (Table A.8 in Appendices). During 1977-78, the Adivasi RLH in the state had an average landholding size of 0.47 hectare, which was higher than for All RLH at 0.16 hectare and for Dalit RLH at 0.11 hectare.280 The decline in average landholding was five-fold in the case of Adivasis but only by over half for All RLH and Dalit RLH. This refers to a period well after the migration wave subsided and this could indicate the severity of land alienation from Adivasis during this period.

Whereas the reduction in All and Dalit holdings may be considered as a fall-out of fragmentation of holdings resulting from population pressure, in the case of Adivasi holdings, this should crucially be considered as a result of land alienation from the Adivasis, possibly under the provisions that favoured tenants under the KLRA, 1969.

279 Curiously, the Adivasi Masterplan committee report has not been made public by the government, probably because it contained sensitive information threatening to the State and dominant classes. Prakash (2002) summarises the district-wise landlessness profile of the Adivasis in the state as follows: The Adivasi masterplan committee, found Wayanad to be having the highest number of landless Adivasi families (14031), followed by Palakkad in the second position (5389) and Kannur in the third position (1395). As for Adivasi families with less than one acre of land, Wayanad figured first with 12184 families, Idukki figured second with 5436 families, Palakkad third, with 2637 families and Kannur figured fourth with 2249 families. (There were only 190 Adivasi families who were landless in Idukki). (Prakash 2002, p. 129). This reveals the intensity of the impact of land alienation on the Adivasis in the various districts: Wayanad figures first, followed by Palakkad, Idukki and Kannur in the descending order.

Since most of the Adivasi tribes were not trained in agricultural work since they did not have agriculture as their traditional occupation, many of the Adivasis had leased out their land. The leasees could have filed for ownership rights under the KLRA and thus swindled the Adivasis of their land in districts like Wayanad.

Following land reforms i.e., in 1977-78, ‘Land poor’ ST RLH were the highest in Keralam at 55.4 per cent among 12 major states in India for which data is available as against the all-India average of 17.8 per cent. The Kerala average of Land poor ST RLH was three times higher than the all-India average. Keralam was followed by West Bengal with 38 per cent in this respect (The figures for landless is unavailable in 1977-78). These are in keeping with the trend in the state for both ‘All’ and SCs (Table A.12 in Appendices).

We would get a clearer picture of the agricultural labour participation and landlessness among Adivasis when we analyse the proportion of Adivasis and the landless among them in Agricultural Labour Households (ALH) vis-à-vis their proportion in the total population (Table 5.11).

There is evidence of feminisation of agriculture among ALH Kerala tribals, from 29.2 per cent in 1977-78 to 38.2 per cent in 1999-01, the corresponding trend is not so stark at the all-India level from 39.1 per cent to 42.6 per cent. The trend of non-agricultural employment by ALH tribal women in the state is also very high in 1999-2001 at 69.2 per cent vis-à-vis 27.1 per cent at all-India level. Increased land alienation and poverty resulting therefrom could have driven many more tribal women into agricultural and non-agricultural labour (Table A.18).

The percentage of population Below Poverty Line (BPL) in rural areas in the state during 1993-94 was 37.3 per cent for ST as compared to 36.4 for SC in the state and the state average of 25.8 per cent, the BPL tribal population at all-India level at 52 per cent and an average of 37.3 per cent for India as a whole. Thus with respect to income poverty, the Adivasis in the state lag slightly behind the Dalits and far behind the rest of the population in the state although they are much better off than their counterparts in the rest of India and their poverty level is comparable to the country-average.

The major section of the Adivasis in the state are no longer forest-dwellers today. Sections of them have been historically integrated into class society, mostly as

\[281\] See the sub-section, “The Socio-economic Location of Dalits and Adivasis among Agrarian Classes”.

\[282\] See Table 5.6 below: “Percentage of Agricultural Labour and Poverty level among SCs and STs in Keralam and India”.
agricultural labourers. Thus many among the Paniya and Adiya tribes in Wayanad district were integrated early into class society as Adiyaalar – bonded labourers who suffered some features of slavery as well. On the whole, the majority of the Adivasi tribes in the state have been integrated at the lowest bottom of the class society as agricultural labourers, although a few tribes (the Cholanaicker tribe, for instance) still live in relative isolation within the forests. According to Geethanandan, one among the top two leaders of Adivasi Gothra Mahasabha/Rashtriya Mahasabha, about one-third of the Adivasis in the state still live in the forests.283 Sreekumar & Parayil say, “An estimated 23 per cent of the Adivasi population lives in forests under the direct control of the forest department.”284 Contrary to this, another activist estimate held that only 6.5 per cent of the Adivasis in the state lived inside the forests.285

According to official estimates concerning the state, the percentage of agricultural labour in the population of the state in 1991 was the highest for ST at 55.5 per cent, and 53.8 per cent for SC while the Kerala average of 25.5 per cent coincided with the all-India average of 26.1 per cent. The corresponding figure for ST at all-India level was 32.7 per cent. This indicates much higher levels of integration into class society as agricultural labourers in case of the Adivasis in Kerala society vis-à-vis their counterparts in the rest of the country.286

There are 36 or more little Adivasi tribes in the state. There are those that are not yet given legal recognition, such as the miniscule Malayalam tribe. Sections of the Vedan tribe in Thiruvithamkoor, named as ‘Vedan’ and ‘Vettuvan’ still figure in the SC list, although one part of the same tribe figures in the ST list as ‘Mala Vedan’/‘Malai Vedan’. This was acknowledged by the study by KIRTAOS in 1990. If the tribes as yet unrecognised are also included in the ST list, the official percentage of Adivasis in Kerala society could marginally go up.287

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283 Personal communication, 19 February 2005.
285 Madhavan 2002-03, p. 3.
286 See Table 5.6 below: “Percentage of Agricultural Labour and Poverty level among SCs and STs in Keralam and India”.
287 List of Scheduled Tribes Kerala 2003 as per the SC and ST Orders (Amendment) Act, 2002 include a total of only 36 tribes (with both Koraga and Kudiya/Melakudi listed as no. 10). Including the newly added tribes, Kammara (Malabar), Kondakapus, Kondareddis, Kota and Marati (Hosdurg, Kasargode) in the earlier list (http://www.kerala.gov.in/kpsc/st.pdf) have been deleted and the three synonyms of Palleyan were integrated as one tribe and new ones – Mala Vettuvan (Kasargode & Kannur districts), Ten Kurumban/Jenu Kurumban, Thachanadan/Thachanadan Moopan, Cholanaickan, Mavilan, Karimpalan, Vetta Kuruman, Mala Panikkar have been newly added into the ST list.
Table 5.6: Percentage of Agricultural Labour and Poverty level among SCs and STs in Keralam and India

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>% SC in total pop.</th>
<th>% ST in total pop.</th>
<th>% agri. labour in total pop., 1991</th>
<th>% population BPL (rural) 1993-94</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kerala</td>
<td>29.10 mn.</td>
<td>9.9</td>
<td>53.8</td>
<td>36.43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>55.5</td>
<td>37.34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>25.5</td>
<td>25.76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>India</td>
<td>846.3 mn.</td>
<td>16.5</td>
<td>49.1</td>
<td>48.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>8.1</td>
<td>32.7</td>
<td>51.94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>26.1</td>
<td>37.27</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Government of India (Goi) 2000: "Tribes in India" (A Data Sheet), Planning Commission & Goi 2000: "SCs in India" (A Data Sheet), Planning Commission, as cited on D. Narayana 2003, p. 39.

Dalits: Profile of their Economic Status

The Dalit (Hindu Scheduled Caste) population in the state constituted 9.9 per cent of the total population of the state. It may be noted that the corresponding population share in the country as a whole was 16.5 per cent. One problem in estimating the Dalit (Scheduled Caste) population in the state is that a large section of them are by now converted to Christianity and these converts have not been accorded the status of Scheduled Castes (SCs) by the government. There have also been large-scale Dalit conversions to the fold of Islam particularly in the Malabar region during the Mysore interlude (1773-92) i.e., the reign by the Sultans of the adjoining Mysore kingdom.

The percentage of Dalit (SC) population Below Poverty Line (BPL) in rural areas in the state during 1993-94 was 36.4 per cent. This may be compared to 37.3 per cent for ST, the state average of 25.8 per cent, 48 per cent for SC population at all-India level and the all-India average of 37.3 per cent. Thus the poverty level of Dalits in the state is much lower than that of their counterparts in the rest of India; it is comparable to the country average of poverty level and that of the Adivasis within the state but the

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288 See Table 5.6: “Percentage of Agricultural Labour and Poverty level among SCs and STs in Keralam and India”.
289 The converts to Protestant Christianity have come under the Church of South India (CSI) after the transfer of power and the converts to Catholic Christianity have been designated as ‘Neo-Christians’. There are also converts from the fisher community who were mostly ‘Latin Catholics’, named after the Latin rite of worship they followed. The rite of worship often demarcated the caste difference vis-à-vis Syrian Christians who followed Syrian rites of worship.
290 For an account of these conversions to Islam, see K. Prasobhan, Sree Narayana Guruviinte Swadenatha Malayala Kaviithayil (Malayalam), State Institute of Languages, Thiruvananthapuram, p. 21.
291 See Table 5.6.
Dalits in the state lag far behind in this respect vis-à-vis the general population in the state.

Going by *Rural Labour Enquiry* 1999-2001, it is clear that Dalit (SC) and Adivasi (ST) sections in Keralam constitute significant sections of the actual toilers on land and a good many of the landless among them. This is indicated by the fact that the average number of those engaged in agricultural work within the Adivasi and Dalit households being at 33.6 per cent and 25.1 per cent, respectively were significantly higher than among ‘All’ at 14.7 per cent in Keralam (Table 5.8). We get a sharper picture in the next section when we analyse the proportion of Dalits and the landless among them in Agricultural Labour Households (ALH) vis-à-vis their proportion in the total population (Table 5.11). 292

Further, among ALH, Dalits had a greater proportion of households without cultivated land at 53.7 per cent, much higher than for ‘All’ at 44.1 per cent 293 and for even Adivasis at 46.5 per cent (Table 5.9). Land poverty among Dalits was even more serious than it was even among Adivasis. Thus according to *Agricultural Census, 1995-96*, the average size of holding of Dalits was 0.08 hectare and the corresponding figure for Adivasis was 0.44 hectare. On the other hand, the average size of holding of ‘All’ was 0.26 hectare for all Keralam. 294 These figures, in turn, are indicative of the urgency of the land question among these sections.

The Dalit land question in the state assumes added importance in the context of the increasing share of Dalit participation in the agriculture sector and declining share in the service sector. Thus in 1991, their participation in the agriculture sector went up to a new high of 73 per cent, marking an increase of over 10 per cent since 1961 whereas their participation in the tertiary sector went down to 17 per cent marking a decline of about 9 per cent. 295

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292 According to the figures provided by the Union Planning Commission, the dependence of SCs and STs on agriculture is much higher than in many other states. While the trend for the general population converges with the all-India average, for the SCs and STs, the dependence on agricultural labour is over 50 per cent, which is one of the highest among Indian states. Thus the percentage of agricultural labour in the population in the state in 1991 was 53.8 for SC and 55.5 for ST while the Kerala average was 25.5 per cent, which coincided with the all-India average of 26.1 per cent. This is marginally higher than the percentage of agricultural labour among SC population at all-India level at 49.1 per cent (See Table 5.6).

The figure for ‘All’ is the average for all categories, including SC and ST and that is why the disparity does not seem so acute. The average for ‘Others’, if available, would have been more revealing. Conversely, landlessness to the extent of 44.1 per cent among agricultural labour households as a whole indicates how important a category of analysis in its own right Class is. Government of Kerala (GoK) 2001: *Agricultural Census 1995-96*, Preliminary Report on Operational Holdings in Kerala, Department of Economics and Statistics, Thiruvananthapuram.

Table 5.7: Participation of Dalits in Different Sectors of the Kerala Economy during 1961-1991

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sector</th>
<th>1961</th>
<th>1991</th>
<th>Variation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Primary</td>
<td>62.88</td>
<td>73.23</td>
<td>+10.35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secondary</td>
<td>07.21</td>
<td>09.52</td>
<td>+2.31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tertiary</td>
<td>26.07</td>
<td>17.25</td>
<td>-8.82</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


The higher figure for average landholding among Adivasis vis-à-vis Dalits and even 'All' may not be considered surprising because historically, the Adivasis used to live a life of abundance in the lap of nature, as they lived on vast tracts of forestland whereas the Dalits were denied of all ownership rights over land under the dispensation of traditional caste-based feudal society. Ajith (2002) argued that the incidence of landlessness was much more acute among Dalits than in the case of around 30 per cent of the total Adivasi population in the state who constitute the traditionally Adiyala tribes like Paniyar and Adiyar. This argument needs empirical substantiation. However, it sounds true if we go by Table 5.11.

Rural Labour Enquiry Reports reveal the contemporary scenario on the Dalit land question in the state. In 1999-01, 'Land poor' (holding 0.01-0.2 ha) SC Rural Labour Households (RLH) are the highest among 15 major states in Keralam at 37.9 per cent vis-à-vis the all-India average of 16.9 per cent. The percentage of landless SC RLH households is the highest in the Punjab, followed by Haryana in 1999-01. Keralam comes fourth from the lowest with 56.2 per cent as against the corresponding all-India average of 65.7 per cent.

Within the state, SC/Dalit RLH continued to have the highest percentage of 'Landless' among them at 56.2 per cent as compared to 46.1 per cent for All RLH, 47 per cent for OBC RLH and 51.9 per cent for Adivasi RLH. Land poverty is much more severe among Dalit RLH in the state than landlessness. This could be because the land reforms had given homestead land to a large number of the SC landless. Among SC RLH, Landless and Land poor households together (designated by us as 'All Land poor') constitute an overwhelming 94.1 per cent as compared to the corresponding Kerala average of 90.9 per cent and the all-India average of 82.6 per cent.

The Dalit RLH continued to have the lowest average size of landholding per cultivating household in the state at 0.05 hectare during 1999-01 as compared to All RLH at 0.07

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298 Table A.7Y based on Government of India 1999-2001, Statement 3.3 (2).
hectare and Adivasi RLH at 0.09 hectare. During the period, 1977-78 to 1999-01, the average size of holding got reduced in the case of All RLH from 0.16 hectare to less than half at 0.07 hectare, for Dalit RLH, it got similarly reduced to less than half from 0.11 hectare to 0.05 hectare and for Adivasi RLH, it got drastically reduced from 0.47 hectare to a mere 0.09 hectare.299

In 1977-78, following land reforms, Land poor (holding 0.01-0.2 hectare) SC RLH in Keralam was the highest among 15 major states at 84.4 per cent vis-à-vis the much lower all-India average of 41.6 per cent. Keralam was followed by Bihar in the second position with 67.2 per cent and West Bengal in the third position with 54.4 per cent, in this respect. Within the state, Dalit RLH had the highest percentage of Land poor among them at 84.4 per cent in 1977-78 as compared to 74.7 per cent for All RLH and 55.4 per cent for Adivasi RLH. Notably, the Dalit RLH in the post-land reform 1977-78 had the lowest average size of holding per cultivating household in the state at 0.11 hectare as compared to All RLH at 0.16 hectare and Adivasi RLH at 0.47 hectare (Table A.11 in Appendices).300

During 1977-78 to 1999-01, SC RLH 'All Land poor' in the state rose from 84.4 per cent to 94.1 per cent, where the Kerala average for All at 74.7 per cent rose to 90.9 per cent and the Land poor ST RLH phenomenally rose from 55.4 per cent to 90 per cent.301

A study on migration has also pointed out that the lowest probability for migration, both emigration as well as out-migration, was among SCs i.e., 15 per cent of the general average for emigration and 50 per cent for out-migration. Lack of assets to enable them to emigrate may be the major reason, besides lack of social networks abroad. Zachariah et al. say, “Emigration is a costly venture. An average emigrant from Kerala spent Rs. 44,000 to go abroad.” The higher returns from manual work considered demeaning to other castes may be an added incentive for retaining them in the home-state. The SCs constituted only 1.4 per cent among emigrants and only about 5 per cent even among out-migrants.302

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We have already observed in Chapter I how the relative disparity between social groups like Adivasis and Dalits on the one hand with the general population in the state is quite high with respect to literacy, for instance.

**The Socio-economic Location of Dalits and Adivasis among Agrarian Classes**

Within the Rural Labour Households (RLH) in Keralam, the average number of those engaged in agricultural labour within the Adivasi and Dalit Rural Labour Households being at 33.6 per cent and 25.1 per cent, respectively were significantly higher than among ‘All’ at 14.7 per cent. The corresponding figures at all-India level are 36.4 per cent and 32.8 per cent, for Adivasis and Dalits respectively and does not mark a huge difference with ‘All’ at 30.8 per cent, unlike in the case of Keralam. With over 14 per cent of SC RLH engaged in non-agricultural labour as their usual occupation in 1999-01, Keralam figures in the top slot in this respect, followed by Rajasthan with over 12 per cent, followed by Assam and Haryana with over 9 per cent, Punjab and Tamil Nadu with over 8 per cent. Similarly, with over 14 per cent of ST RLH engaged in non-agricultural labour as their usual occupation in 1999-01, Keralam figures second in this respect, followed by Rajasthan with over 20 per cent (Table 5.8 below & Tables A.13-A.15 in Appendices).  

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Keralam</th>
<th>India</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>All</td>
<td>SC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agricultural Labour</td>
<td>14.7</td>
<td>25.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Agricultural Labour</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>14.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Occupations</td>
<td>6.3</td>
<td>3.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Occupation*</td>
<td>63.1</td>
<td>57.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


* Presumably, this includes a great majority of women involved in unpaid household work.

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Landlessness profile of Dalits and Adivasis vis-à-vis All Agricultural Labour Households

In the preceding pages, we have analysed the indicators related to Rural Labour Households (RLH). An analysis of the landholding status of Agricultural Labour Households (ALH) *per se* could be more revealing as they relate directly to primarily agrarian sections. In 1999-01, among Agricultural Labour Households in Keralam, Dalits had a greater proportion of households without cultivated land at 53.7 per cent, much higher than for ‘All’ at 44.1 per cent and for even Adivasis at 46.5 per cent. Conversely, landlessness to the extent of 44.1 per cent among Agricultural Labour Households as a whole indicates how important Class is, as a category of analysis in its own right.

Table 5.9: Percentage Distribution Within Social Categories With & Without Cultivated Land, of Agricultural Labour Households in Keralam and India during 1999-2001

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Social Category</th>
<th>Agricultural Labour Households</th>
<th>Keralam</th>
<th>India</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>With Land</td>
<td>Without Land</td>
<td>Total</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All</td>
<td>55.89</td>
<td>44.11</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SC</td>
<td>46.26</td>
<td>53.74</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ST</td>
<td>53.53</td>
<td>46.47</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OBC</td>
<td>56.28</td>
<td>43.72</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Table 5.10: Percentage Distribution Within Social Categories With & Without Cultivated Land, of Agricultural Labour Households in Keralam and India during 1977-78

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Social Category</th>
<th>Agricultural Labour Households</th>
<th>Keralam</th>
<th>India</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>With Land</td>
<td>Without Land</td>
<td>Total</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All</td>
<td>87.48</td>
<td>12.53</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SC</td>
<td>81.86</td>
<td>18.15</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ST</td>
<td>75.00</td>
<td>25.00</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OBC</td>
<td>Not available</td>
<td>Not available</td>
<td>Not available</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


104 The figure for ‘All’ is the average for all categories, including SC and ST and that is why the disparity does not seem so acute. The average for ‘Others’ would have been more revealing.
It may also be admitted that Keralam ranks the second lowest among Indian states in terms of landlessness among ‘All’ ALH at 44.1 per cent during 1999-01, Uttar Pradesh with 38.1 per cent being at the lowest among 15 major states. Similarly, among SC ALH, Keralam figures third lowest with 53.7 per cent landlessness among 15 major Indian states during 1999-01, Uttar Pradesh with 37.2 per cent and Orissa with 49.7 per cent faring better in this respect. The level of landlessness among ST ALH in the state at 46.5 per cent during 1999-01 was similar to the corresponding figure at all-India level at 48.3 per cent. However, it may be noted that landlessness among ‘All’ ALH was already the lowest among 15 major Indian states at 12.5 per cent during 1977-78, i.e., following the land reforms in the state. Similarly, among SC ALH, landlessness was the lowest at 18.1 per cent in 1977-78. Even in respect of the landlessness of ST ALH during 1977-78, Keralam ranked the third lowest among 15 major states with 25 per cent, Rajasthan with 24.4 per cent and Bihar with 19.4 per cent figuring below it.305

In terms of landlessness among ALH in 1999-01, the relative gap of SCs with All within the state was 9.63 percentage points and of ST, 2.36 percentage points. The corresponding gap at all-India level where the relative gap of SC with All was 7.35 percentage points, of ST with All was minus 8.66 per cent and of OBC with All was minus 2.76 percentage points. However, in absolute terms, these deprived sections are better off in Keralam than at the all-India level. Thus SC ALH in Keralam has lesser share of landless among them (54 per cent) than at all-India level (64 per cent). Similarly, there are less landless among OBC ALH in Keralam at 44 per cent, as compared to 54 per cent at all-India level. Likewise, there are only 46 per cent landless among ST ALH in Keralam, i.e., slightly below the percentage of landless STs at all-India level at 48 per cent (Table 5.9).

Let us examine the pattern of landholdings soon after the land reforms. In absolute terms in 1977-78, the incidence of landlessness in case of the Agricultural Labour Households (ALH) among the deprived sections in Keralam was quite small (18 per cent for SC and 25 per cent for ST) as compared to their condition at all-India level (57 per cent and 48 per cent, respectively). But within Keralam, the disparity with the state average of landlessness among All ALH was marginally higher for SC at 5.62 percentage points in keeping with the corresponding gap at all-India level at 5.39 per cent and the gap was already much wider in the state for ST at 12.47 percentage points vis-à-vis the corresponding gap at all-India at minus 2.9 per cent (Table 5.10).

Between 1977-78 to 1999-01, in terms of landlessness, the relative gap between SC ALH and All ALH in Keralam has widened from 5.62 per cent to 9.63 per cent. The corresponding disparity in case of ST ALH has narrowed within the state from 12.47 per cent to 2.36 per cent, probably because of the increasing rate of landlessness of the general population. At all-India level, the corresponding disparity with All ALH in case of SC ALH increased from 5.39 per cent to 7.35 per cent for SC, while it further narrowed from minus 2.9 per cent to minus 8.66 per cent for ST (Tables 5.9 & 5.10).

However, as for landlessness in absolute terms among ALH within the state, there was a quantum leap from 18 per cent to 54 per cent for SC, marking a three-fold increase and 25 per cent to 46 per cent for ST marking almost a two-fold increase. Even in the case of All ALH in Keralam, the increase in landlessness in absolute terms was sharp from 13 per cent to 44 per cent, marking more than a three-fold increase. Correspondingly, at all-India level, landlessness in absolute terms among SC has gone up from 57 per cent to only 64 per cent. This compares with landlessness for All at all-India level going up from 51 per cent to only 57 per cent. In case of ST, landlessness in absolute terms at all-India level has remained somewhat stable at 48 per cent (Tables 5.9 & 5.10). This analysis reveals that the contemporary agrarian scenario within the state is marked by the landlessness of the actual tillers on the land i.e., the ALH. This amply supports our view that the project of land reforms needs renewal.

Quite in tune with what we have argued earlier, Adivasis have traditionally lived on vast tracts of forestland and this explains their better position in terms of landholding. Dalits have been denied access to landed property under the traditional caste-based, feudal society and this could explain their continuing penury. Landlessness of Dalits in the state has gone up during 1977-78 to 1999-01 period with respect to both disparity and in absolute terms. The increase in absolute terms during this period has been very striking in case of both 'All ALH' and SCs. The extent of landlessness of 'All ALH' quite strikingly reveals the class dimension of the land question. The deprivation in land relations in caste terms is a continuing phenomenon and yet the class dimension has strikingly come to the fore by 1999-01.

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278 It may be recalled that the process of land alienation through the major waves of migration of peasantry to the hilly terrain inhabited by the Adivasis, particularly in the Malabar region, was over by around 1960.
Table 5.11: Social Category-wise Percentage Distribution of Rural Labour Households With and Without Cultivated Land as Proportion of All Agricultural Labour Households in Keralam and in India during 1999-2001

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Social Category</th>
<th>Agricultural Labour Households</th>
<th>Keralam</th>
<th>India</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Population %: 2001</td>
<td>With Land</td>
<td>Without Land</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SC</td>
<td>9.81</td>
<td>12.72</td>
<td>14.78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ST</td>
<td>1.14</td>
<td>1.91</td>
<td>1.65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OBC</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>24.19</td>
<td>18.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


According to Census 2001, Adivasis constitute merely 1.14 per cent of the total population of the state and Dalits constitute 9.81 per cent of the population of the state. However, the intensity of the representation of SC Rural Labour Households (RLH) among the total Agricultural Labour Households (ALH) in the state at 27.5 per cent is nearly three times their proportion in the total population. Moreover, well over half of them (14.78 per cent) are landless. At all-India level, Dalits have a representation among ALH of more than twice the proportion of their population and two-thirds of them are landless.

As for the Adivasi RLH among the total ALH in the state, their proportion at 3.56 per cent is more than three times vis-à-vis their proportion in the total population of the state. Nearly half of them (1.65 per cent) are landless. Adivasis at all-India level also have representation among ALH well in excess of their proportion in the total population and near about half of them are landless.

**Fisher community**

Anthropologically, the fisher people in India belong to tribal section, although they are officially classified under Backward Castes or Other Backward Castes. As traditional working class, they are among the basic producers in the country, admittedly engaged in 'one of the riskiest professions'.

The fishing community in the state in 1996 numbered 7,69,000 people living in 222 fishing villages. As a proportion of the total population of the state in 1991, this constituted only 2.64 per cent and as a proportion of the total population of the state in
2001, merely 2.42 per cent. High child mortality, low literacy, low electrification of houses and poor sanitation were reported among them.\textsuperscript{307} The fisher people in the state has been designated as a patent example of an ‘outlier’ community that has been excluded from the benefits or social achievements of the ‘Kerala model’ of development.\textsuperscript{308} The issues concerning the substantial section of the traditional fisher community in the state has hardly ever entered the mainstream discourse even during the Communist movement. During the early 20\textsuperscript{th} century, the era of social reforms, the fisher people in the state had, to some extent, succeeded in constituting themselves into a single fisher community identity cutting across divisions into various castes and sub-castes, Pandit Karuppan playing a very important role in this respect. The coastal people in the state today are a divided lot, not merely as classes but along communal, partisan pro-establishment political party lines. The political movements waged by the traditional fisher people for a ban on trawling during the breeding season was both a class and environmental movement. Today, however, foreign-funded voluntary organisations have come to dominate the scene. And the movement against big vessels depleting fishery resources still remains at the level of tokenism, although it was visualised as logical next step of a movement against trawling directed against boat owners.

Let us examine the status of the fisher community in the state, in the light of the recent tsunami disaster. The tsunami waves that struck the coasts on 26 December 2004 left more than 176 people dead in Kerala state,\textsuperscript{309} out of which Kollam district alone accounted for 142 deaths.\textsuperscript{310} It was in Alappad panchayat under Karunagappally taluk where a large number of people lost their lives.\textsuperscript{311} The lack of a sea-safety warning system, a predatory process of ‘development’ involving the blatant violations of the Coastal Regulatory Zone (CRZ) regulations by vested interests edging out the traditional fisher folk to well-within the danger zones along the sea-coast, and most importantly, mineral sand mining along the coasts and the destruction of the other natural defences like mangroves can be identified as the reasons that made this calamity into a mass disaster.

\textsuperscript{310} Meppayin 2005.
Sadly, the prime role of sand mining in the tsunami disaster has been wholly left out of the analysis by the mainstream media and prominent academics working on the area.\(^\text{312}\)

Coastal Regulatory Zone (CRZ) regulations in India were put in place in 1991 but were subject to gross violations. Coastal stretches influenced by tidal action up to 500 meters on the landward side from the high tide line (HTL) and the land between the low tide line and high tide line was designated as the Coastal Regulation Zone (CRZ). It is supposed to be a 'no development' zone. In other words, developmental activities including mining, industries and construction are banned within the CRZ with a few exclusive exceptions like ports and harbours, defence establishments and thermal plants that require waterfront. Up to 200 metres from the HTL is especially protected. Yet 200 to 500 metres from the HTL has been permitted for fisher people's houses and is conditionally permitted for hotels and resorts, except in ecologically sensitive areas and already well-developed areas.\(^\text{313}\)

Acquisition of land along the coasts for Special Economic Zones (SEZs), tourism development and developmental activities like mining, has edged out the fisher people to well within the danger-prone CRZ in many areas. Against this background of large-scale displacement of the traditional fisher people from their coastal habitats, the 'Right to Safe Habitat' of the fisher people needs to be underlined. There have even been militant protests against mining at Alappad several years back which were allegedly contained through a combination of repression, co-option and a policy of 'divide and rule'. Sharp local contradiction had come to the fore along the coastal belts of Alappad panchayat in Kollam district on the issue of mineral sand mining. There have also been struggles at Bakel in Kasaragode district against land acquisition by the tourism lobby. Following the post-tsunami rehabilitation, the fisher people of Alappad were deeply apprehensive that if they are relocated at far off localities eastward, their traditional work and livelihoods would be adversely affected. It is then, important to respect the 'Right to Self-Determination' of the fisherfolk in deference to their discretions on issues such as whether or not to take up residence beyond the CRZ.


\(^{313}\) Sudarshana 1999: “Coastal zone regulations / India”; 28 May (http://www.csriwisepractices.org/?read=40 (09.01.2005)). The recently submitted Swaminathan Committee report concerning coastal areas has been opposed by fisher people’s organisations for undermining CRZ regulations in favour of the mining and developmental lobbies.
The recommendations of Murari Committee, which were approved by the Central cabinet in 1996 are still pending implementation. They had included: implementation of Coastal Regulation Zone (CRZ) notification, cancellation of all fishing licences to foreign vessels, the establishment of a fisheries ministry at the Centre\textsuperscript{314}, supply of adequate fuel at subsidised rates to the fisherfolk, etc.\textsuperscript{315}

The coast sand dunes of Keralam are enriched with six minerals, namely, ilmenite, rutile, zircon, monazite, leucoxene (brown ilmenite), sillimanite and garnet. Kollam and Alappuzha districts are the most potential source of these mineral deposits along a coastline that stretches about 150 km.\textsuperscript{316} Minerals like Zircon and Monazite find use in the nuclear industry.\textsuperscript{317} The nuclear ambitions that motivate the mining interests here should not be overlooked.

The worst affected area in the state during the tsunami was Alappad panchayat in Kollam district. Alappad panchayat lies on a narrow 18 kilometre stretch between Travankoor-Shornur canal on the east and the Arabian sea on the west, with the Kayamkulam estuary to the north. In some areas, the breadth of the land is only 50 metres. The survivors here were unanimous in saying that but for extensive dredging away of mineral sand from the coasts, the fury of the sea would not have been so terrible.\textsuperscript{318}

In fact, as was admitted by Mr. K.P. Rajendran, Managing Director, KMML, the company had been allotted blocks 1,3,5 and 7 on the 22-km stretch from Neendakara to Karunagapally. IRE has blocks 2,4,6 and 8.\textsuperscript{319} In block 4 alone at least 65 people were reported dead. Many people were killed in blocks 1,2 and 3 as well.\textsuperscript{320} Indeed, the genuine long-pending demand of the local people for a safe habitat and their demand that a part of the profits of the companies should be shared with them for their welfare have fallen on deaf ears. The 22 km. coastal stretch from Neendakara to Kayamkulam has a heavy mineral content of 127 million tonnes with ilmenite content of 80 million tonnes.\textsuperscript{321}

\textsuperscript{314} As of now, coastal areas are controlled by the Ministry of Environment and Forests.
\textsuperscript{317} Zircon is used as structural materials in nuclear power reactors. The mineral 'monazite' is radioactive as it contains thorium and uranium.
\textsuperscript{318} M.P. Veerendrakumar 2005: "Kaathukal niraye kadalinte alarcha maathram" (The ears resound with the roar of the sea - Malayalam), Mathrubhoomi newspaper, 8 January, p. 4.
\textsuperscript{319} Nair 2004.
\textsuperscript{320} Veerendrakumar 2005.
\textsuperscript{321} www.keralaindustry.org.
In late April 2003, the Kerala Minister for Industries, P.K. Kunhalikcutty had announced in the Assembly that a 17-km stretch of state-owned coastal land that lies north of the Alappad panchayat i.e., from Kayamkulam estuary to Thottappilly in Alappuzha district would be leased out to Kerala Rare Earths and Minerals Limited (KREML), a joint sector company, to conduct mineral sand mining for twenty years. "The unprecedented haste with which the lease was awarded evoked suspicion." The heavy mineral content along this stretch was estimated at 17 million tonnes, with ilmenite content of 9 million tonnes. Arattupuzha village is a most densely populated piece of land that comes along this stretch. The tsunami disaster had affected this area and it is evidence enough that the mining proposal was quite ill-conceived. Following public outcry, the government has been buying time to implement the proposal. The proposed mining poses the disastrous potential of the sea engulfing the adjoining Kuttanad marshlands, known as ‘the rice bowl of the state’, which is below the sea level. This stretch has a very fragile eco-system, which is highly erosion-prone. Added to this is the proximity to the Vembanad lake – the largest water body in Keralam that cuts through Alappuzha and Kottayam districts.

In Keralam, it has been pointed out that indiscriminate construction of seawalls would hinder fishing activities and that it is to the benefit of the construction lobby and the ‘commission agents’ in the government that it is being promoted. A judicious mix of seawalls where they are most needed and mangroves and coastal green cover comprising varieties of pandanus and other locally suitable plants has been proposed as a viable alternative.

From available information about the Kerala scenario, if we are to identify the principal factor that made the tsunami into a mass disaster, we could say that the single most important factor was sand mining along the coasts. Mining, principally being a public undertaking under the State, we could pinpoint the culpability of the State and the bureaucrat capital under State ownership and control as primarily responsible for making these calamities into massive human tragedies. It is only rightful to demand that the State own up responsibility for this major mining/industrial disaster that may be

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223 www.keralaindustry.org.
224 Sekhar & Jayadev 2003.
225 Jacob 2003a.
227 Mere State ownership under the so-called ‘public sector’ does not ensure a pro-people outcome. The question of control over these enterprises is crucial here. Democratising the control over these enterprises may rightly be proposed as an alternative to privatisation.
228 It is granted that there have been local variations and specificities to this tragedy and that it was not mining that could have been the primary reason for the heavy death toll in each of the places affected.

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bracketed in the genre of Bhopal gas tragedy of 1984. It is also time to bring under scrutiny the dominant paradigm of 'developmentalism' that fails to take into account the concerns of welfare of the masses.

The fisher people in the state are often a neglected lot in government policy, the social mainstream and even in the parlance of the left wing movement – a typical case of an 'outlier' community. Nevertheless, they constitute an important part of the subaltern classes in the state. Their problems have not received attention even to the extent that the problems of Adivasis and Dalits have. As we have argued, these problems cannot be reduced to a Class angle and needs specific autonomous attention.

The Status of Religious Minorities in the State

An analysis is called for, of the position of the religious minorities in the context of the rise of majoritarian Hindutva politics, particularly since the late 1980s and its growth throughout the phase of neo-liberal reforms. However, within the space of this work, we are able to share only some insights that would need further substantiation. The religious minorities in the state, Muslims (24.7 per cent) and Christians (19.0 per cent), together constitute 43.7 per cent of the population of the state in 2001. Other religious minorities have insignificant presence in the state. At all-India level, Christians and Muslims constitute 13.4 per cent and 2.3 per cent, respectively and together with other religious minorities comprise of only 19.5 per cent of the total population in the country.339

Apparently, the religious minorities in the state are more powerful vis-à-vis their counterparts in the rest of India.330 Historically, a small section of the Syrian Christians and Mappila Muslims had made good fortunes out of maritime trade with West Asia. Syrian Christians have also improved their lot through modern agriculture, especially in the plantations. Employment opportunities in the Muslim-dominated Persian Gulf countries is a major factor that has improved the lot of Muslims and other sections of the population in the state.

As for the literacy percentage for population aged 7 and above, among religious communities in India, the Census 2001 showed that Muslims had 59.1 per cent literacy as compared to 64.8 per cent average literacy rate at the all-India level and Christians did better at 80.3 per cent literacy.331 ‘Other Religions and Persuasions’ (excluding Sikhs, Budhists and Jains) had the lowest literacy figure at 47.0 per cent. The literacy rate of Muslims in Keralam was the highest among major states at 89.4 per cent. Literacy rate

330 See Appendix I: “The Caste Composition of Kerala Society – An Introduction”.
among Christians in the state was well above 90 per cent. A Sample Survey of income inequality among religious communities in India by National Council of Applied Economic Research (NCAER) in 1994 showed that the annual income among the Muslim population in India was 3678 rupees per annum, which compared poorly with the all-India average of rupees 4485. Christians fared better with an annual per capita income of rupees 5920. On both these counts, namely, income and literacy, the figures for Muslims at all-India level was lower than that of Hindus, Christians, and the All India averages and that of Christians better than all-India averages and the averages for the other two communities. The migration of better off Muslims to Pakistan during the partition, and Muslims being at the receiving end of recurrent communal riots and discrimination could have been the reasons for their penury at the all-India level.

Historically, these minority religions have been a democratic force in Kerala society as many from the lower castes had joined the Muslim and Christian religions since the adherents of these religions were spared of the rigours of the caste system.

A path-breaking study by (late) M. Muralidharan finds that there was no ‘Hindu’ identity obtained in the pre-colonial India and that Hindu identity was the contribution of colonial modernity and that there was no rigid demarcation between the cultural boundaries of religious identities prior to the colonial influence. The “calm legalism” of Sankara in the eighth century is revealing: “[A] born Sudra has no right to knowledge”. The fact that there was no ‘Hindu’ community partly explains why kings like Vikramaditya Varaguna patronised Buddhist centres on the Kerala coast or the Chera dynasty patronised the Jews and the Syrian Christians and the Zamorins of Kozhikode gave grants to mosques. M. Muralidharan found that it was pointless to look for religious communities in pre-modern Keralam although there were territorial units like desom, thara, kara, and at its strongest, naidu. The Portuguese traveller in early 16th century, Duarte Barbosa had identified seventeen castes in Malabar but his account did not have the conception of the ‘Hindu’. In order to trace the contours of identity formation, he

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334 The recent report by Rajinder Sachar Commission should be of immense relevance in this regard.
335 Please refer Appendix ... (The Caste Composition of Kerala Society – An Introduction) for details of the traditional caste system in the state.
337 M. Muralidharan 1996, p. 245; as cited from Brahma Sutra Bhashya, 1.3.34.
338 Ibid, p. 246.
339 Ibid, p. 244.
examined three sources: (1) colonial administrative writings, (2) missionary writings, and (3) writings of social reform movements.

Despite the relatively strong presence of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), the paramilitary core of the Hindutva politics, the Bharatiya Janata Party, the political wing of the Hindutva camp, could not as yet open an account in the elections to the parliament and legislative assemblies in the state. The reason for this could lie in the delicate balance of politics between the two coalition fronts in the state. Moreover, the relatively more secular Left Democratic Front (LDF) has majority of its cadres drawn from the Hindu castes. Thus CPI-M, the leading LDF constituent itself, is supposedly, the biggest ‘Hindu’ party in the state, meaning that they have in their fold the greatest number of Hindus than any other party in the state. The religious minorities are under the influence of the United Democratic Front (LDF) led by the Congress party. Apparently, the hold of clergy is stronger among the Christian and Muslim masses vis-à-vis among the Hindu castes. The reason for the state not having had any major communal riot in the recent decades could be owing to the historical influence of the anti-caste social reform movements of a secular character. Nevertheless, it needs to be noted that communal incidents do take place in the state. Thus 64 incidents of communal violence had taken place in the state during the preceding two years, as was admitted by then-Chief Minister, A.K. Antony in mid-2003.341

It would not be inappropriate to mention that a ‘minority within the minority communities’, particularly the Christian churches and Muslim elite within the state have cornered massive benefits out of the minority status accorded, particularly to the educational sector run by minority communities. This has also led to charges of appeasement of minorities in general, in turn, stoking the passions of Hindutva communalism turned against the masses of the minority communities.

We would view that it would be a gross misconception to view the Hindutva movement in India from the angle of a mere communalism-secularism binary without looking at its basis in political economy or the 'class basis of communalism'. Moreover, it would be rather misleading to view the phenomenon from a local or regional angle because Hindutva communalism coincides with the phase of neo-liberal reforms in the country. In analysing the character of the fascistic trend in Indian politics, a determinant factor could be the imperatives of global capitalism of generating surpluses from the peripheries. Moreover, the role of the Indian big capital, apparently the leading class in the dominant-class combine in the state and the influence of the semi-feudal relations in the Indian

countryside also need to be considered. The Muslim community within the state has been restive in the context of the rise of Hindutva communalism particularly since the Ramjanmabhoomi movement in 1989 and the US aggression in Iraq in 2004. The movement of this minority community had a strong tendency to link globalisation and the fascistic trend within the country and it does not seem disorientated in this respect.

The international prescription of broad alliances and militant struggles may be valid for fighting the fascist movement even in India and the fight at the cultural/ideological realm needs to be taken seriously since communalisation of people's minds is, indeed, a potent threat.\textsuperscript{342}

**Migrant Labourers within the State**

The trend of Malayalee migration out of the state has become quite common ever since mid-1970s. The menial jobs within the state have increasingly been entrusted to migrant labourers from outside the state. If Tamil migrant labourers constituted the major chunk of these migrant workers within the state, they are increasingly being replaced by migrant workers from other states, as distant as Bengal and Bihar. Researchers in the field of demography point out, “After a lapse of about 60 years, Kerala has again become a net immigrating state.”\textsuperscript{343} It is the shortage of labourers for performing menial jobs within the state and the relatively high money wages available within the state as compared to other states in the country that has primarily led to such in-migration. Of late, some construction companies have preferred this option of bringing in labour from distant states on short-term contracts probably because they are somewhat ‘rootless’ within the state.\textsuperscript{344} Even Tamil migrant workers have stronger roots within the state, given their proximity to their home-state and linguistic affinity of Tamil with Malayalam. There has been a hue and cry in the media recently, regarding the pitiable condition of migrant workers in Punj Lloyd multinational construction company. This had followed the death of two workers of this company. It is legitimate to expect that Malayalees who contribute their wage labour in other parts of India and other parts of the world should be more...
sensitive to the problems of the migrant labourers engaged in coolie labour within Keralam.

**VII. GENDER AND ITS INTERFACES WITH CLASS WITHIN KERALAM**

Within the space of this chapter, we are unable to dwell at length on the question of women's rights in the state. Nevertheless, we would like to put down some insights, which may need substantiation through further research. Ajith (2002) successfully brings out the linkage between class and caste but he has not attempted a similar analysis linking class and gender, probably indicating the blind-spots of gender-sensitivity even in radical politics. Let us attempt this even though in a rather sketchy manner.

Women's rights activism has rightly focused their attacks on socially constructed gender inequalities rather than naturally endowed differences between sexes. Thus says the 'feminist existentialist' Simone de Beauvoir, in her classic work, *The Second Sex*:

"Woman is determined not by her hormones or by mysterious instincts, but by the manner in which her body and her relation to the world are modified through the action of others than herself." 345 Again, she says, "... this is how woman is brought up, without ever being impressed with the necessity of taking charge of her own existence". 346 The targeted end is both equality and difference in the realm of gender relations. Let us, once again, invoke the authority of de Beauvoir: "... those who make much of 'equality in difference' could not with good grace refuse to grant me the possible existence of differences in equality". 347

Quite in tune with Frederick Engels, Simone de Beauvoir makes an honest admission of the less-acknowledged truth, "Woman was dethroned by the advent of private property. and her lot through the centuries has been bound up with private property: her history in large part is involved with that of the patrimony." 348 This should be revealing, at the theoretical plane, of the critical links between Class and Gender. Nevertheless, even "production"-centric or even "producer"-centric paradigms cannot render justice to femininity as they lack adequate emphasis on the function of 'reproduction' that take up a good part of women's lives. Engels himself in his "materialistic conception" had realised that "the production of the means of subsistence" and "the production of human beings" together make "the determining factor in history". The "social institutions" of any given society "are conditioned by both kinds of production": "by the stage of development of

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347 Ibid, p. 766.
348 Ibid, p. 87.
labour, on the one hand, and of the family, on the other."\textsuperscript{349} Engels cites the draft of the \textit{German Ideology}, the joint work of both Marx and Engels as follows: "The first division of labour is that between man and woman for child breeding."\textsuperscript{350} To this, Engels adds the honest acknowledgement, "The first class antagonism which appears in history coincides with the development of the antagonism between man and woman in monogamous marriage, and the first class oppression with that of the female sex by the male."\textsuperscript{351}

Women constitute half of humanity and they are rightful heirs of 'half the earth and half the sky' and yet the fact remains that it is basically a 'man's world' that we have. As the \textit{Human Development Report 1995} notes, "[W]omen still constitute 70 percent of the world's poor and two-thirds of the world's illiterates. They occupy only 14 percent of managerial and administrative jobs, 10 percent of parliamentary seats and 6 percent of cabinet positions".\textsuperscript{352}

Speaking of the Class-Gender interface, the social oppression of women has a non-class specificity, irrespective of their class location. Thus any woman of whatever class can be a victim of sexual harassment or crimes like rape. And yet gender oppression gets substantive social content according to the class location of the women in question. Scholars like Gail Omvedt had made a distinction between 'family patriarchy' and 'social patriarchy', the former governing the norms and structure pertaining to the family and the latter governing the gender relations of the larger society in question. As a rule, women of propertied classes and social groups claiming higher status constrained women within the strict boundaries of family patriarchy. In other words, women of these sections had to carry the burden of the high status of their families. Traditionally, the plight of Namboodiri \textit{antarijanams} is an instance \textit{par excellence}. Women of property-less classes and social groups with lower status were freer within their homes than their counterparts in the higher sections, also because poorer households have to function like double engine vehicles propelled by the earned incomes of both the parents in order to sustain themselves. Mridul Eapen (2004) says, "[P]oor working women have to contend with larger structures of patriarchy in discriminatory wages and occupational segregation".\textsuperscript{353}

These are, however, aspects of social patriarchy which are intertwined with class oppression. It is true that women from lower classes and lower castes have to face multiple layers of social oppression. The intensity of oppression within upper class, upper


\textsuperscript{350} Ibid, p. 65.

\textsuperscript{351} Ibid, p. 66.


\textsuperscript{353} Eapen 2004, p. 8.
caste families and the women from these families being better educated and having
greater leisure could be the critical reasons why mainstream feminism has more of an
elite orientation. To cite a clear instance, in the case of Nainamkonam evictions and
serious violence against Dalit women in the year 2005 (dealt with in detail in Chapter VI).
the women's organisations in the state had failed to respond sympathetically.

The much-lauded efforts at demographic transition in the state towards low fertility rates
have rightly been critiqued from a feminist angle. J. Devika had pointed out that 1960s
and 1970s had witnessed intense class confrontations sufficient to force the State to yield
important concessions as welfare measures. Less noticed were the tensions on the home
front, over work and domestic authority. But public discussions of the woes of the
working women amply revealed the problems of 'adjustment' within the family. "In both
the aforementioned sensitive areas" – tensions on the social and domestic fronts – "FP
[Family Planning] appeared to offer at least a partial solution, lightening the load and
minimising the necessity for a politically-charged confrontation."

Given the favourable sex ratio (FMR), in Kerala state, women constitute more than half
the population. Thus in the female-male ratio, there were 106 women for 100 men in
Keralam in 1999 and the corresponding figure for all-India was only 93 and for China
94. The figures on Gender-related indicators reveal the status of women in Kerala
society vis-à-vis the rest of the country. The female-male ratio (FMR) in 2001 was 1,058
to 1000 in Keralam which is the highest in the country. Keralam is followed by T.N. in
the second position in this respect with 986. The lowest FMR is found in Haryana with
861 followed by Punjab with 874. The position of Keralam in this respect is enviable
since the country average was only 933.

534 J. Devika 2005: "The Malayali sexual revolution: Sex, 'liberation' and family planning in
Keralam", Contributions to Indian Sociology, vol. 39, no. 3. According to K.P. Kannan, the
combined benefit of all the welfare programmes initiated by the state government amounted to
around 21 per cent of the annual expenditure of rural households during 1980s (K.P. Kannan
1995: "Public intervention and poverty alleviation: A study of the declining incidence of
poverty in Kerala, India", Development and Change, vol. 28, no. 4, p. 722; as cited on D.
Narayana p. 28).

535 J. Devika 2005: "The Malayali sexual revolution: Sex, 'liberation' and family planning in

536 Sources for India and China: World Development Indicators 2001; United Nations Population
Division 1999; Human Development Report 1994: p. 146; World Development Indicators 2000:
tables 1.4 and 2.10; Human Development Report 2001: table 7; World Development Report 2000-
1: Tables 1.3, 11, 13.

For data on Keralam and other Indian states: Female-male ratio, 2001: Government of India 2001b:
‘Provisional Population Totals’, Census of India 2001, Series 1 (India), Paper 1 of 2001, Office of
the Registrar General, New Delhi, p. 141; As cited in Dreze & Sen 2002: Table A.2: ‘India in
Comparative Perspective’.

(ii) Proportion of women aged 20-24, married before age 18, 1998-99: International Institute of
440; cited in Dreze & Sen 2002: Table A.3, Part 5: Other Gender-related Indicators.
There are certain other indicators of female advantage in the state that are mentioned by Dreze and Sen. Thus in 1998-99, the proportion of women aged 20-24, married before 18 years of age in Keralam was, positively so, only 17 per cent as compared to the all-India average of 50 per cent. This was the third lowest in the country after H.P. (11 per cent) and Punjab (12 per cent). Among ever-married women in 1998-9, aged 15-49 who work outside the household, Keralam had a share of 23 per cent as compared to the all-India figure of 25 per cent. 66 per cent (all-India average: 60 per cent) of the ever-married women in Keralam had access to money, 48 per cent (all-India average: 32 per cent) did not need permission to go to the market and 38 per cent (all-India average: 24 per cent) did not need permission to visit relatives. These indicate the relative advantage of women in Keralam over their counterparts in the rest of India. The share of female employment in total public sector employment, as of 1989 in Keralam was 30 per cent, which was the impressive best among the 17 major states.

By ‘conventional’ and rather unreliable standards set forth by UNDP, the factors taken into consideration for computation of both Human Development Index (HDI) and Gender Development Index (GDI) are: life expectancy at birth, literacy and gross school enrolment ratio, and per capita income. Going by these criteria, Keralam was estimated to have impressive levels of HDI and GDI. HDI in the state was estimated to be 0.773 and close on its heels GDI at 0.746 on a scale of 1.0. HDI in the districts of the state showed no wide variation as it ranged between the lowest in Malappuram district with 0.749 to the highest in Ernakulam district with 0.801. However, GDI in the districts of the state also showed no wide variation except for Malappuram district with a GDI of 0.689. The variation was mainly between Kozhikode district with the second lowest GDI of 0.730 and the highest GDI in Alappuzha district with 0.777. It may be noted that Malappuram

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Ibid, as cited in Dreze & Sen 2002: Table A.3, Part 5: Other Gender-related Indicators.


The indices considered were rather ‘conventional’ and rather unreliable because it does not consider other features critical to human development, some of them qualitative and even the indicators considered can be highly misleading. Thus per capita income (GDP/population) as a measurement of human development can be highly misleading in a class-divided society. Moreover, taking life-span as a criterion of health can be misleading in that people who suffer from ailments that are not life-threatening may not exactly be considered healthy. Literacy level is only a rudimentary indicator of educational achievement in any society. The case of Keralam itself can be instructive in that the state has high levels of literacy and yet a poorly performing system of higher education.
and Kozhikode districts are Muslim-dominated districts -- an ample case for exploration of the apparent linkages between religious discourses and gender unfreedom.

Going by the HDI and GDI indicators, the gender differential in the state would seem quite narrow. The achievements of the state in human development have undoubtedly had some beneficial impact on its women in several important respects. An impressive sex ratio, high levels of women's and girls' literacy, low maternal and infant mortality, longer life-span of women which is quite in keeping with the international trend, the high profile presence of a number of women professionals, especially nurses, migrating out of the state (even if migrating out is not considered an unmixed blessing) are indeed positive indicators. There are also other positive features such as the freedom from conventional restrictions over women's education and inheritance of property. The latter was made possible through the tradition of matrilineal families and the former through social reform efforts in late 19th and early 20th centuries.

It may, however, be noted that several aspects of the emerging scenario is not exactly favourable to women. Thus the juvenile sex ratio or female/male ratio in the 0-6 age group in the state was 958 in 1991 and marginally higher at 963 in 2001, according to the Census reports. This marks a major departure from the favourable sex ratio that has prided Keralam for several decades. As Kodoth and Eapen (2005) say, the attainments of women in the state have been "deployed within dominant frameworks". According to Joseph Tharamangalam and Elzy Tharamangalam, 56 percent of all families in Thruvithamkoor were matrilineal and in the other two regions of the state (Kochi and Malabar), it could only have been higher. Robin Jeffrey (1992) had also held that 56 per

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cent of the people of the state had followed the matrilineal tradition. However, social reform movements and legal reforms brought in place modern patriarchal nuclear families. Hindu matriliny was abolished by 1976. Women’s responsibilities were tied to ‘caring labour’ both in the domestic and public spheres. In other words, patriarchy was actively reconstituted through social reforms.

The “emerging picture of declining property rights, violence and the mental ill health of women” are causes for concern in the state. In 1998-2000, Keralam ranks low among states in terms of dowry deaths, marking an incidence of 0.1 per one lakh population as compared to the all-India average of 0.7. Similarly, in ‘kidnapping and abduction’ also Keralam ranked low among the Indian states. However, in case of rape, Keralam in 1999 had the higher figure of 1.63 per lakh population than the all-India average of 1.57; the figure for Keralam had alarmingly risen from 1.33 in 1996 whereas the all-India figure had remained stable at 1.57 during 1996-99. The highly consumerist culture in the state might have constructed women as ‘objects of enjoyment’ to be subjugated through macho strength. The incidence of domestic violence in the state was one of the highest at 7.33 per lakh population where the corresponding all-India figure was lower at 4.43. Even while there should be no debate on the undesirability of domestic violence, the higher rate of domestic violence may not necessarily indicate that women in the state are helpless victims; on the contrary it could well be interpreted as the reaction against a higher level of assertiveness of women against family patriarchy. In the Malayalee popular culture as represented in popular movies, the super-hero Mammootty and the

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370 Kodoth & Eapen 2003, p. 3285.
action-hero, Suresh Gopi are often seen slapping women and this is not popularly seen as offensive but as mark of their masculinity. Another super-hero and even more talented actor Mohanlal is hardly seen slapping women but is popularly held less masculine. Macho behaviour is widely portrayed as masculine in popular movies. During the period of neo-liberal reforms, the total number of crimes against women went up from 1,867 in 1991 to 7,681 in 2004, marking a more than four-fold increase. Incidents of rape rose from 211 to 480, cruelty by husband or relatives marked a stupendous rise from 237 to 3,222.376

The question of women themselves internalising or getting imbued with patriarchal social values has been an important problematic in gender relations. The proverbial ill treatment of the daughter-in-law by mother-in-law in the Indian joint families is an instance in point. Thus National Family Health Survey - II of 1998-99 revealed that 69.4 per cent of women in India and 70.2 per cent of women in Kerala state who had ever experienced violence in their lifetime and 53.3 per cent of women in the country as a whole and 60.8 per cent of women in Keralam who had never experienced violence defended wife-beating on some ground or the other.377 It is notable that the figures for Kerala state were much higher than the country averages, despite the achievements in gender parity in the state.

A recent study in the context of Thiruvananthapuram district in Keralam has identified the negative correlation between domestic violence and women's property rights.378 It speaks of the crucial importance of women's control over economic resources, particularly immovable assets as having a deterrent effect on domestic violence. The conclusions of this study are quite in keeping with the pioneering contribution of Engels that argues how the organisation of the family and the organisation of private property have historically been quite interlinked and in turn, how the State held overriding influence on both these institutions.

The sex segregation of jobs and its perpetuation over time to the disadvantage of women workers have been a perennial concern of feminist and other radical scholars.379 The 'participation of women in social production' since the industrial revolution in the West, has added newer dimensions to this question. The phenomenon, euphemistically called as 'labour flexibility' [or better termed, labour insecurity] under globalisation may mean a

379 Mridul Eapen 2004, p. 5.
larger absorption of the unemployed women into paid work. However, this need not necessarily happen given the capital-intensive orientation of development. Moreover, it can happen only at the expense of the general security of those already employed, both men and women and it would not be fair to invoke the suffering of one section of people, namely, the unemployed, to legitimise the deprivation inflicted on another, namely insecure employees. Labour market segregation may continue to prevail under globalisation. Mridul Eapen (2004) argues that as technology brings up new kinds of work, new categories of ‘women’s work’ get established at the lower rungs of the work hierarchy. The case of IT industry is instructive.

Kodoth and Eapen (2005) find gendered patterns in education and employment in the state. Usually, females in the state undergo longer years of education than males. Whereas the males take up professional or technical education, the females usually opt for general education, except in the case of traditionally 'female professions' such as nursing, teaching, which are rather rewarding and the less rewarding ones such as stenography, clerical work, computer operators, etc. many of which have little prospect for upward mobility. Even when their general education does not lead to gainful employment, it is supposed to intangibly contribute unpaid services like grooming children and possibly, in providing intellectual companionship to their male counterparts. The notions of femininity and masculinity associated with the choice of career need exploration. In the case of women, it is apparently intended to ‘foster domesticity’ -- to cater to “their future domestic careers as wives and mothers”. ([F]or women, full time domesticity is not regarded as unnatural.) On the other hand, in keeping with the notions of masculinity as being able to 'provide for the family', the need to find employment has been central for men. An analysis of the pattern of suicides in the state reveals something significant in this respect. During the year 2003, out of the 9438 persons who resorted to suicides in the state, 6935 were male, constituting 73.48 per cent of the total suicides; 5893 of the male victims of suicides were literate but not educated above the matriculate level; 5344 of the male victims were married; 883 of the male victims were unemployed; 1520 of the male victims were self-employed engaged in farming/agricultural activity; 4248 were aged 30-59 years of age. Seemingly, the dominant pattern that emerges is that of unsuccessful males in the prime of their life.

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381 Eapen 2004, p. 12.
384 Ibid. p. 4.
385 Ibid.
resorting to suicides. This shows how the dominant patriarchal social norm associated with notions of masculinity of male being the provider of the family is being quite oppressive on men. This, however, is not to negate the class dimension of the question but only to extend and enhance it.

We would further observe that in keeping with the prevailing notions of femininity in the state, women try to shun manual labour outside the household. Women keep alive their aspirations for white-collar employment while continuing longer in education.\textsuperscript{387} Barbara Chasin (1990) notes that "women seem to prefer unemployment to labouring in the paddy fields".\textsuperscript{388} A complex intermeshing of the gender division of labour between home and the outside, with white-collar culture in a service-dominated economy and pre-existing caste culture implying a \textit{savarna} notion of femininity are visible here. Work in the slush of the paddy field was clearly associated with the traditionally agrarian slave castes and the presently Dalit castes.

40 per cent of the women in the rural areas of the state are in non-agricultural employment and this figure is the highest among the states in the country. And yet it is notable that even for all the aforementioned white-collar aspirations, 60 per cent of the females in rural areas still engage in agricultural work.\textsuperscript{389} A micro-level study in central Keralam found that nearly 75 per cent of the unemployed women cited the reasons for unemployment as not finding jobs commensurate with their qualifications and preferences. Social status and proximity to home were the factors that shaped their preferences.\textsuperscript{390} Men were in a better position to take advantage of migrating out for employment. Remarkably, the underdevelopment of productive forces, however, took a heavier toll of the prospects of women in the state.

Franke and Chasin (1996) found that in several categories of 'outside work', the men:women ratio was only at an average level of 10:1.\textsuperscript{391} Several studies show that male outmigration and remittances increased the domestic work of women and led to their withdrawal from paid manual work.\textsuperscript{392} K.C. Zachariah, \textit{et al} view the troubles of the

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\textsuperscript{389} Kodoth & Eapen 2005, p. 3281.


\end{footnotesize}
'Gulf wives' with their partners far away, worth their while as they could transform "shy dependent girls into self-confident autonomous managers" able to boldly face a man's world. They are confident that this subtle transformation could have more lasting imprint on Kerala society than any material changes brought about by migration. However, the process was not devoid of its complexities as increased dependence on the incomes from their husbands abroad and their own withdrawal from paid work could increase their domesticity and reduce their bargaining power. The phenomenon is not to be considered marginal since 40 per cent of the households in the state were estimated to have had a migrant in 1998. At the state level, there were altogether 3.75 million migrants, with an estimated 6.35 million households in 1998.

According to NSSO estimates, the Work Participation Rate (WPR) of women in the state, except that of tribal women, has declined during the period, 1987-88 to 1999-00 whereas the WPR of men in general has increased. This has been in keeping with the all-India trend. The WPR of women in the state in 1999-00 was lower at 22.9 per cent as compared to 25.4 per cent at all-India level. According to Economic Survey 2000-2001, in 1991, female labour force participation in Keralam was 16 per cent, i.e. below the all-India average of 22 per cent. Keralam comes in the league of lowest-ranking states in this respect. Punjab with 4 per cent, West Bengal and Haryana, each with 11 per cent and Uttar Pradesh with 12 per cent come below Keralam in this respect. The highest ranking states are H.P. with 35 per cent, A.P. with 34 per cent.

The Rural Labour Enquiry Reports based on NSSO estimates bring out much more starkly the declining work participation of women in Rural Labour Households (RLH) in Keralam during 1999-01, in both agricultural and non-agricultural labour as compared to the corresponding figure in 1977-78 (See Table A.17 in Appendices).

A process of 'housewifisation', i.e., a process whereby women are socially defined as housewives, may be on among the RLH in the state. Such a trend, however, is not visible at the all-India level. Thus in 1977-78, out of the total agricultural labourers in RLH in Keralam, 39.4 per cent were women. It declined substantially to 26.6 per cent in

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393 As cited in Kodoth & Eapen 2005, p. 3283.
Keralam during 1999-01. The figure at all-India level was lower vis-a-vis Keralam at 34.6 per cent in 1977-78 and it rose marginally to 36.8 per cent during 1999-01 (See Table A.17 in Appendices).

The corresponding figure for men rose from 59.8 per cent to 73.5 per cent and at the all-India level, it rose marginally from 59.1 per cent to 60.6 per cent. Children's agricultural labour participation among RLH in the state was already at the lowest in the country in 1977-78 at 0.79 per cent. The figure for 1999-01 is unavailable. At all-India level, children's agricultural labour participation came down from 6.4 per cent to 2.6 per cent.

Among non-agricultural labourers among RLH in Keralam in 1977-78, 30.6 per cent were women. This figure further came down to 24.4 per cent in 1999-01. The corresponding figure in 1977-78 for all-India was only 23.5 per cent which declined to 16.4 per cent in 1999-01. This signals a withdrawal by women from 'outside work' in the state as well as in the country as a whole. If it is a withdrawal from poverty-induced labour participation, it may be considered as a positive indicator but a reduction in 'earned income' could lead to lower status for women within the families.

The proportion of women participating in agricultural labour was higher than the corresponding figure for non-agricultural labour in both Keralam and all-India during both the points of time under consideration. There was a marginal increase in agricultural labour participation by women at all-India level but there was substantial decline in non-agricultural labour participation by women in the country as a whole.

In case of Keralam, there was a decline in the labour participation of women in agricultural and non-agricultural labour alike, marking a withdrawal from 'paid outside work' but the decline in agricultural labour participation was sharper, probably marking a process of 'white-collarisation'. At all-India level, there was a marginal increase in agricultural labour participation of women during the period, marking a feminisation of agriculture but a sharp decline in non-agricultural labour participation by women was in evidence.

Similarly, probably, owing to their low social position, children have been more oriented to agricultural labour than to non-agricultural labour at all-India level during both the points of time. But Keralam had more children engaged in non-agricultural work than in agricultural work. Nevertheless their labour has been coming down in both sectors in the country and presumably in the state as well. Children's non-agricultural labour participation has come down from 5.6 per cent to 1.8 per cent at all-India and 3.1 per cent to 0.2 per cent among RLH in Keralam during the period.
Low and declining levels of WPR of women in the state might indicate a process of *de-facto* 'housewifisation' as a result of better income-level of the family. Culturally, however, there is hardly any stigma attached on ‘working women’ in Keralam unlike among North Indian middle classes. The lower work participation rate of women in Keralam vis-à-vis all-India, may well be attributed to the presence of a larger middle class in the state. The freedom to participate in ‘outside work’ if women choose to, is a pre-condition for female labour participation and may indeed be considered liberatory, as with Engels in *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State* since it indicates a breaking out of the shackles of feudal-casteist strictures that confine women to their homes and hearths. Thus Engels says, “The emancipation of women becomes possible only when women are enabled to take part in production on a large, social scale, and when domestic duties require their attention only to a minor degree. And this has become possible only as a result of modern large-scale industry, which not only permits of the participation of women in large numbers, but actually calls for it and, moreover, strives to convert private domestic work also into a public industry.”

But the fact that women do not actually participate in the labour force may not be an indication of the lack of freedom. Higher levels of female work participation in itself may not be considered a positive indicator since it could be a poverty-induced phenomenon. Some scholars have raised doubts about the linkage between empowerment and wage labour for Third World women. Nevertheless, higher ‘earned income’ by women is more or less a sure indicator of their better status and relative independence (with regard to decision making potential, etc.) within the family, across classes. The historical and empirical study by Anna Lindberg among the cashew workers of Keralam, in essence, supports our view. The lower WPR of women could have adverse effects resulting in their greater dependence, making them economically vulnerable, weakening their 'bargaining position'.

Land reforms apparently strengthened patriarchal property relations even among sections that were until then landless, as the land was allotted in the name of the head of the patriarchal household. This is an instance of how the State supported the notion of 'male breadwinner'. According to Saradamoni, land reforms bypassed the rights of even

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402 Eapen 2004, p. 4.
vulnerable categories of women. There has been a “thinning” of women’s inheritance rights as against the proud matrilineal past of the state. Thus Agricultural Census of Kerala, 1995-96 shows that women hold less than a third of the number and area of operational holdings held by men. Moreover, in the above 10 hectares category, women hold less than 10 per cent of the number and less than 5 per cent of the area of the total operational holdings in the state.

There has been growing social acceptance of dowry in the state and the increasing incidence of dowry led to stripping women of their property rights. Barbara Harriss-White had pointed out, “The north Indian ‘pattern’ of anti-female discrimination is spreading southwards by means of ‘cultural circulation’, rather than through changes in the economy.” At least in many parts of South India, dowry has been a distinctly modern phenomenon. Kodoth (2004) thinks that dowry has turned out to be the preferred mode of transfer of property to the daughters in the state during the last quarter of the 20th century. In any case, a system where marriage becomes the single-most important factor shaping the fortunes of women whether for inheriting property or for wide-ranging social acceptance cannot be considered gender-sensitive, to say the least.

Ammu Joseph points out some qualitative dimensions of the gender divide in the state: Boys have greater mobility than girls as the latter require permission from the males of the family to move about. Although parents’ anxiety about their security is at the root of such immobility of girls, it is unfair to penalise girls for crimes they could fall victims to. The phenomenon of dowry is a source of financial stress to the family and psychological stress for girls. There have even been instances of collective suicides of sisters in the face of their families’ inability to raise the mandatory dowries for their marriages. The phenomenon of males helping out women with household chores is restricted to low-income families. Segregation of sexes in public sphere continues to this day, with social conservatism coexisting with political consciousness of sorts and human development.

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405 Anna Lindberg 2001, pp. 315, 340;
In the cultural realm, feudal-casteist values and the degeneracy of imperialist culture coexist in a country like India dehumanising women. Based on stereotyped notions of femininity, the former confines women to their homes and hearths within the kitchen and nursery, confining them to the activities of reproduction and caring. The latter commodifies the body, beauty and labour of women in the sphere of the market.

Culturally, the gender gap between masculinity and femininity, between the images of masculinity as 'working' subject or male as the provider of the family and the domesticated female widened over the centuries since the beginnings of colonial rule. Presumably, women, here have gone through a process of effeminisation, i.e., representation in essentialist categories alluded to femininity such as weakness, docility, nurturing/emotional, etc. Resultantly, they have gone through what Maria Mies called 'housewifisation', i.e., a process whereby women are socially defined as housewives, dependent on the income of the husband whether or not they are de facto housewives.

As Anna Lindberg (2001) puts it insightfully: Capitalist forces have been active in creating a dichotomised gender discourse. In gender relations, the traditional high caste values (such as dowry) came to coincide with “modern” Western gender ideologies that included male breadwinners and female dependents. This proposition by Anna Lindberg seems to have applicability not only with the cashew workers but also across a large spectrum of Kerala society. And it is to be taken seriously because this is apparently, the emerging pattern of gender discourse in the state today i.e., a confluence/cocktail of feudal upper caste norms blended with the decadence of commercialism propelled by remittances and imperialist patriarchy propagated by the media that seek to commodify the body, beauty and labour in the sphere of the market. Any sincere attempt at addressing the question of women’s rights in this context would require a focus on the cultural realm.

The influence of matriliny among propertied sections, among the Nair caste in particular, must have definitely had a softening effect on the patriarchal culture in the state. Another factor that could have contributed to the prevalence of a cultural ambience in favour of women was probably, the relative absence of martial culture unlike in parts of north-

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409 Eapen & Kodoth 2003.
412 A caste of professional fighters, Kshatriyas is largely absent in Keralam.
west India, which had a history of having been continually assailed by foreign invasions, or unlike countries which had engaged in colonial conquest.\footnote{413}

During the last few years, women’s organisations in the state have been busy fighting sex rackets, where teenaged girls hailing from poor financial background were sexually abused by higher-ups in the socio-political hierarchy. Even noted politicians and film stars stood accused in these cases. The sex rackets may be a reflection of the deep-rooted process of commercialisation in the state. By 1980s, the ‘Gulf boom’ since 1973 had brought in its wake cultural decadence of the \textit{nouveaux riches} and blue movies from the state hit the illegal/black markets outside the state. It may be assumed that women, being a vulnerable section of society, have been drawn into the vortex of this process of commercialisation, adversely affecting them. And this has led to commodification of women in illegal ways since the apparent modicum of age-old moral norms and family control prevented explicit or outright sexual anarchy, even in the Malayalam television channels. This above hypothesis would, however, need further substantiation.

It is worth recapitulating the \textit{promises} of the Soviet Revolution of nearly nine decades past:

Women would be provided equal opportunities in their upbringing and training and would be paid equal pay for equal work. Erotic liberty would be recognised by custom but no woman would be required to provide sexual services for a living. Marriages and divorces could be made out of the free will of the spouses. Maternity would be voluntary and abortion and contraception would be authorised [that women may have control over their bodies]; Marriage also would be voluntary and all mothers and children would have the same rights in or out of wedlock. Pregnancy leaves would be paid for by the State, which would also assume charge of the children, meaning not that they would be taken away from parents but that they would not be abandoned to them.\footnote{414}

It is striking that only one of these conditions are met in our country, i.e., maternity being voluntary and abortion and contraception being permitted, which is not surprising in a supposedly ‘overpopulated’ country like ours. If today, all but one of these minimalist \textit{promises} seem remote possibilities in our country and in the state, it should be helpful in revealing the present-day status of women in our society. Our analysis, however, implies no feminist exclusivism and it is apt to say, ‘She craves not spring for herself alone.’ It is

\footnote{At Devra in Rajasthan, a village of Rajputs, the warrior caste, according to the Times of India News Service (June 1999), all female infants have been killed at birth for the last 110 years. One female that escaped made this practice newsworthy (As cited in Harriss-White 2003. p. 127, f.n. 58).

\footnote{As cited in Simone de Beauvoir 1993, p. 760.}
only by the emancipation of ‘the Other half’ of humanity that humanity can realise its true
worth and true joy in life.

VIII. CLAss-NATIONAlITY INTERFACE IN KERALAM

The overall underdevelopment of Kerala nationality may be seen to have an overriding
constitutive effect upon the formation of the classes (seen in relation to castes) within it.
Thus, corresponding to the state of industrial underdevelopment, there is a near absence
of an industrial capitalist class. Working class in modern industry is a miniscule category,
although working class itself constitutes the major chunk of the population.

Notably, at momentous junctures of Kerala history, the nationality question had come to
the fore: the state formation, the food grains shortages in the 1960s, land reforms,
educational reforms, etc. were definitely among these decisive moments. Historically, it
was the working class and peasantry in Kerala that had in the course of the Communist
movement against colonialism and feudal landlords and princely states, raised the demand
for the formation of a linguistic state. The Class-Nationality interface here should be
evident enough. For instance, the Punnapra-Vayalar revolt in the present Alappuzha
district (which was brutally crushed) in 1946 was directed against the princely state of
Thiruvithamkoor and had the formation of the linguistic state of Kerala, as a major
demand.\footnote{E.M.S. Namboodiripad 1952: National Question in Kerala, People’s Publishing
House, Bombay. These Class-Nationality linkages are traced in further detail in the concluding
Chapter in this thesis.}

Speaking of Class-Nationality interface within Kerala, with lesser semi-feudal influence
upon the government within the state, with a largely plantation-dominated agrarian sector,
and with an early maturing of the land struggles within the state, as compared to many
other parts of India, the land reforms within the state could have taken place much earlier
and in a more thoroughgoing manner had not the first government under the Chief
Ministership of E.M.S. Namboodiripad in 1959 been dismissed by the Centre in an unjust
manner.

The prospect of land reforms became bleak when the Communist ministry was dismissed
under article 356 in 1959 and when the Supreme Court struck down the Agrarian
the 1959 reforms because of Delhi’s intervention, had sufficient time, reason, and ability
to rearrange their holdings to evade the ceiling.”\footnote{Ibid, p. 212.} A watered down version of the
Agrarian Relations Bill was passed by a Congress-Praja Socialist Party government and it
was signed into law in January 1961. However, it never became fully operational because crucial provisions were struck down by the Supreme Court in 1961 and by the High Court in 1963.\textsuperscript{418} Moreover, the broad parameters under which land reforms were to be undertaken were laid down by agencies of the Union government such as the Planning Commission, leaving much less scope for manoeuvre for the state government. This is because it is only through adherence of these guidelines that the state government could hope to secure sanction from the Centre for their legislative measures. Agrarian Relations Bill (ARB) was passed by the Legislative Assembly on June 10, 1959. Within 48 hours, "direct action" was launched by vested interests opposed to the reform.\textsuperscript{419} Speaking of the Bill, E.M.S. Namboodiripad says, "...[M]ore radical measures preferred by the government were dropped in the belief that Delhi would deny approval."\textsuperscript{420} Elsewhere he says about the government led by him during 1957-59 that the government had to prove its bona fides by working "within the system" and yet deliver some relief to the socially oppressed sections.\textsuperscript{421} There is a great deal of truth in both these assertions: it was by no means a revolutionary transformation that this movement envisaged but even the prospects of genuine reforms within the parameters of the system were thwarted by a much more conservative influence from the Union government.

Even in the 1959 bill, the compensation compromise was inevitable as outright confiscation would almost certainly have been ruled \textit{ultra vires} the Constitution, says the veteran CPI leader, (late) C. Achutha Menon.\textsuperscript{422} According to Herring (1983), "Exemptions from the ceiling were allowed for public, religious or charitable institutions (a concession to Delhi) and for plantations."\textsuperscript{423} Under the 1969 legislation too, these concessions were granted to constitutional requirements or the preferences of the Centre.\textsuperscript{424}

For the implementation of the 1969 legislation, despite Namboodiripad's clear insistence on involvement of peasants themselves through popular committees, the implementation had to be entrusted to the Revenue department because the Centre denied permission to issue an ordinance so as to confer statutory powers to the popular committees.\textsuperscript{425} Courts

\textsuperscript{418} Ibid, pp.172-75.
\textsuperscript{419} Ibid, p. 171-2.
\textsuperscript{422} C. Achutha Menon 1958: \textit{The Kerala Agrarian Relations Bill: An Interpretation}, People's Publishing House, New Delhi, pp. 40-41.
\textsuperscript{423} Herring 1983, p. 166.
\textsuperscript{424} Ibid, p. 190.
\textsuperscript{425} Ibid, p. 189.
also proved to be hostile to the notion of popular committees.\textsuperscript{426} A further constraint from the Union government was financial: An extensive reform such as this placed heavy financial burden on an already poor state government, but the Centre was unwilling to make major financial concessions.\textsuperscript{427} The crucial 1969 Bill was received by the Centre for consideration in August 1968 itself, when it was introduced in the Assembly but there was undue delay in responding. It was only in February 1969 that the Centre responded, terming the fair rent and other provisions "arbitrary and unreasonable". The contrast is obvious from the fact that the Centre found it possible to approve the conservative 1964 legislation by the Congress ministry in a mere three weeks. The Centre had initially given no encouraging response to the proposal for nationalisation of foreign-owned plantations such as the sprawling Kannan Devan estate that ran into 137,424 acres.\textsuperscript{428}

Welfare measures initiated by the state government producing fiscal pressures, the import policy of the Central government affect farm prices in the state, monetary policy affects exchange rates, and a whole host of policies initiated by the Centre, including signing of international treaties, particularly the WTO agreement in 1994, underline the dependence of state governments on decisions from the Centre. As Herring rightly says, "In a critical sense, state power does not reside at the State level, and thus the strategy for revolution in one State remains elusive."\textsuperscript{429}

Even after the formation of the linguistic state in 1956 and the land reforms implemented since 1970, the working class, the peasantry and the broad masses of people in Keralam have had a stake in the question of development of productive forces within the national formation. High levels of unemployment and massive outmigration may be considered the net results of underdevelopment.

To cite an instance of how the national formation in political economy terms has had its definite implications for the class relations in the state, the inter-class disparity in the state is apparently much more acute than in other states in India. The service-dominated economy in the state, driven primarily by remittances stands in stark contrast to the other states in the country. Thus making an inter-regional comparison of social inequality in India, Dreze & Sen say that "the Gini coefficient of the distribution of per-capita expenditures indicates that there is more inequality in Kerala than in, say, Bihar or Uttar

\textsuperscript{426} Ibid, p. 190.
\textsuperscript{427} Oommen, M.A. 1975: \textit{A Study of Land Reforms in Kerala}, Oxford and IBH, New Delhi, pp. 71–76.
\textsuperscript{428} Herring 1983, pp. 190, 200, 201.
\textsuperscript{429} Ibid, p. 216.
Pradesh. In fact, Kerala turns out to be one of the most unequal states in this respect, while Bihar is one of the least unequal.\textsuperscript{430}

Further, Kerala had an average household per capita expenditure of Rs.810/- per month in 1999-2000 as compared to Rs.414/- in Bihar, which is well-recognised for its backwardness and Rs.589/- at all-India level.\textsuperscript{431} The proportion of asset-poor households (in terms of ownership of durables) was at 15 per cent in Kerala, the highest among 17 major states being at 62 per cent in Bihar, the lowest in H.P. at 7 per cent and was 40 per cent at all-India level in 1992-93.\textsuperscript{432}

In sum, we would observe that the constitution of the nationality in political economy terms has had overriding influence upon the formation of classes and social groups within the national formation.

\textbf{IX. Classes, Social Groups and their Political Outlook}

Yet another question that should be addressed by any agenda of social transformation for Keralam would be the political outlook of the classes/social groups constituting the society. It has been pointed out that unlike in most parts of India or most other countries of the Third World, in Keralam working class constitutes not only a potentially leading force in terms of their political outlook, but also forms the main force among the toiling sections in society in terms of numerical strength. Working class as the major chunk of the toiling sections in society consists of modern industrial workers, workers of traditional industries (including those in fishing industry), workers in commercial crop plantations, workers engaged in other agricultural operations (agricultural labourers) and workers in the now-booming service sector. As we have observed in Table 5.1, cultivators (who may be designated as peasantry) \textit{per se} constituted only 7.2 per cent of the total workforce in 2001 and 12.2 per cent in 1991. Working class could be most suited to lead a movement for social transformation of the toiling and oppressed sections of society. And the working class could with an international perspective, link such a struggle with the anti-feudal, anti-imperialist people's (also peoples') struggles in the rest of India.

\textsuperscript{430} "The available Gini coefficients are sector-specific (i.e., rural or urban); rural or urban inequalities, for their part, are comparatively low in Kerala." (354; f.n. 14)


Workers in modern industrial sector would be potentially the most conscious section as they are associated with the modern production processes; being geographically proximate as they are concentrated mainly in cities; broken away, in relative terms, from parochial social divisions and so on. Yet it is to be noted that it is, apparently, the workers in unorganised sector who live in more oppressive conditions as compared to organised/formal sector. The working class in Keralam "in itself" is yet to be constituted into a "class for itself", imbued with class-consciousness.

Poor and middle peasants are considered to be the closest allies of the working class in terms of social position and material interest. The white collared workers associated with the relatively large service sector, in the state, though vulnerable to imperialist cultural influence, could also be allies of the worker-peasant classes. Similarly, other sections of lower middle and middle classes would also be allies of these basic producing classes, the workers and peasants. Even the rich peasants could be allies of these classes in terms of class interest. However, the rich peasants involved in cultivation of commercial crops would be of a more vacillating nature, as compared to the rich peasants involved in food grain cultivation, as the former are dependant on external markets. But with the price crisis of commercial crops with Structural Adjustment Policies, the vacillating sections may also be won over or neutralised towards a popular movement for social transformation. Middle level trading interests may retain their vacillating character given their dependence on external markets. Students and youth, as in every other society, could play a very positive role in a movement for social reconstitution. The presence of a large number of unemployed and prospectively ‘unemployables’ among them is an added factor for their unconservative orientation to social change.

The marginalised social groups/oppressed non-class social sections in Kerala society may be identified as Women, Dalits, Adivasis and Religious Minorities as also in the rest of India. But to this list must be added the Fisher community and a particular linguistic/ethnic minority viz. immigrant labourers among whom Tamil labourers predominate. These could be categorized as the social groups facing social oppression of a non-class nature. If religious minorities, particularly, Muslims and Christians are at the receiving end of the rise of fascistic Hindutva communalism, Adivasis faced threat to their physical habitats and cultural identity since the colonial times besides being victims of economic exploitation having been integrated at the lowest rungs of class society. Dalits are victims of social prejudice, and even social violence, emanating from the

casteist culture of the pre-existing caste society, besides economic exploitation, as most of them are landless poor. Women belonging to lower classes and other oppressed social sections are, by far, among the most deprived section in society, having to cope with multiple layers of social oppression. All women are victims of patriarchal society to a greater or lesser degree. In general, the fringe groups, Adivasis, Dalits, fisher people have been the “excluded ones” from the benefits of human development under the so-called ‘Kerala model of development’, far apart from the mainstream of Kerala society. Moreover, these social groups are the most vulnerable social casualties of the ongoing Structural Adjustment Policies.\(^\text{434}\) It is by addressing the non-class aspects of social oppression on these social groups that they could be made firm allies of a movement for social transformation.

Plantation lobby, strongly represented by the Indian big capital, a handful of powerful trading interests and industrialists part of the Indian big capital would find themselves in the rival camp of a movement for social change in the state. The dominant interests within the state who have derived undue benefits from the State in terms of corruption and tax evasion could find themselves in the rival camp. They include RDCs like the Abkari (liquor) lobby, the corrupt education lobby, forest mafia, sand mining mafia, etc. Oppressive semi-feudal relations persisting in certain areas of the economy and society face the likelihood of the wrath of people's movement. The dominant bureaucracy in the state consists of three sections – the bureaucracy of the State machinery, the bureaucracy in the cooperative sector and the bureaucracy on the trade union front. Bureaucracy, including the one at the trade union leadership is found to be of a most regressive character. As for the antagonists external to the State, semi-feudalism, imperialism, the all-India big capital and Indian State in which these forces are represented seem to constitute the adversary camp. It is noteworthy that the Monopolies Inquiry Commission could find hardly any big capital with social origins in Keralam that could be counted among the all-India big capital.\(^\text{435}\)

We would view that understanding the Class-Nationality interface would be of paramount importance for any movement for the democratic transformation of society in the state.

**X. Summary and Conclusions**

We have already in the last section indicated the attitude of Classes and social groups in the state towards an agenda of social transformation, which was conclusion-like. Nevertheless, we would like to summarise and conclude this rather complex chapter,

\(^\text{434}\) See Chapter IV for the impact of globalisation on the marginalised sections.

especially for the sake of easy reading. In this Chapter, we have analysed the structural
location of classes and social groups, which we have designated as the ‘hardware’ of class
analysis. We have focused on subaltern social forces within the state that are capable of
ushering in social transformation. We have also proposed an ‘ad hoc hypothesis’ that the
trader-plantation interests in the state had their interests historically intertwined with
external market forces and have been impotent to usher in independent, self-reliant
development of the indigenous economy. We have indicated that the colonial
transformation/colonial modernity in the state had quite refractive consequences for the
people of the state. The beneficial impact included alleviation of caste inequalities and
capitalist development based on wage labour and the pejorative impact spelled large-scale
ecological ruin, abolition of matrilineal system in gender relations and the formation of a
regressive pan-Hindu community identity.

We have identified the major Social Structures of Accumulation (SSA) in the state as
class, nationality, caste, gender, community, tribe and environment and argued that each
of them requires sufficient autonomous attention and yet class and nationality can be
considered as the primary structures of accumulation within the state.

The poverty estimates since 1993-94 is rife with controversy, particularly because of the
change in the basic indicators and yet we tend to believe that no conclusive inferences are
drawn for the class relations in the state. Agriculture sector has crucial importance from
the angle of self-reliance of the economy in national formations in the peripheral regions
of the world, particularly under a volatile world order of today. And therefore, the decline
of the primary sector of the economy is related to the national question in the sense that it
has negative consequences for the very basis of the self-reliance of the economy. Moreover,
it has critical importance in the light of the concerns of livelihood of the
deprieved classes and social groups and so it is obviously related to the class question.
Despite the fact that its share in income and employment has come down drastically over
the years, agriculture still remains the principal commodity producing sector in the state.
It may further be borne in mind that nearly three-fourths of the population of the state still
live in rural areas. Despite claims of the state having achieved a successful land reforms,
in terms of land concentration, Keralam figures the highest among 15 major states in the
country in 1999-01, according to the Rural Labour Enquiry Report of the NSSO. And
according to National Family Health Survey (NFHS), the percentage of rural households
not owning any agricultural land in 1992-93 at 63 per cent was the highest in the state, as
compared to 36 per cent at all-India level. Agricultural labourers were 16 per cent of the
Food grain production should be considered the most important activity in the agriculture sector and it has faced serious decline since land reforms in 1970 and particularly under SAP in Keralam. During 1990-91 to 2003-04, the cropped area under paddy declined by an estimated -49 per cent and that of tapioca, another food crop, to the tune of -36 per cent. By other estimates, the area under food grains declined by 37 per cent and output by 33 per cent during 1990s. The multiple benefits of a food self-sufficient economy would have included reduction of dependence, bringing down real wages, etc. and above all, ensuring the very human survival in a ‘crisis-ridden and unpredictable world’.

As for the land reforms in the state, unlike in most other parts of India, the measure of abolition of intermediaries (vis-à-vis colonial Raj) had not taken off in Keralam. The implementation of land ceiling legislation was also by and large, a failure in the state, particularly because of the dismissal of the first Communist ministry in the state by the Centre in 1959. What was achieved in the state was a relatively successful tenancy reform implemented since early 1970. An estimated 36.5 per cent of the net cultivated area had its ownership right transferred through tenancy reforms. It was pointed out that the measure of favouring the leasees in general benefited a large segment of rich peasants under the category of ‘other tenants’ who had leased in land for cultivation, although this category also included substantial section of the poorest in the agrarian hierarchy. Thus those holding above 5 acres of land received an estimated 63.8 per cent of the redistributed land. Attack on rentiers without fracturing the rural social base of the popular movement was the theoretical rationalisation offered for the policy of not differentiating between the leasees by classes. And the actual tillers of land under wet cultivation, the Dalits, formerly adiyaalar, got a raw deal when the slogan, ‘Agricultural land to the agriculturists’ was implemented instead of a much more desirable, ‘land to the tiller’. The main responsibility for this volte face lies with the state government since land reforms is clearly listed as item 18 in the state list and also with the Communist movement that articulated the demands of the agrarian movement. It has also been observed that there has been a tendency towards convergence of the political lines of the LDF and the UDF since early 1980s, i.e. by the time the implementation of the tenancy reforms was an accomplished fact.

Such a critical analysis can help us avoid the pitfall of naïve idealisation of the land reforms in the state. So then, land reforms may be seen as having effected a reformation of the system of caste-based landlordism in continuation of the colonial transformation in agriculture if we consider that rich peasants were the prime beneficiaries and that plantations were not brought under the purview of the reforms. Nevertheless, it needs to be underlined that without intense pressure from below in the context of ‘agrarian crisis in
extremis’, the land reforms in the state could not have taken place. So then, the basic impulses for the reforms came from below and therefore it was an ‘agrarian transition from below’ in the terminology of Terry Byres.

Land reforms, in effect, achieved the undeclared objective of forcing landowners to shift from coconut and food crops to plantation crops, especially rubber. Thus between 1965-66 to 1995-96, the area under cultivation of paddy came down to almost half and tapioca to less than half. It was pointed out that an after-effect of non-cultivating owners owning land through land reforms was an increase in the cropped area of perennial crops such as coconut, rubber, etc. that did not require supervision throughout the year. Another impact of the land reforms was the increased dependency on external markets and the attendant uncertainties, consequent upon the increased shift to plantation crops.

Land reforms gave a further fillip to capitalist relations in agriculture. However, tenancies could not be abolished in the real sense. They went underground and subsequently resurfaced clandestinely. Today, subsistence lease farming has come back in a big way through the government aided neighbourhood network and otherwise. Rich peasantry benefiting substantially through land reforms has become the context for the emergence of contradiction between non-cultivating owners and non-owning cultivators. This speaks of the vital need for a renewal of the project of land reforms. And towards this end, we would suggest the following measures: (i) The government could lay down minimum production requirements on land or impose fines on landowners which could be contributed to the welfare the agricultural labourers and poor peasants. (ii) Land acquisition may be done in case of those unwilling to cultivate or are not mainly agriculturists. However, caution needs to be exercised that middle class non-agriculturists need to be adequately compensated, possibly through insurance schemes of their choice since landed property is considered by them as a collateral against contingencies such as disease or famine. (iii) Tenancies need to be recorded in the first place so that at least minimum legal rights can be secured for the cultivators. (iv) Legalisation of tenancies can be a useful ad-hoc measure for bringing tenancies overground however, there is the need to address and rectify the basic underlying contradiction for a lasting solution.

Given the contemporary scenario of agrarian relations in the state, we would further hold that it is possible to have an alliance of the lower rungs of the agrarian hierarchy against the top without adversely affecting the middle. Moreover, labour being the sole producer of value, the labourers do have the right to demand ownership of the means of production irrespective of the prevailing mode of production. This would not afford scope for exemption of plantations from any future measures to address the land question.
We would hold that it would be erroneous to approximate the mode of production in the state to the pre-revolution Chinese one as ‘semi-feudal, semi-colonial’. Yet the revival of large-scale subsistence farming has placed a question mark on the character of the mode of production. It may be argued that ‘semi-colonial’ relations of the neo-colonial type (i.e., indirect domination) are getting accentuated as in Wayanad district today. Moreover, capitalism in its oligopolist phase articulates with pre-capitalist social relations. Moreover, graded caste inequalities persist with respect to landholdings in the state.

The rationale provided by Dreze and Sen for land reforms was equity for the sake of growth. Herring held land to be embodying a ‘bundle of rights’. The land question assumes immense importance in the context of the need for food self-sufficiency in a plantation dominated economy. Moreover, the concerns of equity, efficiency and the need to create ‘effective demand’, the need to create a permanent asset base for the rural poor, self-reliance in the context of a capital-scarce economy as was emphasised in the Soviet industrialisation debate, etc. underline the rationale for a renewed focus on the land question. Focus on the land question in the context of a primarily agrarian economy could enable us to have simultaneity in addressing issues of class, caste, gender, nationality, etc.

Land fragmentation in the agrarian economy of Keralam is often overemphasised. However, the below one hectare category constituted only less than half of the total agricultural land in the state in 1990-91. On the other hand, a minuscule 0.1 per cent of the total landholdings in the state accounted for at least 9.7 per cent of the land area in the state in 1990-91, even as it seems an underestimation in the context of the plantation dominated economy and large-scale land grabs. There has been a substantial rise in land concentration following land reforms. Above 25 acres holdings averaged 145 acres in 1990-91, up from 51 acres in 1966-67.

As compared to other states also Keralam comes among one of the states in the top bracket in terms of land concentration, apparently owing to the exemptions from ceilings permitted to plantations. Going by Rural Labour Enquiry (RLE) Reports, in 1999-01, land concentration in Keralam, West Bengal and Orissa are in the same highest range with 0.1 per cent of Rural Labour Households (RLH) controlling all holdings above 2 hectares. This marks a higher concentration from 0.17 per cent RLH controlling it in 1977-78. This is a matter of concern since the average size of holding in the state is less than 40 per cent of all-India. The average size of holding per RLH was 0.16 hectare in 1977-78 and dwindled to less than half at 0.07 hectare in 1999-01 and at all-India level, it fell much more sharply to less than one-fourth during this period from 0.61 hectare to 0.18 hectare.
Despite claims of a successful land reform in the state, according to estimates in the *RLE Reports*, in 1999-01, land poor in the state is at the highest among 15 major states. Land poverty in Kerala has risen sharply in Kerala during 1977-78 to 1999-01. The corresponding rise was much sharper at all-India level. The proportion of landless is lower than the all-India average and yet landless and land poor together constituted 91 per cent of the RLH in the state in 1999-01, i.e., up from 75 per cent after land reforms in 1977-78 vis-à-vis 77 per cent all-India level in 1999-01, which marked a substantial rise from 33 per cent in 1977-78.

Substantial proportion of non-farm employment in rural areas in the state could be an important reason why the land question did not assume serious proportions in the state in recent times.

Despite the apparent modicum of rule-based accumulation, accumulation by other means such as through primitive means i.e., through forced and illegal manner on a wide scale has characterised the Kerala scenario. As was acknowledged by Legislative Assembly Committee Reports, Tata has grabbed 58,583 acres of government forest land. The Harrison’s Malayalam (HML) Plantations in Wayanad district under R.P. Goenka group is known to have encroached upon thousands of acres of forestland. These land-grabs were done by both the Indian big capital and the Regional Dominant Classes (RDCs) within the state.

The state government has been unwilling to implement the Supreme Court order in 2001 for evicting encroachments over 10,038 hectares of land in the state. There have been several other instances of land grabs at Wagamon, Mathikettaan, etc. in recent years. *Ganja* (Cannabis) cultivation is going on in around 20,000 acres or more of designated forestland with the connivance of the ruling fronts, both in Idukki and increasingly in Palakkad district. The state government has given on lease thousands of acres of land to powerful interests. In spite of the expiry of these leases, they are being continued informally. On the other hand, Adivasis are struggling for land and Dalits who do not have land even to bury their dead are demanding land rights, as we shall see in detail in Chapter VI. Nevertheless, these issues do not become major political issues in the state and should cast a keen reflection on the class reality in the state.

We have sought to deal with classes as substantive categories rather than abstract, de-contextualised ones. So we have related them to caste and gender in particular and focused our attention on the subaltern classes and social groups who are capable of bringing about social transformation. We have tried to identify their social location/socio-economic position in this Chapter. We see classes and social groups as relational
phenomena in Chapter VI, although we have already dealt with women and fisher people in a relational manner in this Chapter.

Speaking of Caste-Class interface, each caste or community has carved out a niche for itself in the accumulation process and this has been related to cultural processes.

The Narendran Commission Report on reservation of posts for backward castes in Kerala government services indicated how the Latin Catholic/Anglo Indians, Nadars and Dalit Christians in that order have not been able to secure the quota of jobs allocated to them. Muslims have also lagged behind in this respect. Whereas Ezhavas, in particular, have reached a higher stage of social development so as to take advantage of the merit route to exceed their quota in certain categories of posts. The need to further target protective discrimination to the vulnerable sections may, therefore, be underlined.

Adivasis or Scheduled Tribes (STs) in the state constituted only 1.14 per cent of the total population in 2001. The decadal percentage change in the Adivasi population in the state has declined during 1991-01 vis-à-vis 1981-91. ST population in the state is concentrated in Wayanad, Palakkad and Idukki districts, these together accounting for two-thirds of the total tribal population in the state. They mainly inhabited the eastern hilly terrain in the state. The highest concentration of Adivasis was in Wayanad with 37 per cent of the total ST population in the state in 2001. There was greater concentration of STs, in the northern districts of the state where they constituted 1.5 per cent of the total population and in the southern districts, 0.75 per cent.

As for the landlessness profile of the STs in the state, RLE Report 1999-01 revealed that 'Land poor' ST in the state was the second highest among 15 major states whereas the proportion of 'Landless' was not so high. However, Landless and Land poor together constituted 90 per cent of the Adivasi RLH or Adivasi population in the state and showed a marked rise during the post-land reforms period.

Interestingly, the average landholding by Adivasi RLH in the state at 0.09 hectare during 1999-01 was higher than 0.07 hectare for All RLH and 0.05 hectare for Dalit RLH. The better average landholding status of Adivasis may be explained with reference to their occupancy status over large tracts of forestland historically. The landlessness of Dalits may be explained with reference to the denial of land rights to them under caste-based feudalism. However, the decline in landholding post-land reforms was five-fold for ST RLH unlike with the other two categories. This could be an indication of Adivasi land alienation during this period. This goes to indicate that Adivasi land question in the state is more in the nature of a question of dispossession rather than a historically penurious condition as with Dalits. It is also important to note that there is much higher level of
integration into class society among Adivasis in the state as is indicated by the higher proportion of their population as agricultural labourers vis-à-vis the general population and all-India average. Official poverty level among Adivasis in the state was marginally higher than among Dalits/SCs and significantly higher than among All.

Dalits (Hindu SCs) constitute 9.9 per cent of the total population of the state. This is excluding converts to Islam and Christianity.

*RLE* estimates clearly show that the proportion of agricultural labour participation among Adivasis and Dalits in the state is much higher than for All. Agricultural labour participation is higher among Adivasis as compared to Dalits. Agricultural Labour Households (ALH) with cultivated land was at a much lower level among Dalits than among Adivasis and All. Adivasis were better off than All in this respect. Both *RLE Reports* and Agricultural Census 1995-96 indicate these.

According to *RLE*, Land poor Dalit RLH was the highest in the state among 15 major states in both 1977-78 and 1999-01. The proportion of Landless Dalit RLH in the state was lower than that of their counterparts at the all-India level apparently because land reforms had given them homestead land. However, Landless and Land poor SC RLH in the state together averaged even higher than the corresponding all-India average. The proportion of Land poor SC RLH in the state rose during the post-land reforms period from the already low level in 1977-78.

Going by *RLE* estimates, unlike at all-India level, there is sharp difference between the levels of agricultural labour participation among Adivasi and Dalit RLH with All in Keralam. Keralam figures highest in this respect in case of SC RLH and second highest in case of ST RLH. There is greater proportion of Dalit ALH who are landless as compared to Adivasi ALH and All ALH. Landlessness to the tune of 44 per cent among All ALH indicates the importance of class as a category of analysis.

As per *RLE*, both Adivasis and Dalits in Keralam are represented more than three times their share in the population among ALH and around half them are landless in each case.

Landlessness among Agricultural Labour Households (ALH), i.e. the actual tillers on land in Keralam showed a different picture from that of RLH in comparison to the rest of India. Thus landlessness among ALH in Keralam was lower than the all-India average across all social groups both in 1977-78 and 1999-01. The relative gap in landlessness between SC ALH and All has widened since land reforms in Keralam. Unlike at all-India level, landlessness in the post land reforms period has made a quantum leap in Keralam across all social groups of ALH. It rose three-fold for SC ALH and All ALH, and two-
fold in the case of ST ALH. This supports our view that there is need for a radical renewal of the project of land reforms. The extent of landlessness of All ALH and its phenomenal rise also points to the importance of the class dimension in the land question.

The fisher people in the state comprised of 2.42 per cent of the total population of the state in 2001. They have, rightly, been designated as the excluded/outliers from the process of human development in the state. We have, in this Chapter, sought to locate their socio-economic status as a relational phenomenon as well. The issues of the fisher people as apart of the traditional working class in the state hardly ever entered the mainstream discourse even during the Communist movement. Although there have been successful efforts at unifying the community cutting across castes in early 20th century, today, the community is divided along communal, partisan lines and foreign-funded voluntary organisations dominate the scene along the coasts. The tsunami disaster in late 2004 should have been a wake-up call against the apathy concerning the problems of the fisher people. We would view that it has been the gross violation of the CRZ norms by the mining/nuclear lobby that has been the prime reason for the natural calamity turning into a mass disaster at Alappad in Kollam district. The specificities of the problems faced by the fisher people are not reducible to a class angle. They include the demand for the 'Right to Habitat' along the coasts, the implementation of the Murari Committee recommendations in 1996 such as the enforcement of CRZ regulations and cancellation of the licenses of foreign vessels. The protection of coastal ecology and opposition to fresh mining proposals on a fragile eco-system such as the one along the coast north of Alappad are other demands of urgent importance. The concerns of the fisher people also question the dominant paradigm of 'developmentalism' in the state.

The rise of fascistic Hindutva communalism has coincided with the period of neo-liberal reforms in the country. The religious minorities, Muslims and Christians in the state are numerically bigger at around 40 per cent and are economically better off than their counterparts in the rest of India. It has been convincingly shown that Hindu community identity was a construct of colonial modernity and was unobtained prior to it. The large presence of the religious minorities in the state, the secular influence of the past social reform movements, the ideological hegemony of the left wing parties among large sections of the Hindu castes could be among reasons for the absence of any major communal outbreak in the state, as yet. However, communal politics has been making inroads into Kerala society as a reflection of all-India politics and as a reaction against the rentier orientation of the dominant sections of religious minorities within the state. We have underlined the need to look at the class basis/political economy of communalism rather than merely viewing it as a communalism-secularism binary. We would consider
communalisation of people’s minds a potent threat to be faced up to and would concede that the international prescription for fighting fascism, viz. broad alliances and militant struggles is valid even to the case of India.

Immigrant labourers, traditionally Tamil labourers and of late, labourers brought in on short-term contracts from distant states contribute their coolie labour in the state. They are subalterns by both class and ethnicity and their problems require specific autonomous attention.

Women’s rights activism rightly strived for equality on the socially constructed aspects of gender oppression. Both production and reproduction have been of concern to those seeking a radical restructuring of gender relations. The relationship between gender and class is revealed by the fact that women’s lot has, historically, been bound up with private property. A useful distinction can be drawn between social patriarchy and family patriarchy, the latter being more oppressive on women of higher classes and social groups. And yet there is a non-class specificity to the question of women’s oppression.

Class-gender interface become obvious from diverse issues concerning women such as demographic transition, domestic violence and unemployment. The much-lauded demographic transition in the state has been critiqued as having been initiated as a measure for ‘minimising a politically charged confrontation’ on both class/social and gender/domestic fronts. It has interestingly been shown with reference to the state how women having control over economic resources, particularly over immovable assets could have a deterrent effect on domestic violence. The emerging scenario of women’s unemployment in the state is of serious dimensions as estimates show. During land reforms, the State supported the notion of the ‘male bread winner’ and allotted title-deeds on land’ to them. Estimates indicate that there has been a ‘thinning’ of women’s inheritance rights in the state as against its matrilineal past.

Going by RLE Reports, during the post-land reforms period, there has been a sharp decline in the participation of women in agricultural work among RLH in Keralam. The corresponding decline at all-India level has been marginal. There has also been some decline in the non-agricultural work participation by women in RLH in the state. These may indicate a process of ‘housewifisation’ and withdrawal from ‘outside work’. Absence of ‘earned income’ through ‘paid outside work’ by women could lead to their lower status within the family, although poverty-induced work participation in itself may not be considered a positive indicator. Lowering of work participation of women in Keralam may be owing to better income levels of the family, since there are hardly any strictures against women participating in outside work.
There are certain aspects of female advantage in Keralam which include a favourable female-male ratio, better levels of human development (life expectancy, low maternal and infant mortality, etc.), women being allowed to participate in 'outside work' and even migrate out of the state for work. The prevalence of matrilineal tradition in the state was indeed a favourable factor historically. However, there are also a number of issues of concern on gender relations in the emerging scenario. These include low juvenile sex ratio, increasing incidence of dowry and declining property rights, high incidence of domestic violence, sexual violence like rape and mental ill health.

The cultural construction of masculinity and a decadent consumerist culture constructing women as objects of enjoyment to be subjugated through macho strength have been of great relevance to gender relations in the state. Women internalising patriarchal values has been another perennial concern in gender relations. The economic dependence and independent family management by ‘Gulf wives’ could have quite refractive socio-cultural implications.

The assertions that patriarchy has been actively reconstituted through social reforms and that the attainments of women in the state have been ‘deployed within dominant frameworks’ need to be taken note of. The existing notions of femininity in the state foster domesticity and women’s labour has been confined more in caring jobs and they tend to keep off from manual labour outside the household. On the other hand, the dominant notions of masculinity demand that men be the head of households and providers of the family, which often turned out to be quite oppressive on men themselves.

An important conclusion that emerges from this chapter is that Class is not an abstract category but a substantive one as related to caste and gender in particular, in the Indian context. At macro-level, Class is related to national formation as well, as we have already discussed in Chapters II and III. We would consider that the existence of a multiplicity of unresolved contradictions is related to the hegemonic role that has been exercised by colonialism/global monopoly capitalism and can be resolved only through the conscious intervention of democratic forces. The ‘multidimensionality of the social being’ necessitates a ‘multidimensional liberation’.

In the cultural realm in gender relations, feudal-casteist values and the decadence of imperialist culture coexist in our country, the former confines women to the domestic sphere engaging them in tasks related to caring and reproduction. The latter commodifies women in the sphere of the market and is gaining increasing ascendency. It may also be indicated that the emergence of sex rackets in the state could be a reflection of the deep-
rooted commercialisation in the state since the Gulf boom of the mid-1970s, in which poor girls as a vulnerable section have fallen victim to.

It is of utmost importance to concerns of gender equity that culturally, the gender-gap between male as the provider of the family and the domesticated female has widened ever since the beginnings of colonial modernity. It is crucial to point out that the emerging pattern of gender discourse in the state today is a cocktail of feudal upper caste norms such as dowry blended with the decadence of commercialisation and imperialist patriarchy. Therefore, a focus on the cultural realm is crucial for addressing the women’s question in the state.

Even the minimum promises of the Soviet revolution, nine decades past, towards making a society of gender equals seem remote possibilities in our country today and yet it is by the emancipation of ‘the Other half’ of humanity that humanity can realise its true worth and joy in life.

We have observed that the constitution of the nationality in political economy terms has its overriding influence upon the formation of classes and social groups within the national formation. At momentous junctures of Kerala history, the nationality contradiction has come to the fore i.e., during the state formation, the food shortages of the 1960s, land reforms, educational reforms, etc. The unjust dismissal of the state government by the Centre in 1959 scuttled the implementation of land ceiling reforms in particular. The state government had to avoid radical measures in anticipation that the Centre would deny approval. Compensation to landlords had to be offered since confiscation could have been ruled violative of the Constitution. Both Supreme Court and the High Court exercised a conservative influence striking down crucial provisions of the 1961 Act. They were also averse to popular committees in implementation. Religious and charitable institutions were exempted from ceiling laws in deference of the Centre.

The fiscal and monetary policies of the Centre, and the treaties signed by the Centre critically affect the Class and National questions in the states. Thus inter-class economic disparities are quite acute in Keralam, as it is constituted by external factors such as remittances.

As for the political outlook of the classes and social groups in the state, working class in the unorganised sector constitutes the most numerous and politically conscious section of the toiling people in the state. Cultivators (peasantry) is a less numerous category whose proportion in the total workforce has been 12 per cent in 1991 and merely 7 per cent in 2001. Middle class, and rich peasantry engaged in food crop production are definitely close allies of these basic producing classes. Women, Dalits, Adivasis, Religious
Minorities, the Fisher community and immigrant labourers are social groups in the state facing social oppression with non-class specificities that demand autonomous attention. The dominant classes in the state include the Indian big capital strongly represented in the plantation lobby and big industries in the state, powerful sections of trading classes and RDCs including the Abkari lobby, the corrupt education lobby, mafias of various kinds, bureaucracy in its diverse components, etc. As for external structures of domination, it is the Indian State of a regressive Class/social character and global monopoly capitalism that constitute the antagonist camp. The agenda of social transformation needs to have simultaneity in addressing both Class contradictions i.e., broadly speaking, intra-societal contradictions and Nationality contradictions i.e., anti-State/anti-imperialist contradictions.

Having thus analysed the 'hardware' of Class, i.e. in terms of economic categories, we would, in Chapter VI, turn to analysing the 'software' of Class, i.e. in terms of Class-consciousness, Class as a phenomenon characterised by relationships, Class struggles.